



Good afternoon. I'd like to thank the Churches Conservation Trust for inviting me to give this talk. It is really great to know that so many people are interested in medieval churches and are joining us today.

What I'm going to try to do, is this: to take you back in time, to 500 years ago, to come with me to look at an ordinary day in an English village church building. We are going to see what went on inside it, and outside and around it. This church building isn't based on any particular place, but its composite plan and furnishings are based in every detail on what we have found during nearly ten years' research in churches all over England and Wales.

I am going to try to show you: who were there 500 years ago – what they did, and where, when and how they worked and worshipped during the course of that single day.

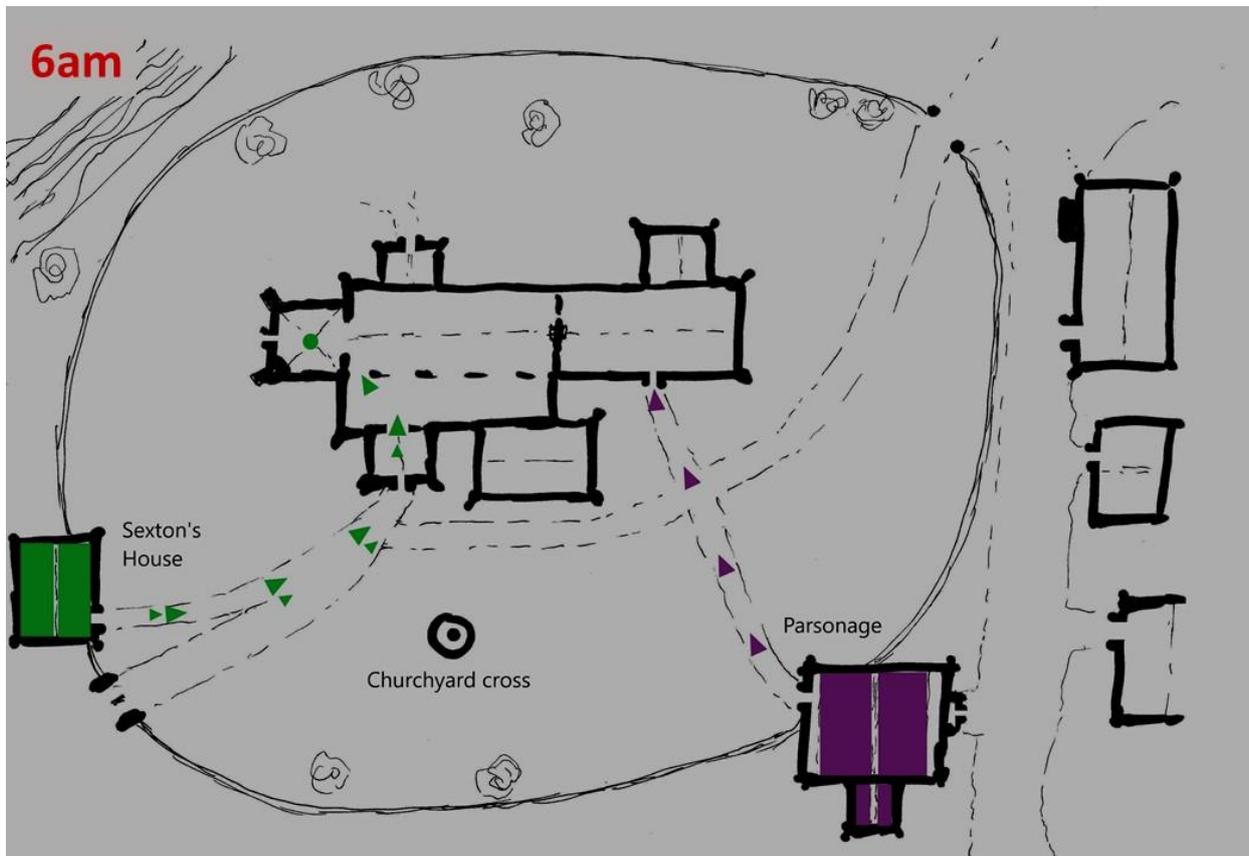
And I hope to be able to show you that they were able to do these things because they were helped to do them by the design of the church building and the placing of its windows – and by its acoustic design as well.

I'm going to tell you the story of that day by using some of the characters that would have been found in and around a typical medieval church. To make the story more human, I have given them names. On the plans, these characters are colour-coded, too, so that – I hope – you will be able to follow their movements. The church clock bell will remind us of the time of day and the church yard and church plans will show where the sun is at any time in relation to the church building, and what it can light up. [Martin sang the phrases in italics below, using medieval plainsong.]

Here we go!

## 6 am

The clock bell in the tower has just sounded, for the first time today. It is six o'clock and still quite dark – any sunlight is just a pale hint in the sky. Harry the sacristan, known to everyone as Harry the Sexton, is already in the church and rings the Angelus bells from the floor in the west tower.

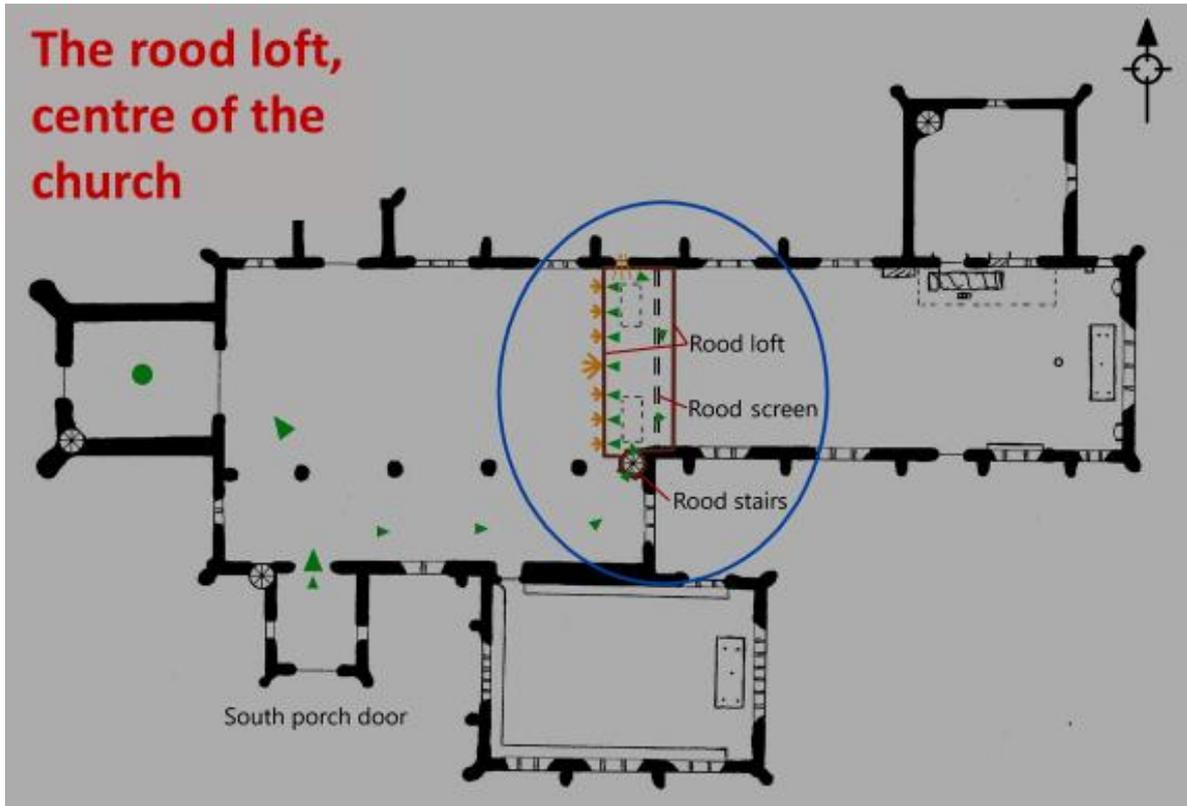


While the Angelus is being pealed, William the parish priest sets off, walking briskly, from his house on the edge of the church yard towards the chancel door, saying the Angelus prayer to himself:

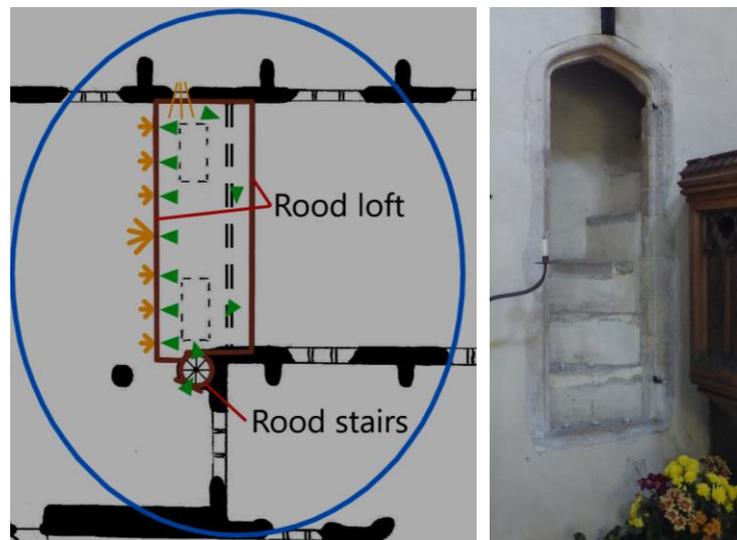
*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum ...      Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you ...*



Harpley, Norfolk



Meanwhile, Harry's son has work to do on the rood loft. He goes up a narrow stairway and onto the rood loft. He lights a small taper from the wax candle which burns all the time below the high crucifix.



Stairs to rood loft: Framsdon, Suffolk



Rood loft & parapet: Attleborough, Norfolk



Rood, Mary & John: St Teilo's, St Fagan's Museum

With this, he lights the six floating candle-wicks in the basins of oil which are placed along the front parapet of the loft, in front of the statues of Mary and John. Carefully carrying the taper, he goes back down the loft stairway, and lights two candles on a small altar under the rood platform. Putting out the taper and locking the lower rood loft stairway door, he leaves the church to go home for his breakfast.

