

Liturgy and Architecture in the Middle Ages

by Francesca Tinti



The Third
Deerhurst Lecture

The Third Deerhurst Lecture
LITURGY AND ARCHITECTURE IN THE
MIDDLE AGES

by David Parsons

Introduction

The intention of this paper is to offer a number of insights into the inter-relationships between church buildings and church worship in the Middle Ages, in particular during that remote period before the Norman Conquest. It does not pretend to be either comprehensive or exhaustive, but selects a number of examples to illustrate the overall theme. The basic premise is that buildings and their furnishings are designed and arranged in the best manner possible to carry out the functions expected of them. In the case of churches the primary (though not the sole) function is the performance of Divine Worship, and the buildings may be expected to bear some relationship to the liturgical uses for which they are intended. The current need to re-order many Anglican churches is a reminder, however, that liturgical practice is not static. As modes of worship change, so must the churches; what was appropriate in 1886 is not well suited to the services of today. Furnishings and fittings can to a large extent be altered, moved, discarded, but the basic structure of the building is less easily changed, so that every rearrangement represents a compromise between what is desirable and what is practically possible. Only brand new purpose-built churches show a close 'fit' between the architecture and current liturgical usage.

In the early Middle Ages, when Christianity was establishing itself in Western Europe, a large number of new churches had necessarily to be built, and they offer us the best chance of studying the relationships between the structures and the liturgy of the time. Those early churches which survive have been constantly altered, rebuilt and added to in the last thousand years or so, and the study of liturgical texts is one of the methods (alongside archaeological research) by which the original shape and layout of these early buildings can be reconstructed. Conversely, the archaeological interpretations of the churches themselves

can sometimes throw light on liturgical practices for which there is no direct evidence in the service books that survive.

Saint-Riquier and Angilbert's Ordo

In England, unfortunately, very few churches and almost no liturgical documents have survived from the earliest period, that is from the 7th and 8th centuries. Much of our information about these early buildings comes from the writings of men like the Venerable Bede (d. 735). Although these descriptions often go into some detail about building materials, the use of glass, the schemes of interior decoration, and so on, they are rarely specific about the layout of the buildings, for example whether there was a vestry, or where the high altar was. It is therefore impossible to draw any but the most general conclusion about what the churches looked like and how they were used.

The first substantial evidence comes from just across the Channel, where at Saint-Riquier in Picardy (NE France) a major monastery was built toward the end of the 8th century. Virtually nothing has survived above ground of the buildings of this period, though some evidence has been produced by archaeological excavations. The principal church was replaced at the end of the Middle Ages by the great Gothic building which stands there today; the claustral buildings were totally reconstructed in the 17th and 18th centuries, while two minor churches on the site have completely disappeared. What is known about the original complex consists of a chronicler's description written just before 1100 and some illustrations based on a medieval drawing which has not survived.⁽¹⁾ In addition to this, some fairly detailed instructions have survived about how the church should be used.⁽²⁾ It is therefore possible to match the instructions for the performance of the liturgy with the chronicler's description and with the illustrations that show the shape of the church. The orders of service, preserved in an old manuscript in the Vatican library, are supposed to have been drawn up by Angilbert, a right-hand man of the Emperor Charlemagne, who was the lay abbot of the monastery at Saint-Riquier. He is thought to have planned the whole of the monastery and the liturgy to suit each other. I must admit to having the gravest doubts as to whether the fragments of material that survive were actually written by Angilbert, but detailed argument of the case would be out of place here. Few colleagues would agree that the document, along with a description attributed by the chronicler to Angilbert, is a forgery of the 11th century, but that is at least a possibility.⁽³⁾ For the purposes of this paper it is assumed that the Vatican manuscript *does* contain fragments of an elaborate liturgy of around 800 AD, written for what appears from the illustrations to have been a rather elaborate church building of the same date.

ECCLESIA AB ANGILBERTO APUD CENTULAM AN DCC XCIX
CONSTRUCTARVM E SCRIPTO CODICE EKMAFEION



Fig. 1. Saint-Riquier : view of the monastery before AD 1100

Figure 1 is taken from an engraving of 1612, which purports to be a copy of a lost medieval document, which was attached to the text of the chronicle. It shows not a single church but a ‘family’ of churches, the largest of which has its dedication written on part of the structure: Sanctus Richarius. This local holy man became the patron saint of the high altar at the east end of the church,⁽⁴⁾ and the whole of this part of the building – the eastern arm (not the outer crypt, which is an 11th-century addition), the crossing tower and the transepts – is thought to have constituted the church of St. Richarius at the time of Angilbert. At the west end was an almost separate church dedicated to St Saviour, making this a great bi-polar building, with an important altar at each end of the church, and the nave almost a corridor connecting the two important parts. It was effectively two churches in one. South of the main church are chapels dedicated to St Benedict and to St Mary, so there were three or even four churches on the same site. One of the characteristics of early medieval monasteries is that there were often several churches, all part of the same complex, and in the case of Saint-Riquier clearly connected together by corridors. Superficially the area enclosed by these corridors resembles a standard cloister garth, though it is not exactly square, but in fact topographical work and excavation in the village have pinpointed the site of St Mary’s, while a well dedicated to St Benedict seems to indicate where that church was. The area enclosed by these covered ‘cloister walks’ was huge, and it is not out of the question to imagine that some of the farmland belonging to the monastery was actually in the middle of the area that looks like a cloister. The people wandering about in this open space in the middle do not appear to be monks, but rather layfolk, perhaps engaged in agricultural pursuits and other aspects of everyday life. They seem to be carrying agricultural implements of various sorts. This suggests that the picture represents one of the seven villages of which the monastic estate consisted; another, with its own church or chapel, can be seen in the background top right.

Returning to the main church, the principal entrance was at the west end through some sort of vestibule flanked by towers, similar to those flanking the central tower. These probably all held staircases leading up and down to the various levels, and it is important to recognise that the two tower-and- transept blocks at either end of the church were multi-storeyed structures. The transepts have at least two ranges of windows, not only the ordinary range at ground floor level, but a comparable upper range high in the wall. Whether the circular features in between represent a further range of windows, and therefore an additional storey, is not clear. It is perhaps more likely that they were carved roundels of the sort to be seen on the tower of Barnack church (Cambridgeshire).

