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STYLE, PATRONAGE AND ARTISTIC CREATIVITY IN KENT PARISH CHURCH ARCHITECTURE: c. 1180–c. 1260

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This essay explores the creativity of masons designing parish churches in Kent in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Concentrating on the common early Gothic rebuilding of chancels and the addition of nave aisles to earlier Romanesque churches, it attempts to present an alternative to the usual treatments of medieval parish church architecture in England. The historiography of these buildings has generally taken one of two forms: most often it has concentrated on understanding the building in relative isolation, uncovering the archaeological sequence of construction and viewing that sequence in the local historical context, or it has demonstrated an art historical concern with architectural motifs, but only insofar as they reflect a usage in larger churches. Both these approaches have yielded interesting insights, but the former, besides its atomistic view of what was clearly a massive wave of intimately related architectural activity, takes little account of any aesthetic or visual desiderata on the part of either mason or patron, while the latter encourages seeing parish church architecture only through glasses fogged with the images of cathedral and great abbey churches. The alternative presented here argues that parish church architecture needs to be considered on its own terms, with different objectives and necessarily lesser resources, but hardly without aesthetic pretensions, even when the work may only encompass a single aisle arcade or the refenestration of a Romanesque chancel wall.

More rebuilding of Kent parish churches took place c. 1180–1260 than at any other time in the Middle Ages. Work of this period can be found in approximately 160 of the 350 medieval parish churches surviving in Kent.¹ The lack of any extensive late medieval rebuilding

¹ These figures and all the larger statistical totals in this article are based primarily on the descriptions in J. Newman, *B/E: North-east and East Kent*, 3rd ed. (Harmondsworth 1983), and *B/E: West Kent and Weald*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth 1976). Such figures must obviously be taken as very approximate due to the loss or reconstruction of many buildings and the difficulty of dating precisely many which do survive.

in the county means that a higher proportion of Early English work may survive than elsewhere in the country.² Chancels showing evidence of Early English work survive in about 130 buildings, while about 110 received nave aisles.³ The historical reasons for this extensive rebuilding are beyond the scope of this paper, but they were probably those familiar in many other parts of the country: population growth, increasing wealth and the ambition for display that accompanied it, and the desire of the clergy for a more distinct space of their own, a larger or more splendid chancel separate from their parishioners' nave.⁴ Patrons, whether clerical or lay, instigated and financed this construction boom, but to what extent they influenced the architectural designs themselves is another question, to which I shall return at the conclusion of this article.

PARISH AND GREAT CHURCHES IN EARLY GOTHIC KENT

It seems appropriate to begin this analysis with a critique of the traditional view of parish church architecture as a pale reflection of the local great churches. In Kent these are obviously the two cathedrals at Canterbury and Rochester, with St. Augustine's Abbey, and it is remarkable (at least from the traditional point of view) how little direct influence these seem to have had on Kent parish church design. This is not to say, of course, that the basic architectural features of the Early English style, such as pointed arches, finely subdivided mouldings, thin detached shafting, or various types of foliage capitals, did not derive from Canterbury and other large workshops. Such generalizations do not get us very far in understanding the designs of specific parish

² By late medieval I mean after c. 1350, for it is clear that the Early English boom in the rebuilding of parish churches continued into the early fourteenth century, a period we usually associate with the Decorated style. In parish church architecture in Kent, however, the only visually significant change is the introduction of window tracery, for round or octagonal piers and chamfered arches continue in use. It may well be also that lancet windows continued to be built in some buildings into the early fourteenth century, so that although I have omitted most buildings with window tracery from my survey I may well have included buildings without it that were built past 1260, but which are difficult to date.

³ This figure includes 65 churches where both north and south aisles were reconstructed in this period (although not necessarily at the same time). In 21 churches only north aisles were rebuilt and in 25 only south aisles.

⁴ For an interesting recent discussion of these problems see R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London 1989), Chapters IV–VII.

churches, however, and should be accompanied by the obvious reminder that such essential great church features as complex plans, vaulting, multi-storied elevations, or innovative systems of buttressing were all mostly irrelevant to parish church designers.