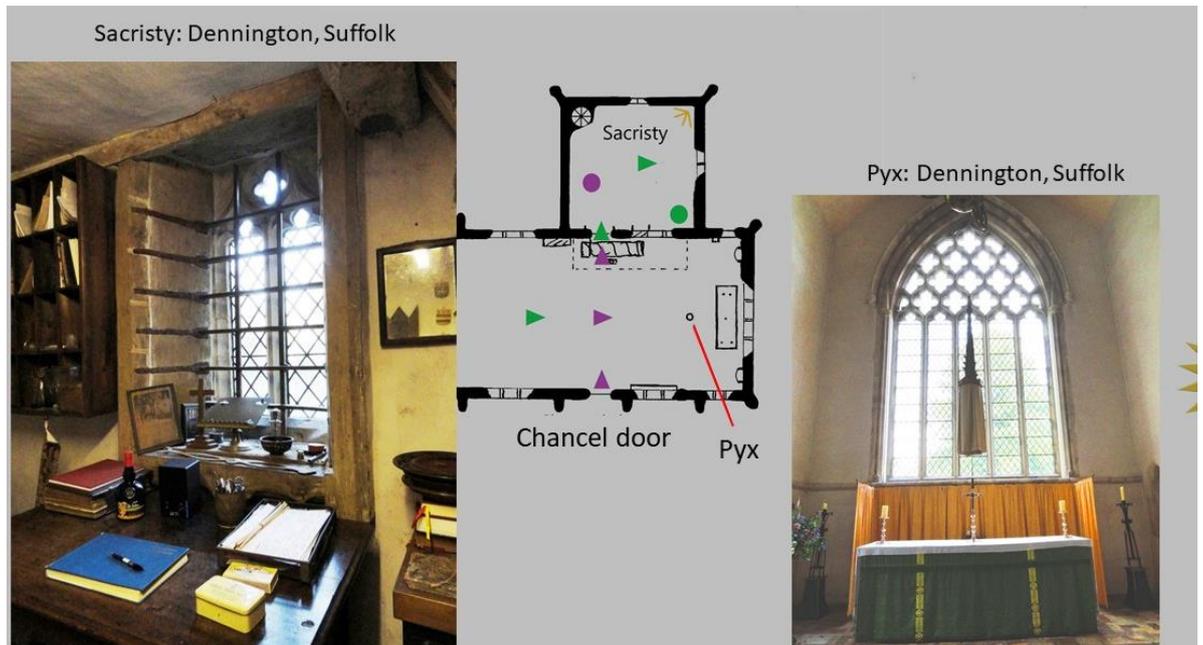


Rood stairs: Stoke by Clare, Suffolk



Rood stair door: Aylmerton, Norfolk

While Harry's son is on the rood loft, his father walks through the church, unlocks and passes through the rood screen doors and goes to the sacristy to set out the mass vestments.



Sacristy: Dennington, Suffolk

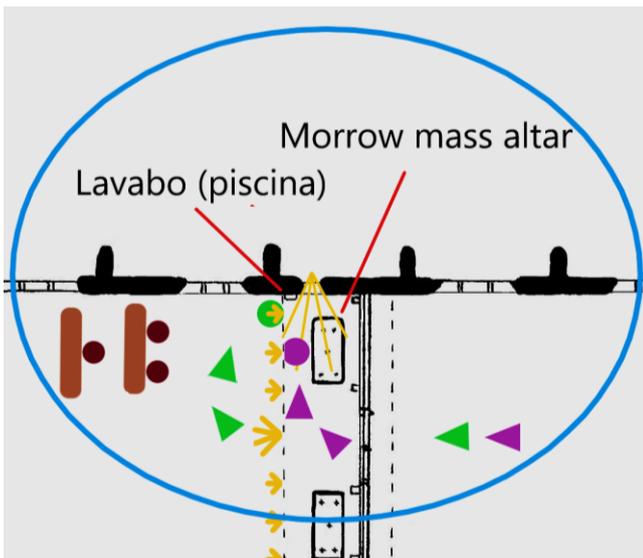
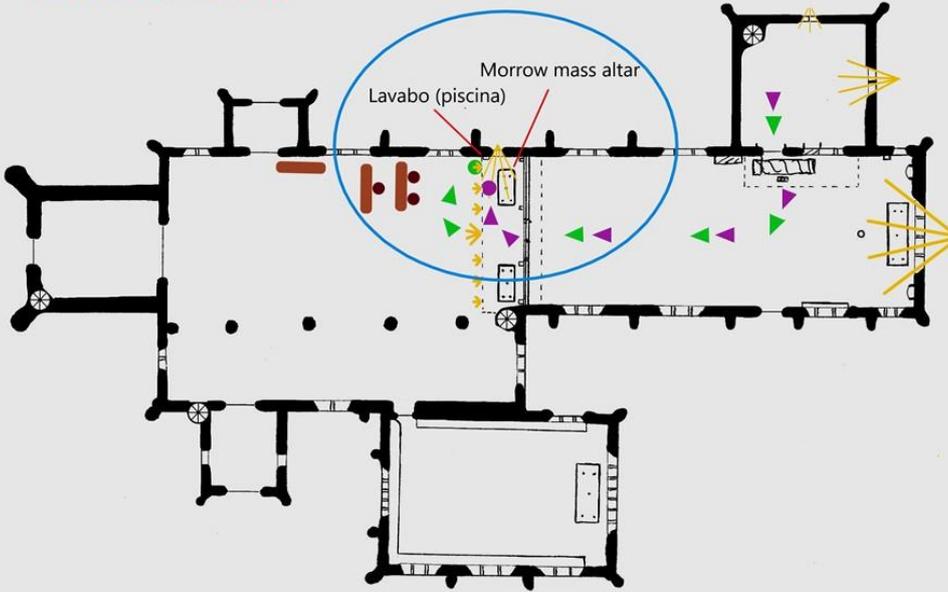
Pyx: Dennington, Suffolk

Will the Parson, as the priest is known by his parish flock, arrives at the chancel door, unlocks it and enters the chancel. He goes across it to the other side, genuflecting as he passes the sacrament hanging in its pyx in front of the high altar.

In the sacristy, Harry helps Will to put on his vestments.

They leave the sacristy and pass between the quire stalls to go through the rood screen doors.

**Morrow mass**



North altar: Patrishow, Brecon



Altar stone slab:  
Patrishow, Brecon



English chalice c1200:  
V&A



Lavabo with bottle shelves:  
Tong college, Shrops

Then they turn right towards the small altar under the north side of the rood-loft. Harry places the chalice at the back of the bowl of the small lavabo cut into the wall near the altar.

He opens the shutter of the window to let just a little light into this otherwise dark place.



Window to light north altar:  
Lydden, Kent

Will stands still for a moment to prepare himself to celebrate the morrow mass of day-break.

Three people who have come to hear mass are sitting on some loose benches near this 'morrow mass' altar. They are dressed warmly, not only because it is quite cold in the church, but also because they are about to go with some of their farm produce to the weekly market in a town four miles away.

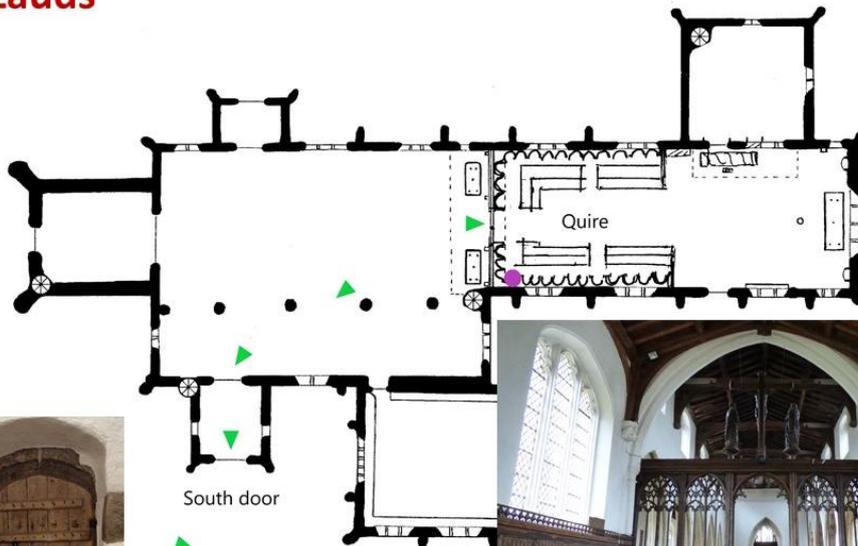


Benches: Cawston, Norfolk

Their journey takes them through a wood that attracts robbers, so they wish to have the comfort and protection of hearing mass before they leave.

Twenty minutes later, the short, said mass is ended and Will the Parson returns to the sacristy.

## Lauds



South door: Patrishow, Brecon



Quire: Gamlingay, Cambs

Harry the Sexton locks the rood-screen and then goes home through the south porch door of the church for breakfast.

But Will still has work to do. He takes off his mass vestments and puts on a heavy dark brown quire cloak with a fur collar. Then he goes back through the quire stalls to his seat on the south side of the quire. He sits there for a few moments, facing the high altar, with his back to the rood-screen.



Quire: Gamlingay, Cambs

The daily office book, which is part of the chancel's library, is kept in a small 'stobbe' or cupboard in the corner between the seats to his right. He leans over and finds a small Breviary, and then he rises to open the shutter at the bottom of the nearby window, so he can see the special prayers for the day by the first light of the rising sun.