In order to understand the liturgical instructions in the document attributed to Angilbert, it is necessary also to realise that the main church contained a large number of altars. These, and their dedications, are known from the various documents, and a great deal of work by modern scholars has made it fairly certain where in the church each of the altars stood.⁽⁵⁾ Most seem to have been at ground floor level, except St Saviour's altar, which was upstairs in the western part of the church.

Angilbert's *ordo* is unfortunately incomplete and begins with what was originally section V, which gives instructions for the Palm Sunday liturgy. There could be no better starting point, since Palm Sunday is traditionally a day for processions and elaborate rituals in which both laity and clergy take part. The *ordo* begins with the instruction that vespers and the night offices shall be said both in St Saviour's, the transeptal block at the west end, and in the eastern part of the church, dedicated to St Richarius. In other words, they expect to have the whole church full, and they celebrate the offices at both ends of the church. After the monks have had their chapter meetings, they go to St Mary, where they sing tierce. Now St Mary is at the extreme southern end of the site, so part of the succession of services on Palm Sunday involves processions along the covered connecting walkways. At St Mary's they collect their palms or fronds, which they carry *per viam monasterii* along the monastery road. No roads or paths are shown in the engravings, but the suggestion is that this route ran up the western side of the monastery to the gate of the Archangel Michael, which led into the 'paradise' or open courtyard area west of the main entrance. Here prayers were said in front of the Holy Nativity, a great sculptural tableau over the door. The procession next went in through the south door and up the south staircase into the upper gallery church of St Saviour, where Mass was celebrated. If the weather was bad, they avoided this presumably rather muddy monastic road in favour of the covered passages from St Mary's, and went into the main church through a door on the south side. Having entered the church, they then turned left and went in a westward direction to get to the staircase and up into St Saviour's church.⁽⁶⁾

Now we can parallel some of these directions for the big feast day from English documents, and probably the best known of these is a compilation known as *Regularis Concordia*. This was an agreed set of observances drawn up by the monks of the reformed movement in the second half of the 10th century, and therefore nearly two centuries later than the supposed date of Angilbert's *ordo*. The English ordinance for the festival reads as follows:

‘On Palm Sunday, as the greater procession is yet to come, that which customarily takes place in the cloister shall be carried out by a single priest who shall sprinkle with holy water and give the blessing while the Morrow Mass is being sung. When that Mass is over the greater procession shall take place; and it shall be held, as we have said before, in the following manner: ... [the brethren shall vest and] ... shall go to the church where the palms are, in order of procession and occupied with psalmody. On reaching the church they shall say the prayer of the saint to whom the church is dedicated, imploring the help of his intercession ... [After the gospel and the blessing of the palms] the palms shall be sprinkled with holy water and incensed ... the palms shall be distributed and the procession shall go forth. As soon as the Mother church is reached the procession shall wait, while the children who have gone before [complete the *Gloria Laus*].’⁽⁷⁾

Once again it is perfectly clear that there is more than one church involved in the liturgy: the mother church, where the major services are clearly held, and at least one minor church whose dedication is not specified. Just to reinforce the point, another part of this same document tells us what happens on Ash Wednesday:

‘When None has been sung, the abbot, wearing a stole, shall bless the ashes and shall then lay the blessed ashes on the head of each brother ... They shall then proceed whithersoever they should, singing the antiphons which are in the Antiphonar. When they have reached the church for which they are bound, they shall again pray awhile’.⁽⁸⁾

In other words, ‘proceeding whithersoever they should’ means that they are going to another church. So on Ash Wednesday, as well as on Palm Sunday, they are involved in processions and going to a succession of churches in the carrying out of these services. There is no guarantee that all English monasteries were laid out like Saint-Riquier, but the latter obviously provides us with some kind of a model arrangement for which this sort of liturgy would be suitable. Inside the church, the services are equally not static. Frequent processions take place in the course of the service. For example, the ordinances for normal everyday services during the winter months prescribe what happens, for instance, after Lauds. After this service they say

‘two psalms for the King, Queen and benefactors ... and when these are finished they shall sing the antiphons of the Cross, of St Mary, and of the saint whose name is honoured in that church.

Or, if there be none such, of the dedication of that church. After these they shall go to Matins Of All Saints, singing an antiphon in honour of the saint to whom the chapel to which they are bound is dedicated'.⁽⁹⁾

It is apparent, then, that they are moving about within the church, going to a side chapel somewhere (or perhaps an upper chapel) to carry out another part of the linked services.

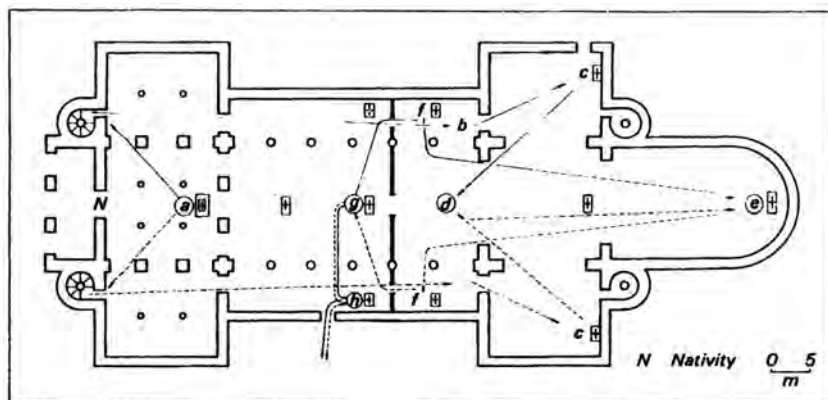


Fig. 2. Saint-Riquier : reconstructed plan (*courtesy Dr. H. M. Taylor and Macmillan Publishers Ltd.*).