The motif most commonly evoked as indicating cathedral influence in Kent churches is the foliage capital. Thus John Newman cites the capitals at Stockbury, Selling, Deal, and Stourmouth as reflecting Canterbury to a greater or lesser degree.⁵ Capitals are, however, one of the least diagnostic of architectural features and can be easily fitted into all sorts of architectural frameworks.⁶ Nor are foliage capitals at all common in Kent parish churches, appearing in only 24 nave arcades as opposed to 75 with moulded capitals, in only 4 of about 60 surviving eastern façades, and in the lateral lancet windows of only one church, Folkestone. The Canterbury capital carvers do not seem to have spent much time on the parish church circuit. The cathedral's influence on parish church pier design is ambiguous. The alternation of round and octagonal piers may already have been present in Anselm's choir; certainly, William of Sens' use of them in his choir provided a prestigious model for forms easily copied by parish church designers and such alternations appear in 16 parish churches. On the other hand, round piers alone are used in 48 parish church arcades and octagonal alone in 34; the very ubiquity of these forms in parish churches throughout the country makes attribution to a particular source a chancy business. The Purbeck-shafted piers of William's presbytery had certainly no influence on local parish churches, Hythe aside. Nor did the moulded arches of the cathedral make any impression. Here it must be emphasized that Kent was of course lacking in good freestone and features such as foliage capitals, complex mouldings, and fancy piers would have required imported Caen stone, which would have made them more expensive than their equivalents in, say, Rutland or Lincolnshire. It may also be that the relatively quick completion of the Canterbury rebuilding meant that the masons working there decamped quickly to other major sites such as Chichester or Lincoln, whereas the 75 years of continuous work at the latter would have provided much more opportunity for the training of local masons.

Three Kent parish churches that do show great church influences are

⁵ Newman, *North-east and East Kent*, 278, 450, 463–4, 465.

⁶ See, for example, Morris' interesting discussion of waterleaf capitals in *Churches in the Landscape*, 310–15, where he associates them with quarries rather than with individual ateliers.

the exceptions that prove the rule. The most ambitious Kent parish church of the thirteenth century was that of the flourishing Cinque Port of Hythe. Hythe was ecclesiastically a chapel of the archbishop's church at Saltwood, and it was quite likely the archbishop who paid for the reconstructed chancel and who may have inspired, directly or indirectly, the connection with Canterbury. Hythe's chancel was designed with a three-storey elevation and was originally planned to have high vaults. The arcade piers, and especially the east responds, with their complex batteries of detached shafts, are actually more complicated than anything at the cathedral, and the same is true of the arch mouldings, with their interesting combination of chamfers with undercut rolls and hollows. The middle storey, on the other hand, is taken straight from Canterbury, and the clerestory with wall passage is also a simplification of a great church feature. The play of thin, attenuated shafts articulating the east lancets might even be seen as reflective of some of William the Englishman's work, although Hythe is probably several decades later. For all these great church parallels, however, Hythe never fulfilled the obvious ambitions of its patron. The main elevation remained incomplete and unvaulted until the nineteenth century and the choir aisles were designed to radically different formulas and also never vaulted in the Middle Ages. This attempt to build a parish church in a literal great church mould contrasts with the second Kent church with clear connections to a great church workshop, Stone.

Stone parish church is a building of *c.* 1260 which most scholars agree was actually built by masons from Westminster Abbey.⁷ Unlike Hythe, there are no inconsistencies or awkward moments at Stone; all is exquisitely finished in up-to-date detail of the most sumptuous kind. Complex piers with detached Purbeck shafts support still more complex arch mouldings that crescendo subtly in form from west to east. In the chancel there is an ornate dado arcade with foliage-filled spandrels and shafts for a stone vault rebuilt by Scott in the nineteenth century. What is most significant about Stone for the purposes of this article is how its builders chose to work on a typical parish church scale with parish church motifs. While these may be carried to a degree of opulence without parallel in Kent, they are still recognizable as fitting into the genre in a way that Hythe does not. There is no three-storeyed chancel at Stone, nor any nave clerestory. At Stone, masons from a great church

⁷ The church's restorer, G.G. Scott, first suggested this connection in 'Some Account of St. Mary, Stone, near Dartford,' *Arch. Cant.*, iii (1860), 108.

workshop chose to build a parish church, albeit one with an exponentially enhanced vocabulary, while at Hythe, one has the impression that a talented and ambitious parish church designer attempted to build a great church. Neither of these opposite cases has any other parallel in the county.