Breviary late C14:  
Lucca, Italy



Corner stobbe:  
Salle, Norfolk

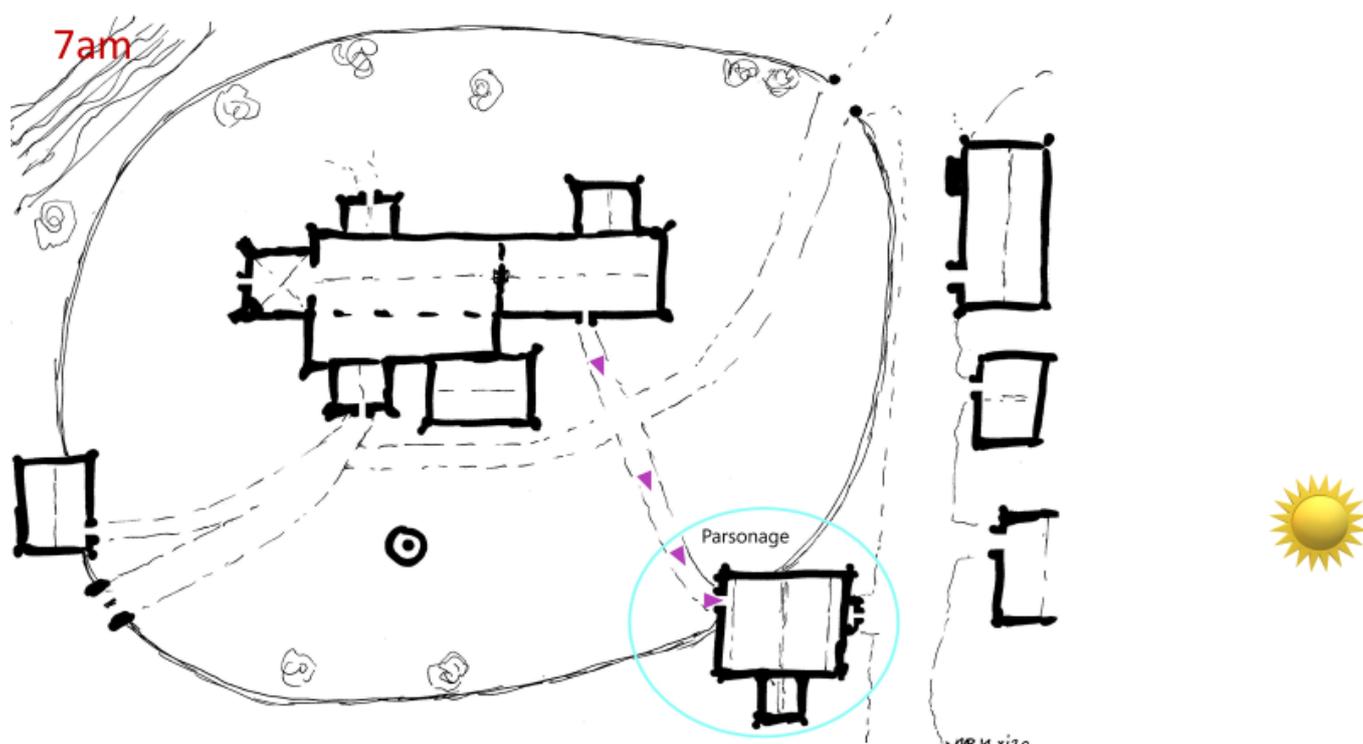


South side quire return stalls with low west window: Gamlingay, Cambs

Standing, he sings *Deus in adiutorium meum intende ... O God, make haste to help me ...*

And Will once more starts the daily round of offices with the combined office of Matins and Lauds, which he chants quickly in a low, quiet singing voice. Today, the 26th of November in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Henry VIII, is not a feast day. It is just an ordinary working day, a ferial one, in the Year of Our Lord, *Anno Domini MDXX*, 1520.

Twenty-five minutes later, Will gets up out of his seat, having rested there a short while, after being on his feet for so long. Turning around and looking through the rood screen, he sees that he has had two silent companions. One is Margery, an older widow-woman, popular for her good works around the parish. The other is Alyson, a younger, unmarried and well-educated woman, who was recently elected as one of the two church wardens. She reads from her own prayer book during the office. Both leave the church silently while Will returns to the sacristy. Soon after, the clock bell chimes again.



It is 7 o'clock. In the sacristy, Will checks that everything for the high mass of the day is ready. He locks the sacristy door and leaves through the chancel door, locking that behind him as well, and returns to the parsonage.



Parsonage: Muchelney, Somerset



Parsonage with oratory: Milverton, Somerset

Once home, he takes a quick drink of small ale and sets light to some kindling-wood in the kitchen stove. Then he goes straight upstairs to the oratory over the south porch which overlooks his garden, to say the short office of Prime. This is much less complicated than the earlier office of Mattins and Lauds. It consists of responses and prayers, and three psalms which change every day so that he says or sings all the 150 psalms every week. Will knows these by heart, and needs to consult his personal small Breviary only for the special collect for today, Thursday before Advent.

Will says quietly to himself the opening phrase of this and every office,

*Deus in adjutorium meum intende*

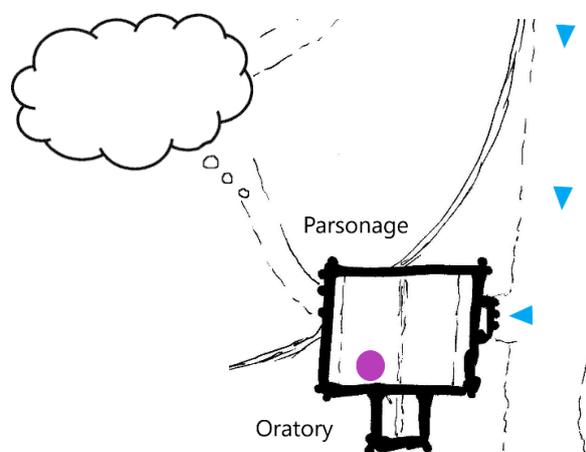
And twelve minutes later, Prime is finished.



Breviary: late C14 Lucca, Italy

Will goes downstairs and out of the back door to the privy to relieve himself. Now he can break his over-night fast. Since he has not yet sung the high mass, he doesn't eat any meat. Warming up some sheep's milk on the stove, he dunks pieces of yesterday's bread into it.

**8am**



Assistant priest (Simone Martini 1285-1344)



Arnold the organ maker is coming to tune the organ

The clock-bell chimes eight times while Will is eating an apple and thinking how he can manage the rest of the day. He is expecting two visitors. One is a priest that Will hopes will help him with an increasing work-load. Extra pressure on his time has come especially from those requesting sung chantry masses for the souls of their recently-departed relatives.

The other person he is expecting to see today is the organ maker. He is due to come to check over and tune the organ in good time for Christmas. So Will wonders if an assistant priest might also be

able to play the organ? That would save having to find an organ-player in the nearest town, for the feast days around Christmas.

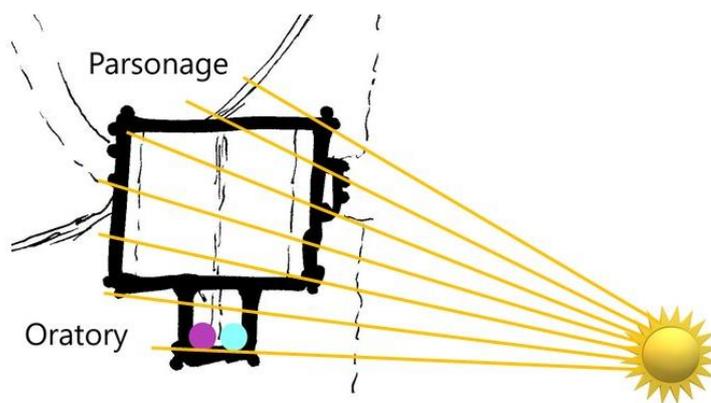
Just as Will was cleaning his beaker and platter and thinking about going outside for some more firewood, there's a knock on the street door. Dressed in a thick overcoat, a young man is standing outside. Greeting him by name, Will invites Thomas to come in. Stooping slightly to step through the doorway, Thomas takes off his fur-lined hat and reveals his clerk's tonsure.

Thomas had lodged in the friary in the local market town overnight, so he is very happy to accept some of the same milk and bread for his breakfast. While they are talking, Will mentions that either father or master Arnold are due to come today to tune the quire organ. Thomas surprises him by saying that he knows the Arnold family well.



Carving: Stowlangtoft, Suffolk

## Terce



## 9 am

The clock bell strikes nine times, so it is the hour for Terce, the next office. Will invites Thomas to join him in the oratory. After Terce has been said, Will asks Thomas to help him at high mass. ... And when they are ready, they set off for the chancel door.

9.30am  
High Mass



Harry the Sexton, meanwhile, returns to the church through the west door in the tower and winds up the clock. Going to the sacristy, Harry takes two small bottles, with wine and water in them, and carries them to the lavabo in the sanctuary. Then he takes the mass books from their locker and sets the large and heavy altar mass-book open on its cushions on the high altar, and places the epistle and gospel books on their desks.