These processional routes in church have been studied closely by colleagues on the continent, particularly in relation to the church of Saint-Riquier. Figure 2 is a plan based on what the engravings appear to tell us about the shape of the church. The altars have been added in the positions which seem most probable in the light of recent research. This version of the plan also shows the processional routes identified by Dr H. M. Taylor as those followed by the monastic community on every ordinary day of the year, when no special services were prescribed. One of the prescribed circuits begins with all the monks in the gallery over the western transept (a), where they say both Vespers and Matins. Then the group splits into two; one goes down the northern staircase and the other goes down the southern staircase to get to ground floor level. From there they follow separate paths until they come to the stations of the Resurrection and the Ascension (b). They pray there and then go on further to the altars of St John and St Martin (c). From there they return through an arch in

the middle of the church, to unite for prayer in a position in front of the Passion (*d*). Then they go to the patron saint's altar for further prayers (*e*), and divide up for a second time. The two choirs go respectively to the altars of St Stephen and St Lawrence (*f*) and finally they congregate again as one body in front of the altar of the Holy Cross (*g*). (Typically this was in the middle of the church, the main altar on the public side of the screen dividing the monastic part of the church from the public part of the nave.) After psalms and prayers in front of the Holy Cross, the monks go via the altar of St Maurice (*h*), and out through the door into the system of corridors. Ultimately they reach St Benedict's church, and say the next part of the service there.⁽¹⁰⁾

The text mentions 'stations' of the Nativity, the Passion, the Resurrection and the Ascension, and another piece of documentary evidence describes these as great tableaux. They appear to have been set on the wall above the arches, and took the form of three-dimensional sculptures made of stucco, gilded, ornately painted, and with scenes – perhaps in low relief – of the important events in the life of Christ. Over the western door was the Nativity, which could be seen on entering the church. In the middle of the church over the chancel arch was the Passion, that is the Crucifixion. On either side, at the ends of the aisles over arches leading into the transepts, were the tableaux of the Resurrection and the Ascension.

This is somewhat different from what appears to be the English tradition. The early evidence suggests that in Anglo-Saxon churches what was portrayed over the main door was the rood (i.e. the Passion). Headbourne Worthy in Hampshire is the most reliable example, though the actual figures, the original three-dimensional part, have been chiselled away, presumably at the Reformation. It is nevertheless clear where the Crucifixion was, and the right hand of God, above the cross, has by chance been protected, and survives in the round. On either side there were the figures of Saints Mary and John, completing the scene of the Passion. Several Anglo-Saxon carved stone roods have survived, most of them not in their original place; presumably they were mounted originally over major arches in the church, like the Saint-Riquier tableaux, and perhaps, as at Headbourne Worthy, over the main entrance.

The evidence from Saint-Riquier for the Passion being portrayed over the major arch at the east end of the nave is paralleled in this country, later in the Middle Ages, by the mounting of the great rood directly in front of, and often slightly above, the chancel arch. It stood on a beam across the width of the church, and was served by a narrow gallery or 'loft', which was approached by a spiral stairway and a high-level doorway cut through the church wall. The roods themselves, bearing the

image of the crucified Christ, and with the accompanying figures of Saints Mary and John, disappeared almost without trace at the Reformation, though the structural evidence of rood-loft stair and associated doorways often survives. In a few rather more exciting cases, enough paint remains on the wall over the arch to show the exact size and position of the missing rood. At Raunds in Northamptonshire (Pl. I) paint has survived on all of the wall surface, except for the area which was covered by the crucifix and the flanking figures, and it is clear what a massive composition the rood was, and how it must have dominated the interior of the church. Similar evidence survived by chance at Wenhaston in Suffolk. Here the paint had been applied to a partition made of wooden boards, which once filled the head of the chancel arch. Once again, the parts covered by the rood and its attendant figures remained unpainted; in this instance, it is apparent that the Crucifixion was mounted at a lower level than the one at Raunds.

The evidence for roods in English parish churches is usually of late medieval date, that is from the 14th to the early 16th centuries. In many cases the fabric of the rood-loft stair has been added on, and the upper doorway cut through already existing church walls. Few churches were provided with a rood-loft access as an original feature, and it appears that the rituals associated with the Crucifixion in this position must have been less elaborate before the 14th century. Indeed, it is possible that roods were not placed over the chancel arch until that date, for there was an alternative tradition in England, which may have been more influential in the earlier medieval period. As it happens, the Wenhaston tympanum mentioned above shows the fusing of the two traditions, since the painted background to the rood consisted of a Doom or Last Judgement scene, which is familiar from a number of late medieval churches, such as St Thomas of Canterbury in Salisbury.

The ancestor of this type of scene can be recognised as early as the 11th century from shreds of evidence in the church at Nether Wallop in Hampshire. Here a later chancel arch has cut into, and all but destroyed, a Christ in Majesty. All that survives is the top of the mandorla, or 'glory', which surrounds the figure of Christ in this kind of composition, and two of the flying angels supporting the 'glory', as though it were an eccentrically-shaped celestial picture frame. The original appearance of the Majesty must have been similar to the upper part of the illustration of the late 10th-century charter presented by King Edgar to the New Minster in Winchester. The same subject appears again – completely preserved this time – high on the wall of Clayton church in Sussex, above the late Anglo-Saxon chancel arch (Pl. II). This example is usually dated to the

early 12th century, but may be 11th; a claim has recently been made that it is contemporary with the chancel arch, and pre-Conquest.

The Service of Consecration

A form of service more frequently required in the early Middle Ages than later on was that for the dedication of a new church. There are several documents in which this order of service has been preserved. The following paraphrase of the ceremonies is based on the Egbert Pontifical, i.e. a book of special services for the use of a bishop. This particular pontifical dates from the 10th century.

On the day before the consecration the bishop provides some saints' relics which are going to be incorporated in the altar of the new church. These are taken away and put somewhere safe, and watched overnight; hymns are sung and lights kept burning. On the day of the dedication the clergy of the church put on their Mass vestments and go to the door of the church. They light twelve candles, which are placed around the outside of the church, three to the north, three to the south, three to the east, and three to the west. After further prayers, they go round the church in procession, chanting a litany, and they put as many or as few saints into the litany as they need to get all the way round. All these things are intensely practical; one of the books actually says 'the litany shall be said while the priests are vesting, and if they take a long time over it, put a few more saints in', or words to that effect. The procession having gone all the way round the church chanting, one of the deacons goes into the church, shuts the door and stands behind it, everybody else, including the bishop, remaining outside. The bishop knocks three times with his staff, the sequence 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates...' is said three times, and the doors are opened (see Pl. III). They all go in and stand in the middle of the church, where they recite the Kyrie and another litany, and the clergy prostrate themselves at the altar. Then a remarkable thing happens. The bishop takes his staff and in the dust and ashes on the floor draws the alphabet in the form of a great St Andrew's cross from one corner of the church diagonally to the other, and again joining the two remaining corners. Then there is the blessing of water, and of salt and ashes, which are mixed together and sprinkled over the water; then wine is added and the bishop goes around making the sign of the Cross with this mixture, beginning with the four corners of the altar. He goes round the altar seven times, and finally blesses the altar. Then he goes around the walls of the church, beginning to the right of the altar and making a complete circuit, aspersing with water three times inside, and then three times outside the church. Returning to the altar, the floor is sprinkled all over with holy water. If there is any water left after all this (with the ashes and salt and wine mixed in it), it is poured