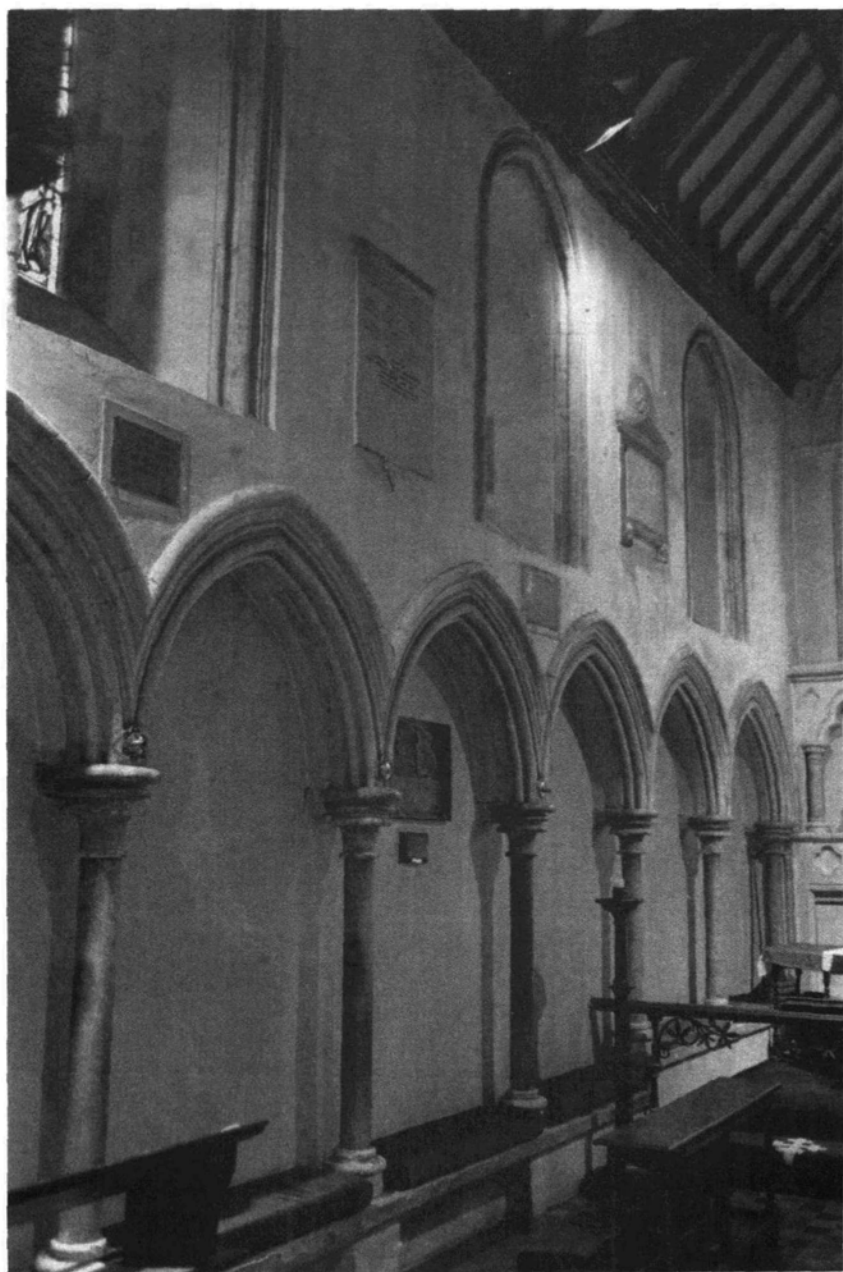
That cannot be said of Stockbury, which fits much better into the patterns of Kent parish church construction than either Stone or Hythe (Plate I).⁸ At Stockbury the choir arcades are continued as blank arches framing two bays of lancets that light a projecting sanctuary. This scheme has local parallels to be considered in more detail below, but Stockbury is the only example to interpret this Kent parish church formula with vocabulary derived from Canterbury Cathedral. The lavish foliage capitals, the arches moulded with corner rolls, the dark detached shafts of the eastern arches, and still more the coupled shafts of the north choir arcade proper all copy cathedral features. As at Stone, but more modestly, these features are all integrated into a typical local parish church design. Stockbury, unlike Stone, was most likely designed by a local man rather than a cathedral mason. Nevertheless, the two buildings are similar in their subordination of vocabulary derived from nearby great churches to a parish church framework. Hythe remains the only Gothic exception to this rule in Kent. Most masons understood that parish church design required different aesthetic 'rules' than great church design.