Lavabo: Blockley, Glos



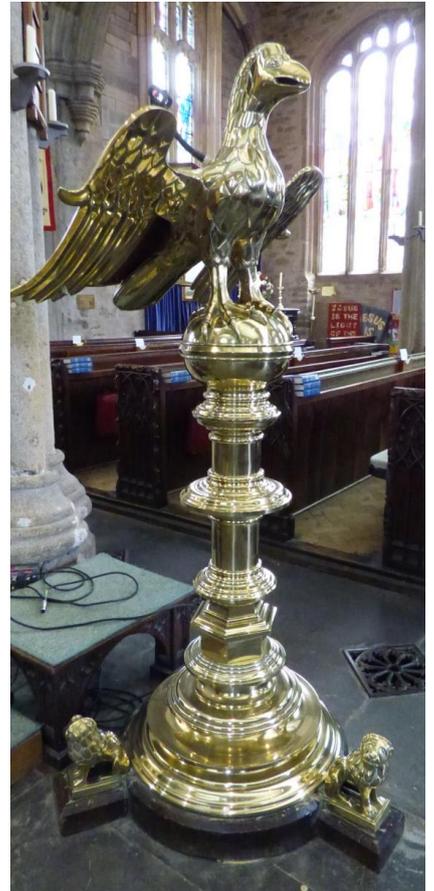
Stobbe: Dorchester, Oxon



Altar book



Wooden epistle (or music) desk:  
Ivinghoe, Bucks

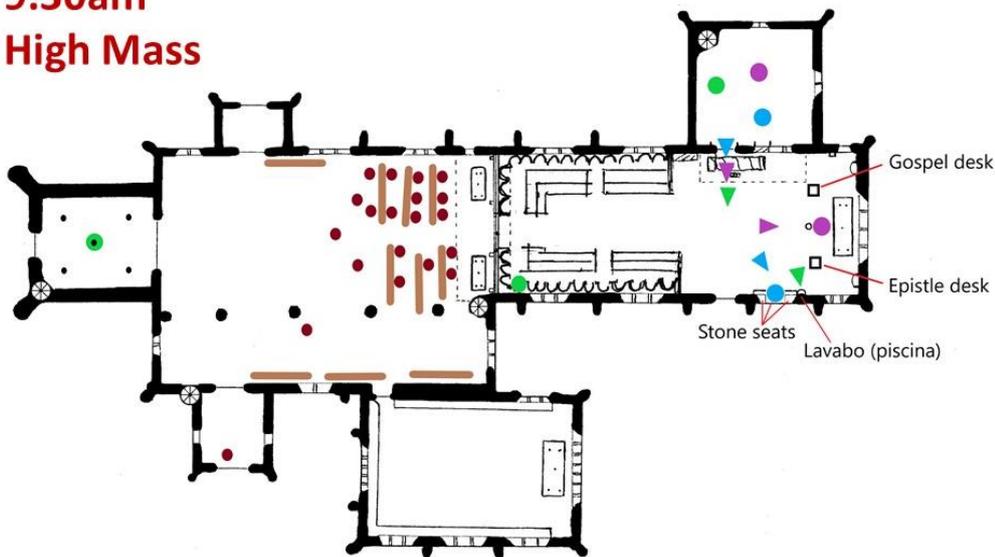


Brass eagle gospel desk:  
Tiverton, Devon

Finally, he lights the two candles on the altar, the epistle-side candle first. Harry returns to the tower and starts to peal for mass by chiming the three middle bells of the five tower bells.

Within a few minutes, about a dozen women and a few older men, including one of the church wardens, are gathering in their church. They stand in the church or sit on moveable forms. Everyone has positioned themselves to see and hear what is about to take place. There is a short period of silence when Harry stops chiming. So as not to disturb the congregation, he leaves by the west door and, passing by the church yard cross, he goes through the chancel doorway and into the quire.

**9.30am  
High Mass**



He puts on a surplice he had left on one of the quire stalls, and he picks up the high crucifix kept there, and goes to the sacristy door.



'Bosworth' crucifix, mid-C15



Woodcut: Procession to the altar

Followed by Thomas, wearing deacon's vestments, and Will in priest's vestments, Harry leads them the short distance from the sacristy to the sanctuary. Thomas carries the chalice and places it on its shelf in the lavabo on the south side of the sanctuary. He then takes his place near the stone seats next to the lavabo, while Harry returns to the quire stalls.

From the step in front of the high altar, Will begins mass by singing:

*Dominus vobiscum ... The Lord be with you ...* and Thomas and Harry reply: *Et cum spiritu tuo ... And with your spirit ...*



Lavabo: Stanford in the Vale, Berks



Woodcut: High Mass starts

Thomas sings the epistle from the wooden desk near the stone seats and then Will sings the gospel from the brass eagle on the other side of the altar.

At this time in the morning, both are glad of the extra light from the three new sanctuary windows, because chanting the epistle and gospel had become more complicated. No longer is it just a question of singing them in a near-monotone, but each phrase now needs its special inflexions.

## Lighting the sanctuary and the Epistle and Gospel desks

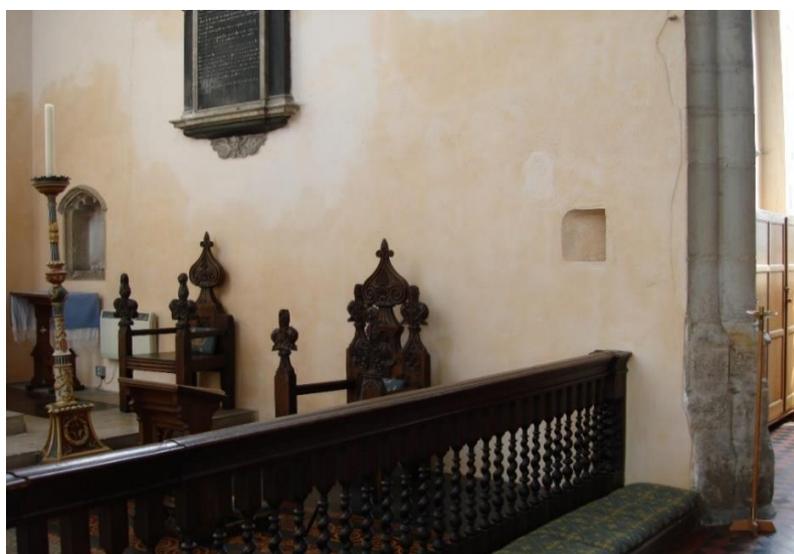


Turning to face the east window, by now not as bright as it had been an hour before, when light was streaming directly through it, they sing the Creed. This is also sung with musical elaboration, the sounds they make reflecting the way it is written down in the illuminated mass books – with decorated initial letters and final flourishes.

*Credo in unum Deum ... I believe in one God*

Then, the two priests mix together the wine and some of the water in the chalice, pouring these from the small bottles placed next to the chalice on the lavabo shelf. Thomas then pours a little water over Will's fingers while he says

*Lavabo in innocentia manus meas et circuibo altare tuum Domine ... I will wash my hands in innocence and so will I go to your altar, O Lord.*



Stump of veil beam: Clare, Suffolk

Harry now unhooks the sanctuary veil and lets it hang down from the veil beam. The two priests,

now hidden behind the veil, start the canon, the central part of the mass, by responding, very quietly

*Dominus vobiscum ... Et cum spiritu tuo*

The most sacred part of the mass continues in almost complete silence, with Will singing its words very quietly. Only Thomas is near enough to hear and respond. Thomas rings the small sanctuary bells so that Harry can respond by pulling a rope from his place in the quire stalls to chime the sanctus bell high up on the peak of the roof above him.



Sanctus bell  
turret:  
Glastonbury,  
Somerset



Llanfilo Brecon

At the Sanctus, there are three spaced strokes of the bells

*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Deus Dominus ... Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Lords*

The Sanctus bell alerts those working at home on their looms or in their kitchens or gardens, or further away on their strips in the fields. These three strokes tell them that the central part of the mass is under way. Then at the three more rapid strokes of the bells at each consecration ... they kneel if they can. Those in the church, who have been waiting attentively for this moment, watch for the elevation of the host and then the chalice above the veil.





Ivory pax with *Crucifixion*: Germany or France, C15

Then Harry passes the pax, and a cloth to wipe it, through the rood screen so that the people in their church can kiss it and say

*Pax tecum ... Peace be with you ...* and receive the reply *Et cum spiritu tuo* before passing it on.

### 10 am

The clock bell chimes ten times. Mass finishes quickly with priests' communion, the ceremonial washing of the chalice and paten in the lavabo, while Harry raises the veil, and the final chants.

But mass is not yet quite complete. Will goes to the north side of the altar. Set in the north wall beyond it, there is a small desk with a single page of writing on it.



Last gospel desk: Otteringham, Yorks

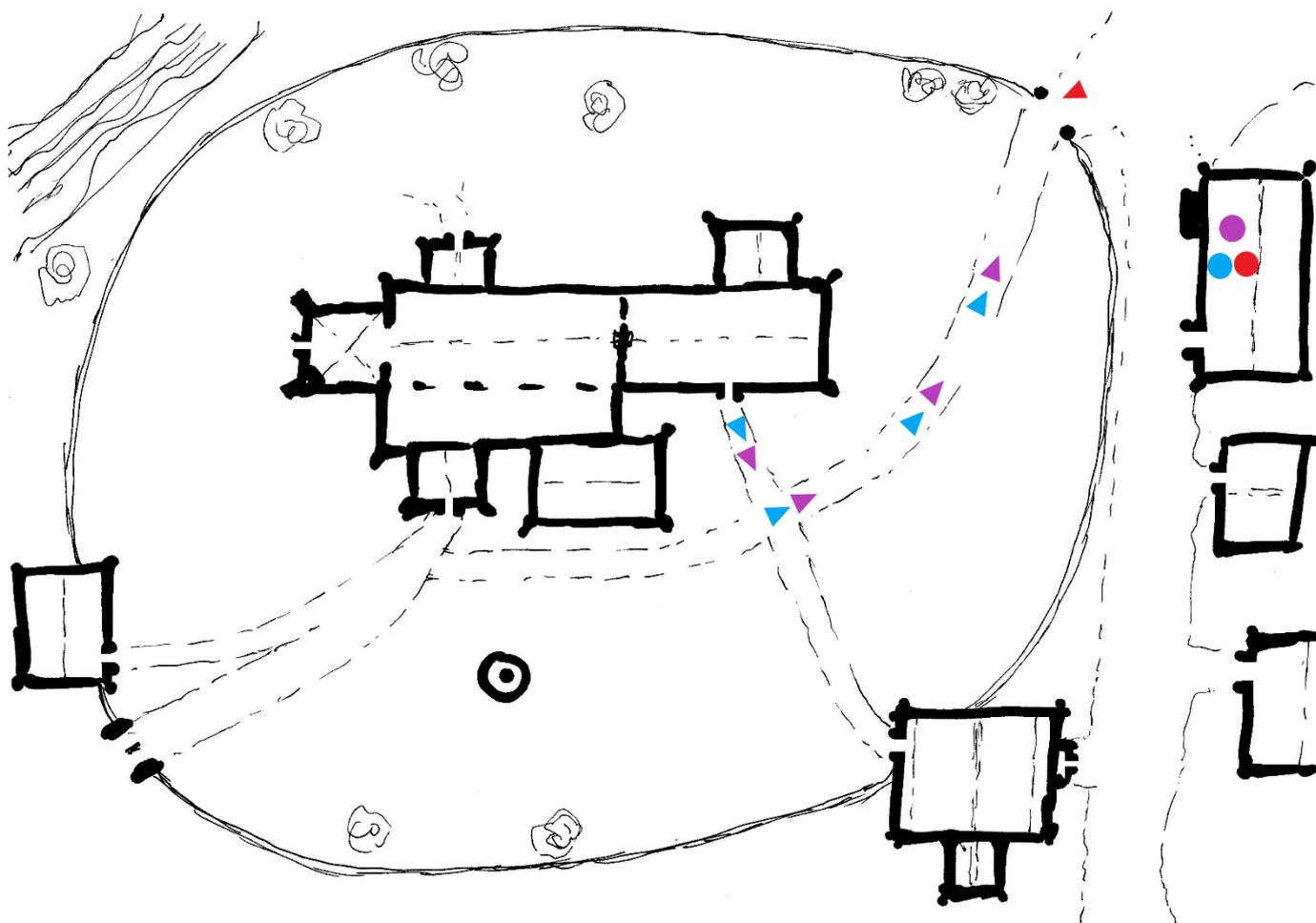
Facing this he intones the 'last Gospel', the first verses of the gospel of St John:

*In principio erat Verbum  
 et Verbum erat apud Deum  
 et Deus erat Verbum  
 ... et Verbum caro factum est  
 et habitavit in nobis,  
 et vidimus gloriam,  
 eius gloriam quasi unigeniti a Patre,  
 plenum gratiae et Veritatis*

*In the beginning was the Word  
 and the Word was with God  
 and God was the Word  
 ... and the Word was made flesh  
 and lived with us,  
 and we saw the glory,  
 His glory of the first child of the Father,  
 full of grace and truth.*

After un-vesting in the sacristy, the two priests leave Harry to put the mass vestments back into their press, and to lock the altar books and chalice and paten in their stobbes.

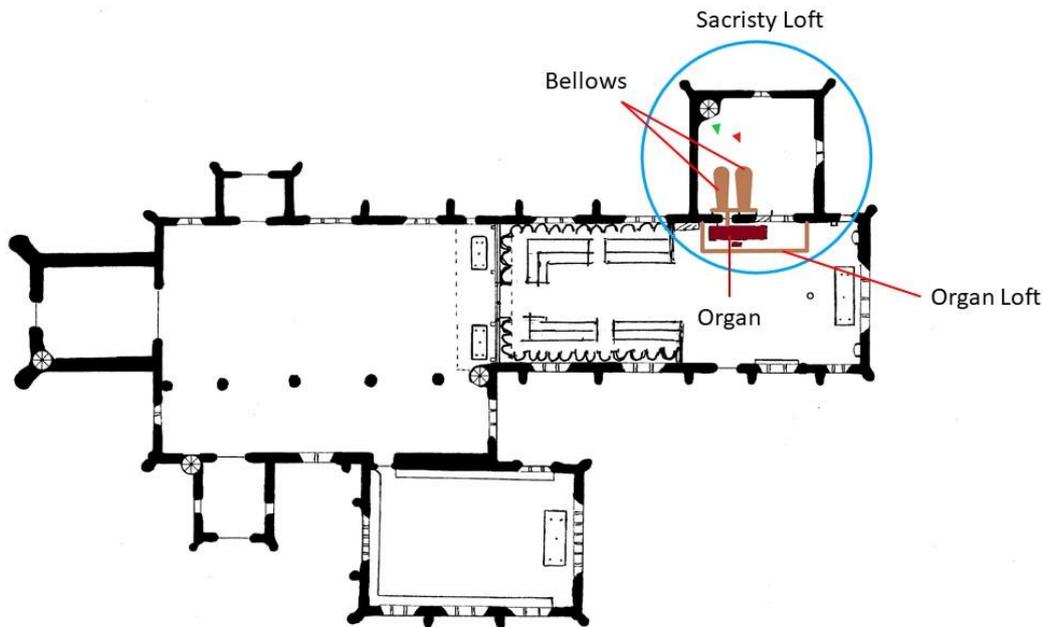
Will and Thomas set off for the parsonage. On their way there, they see a man tying up his horse at the eastern church yard gate and go to greet him.



It is master Arnold, the younger organ maker. He had heard the consecration bells while on his way. Having spurred his horse on, he is grateful for Will's suggestion that they should all go to the church house, to have a drink of light ale, together with the church folk who had been present during the mass. His horse would be equally grateful for a drink from the water trough, and a bucketful of oats from the church's store. At the church house, Arnold is welcomed by Robert, church warden, who thanks him for his pains in riding the fifteen or so miles from his workshops. Will talks with his parish folk and introduces Thomas to them, and then they return to the parsonage. Robert the Warden goes with master Arnold to the church to find Harry and to sort out what needs to be done to the organ. Harry is still working in the sacristy, so he opens the door to the staircase which leads to the loft over the sacristy.



Stairs to sacristy loft: Adderbury, Oxon



All three go up to see what condition the bellows and their mechanisms are in. The organ was last played on All Hallows' Day at the beginning of the month, and there is a problem because Harry's son was finding it hard work to keep the bellows full of air.

Arnold was not surprised. With winter coming on and harvesting done, there is usually an invasion of hungry field mice hoping to make nests and chew the tasty skins on the bellows which are greased with some tallow-fat to make their leather supple. And sure enough, small teeth-marks are visible on the bellows even when they are lying flat. On raising the bellows and inspecting them carefully, Arnold finds that there are two small holes in one of them and a much larger hole in the other.



Adderbury, Oxon

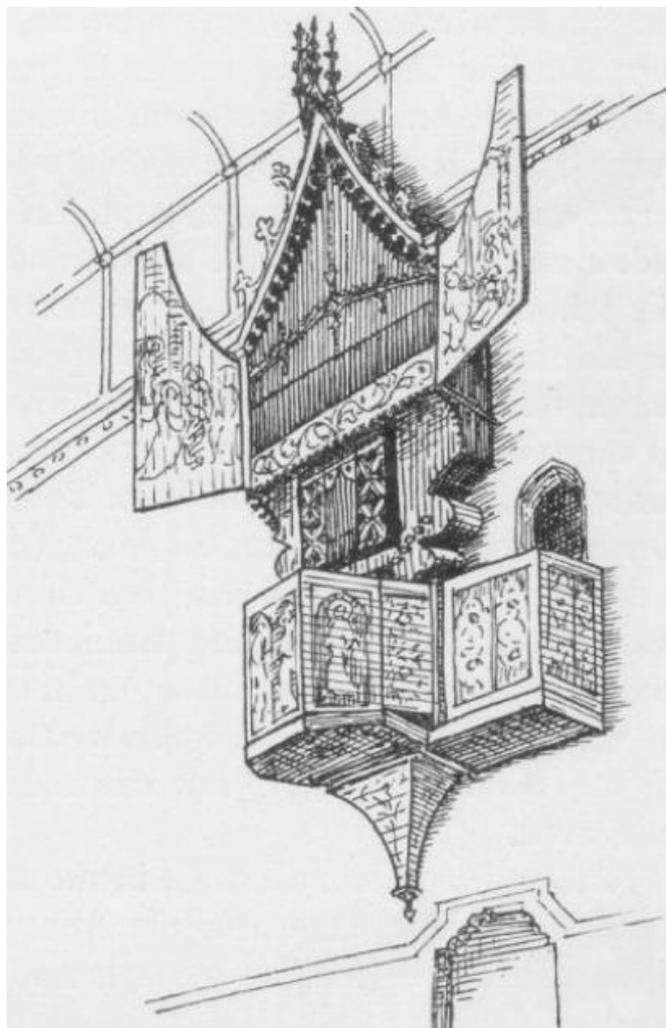


Glue pot and cow hide, hammer and large-headed nails

Arnold had brought with him a glue pot and glue, with various wide-headed nails and a couple of square feet of flexible cow-leather. He needs some boiling water in the outer pot of his glue-pot to re-melt and heat up the glue, so he asks Harry to go over to the church house with the pot to heat it up on the fire in the meeting room.

**11am**

### **'Amending of the organs'**



Drawing c1950 by Cecil Clutton of the C19 organ and gallery at West Tofts, Norfolk

It is eleven o'clock. While Harry is away to heat up the glue pot, Arnold goes with Robert to the organ loft from the sacristy loft, through a doorway which had been made between the uprights of an old window. This window had otherwise been blocked up when the sacristy had been enlarged and its loft built up about fifty years ago.



Keyboard and levers: S. Petronio, Bologna C15

Lifting the cover over the keys, Arnold checks for any mouse droppings between them. He sits down on the organ bench and plays up and down the keys to see if any of them sticks down. One does, so he grasps it and the key next to it and pulls and pushes them up and down, and grinds away the droppings into powder to free the key. Robert watches him attentively, so that he knows what to do if this happens again. Arnold then checks the iron stop-levers to the right of the keyboard to see if they are working properly and then cleans the area round the organ keyboard and the floor below. Robert leaves to go to his home in the village.

## Organ bellows



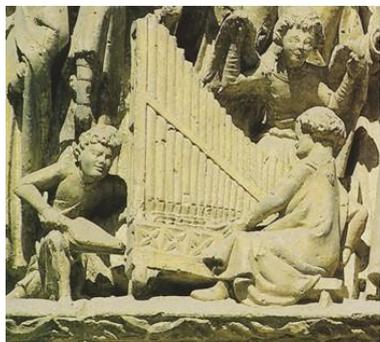
Forge bellows: Moisdon, France



Angel organists c1505: Hillesden, Bucks



St Denys, Walmgate York 1430s



León cathedral, Spain Judgement doorway C14



Organ bellows 1530s: Church of Saint Savin, Pyrennes, France



Forge bellows: Musée Alsacien de Strasbourg

When Harry returns, Arnold is back in the sacristy loft. He has cut out three pieces of leather and got out the large-headed nails which will help the glue hold better in this damp weather. He repairs the bellows quickly, before the glue cools down. The leather patches over the two small holes did not need any re-reinforcement, but the larger piece at the neck of the other bellows did, so he bangs a few nails in.