away at the foot of the altar. The bishop then dries the altar with a cloth, offers up incense, puts oil on the altar, makes a cross in the middle and anoints the stone with his own hands, while another priest goes round the altar censing. The sub-deacons and acolytes then come forward, holding the altar cloths and the ornaments and the sacred vessels, and the bishop blesses these as well. Then the collection of relics is produced from the safe where they were left overnight and brought to the altar. They are put into the altar and shut in with incense and with three pieces of the consecrated host. The altar is blessed. Next, the bishop and clergy go to a place called the *sacrarium*, and they put on different vestments; the *sacrarium* therefore appears to be a vestry. Meanwhile people go round putting lights on in the church, the precentor is blessed by the bishop, and moves out of the vestry as the introits of the Mass begin. The solemn Mass for the dedication of the church completes the ceremony.⁽¹¹⁾

An apparent contrast to this elaborate ceremonial is provided by the simplicity of the tiny Anglo-Saxon church at Raunds, Northamptonshire, excavated in the late 1970s (Fig. 3). It consisted of only a nave and chan-

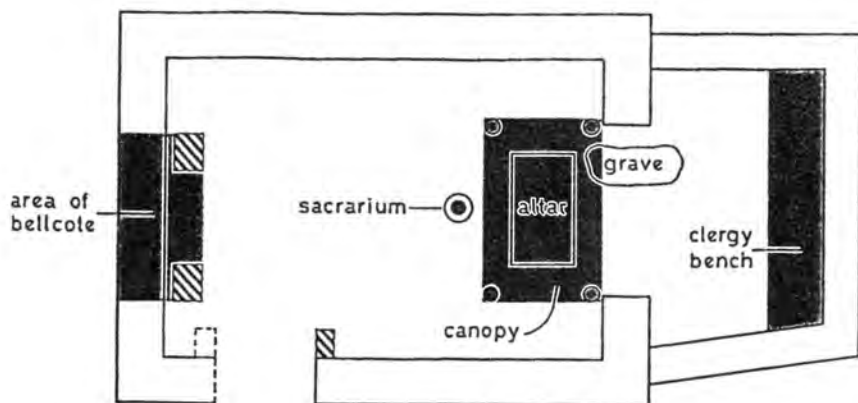


Fig. 3. Raunds, Northamptonshire : schematic plan of the 10th/11th-century church (*drawing by D. Parsons*).

cel, not more than eight metres long, and was succeeded, about the time of the Norman Conquest, by a slightly bigger church, which went out of use after a very short time. It never became the parish church, but it did have its own graveyard and although small, it was obviously a local church of some importance. The first stage of this church was very tiny indeed. It was a simple rectangular building, about six metres long or less, to which the chancel was only later added. On the centre line of

this church was found a pottery vessel with some burnt soil and ash in it and ashy soil spread about it. The pottery vessel was proved by laboratory examination to have been used for something to do with wax processing. It had apparently got overheated, the whole thing had caught fire, the pot had cracked and it was no longer any good for its original purpose. It was then buried, upright, in the middle of the church floor, and some of the ash seems to have been scraped up and put into the pot. This seems to have happened immediately before the church went into use, because the floor was then laid directly over the deposit.

It seems that what has been discovered is the archaeological evidence for part of the dedication service. The ceremony calls for twelve candles to burn around the outside of the church, so a fair amount of wax would have to be processed before the consecration could take place. In its first period of use the pot may well have served this purpose. Other parts of the ritual require ashes, including those strewn on the floor for the bishop to write the St Andrew's cross in, and after the ceremony it is necessary to have somewhere to pour away the remains of the holy water. The altar at Raunds must have been near the east end of what later became the nave, so that a position described as 'at the base of the altar' would coincide neatly with the place where the buried pot was discovered. This, then may have been the *sacrarium* where they poured away the water and put all the surplus ashes.

At no stage of its existence was the little church at Raunds provided with any side chambers which could serve as a vestry, so presumably the priests had to change their vestments in full view of the congregation. But larger churches are likely to have had a room which might serve as a vestry of the sort mentioned in the text. Several Anglo-Saxon churches survive which have a central tower or square choir space with flanking chambers, some of them in the form of rudimentary transepts. Examples range from Breamore in Hampshire to Repton in Derbyshire, while at Brixworth in Northamptonshire the series of *porticus* flanking the body of the church extend one bay east of the nave to overlap the choir; either of the overlapping chambers could have served as a clergy vestry. Some earlier and simpler buildings, such as Reculver in Kent, also had flanking *porticus* which may have served the same purpose (Fig. 4). At Escomb in County Durham a blocked door in the north wall of the small chancel indicates that a similar chamber once existed on that side of the church, and this was proved twenty years ago, when the walls of the *porticus* were found by excavation. Deerhurst church itself displays a number of these characteristics. It may have had a central choir space like Breamore or Repton; it certainly had ranges of *porticus* to the north and south, of which those flanking the choir may be regarded as quasi-transeptal,



Plate I. Raunds, Northamptonshire, parish church : detail of east wall of nave,
showing former position of rood with painted background
(*photograph Michael Hare*)



Plate II. Clayton, Sussex, parish church : detail of east wall of nave, showing
Christ in Majesty painting
(photograph *Michael Hare*)



Plate III. The dedication of a church : the bishop knocks at the door
(from the Lanalet Pontifical, fol. 2^v, 11th century)