The small scale of most parish church construction and the limited resources available for that construction meant that relatively minor motifs of great church design might acquire much greater purchase when used by parish church designers. Dado arcades are a good example of this transformation in formal importance. Dado arcades were already present in Anselm's choir in the early twelfth century and they remained a feature of William of Sens' rebuilding seventy years later. When viewed in the context of the vast and richly appointed cathedral, these arcades make a relatively minor impact. They become major motifs, however, when used by parish church masons in Kent. In the chancel of Cheriton church, for example, the dado arcade takes up nearly half the height of the chancel walls; the narrowness of the chancel further enhances the visual power of these arcades (Plate II). This narrowness, perhaps the result of a pre-existing Anglo-Saxon

⁸ Stockbury was heavily restored twice in the nineteenth century, but the changes made then do not affect the points made here. See the list of alterations in Newman, *North-east and East Kent*, 463–4, and the comments in *Arch. Cant.*, xxv (1902), 244–50.



Stockbury. South chancel arcade.



Cheriton. North wall of chancel.

nave, has led the designer to light the east wall with two instead of the usual three lancets. The lateral windows are carefully aligned with the arcade beneath and are modestly outlined with a continuous roll, as if not to compete with the more richly moulded arches below. Here, characteristically, a great church feature of minor importance has been creatively reinterpreted to become a dominant feature of a small church design.

While the dado arcade is at least identifiably a great church feature, the full-height blank arcades gracing a number of chancels in north-central Kent have no such obvious source. Given their proximity to Rochester, it might be thought that their source lies in the deep, high, window-enclosing arches of the cathedral presbytery, or the blank arches of its solid-walled choir. Both these designs substitute for true arcades in a cathedral where the latter are found only in the nave. As with the dado arcades at Canterbury, however, the Rochester arches are part of a richly articulated, multi-storeyed elevation, and if they did inspire some parish church designer, that filiation is less important than the creative act necessary to adapt them to the architecture of the typical parish church chancel. Whatever the specific details of their design, these high chancel arcades are a notable device for linking the window zone of the lateral walls to the floor in a vaultless building. Their presence in the small space of chancels at buildings such as Lower Halstow or Hartlip (Plate III), or, on a larger scale, at Sittingbourne (Plate IV) or in the transepts at Cliffe, shows a concern for a kind of monumentality even at this parochial level. Whether adapting a great church feature or inventing their own, then, parish church designers were well aware of the greater impact even simple architectural forms might have in the smaller spaces of their churches.

THE USES OF VARIETY AND CONTRAST

The use of variety and contrast within a building, within one part of a building, or even within a single feature of a building, is a common design strategy among Kent parish church masons. At Cooling, for example, the southern dado arcade of two-centred chamfered arches with moulded hoods continues eastward as three broader, trefoiled, sedilia arches. These arches are also raised up by a higher seating, but in spite of the greater emphasis they receive, their essential identity with the rest of the dado is clear from the continuous chamfers and hood moulds and the dark detached shafts supporting the entire composition. The eastern climax of all this is a double piscina with trefoiled arches and an independent trefoil in the spandrel, forming a



Hartlip. South wall of chancel.