The glue will now have to be left to dry, so Harry suggests that Arnold should go back to the church house to eat. They are brewing the strong Yule-tide ales there today as well as baking, so there are various people around to share whatever each had brought along for their midday meal.

## 12 noon Angelus



The sun has by now got as high as it will in the grey sky, and the clock-bell strikes twelve. Then, Harry chimes the second tower bell three times and then three more after a pause. And he chimes the fourth bell seven times and the second bell three times again – and goes home.



Annunciation:  
Fra Angelico  
c1433-4

In the parsonage oratory, the two priests say the 'Hail Mary':

*Ave Maria gratia plena ... Hail Mary, full of grace ...*

They follow this by saying the short office of Sext.



Then at last it is time for their midday meal, a hot-pot made from their own pork and garden root-vegetables. Meg, the ‘good woman’ who cooks for them, has also brought over some freshly baked bread from the church bake-house. And as a special pre-Advent treat, to go with some hazel and cob nuts, Meg has also brought in four small sugary cinnamon cakes. Lunch is washed down with some light ale, also fresh from the church brew-house.

**1pm**

One o’clock chimes and it is now time for a rest, so Will suggests that Thomas should use a small truckle bed in the second, guest bed chamber.



After a short nap, Will gets up, puts on his wooden clogs and goes out to the garden, where he tries to spend about an hour every day, digging and weeding.

When Thomas appears after a longer rest, Will asks him to help bring in part of a felled ash tree. Together they saw and split its wood with a broad axe, talking as they work.

**2pm**

Two o'clock is chiming while Thomas tells Will about how he was educated in his home town:

## **The education of Thomas**

### **The first form**



Boy's benches: Walpole St Peter, Norfolk



Ranworth Antiphoner



'I started when I was six on the first form in the quire and learned all the psalms and canticles by heart. When I was first ordained as a junior clerk when I was seven, I moved upwards into the front quire-stalls.

### **Learning to play the organ**

### **Being taught at the grammar school**



Chester cathedral above west door

I was fourteen when my voice changed, and then I sang the second line in written music and learned how to play the organ. And that's why I know the Arnold family. I was taught at the grammar school run by the parish guilds.

## College and ordination



Clerks in training c1453 at New College Oxford



Ordination: Woodcut

They gave me an exhibition which paid for me to go to the large county college when I was 18, because I had chosen to be trained as a senior clerk in holy orders before my ordinations. I'm now looking for a teaching position, but I know full well that I have to start modestly in the priestly life because I'm not from a wealthy family.'

Will asked Thomas if he would like to lead the singing at this afternoon's Vespers, to make it more solemn with more music? He added that if the church wardens and guild aldermen were satisfied with his work, Will would arrange with them to pay Thomas an annuity. Perhaps, he thought, they might pay the rent of a house for him to live in.

### 3 pm

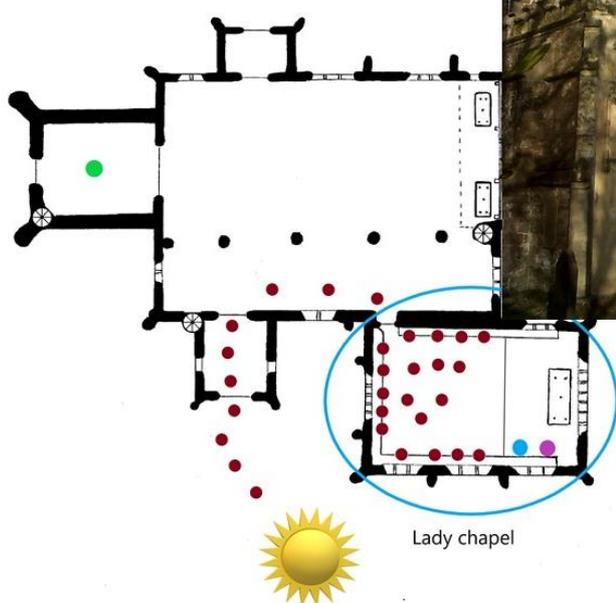
Three o'clock chimes – and, with the sun already beginning to move towards the cloudy horizon, it is time for Will and Thomas to say Nones in the oratory, before they prepare for the late-afternoon office of Vespers. This is due to start at any time after half past three, when the parish folk can come in from their fields. When the two priests walk back to the sacristy to prepare for the office, Will and Thomas immediately hear sounds from the organ as they go through the chancel door.



Mid-C19 medieval organ reconstruction for West Tofts, Norfolk, case & pipework made and painted in Belgium; 1950 moved to South Pickenham, Norfolk

A discreet cough from Will as he passes across the chancel warns player and tuner that it is time to stop for a while. Robert and Arnold go with Harry’s son over to the church house to warm up their cold bones, passing the parish folk who are coming along to the church. Harry starts to peal for Vespers on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> bells.

## Vespers

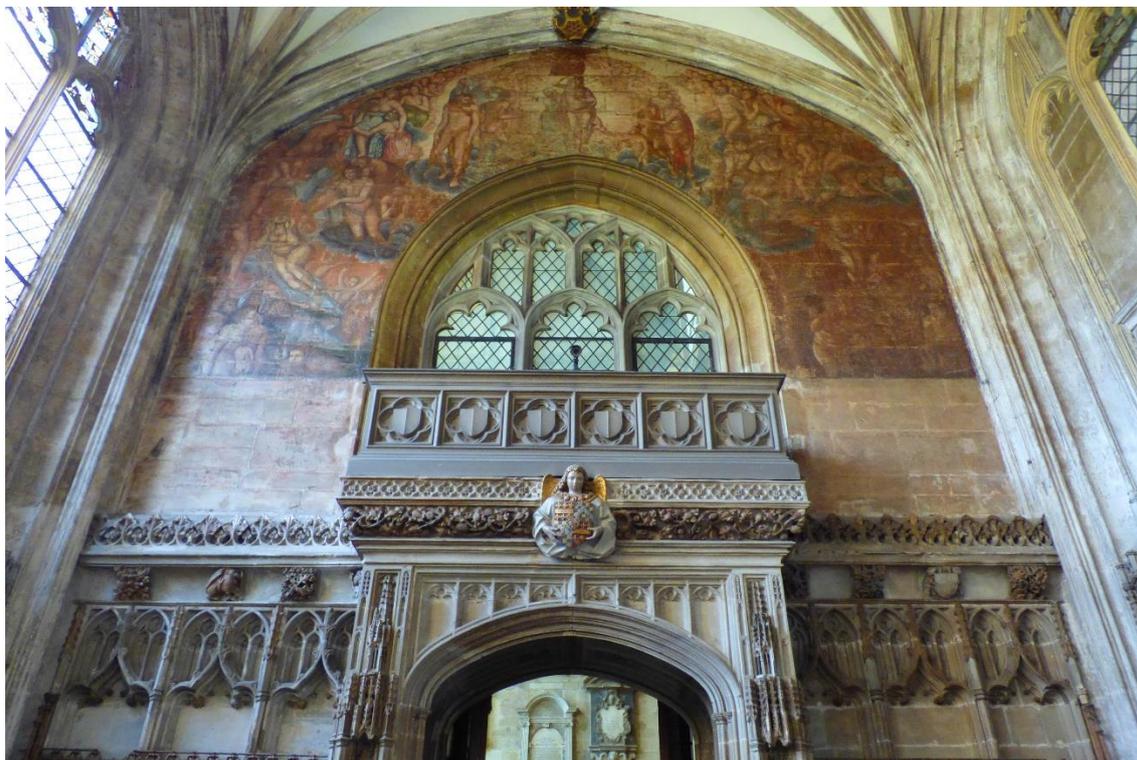


Tiverton Devon



Lavabo & stone seats: Lawford, Essex

Today, Vespers is going to be sung solemnly in the wide, arch-vaulted and acoustically resonant Lady chapel. It had been built jointly by the various parish guilds onto to the south side of the church only about twenty-five years ago – at about the same time as the rector paid for the sanctuary to be extended with its own new windows. The Lady chapel was designed and built in the latest style for elaborate musical ceremonies, especially for the Masses and Vespers of Our Lady, so it has its own



Beauchamp chapel, Warwick

set of lavabo and stone seats. And the chapel is positioned deliberately so that, while the sun is in the south-west at Vespers time, its beams of light come though the chapel's wide and tall windows and light up every carved and painted corner of it.



Carvings on chancel stone seats: Car Colston, Notts



Angel corbels: Broad Chalke, Wilts

Harry stops peeling and rings the Angelus while the church people settle themselves in the Lady Chapel.

*Magnificat anima mea Domimun ... My soul magnifies the Lord ...*

Being a solemn ceremony, today's office of Vespers will take longer than usual because it will include more music, including special antiphons and hymns.



Cope c1400: Chipping Campden, Glos

The two priests process to the Lady Chapel in their wide, lavishly-embroidered quire copes.