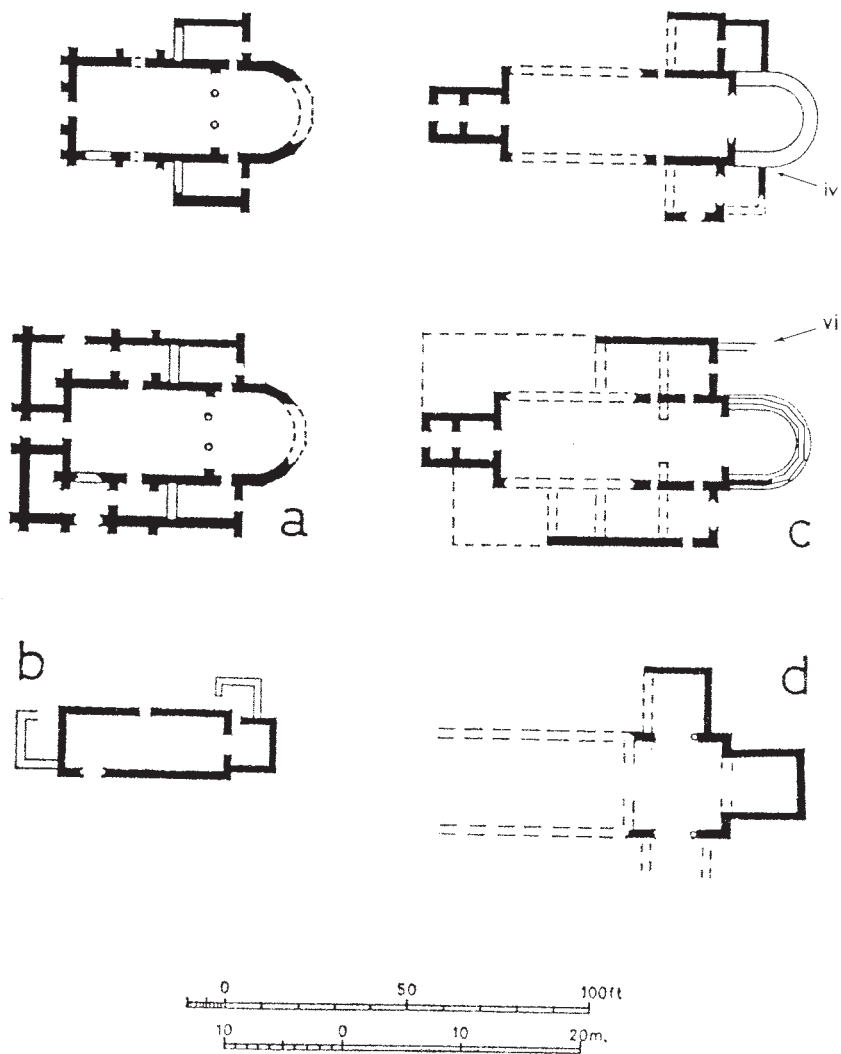


Fig. 4. Comparative plans of churches mentioned in the text
(courtesy Dr H. M. Taylor)

- (a) Reculver, phases i and ii ; (b) Escomb ;
 (c) Deerhurst, phases iv and vi ; (d) Repton

and it had smaller chambers tucked into the re-entrant angles between the apse and the end wall of the lines of *porticus*. One of these is quite likely to have been the vestry required by the consecration liturgy.

Another point of interest emerges from the order of service in the Egbert Pontifical; the altar cannot have been placed hard up against the east wall of the chancel, as later medieval practice dictated. It must have been free-standing, so that the bishop could walk round it seven times, and another priest could take his censer around it, as the ceremony demands. This is confirmed by a late 10th-century illustration in the Benedictional of St Aethelwold, which shows a bishop pronouncing the blessing at the dedication of a church. The altar by which the bishop stands is square in shape and appears to be supported by a column or shaft, rather than the solid mortared masonry which became usual at a later date. The picture seems quite clearly to show the sort of free-standing altar around which the bishop *could* walk seven times. It could also be argued – though this is a more contentious issue – that the illustration also shows the altar in a position in front of the chancel arch, that is, in the nave of the church. There is some archaeological evidence for altars in this position in the Anglo-Saxon period, though how widespread this practice was is not known (see below, pp. 18–21). The liturgical implication of this is that the officiant must have celebrated Mass facing westward, and from a position under the chancel arch; a very dramatic arrangement, for which there is unfortunately no corroborative evidence in the documents.

Regularis Concordia: the Architectural Implications

The provisions of *Regularis Concordia*, the late 10th century English monastic customal, have already been cited in support of the general topographical and architectural interpretations of the Saint-Riquier documents. It is possible to obtain even more detailed information about church buildings from the *Concordia*, as Professor Arnold Klukas demonstrated recently in a study of the text which sought to relate it specifically to the surviving pre-Conquest parts of Deerhurst church.⁽¹²⁾ An example of this more detailed information is a passage already referred to, taken from the instructions for the daily round of services. After Lauds the monks are directed to ‘sing the antiphons of the Cross, of St Mary, and of the saint whose name is honoured in that church ... After these, they shall go to Matins of All Saints, singing an antiphon in honour of the saint to whom the chapel for which they are bound is dedicated.’⁽¹³⁾ No directions are given as to the location of this chapel, except that it is at a distance from the choir, and one can infer that it is large enough to hold all the standing brethren. The word used here is *porticus*, meaning an enclosed chapel-space, rather than an altar in the body of the church. A customary from Essen in Germany,

which shows a remarkably close liturgical and textual relationship to the *Regularis Concordia*, also mentions this observance, and specifies that the procession was to the altar of St Peter, which we know, in the case of the church at Essen, stood on a raised and enclosed platform at the west end of the nave. While no location is specified in the English text, it seems highly probable that the *porticus* mentioned in the *Regularis Concordia* was a chapel of ample size at the west end of the church. Since an axial entrance at the west end of the church was a common feature at the time, this western chapel would more than likely have been at an upper level, over the porch. Such an arrangement appears to have been made at Brixworth in Northamptonshire, where a triple arched window looks down into the nave from the first-floor chamber in the western tower. At Deerhurst the structural evidence is even more compelling, since corbels projecting from the nave west wall and a blocked doorway just above them imply a gallery at that end of the church. Several other Anglo-Saxon churches had western galleries; the clearest example is Wing in Buckinghamshire. While it would be true to say that the *Concordia* text does not refer specifically to such galleries, it is clear that churches like those just mentioned offered facilities ideally suited to the form of liturgy which it prescribed.

In addition to the western gallery, Deerhurst has evidence of the use of an upper storey elsewhere in the church. The arched openings high in the north and south walls of the choir space imply the former existence of two-storeyed annexes on either side of the church with first-floor chambers for some purpose or other. Professor Klukas relates these to the general instruction in the preamble to *Regularis Concordia*. Having encouraged the monks to do the same as each other for the sake of uniformity and discipline, the text goes on to say: ‘For the rest, all shall be free to give themselves voluntarily to private prayer in the secret places of the oratory, with God as their witness’;⁽¹⁴⁾ in other words, although most aspects of monastic life were closely regulated, the monks were at least allowed to go off alone to pray in a private chapel. What, asks Professor Klukas, could be more secret than chapels up at first-floor level, which ordinary visitors to the body of the church cannot see into? He therefore regards this section of the text as evidence for upper storeys in some parts of the church. This is an intriguing suggestion, but there are other points which have to be considered. First, recent archaeological investigation by Dr H. M Taylor has shown that, on the north side at least, the annexe did not originally have a door into the body of the church at ground-level. The gable-headed doorway there was a later insertion. The lower chamber was therefore a good deal more ‘secret’ than the upper.

Although one could not look directly into the upper chamber, the archway in the choir wall was of quite generous size, and seems to be concerned more with communication than with secrecy. The second point is suggested by the famous plan of a monastery drawn on parchment c. 820 AD, and preserved in the cathedral library at St Gallen in Switzerland. The drawing shows an extensive church with side aisles, which are divided by screens into separate chapels, each two bays long and with its own altar. Such enclosed spaces could equally well fulfil the description of ‘secret oratory places’, and there is no absolute need to expect such chapels to be at first-floor level.

A further point about the upper chambers at Deerhurst is that another part of the *Concordia* text could be held to refer to them. The Maundy Thursday instructions say ‘when ... the gospel [is] finished and all the lights put out, two children [i.e. boys] should be appointed who shall stand on the right-hand side of the choir and shall sing *Kyrie Eleison* with clear voice; two more on the left-hand side who shall answer *Christe eleison*; and, to the west of the choir, another two who shall say *Domine Miserere nobis*’.⁽¹⁵⁾ This does not necessarily imply flanking chapels of course, but an 11th-century abridgement of the text actually specifies two boys in a north *chapel*, two in a south *chapel*, and the rest of them on the western part of the church.⁽¹⁶⁾ Applying this direction to Deerhurst, the problem immediately arises that the ground-floor *porticus* did not originally connect with the choir space, so that the boys could not possibly have sung ‘with clear voice’ from such a position. However, it would make very good sense to have this antiphonal singing taking place in the archways of the *upper* chambers. Perhaps, then, the elements of Professor Klukas’s interpretation should be transposed, with the liturgical spaces upstairs and the ‘secret oratories’ below. Such an arrangement would also permit transeptal chapels (e.g. at Repton or Breamore) to be used both as vestries, as suggested above, and for liturgical purposes.

Regularis Concordia: the Easter Drama

The best-known and perhaps the most interesting part of the *Concordia* text is the very full description of the rites to be carried out in the period leading up to Easter. These rituals were full of symbolism, and on Easter Day itself a brief dramatic performance developed out of the liturgy of the morning service. *Regularis Concordia* is the earliest known English book to include the text of the play with directions for the actors. The ceremonies begin on Good Friday:

‘Since on that day we solemnise the burial of the Body of our Saviour, if anyone should care or think fit to follow in a becoming

manner certain religious men...we have decreed this
on that part of the altar where there is space for it there shall be a representation as it were of a sepulchre, hung about with a curtain, in which the holy Cross, when it has been venerated, shall be placed in the following manner: the deacons who carried the Cross before shall come forward and, having wrapped the Cross in a napkin there where it was venerated, they shall bear it thence singing the antiphons *In pace in idipsum*, etc., to the place of the sepulchre. When they have laid the cross therein ... during the night let brethren be chosen by twos and threes ... who shall keep faithful watch, chanting psalms.^{'(17)}

The watch continues through the nights of Good Friday and Holy Saturday until:

‘On the holy day of Easter the seven canonical hours are to be celebrated by monks in the Church of God after the manner of the Canons ... On that same night, before the bells are rung for Matins, the sacrists shall take the Cross and set it in its proper place.’⁽¹⁸⁾

Then follows the normal sequence of services. During Nocturns,

‘while the third lesson is being read, four of the brethren shall vest, one of whom, wearing an alb as though for some different purpose, shall enter and go stealthily to the place of the “sepulchre”, and sit there quietly, holding a palm in his hand. Then, while the third respond is being sung, the other three brethren, vested in copes and holding thuribles in their hands, shall enter in their turn and go to the place of the “sepulchre”, step by step, as though searching for something. Now these things are done in imitation of the angel seated on the tomb and of the women coming with perfumes to anoint the body of Jesus. When, therefore, he that is seated shall see these three draw nigh, wandering about as it were and seeking something, he shall begin to sing softly and sweetly, *Quem quaeritis?* As soon as this has been sung right through, the three shall answer together *Ihesum Nazarenum*. Then he that is seated shall say *Non est hic. Surrexit*. At this command, the three shall turn to the choir saying *Alleluia. Resurrexit Dominus*. When this has been sung, he that is seated, as though calling them back shall say the antiphon *Venite et videte locum* and then rising and lifting up the veil, he shall show them the place void of the Cross, and with only the linen in which the cross had been wrapped. Seeing this, the three shall lay down their thuribles in that same sepulchre, and taking the linen shall hold it up before the clergy; and, as though

showing that the Lord was risen and was no longer wrapped in it, they shall sing the antiphon *Surrexit Dominus*. They shall then lay the linen on the altar. When the antiphon is finished the prior, rejoicing in the triumph of our King in that He had conquered death and was risen, shall give out the hymn *Te Deum laudamus*, and thereupon all the bells shall peal.^{'(19)}

This powerful dramatic episode centred around the 'sepulchre' placed on the altar, apparently something hung about with curtains, which sounds remarkably like the objects frequently described in documents later in the Middle Ages. For example, amongst the records of St Stephen's church in Coleman Street, London, there is a specification for the manufacture of one of these things:

Item one sepulchre over gilded, with a frame to be set on with 4 posts and crests thereto.

Item 4 great angels to be set on the sepulchre with divers small angels.

Item 2 stained clothes with the Apostles and Prophets beaten with gold, and with the Creed.

Item 8 bears beaten with gold to be set about the sepulchre with divers small penons.⁽²⁰⁾

Or at St Mary Redcliffe in Bristol, in 1470:

Item, That Maister Canynge hath delivered this 4th day of July, in the year of our Lord 1470, to Maister Nicholas Petters, Vicar of St Mary Redcliffe, Moses Conterin, Philip Bartholomew, Procurators of St Mary Redcliffe aforesaid, a new sepulchre well gilt with golde and a civer thereto.

Item, An image of God Almighty rising out of the same sepulchre, with all the ordinance that longeth thereto (that is to say), a lathe made of timber and the iron work therto.