**4 pm**

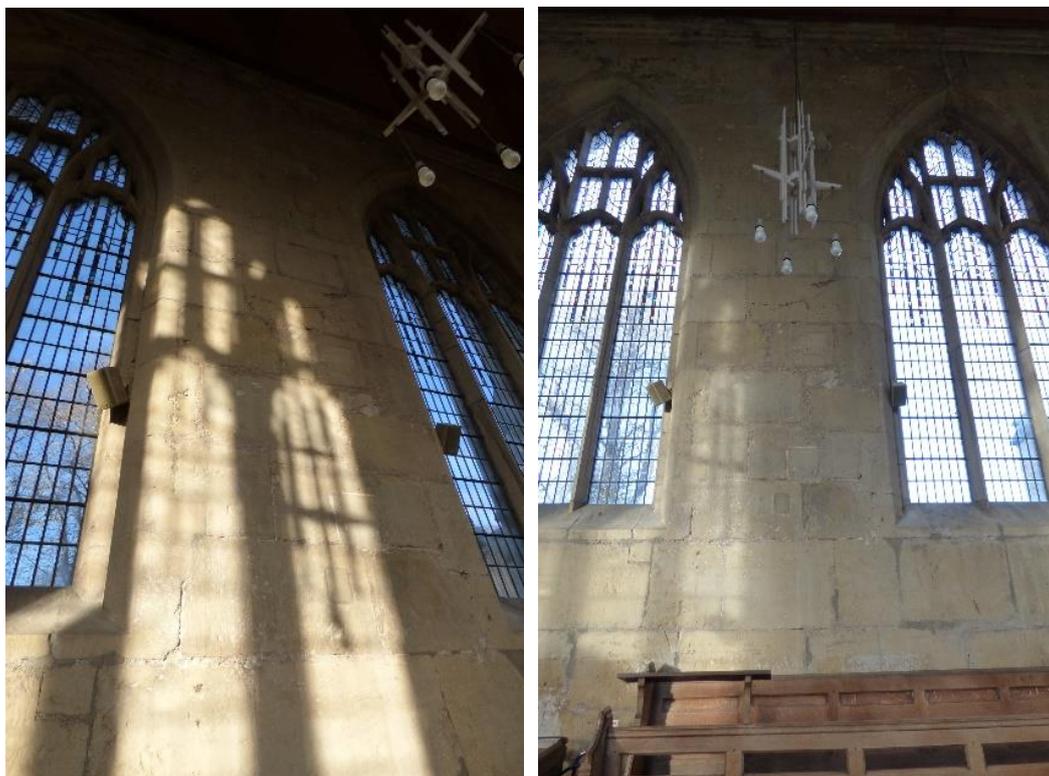
The clock bell strikes four, and the priests begin Vespers.

It is quickly apparent that Thomas's training is adequate to all musical demands. He leads confidently from one psalm, antiphon and hymn to the next, carefully managing their changes of tones.

At the end of the office, as the sun-light begins to fade, he sings his favourite love song to Our Lady:

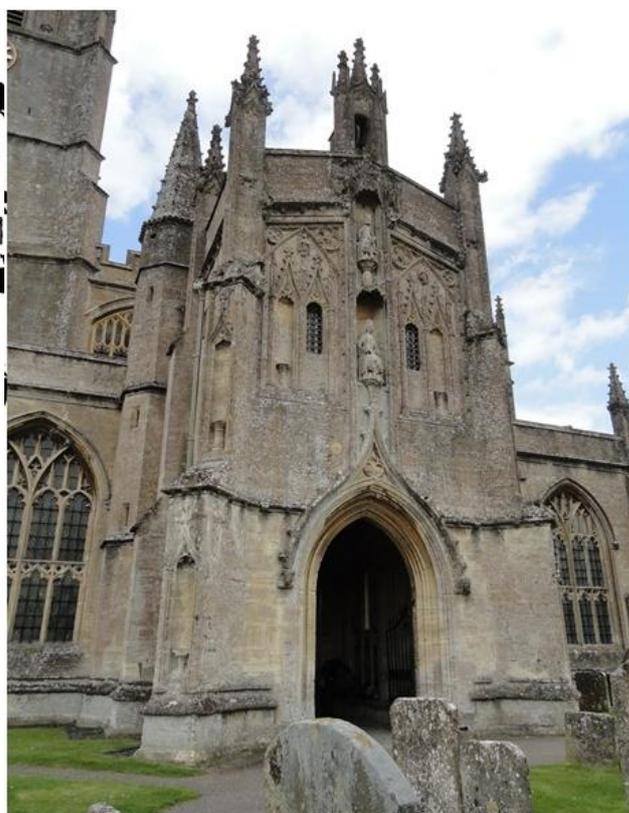
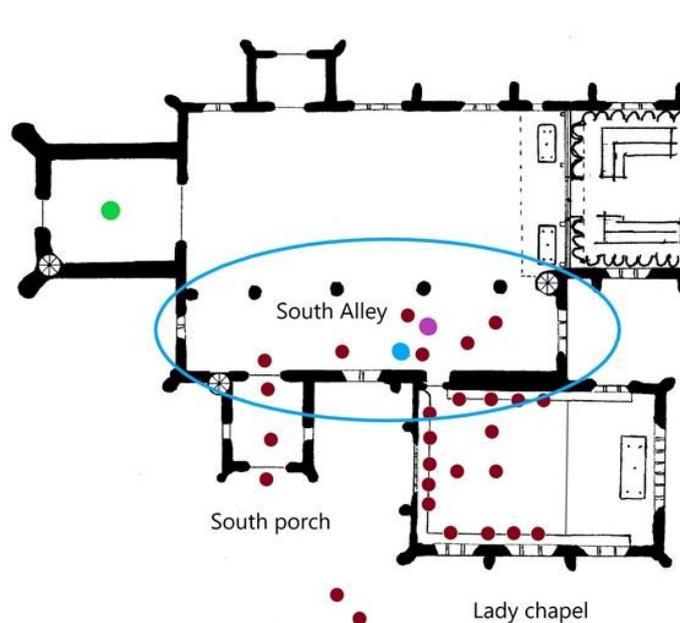
Edi beo thu, hevene quene,  
Folkes froure and engles blis,  
Moder unwemmed and maiden clene,  
Swich in world non other nis.  
On thee hit is wel eth sene,  
Of all wimmen thu havest thet pris;  
Mi swete levedi, her mi bene  
And reu of me yif thi wille is.

*Blessed be you, heavenly Queen,  
Peoples' comfort and joy of angels,  
Mother unblemished and maiden pure,  
Such in the world none other is.  
In you it is well seen,  
Of all women you have that prize;  
My sweet lady, hear my request.  
And take pity on me if it is your will.*



Skirlaw, Yorks

5pm



Two-storey south porch: Northleach, Glos

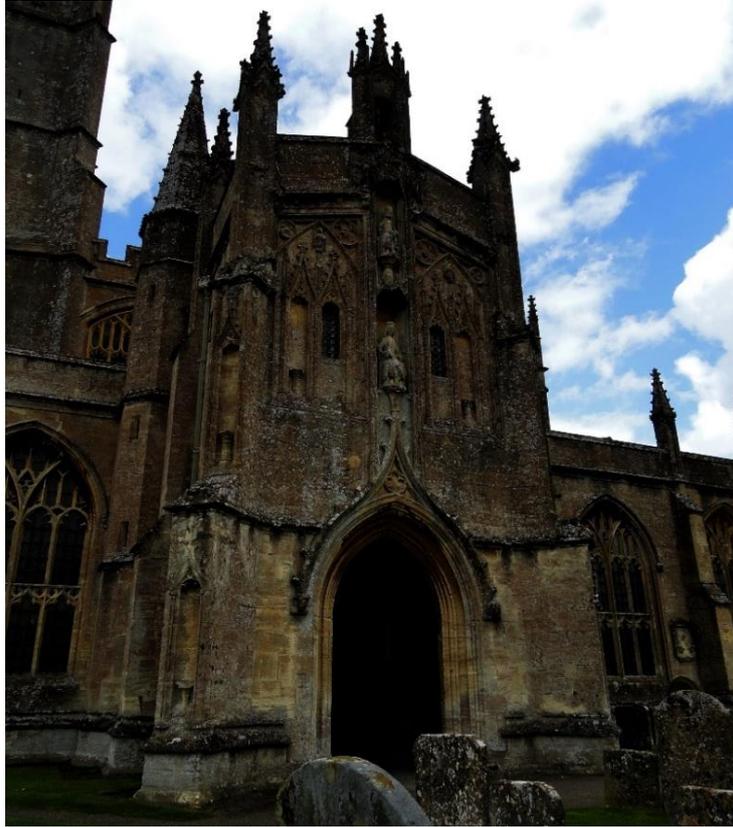
Robert and his fellow church warden, Alyson, are present at Vespers and can hear Thomas's skill for themselves. So, while folk gather after the office in the south alley where the Lady altar used to be, Will asks the church wardens to pay Thomas an earnest shilling, which will seal their bargain that he should serve the church for a year.

They notice that master Arnold is standing nearby. He says that he has one more set of pipes to amend. This will not take long, since these are trumpet-like regal pipes that are quick to tune. And, since Arnold has almost finished his work and needs to set off to go home again as soon as he can, the

wardens confer. Then, unlocking the door and going up the stairs to the loft above the south porch, Robert unlocks the parish chest and brings down two shilling coins.

Alison gives Thomas his earnest shilling with a little smile, and Robert gives the other shilling to master Arnold to pay for his fee.

The organ work is finished not long after the clock bell strikes five, so, when master Arnold and Robert have left, Harry locks up the sacristy. Harry's son goes up to the rood loft and pinches out all the lights there except the perpetual one that stays alight at the foot of the crucifix.



South porch: Northleach, Glos

Checking that the chancel door is locked, Harry locks the rood-screen doors, and finally locks the south porch door as they leave the church and go home.