Item, Therto longeth Heaven made of timber and stain'd clothes.

Item, Hell, made of timber & iron-work therto, with Divels to the number of 13.

Item, 4 Knights, armed, keeping the sepulchre with their weapons in their hands; that is to say, 2 axes & 2 spears & 2 pavés.

Item, 4 payr of Angels' wings for 4 angels, made of timber, & well painted.

Item, The Fadre, the Crowne, & Visage, the ball with a cross upon it, well gilt with fine gould.

Item, the Holy Ghosht coming out of Heaven into the Sepulchre.

Item, Longeth to the 4 Angels, 4 chevelers.⁽²¹⁾

These structures of wood and cloth were obviously quite elaborate affairs. Others, no less elaborate, were made of stone and incorporated into the fabric of the chancel north wall. In some cases the events of Easter morning are shown in relief carving, with figures of the angel, the Marys and the soldiers (either asleep or hiding in the shrubbery); sometimes Christ himself appears, presumably in the guise of 'gardener', as in the version of the Resurrection story given in St John's Gospel, 20¹⁵. Well-known examples of such ornate Easter sepulchres can be seen at Patrington (North Humberside), Heckington (Lincolnshire) and Hawton (Nottinghamshire). Not far from Hawton at Sibthorpe (both are close to Newark) a smaller and less elaborate example is particularly interesting. It shows two Mary figures, not bearing spices but swinging censers, and dressed apparently in male clerical garments. This must surely mean that the Sibthorpe sculptor was attempting to show not the actual events of the first Easter Day, but the re-creation of them by clergy acting the parts specified in the 'stage directions' for liturgical drama of the sort contained in *Regularis Concordia*.

Liturgical Furnishings and the Place of the High Altar ⁽²²⁾

From the beginning the association of Easter sepulchre and altar was a close one. In the *Regularis Concordia* text it is clearly stated that the sepulchre stood actually on the altar. By the late Middle Ages, when sepulchres began to appear as part of the church structure, their position at the east end of the chancel north wall implies a position for the high altar directly under the east window. This implication is amply confirmed by other evidence. On the one hand there is documentary evidence, mainly contained in churchwardens' accounts, of the removal of medieval altars at the Reformation; in many cases this involved quite substantial repairs to the east wall. On the other hand there is further indirect evidence supplied by other features surviving in the chancel walls, in particular by piscinas. Piscinas integral with the wall are likely to be good indicators of the altar position, since their early medieval predecessors were portable basins 'on the right-hand corner of the altar'. They frequently occur in conjunction with sedilia, or built-in clergy seats, and both features are usually found as close to the east end of the chancel as is practicable.

All of this evidence points unambiguously to an easterly altar position, as the Tractarians and traditionalists of the 19th century well knew. But it is becoming clear, for a number of reasons, that this was not necessarily true in all places and at all times during the Middle Ages. In the first place, there are structural features in some churches which entirely contradict the evidence of the piscinas, sedilia and Easter sepulchres; for

example, doors or aumbries in the east wall of the chancel, as at Hallaton (Leicestershire) or Normanton on Soar (Nottinghamshire), which would effectively have prevented the placing of the altar against the wall. Further, there is the more problematic evidence of squints, which, despite some special pleading in the literature, often give a sight-line towards a position forward of the east end of the chancel. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this is the squint in the chancel north wall at Kingston Buci (West Sussex), which looks due south to a position just behind the chancel arch. One of the difficulties with this evidence is that squints are often cut through existing walling, and that it is almost impossible to date them.

The second reason for looking critically at the evidence of liturgical fittings is that it is almost all of mid- to late-medieval date and not necessarily valid for the earlier Middle Ages. The Easter sepulchres with which this discussion began did not become structural features until the 14th century, so their evidence can apply only to the end of the medieval period. There are very few sedilia earlier than the 13th century, and of the few 12th-century examples most date from late in the century, or (in the case of St Mary de Castro, Leicester) are thought possibly not to have been sedilia originally. Similarly, wall-built or niche piscinas are common only from the 13th century. In this case, however, there is no dearth of 12th-century material. Although no systematic corpus of the material has been drawn up, two independent estimates suggest that as many as three-quarters of the surviving 12th-century piscinas are of the free-standing pillar variety, which is essentially movable and consequently never found *in situ*. The remaining piscinas of this date, the niche type, are not universally to be found in chancels, so that evidence for the high altar position before *c.* 1200 is again remarkably thin. The recent discovery of two-stall sedilia with a niche piscina at Hook Norton (Oxfordshire), apparently of late 12th-century date, and in what one may term the ‘normal’ position, merely serves to emphasise how rare such things are.⁽²³⁾ The fact that there is also at Hook Norton a niche in the wall just under the chancel east window further shows that the conventional placing of sedilia and piscina does not automatically guarantee an extreme eastern position for the altar (or, *mutatis mutandis*, that features in the east wall inevitably preclude it).

It seems facile to explain this dearth of early evidence by claiming differential survival. Disproportionately large numbers of Norman fonts have survived, including some apparently early enough to have attracted an Anglo-Saxon tag in some quarters, and although Anglo-Saxon churches are not two a penny, enough of them still exist to suggest that, where there is early evidence, some of it will survive. Chancels,

however, were very susceptible to change, especially as a result of lengthening schemes in the 13th to 14th centuries. It is none the less odd that not one shred of evidence exists for features like sedilia and piscinas of earlier date nearer to the west end of the chancel south wall, in what would have been the 'conventional' position in a shorter chancel. On balance, the explanation seems to be that the lack of these features in contexts earlier than the late 12th century indicates that rather different liturgical arrangements obtained before that date.

This leads to the third complex of evidence, that derived from archaeological excavation. The prime example here is the first phase of the Old Minster, the Anglo-Saxon predecessor of the cathedral at Winchester. The Biddles' investigations have revealed what is almost certainly the foundation for a square altar *directly in front of the chancel arch*, with four post-holes around it which are interpreted as foundations for an altar canopy. This arrangement continued until the late 10th century. Similarly, at Reculver (Kent) there was a massive foundation in front of the chancel arch of the now demolished Anglo-Saxon church. When Leland visited the church between 1535 and 1543, a great decorated stone cross stood on this base, and it had certainly been there since 1296, when it was mentioned in Archbishop Winchelsey's register. Nevertheless, Dr H. M. Taylor has plausibly suggested that the base originally supported the altar, and he has quoted several parallels for this arrangement in the early Middle Ages. The case of Reculver is particularly interesting, because excavation also revealed a clergy bench running round the apse wall at the east end of the chancel. A similar feature against the straight east wall of the chancel of the minute Anglo-Saxon church excavated at Raunds (Northamptonshire) has also been interpreted as a clergy bench. This may be part of the answer to the problem of why sedilia do not appear until a later date.

Another problem remains, however: that of bridging the gap between the evidence for nave altars, which takes us into the late 10th or early 11th century, and the establishment of the eastern position for the altar, which seems to have occurred increasingly from the late 12th century. There is some archaeological evidence for the altar being moved just into the chancel in the course of the 11th century, and a little for its placing in a more central position thereafter, but the dating of this sequence is not yet clear, nor is it certain that the changes occurred simultaneously in all places. Much more evidence is needed from excavation before any more positive statement can be made.

Something further can be said, however, about the implications of the nave altars of the Anglo-Saxon period, and here archaeology may be

seen to contribute liturgical information not obtainable from the texts themselves. The placing of the main altar in the nave of a church of only moderate (or, at Raunds, very small) size makes it unlikely that the officiant would celebrate Mass from a position to the west of the altar. Given the need for a decent space between priest and people, the area of the nave available for public use would have been unreasonably restricted; and given the vacant chancel space beyond the altar, the overall use of the available space would be quite unbalanced and illogical. The Reculver evidence implies that the priest, seated initially at the crown of the apse, with his assistants on either side, would simply have walked forward and celebrated from the east side of the altar, facing westwards. Thus there would have been more public space in the nave of the church, and Anglo-Saxon congregations would have been more closely involved in the Mass than their late medieval successors. If this reasoning is correct, then the celebrant's position in the Anglo-Saxon period was directly under the chancel arch – a dramatic, not to say theatrical, one. It accords entirely with the examples already given of the dramatic potential of the early medieval liturgy, not only the overtly dramatic Easter sequences of *Regularis Concordia*, but also the sustained symbolic action of the dedication service in the Egbert Pontifical. Though they might not emulate Saint-Riquier's huge church or grandiose processional liturgy, Anglo-Saxon churchmen had an eye to dramatic effect, and arranged their churches and their furnishings accordingly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have tried not to overburden the text with ‘learned’ footnotes, but think it important to indicate where the basic information can be found. The notes and references acknowledge my debt to other scholars, without whose research this lecture could not have been given, but I wish here to thank specifically:

Dr Harold Taylor, whose research into Anglo-Saxon churches, especially St Mary’s, Deerhurst, is indispensable for any study of the subject;

M. Carol Heitz, Professor at the University of Paris X (Nanterre), who has pioneered the study of early medieval architecture and liturgy, with particular reference to Saint-Riquier; and

Professor Dr Edgar Lehmann of Berlin, whose work on the altar positions at Saint-Riquier has made it possible for others to understand the way in which the building was used.

Finally, Mrs. Maureen Cottrell had the unenviable task of transcribing the recording of the lecture as delivered in Deerhurst Church on 19th September 1986 and then of retyping the whole text with extensive and illegible amendments. Without her, this published version would never have appeared.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The texts, edited with extensive commentary by Ferdinand Lot (Paris 1894), are not easily accessible in this country. A brief summary of the evidence is available in H. M. Taylor, 'Tenth-century church building in England and on the Continent', *Tenth-century Studies*, ed. D. Parsons (Phillimore, 1975), 141–68, esp. 142–52.
2. The Latin text of the liturgical directions is published in E. Bishop, *Liturgica Historica* (Clarendon Press, 1918; repr. 1962), 314–32 (hereafter referred to as *LH*).
3. D. Parsons, 'The pre-Romanesque Church of St-Riquier: the documentary evidence', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, **130** (1977), 21–51.
4. St Richarius died about the middle of the 7th century. The little that is known about him suggests a very interesting career. In his youth he had apparently sheltered some Irish monks who were being tormented by the local population, and as a result of this appears to have come to England to receive some kind of monastic training; returning to France, he founded a monastery near Amiens, where he had been born, and eventually died there. He was later exhumed and taken bodily to the place now known as Saint Riquier, not far from Amiens, where a church was built in his honour.
5. Taylor (see note 1), Fig. 12, p. 150.
6. *LH*, 321–22.
7. *Regularis Concordia*, ed. T. Symons (Nelson, 1953), §36, pp. 34–35 (hereafter *RC*).
8. *RC*, §34, pp. 32–33.
9. *RC*, §19, pp. 14–15.
10. *LH*, 328–29.
11. *The Pontifical of Egbert, Archbishop of York*, ed. W. Greenwell, Surtees Society, **27** (1853), 26–51.
12. A. W. Klukas, 'Liturgy and Architecture: Deerhurst Priory as an expression of the Regularis Concordia', *Viator*, **15** (1984), 81–106.
13. *RC*, §19, pp. 14–15.
14. *RC*, §6, p. 4.
15. *RC*, §37, p. 36.
16. Klukas (see note 12), 87, note 17.
17. *RC*, §46, pp. 44–45.
18. *RC*, §50, p. 49.
19. *RC*, §§51–52, pp. 49–50.
20. Quoted in G. H. Cook, *The English Medieval Parish Church* (Phoenix House, 1954), 171.
21. Quoted in *Archaeologia*, **42** (1869), 301.
22. The subject of this section has been discussed at greater length in D. Parsons, 'Sacrarium: ablution drains in early medieval churches', *The Anglo-Saxon Church: papers...in honour of Dr H. M. Taylor*, ed. L. A. S. Butler & R. K. Morris, Research Report **60** (CBA, 1986), 105–20.
23. Dr John Blair kindly drew my attention to this example.

— **DAVID PARSONS** —

LITURGY
and
ARCHITECTURE
in the
MIDDLE AGES

The Third Deerhurst Lecture
— **1986** —

ISBN 0 901507 41 5

ISBN 0 901507 41 5

First published 1989 by
Friends of Deerhurst Church
in association with
University of Leicester Department of Adult Education

Reprinted 1991, 1995
Reset and reprinted 2013

© 1989 Friends of Deerhurst Church

For a list of publications in print
of the Friends of Deerhurst Church,
visit <http://deerhurstfriends.co.uk/publications>

2013 reprint produced for the Friends of Deerhurst Church by
Past Historic, Kings Stanley, Gloucestershire.
Printed in Great Britain