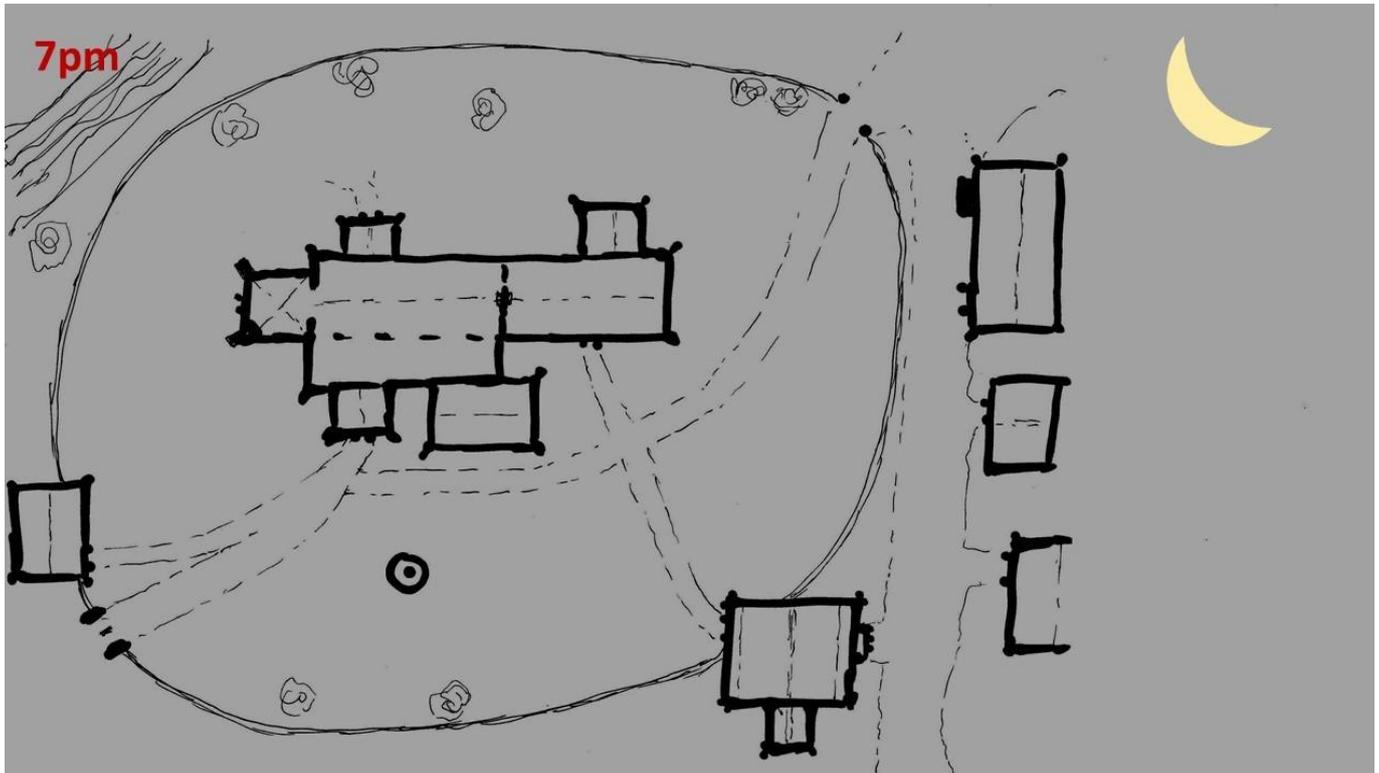


Redenhall, Norfolk

As they pass the tower, some last sinking rays of the sun light it up ...

**6pm**

The work of the church building would normally be finished now, but there is more drama later that evening. Not long after six o'clock chimes, during supper, there was a bang on the street door of the parson's house and there is master Smyth, who says that his grandmother has been taken 'very bad' by a heart seizure.



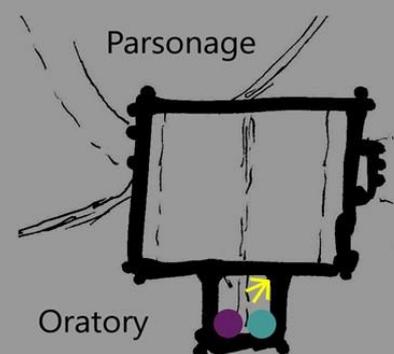
So, the light of lanterns can be seen to move round the chancel as the priests take the sacrament from the pyx and pack the holy oils. They take it to her along the streets, preceded by Harry ringing a hand-bell, and as they go the church clock chimes seven times. ...

When all is over, and she has received absolution and the sacrament on her death-bed, they leave the family in the capable hands of Margery, the wise woman.

On their return, Harry tolls Mistress Smyth's knell on the fifth and largest bell seventy times, which is what her family thinks is how old she was.

## Compline

Orwell, Cambs



Compline, the last office of the day, when every sleeping person's soul is commended to God, is quietly sung this evening in the little oratory, lit by a single candle ...

... and punctuated by the slow tolling of the knell ...

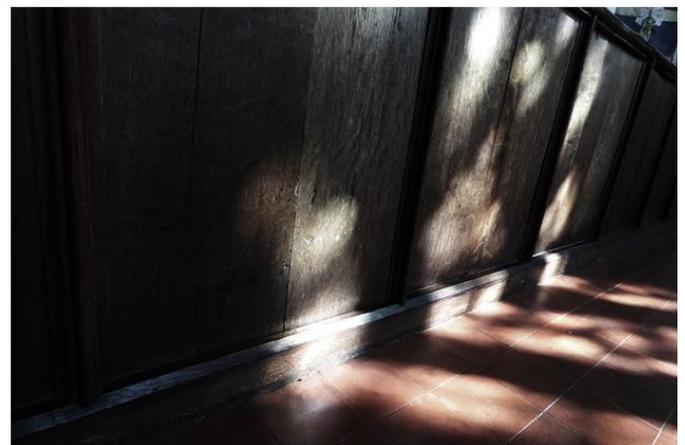
*Before the ending of the day,  
Creator of the world, we pray  
That, with Thy wonted favour, Thou  
Would'st be our guard and keeper now...*

## 8 pm

Both knell and Compline have run their course before the clock bell sounds for the last time at eight o'clock, the curfew hour.

Back home, Harry thinks about getting out the church mattock tomorrow, to dig a four-foot deep pit for old Mistress Smyth. Will ponders what he might say about her long life, lived in often turbulent times, at tomorrow's requiem mass. Thomas remembers Alyson's smile and hopes he will be happy in his new community.

## Ghostly shades of moon light



Meanwhile, shades of moon-light form ghostly patterns on the tiled floors in chancel and church ... while echoes of bells glide down the tower, pass through the autumn mists and sink down into the dewy fields ...

*O Father that we ask be done,  
Through Jesus Christ, Thine only Son,  
Who with the Holy Ghost and Thee  
Shall live and reign eternally ... Amen*

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Well, there we are ... I hope that this brief glimpse of what might have happened in and around a village church building on a typical day 500 years ago, will have given you an idea of why churches were designed as they were. They are buildings made for daily music, and to make this possible they and their windows were arranged according to the daily movement of sunlight.

Thomas's home town church, a larger and more complicated building, would have resounded to music almost continuously from dawn to dusk. Our village church has had a fair share of music today though, with the two sung public offices and the high mass, plus the sounds of the organ being tuned! And tomorrow there will be four sung services, including Mistress Smyth's requiem. On Sunday, there will be a procession before high mass and a short homily and bidding from the pulpit, and the offices will be longer and more solemn. Thus the daily round goes on, seven days a week ...

So, next time you are able to visit a church, try to stay there long enough to notice how the size and placing of its windows are aligned with the sun, as it moves from the east, across the south, and towards the west of these buildings. Imagine how this reflects the placing and timing of the daily services. If you noticed that there was quite a lot of locking and unlocking of doors going on today (and I haven't included all the possible times this might have happened), think about how richly-furnished churches were then and what temptations they might have presented to commit sacrilege by stealing. Have a look at the outside of windows too, and see if they are barred and ask yourself, what were they protecting? There was also quite a lot of ringing of bells of all kinds, and we need to think about how practical and necessary these sounds were.

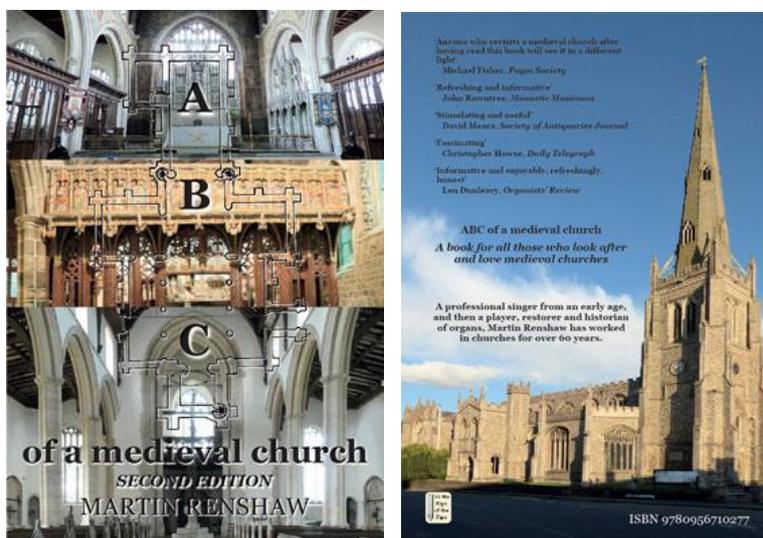
There are many other details I could have mentioned, if I had time today, but they all make sense if the daily use of the church building is taken into account. And I'm sure that if you take the time to explore these buildings carefully for yourselves, you'll have an even more profound admiration for our ancestors who designed, built, furnished and adorned these unique national treasures – our medieval churches.



This website presents a new approach towards understanding why medieval churches are so compelling. We can all appreciate that they were beautifully built and adorned, but at the same time they were designed with practical purposes in the minds of their creators. What were these?

Details of how to order Martin Renshaw's book 'ABC' of a medieval church' can be found on the Library page.

To contact Martin Renshaw email [renshaw.martin@wanadoo.fr](mailto:renshaw.martin@wanadoo.fr)



I've written a short book called 'ABC of a Medieval Church' to explain more about what I've said today. This is available through our research website: [soundsmedieval.org](http://soundsmedieval.org)

The text of this talk will be published on the website, together with all the power points, so you can have a closer look at these if you would like to. I'm now writing two more books, one on the organs in medieval England, and the other on the social, educational and musical life of parish churches.

Thank you all for coming with me on this journey today. And a really big 'thank you' to Vicki for the wonderful power points.