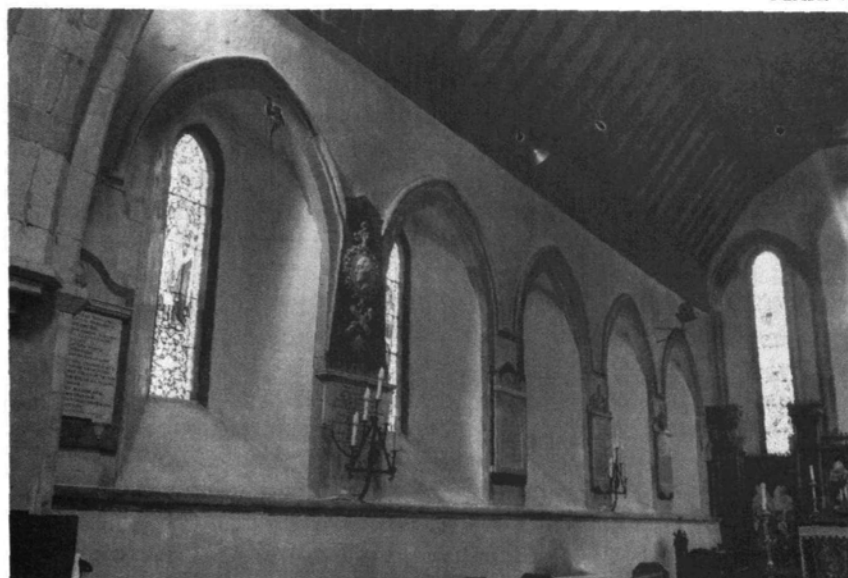


Sittingbourne. North wall of chancel.

kind of plate tracery. Such eastern amplifications are, of course, designed to draw the worshipper's eye toward the high altar, the sacred focus of the entire building. At Eastling, the chancel sedilia and piscina are set with shafts supporting moulded trefoiled arches, while on the opposite wall hangs an odd dado arcade supported by crude atlantes. The dado arcade is also trefoiled, but chamfered rather than moulded, as though to accord a kind of primacy to the functionally more important sedilia. At Dover St. James the dado arcade remaining against the east wall shows a slightly different method of emphasizing the altar: the arcade is divided into three sections of which the outer two have two-centred arches with moulded capitals while the centre section directly behind the altar has trefoiled arches with foliage capitals.

Masons frequently embellished east lancets more lavishly than lateral lancets as another way of emphasizing the eastern focus of the chancel. At Cheriton, to take one example, the fully shafted eastern lancets, with their connected hoods, trump the lateral windows with their continuous rolls (Plate II). At Eastry, to take another, the lateral windows have only a connected hood mould to set against the trefoiled and shafted eastern windows (Plate V). Sometimes the contrast between eastern and lateral windows is softened by a kind of transition, as at Preston St. Catherine, where the easternmost shaft alone of each range of lateral windows is given a foliage capital like those adorning the adjacent east windows. The builders have stressed these latter as well by providing them with two orders of shafts instead of one, and by moulding, instead of chamfering, their arches. At West Malling, the easternmost lateral windows alone are shafted, as are those in the east façade. At Ulcombe, the contrast between lateral and eastern wall is not at all subtle; the side walls are scanned by simple chamfered wall arches while the east wall is decorated with Purbeck monoliths with shaft rings supporting moulded arches and framing an inner order of ornamental circles. Such a stark contrast is unusual. Ash (west) illustrates the opposite extreme, where a simple hood mould is added over the easternmost chamfered wall arch on each side of the chancel. The principle, nevertheless, remains the same.

There are also Kent parish churches where whole parts of the building seem designed to contrast with one another. At Woodchurch, for example, one of the most lavishly articulated chancels in Kent, with lancets framed by two orders of dark marble shafts and moulded arches, is preceded by an elegant, but austere nave of round and octagonal piers supporting arches of a single chamfer. At Horton Kirby, the windows of the chancel are provided with ringed shafts and capitals, but the crossing and transept, though grand in scale, are



Eastry. North wall of chancel.

articulated entirely with chamfers.⁹ The mason(s) who designed the transepts at Cliffe seems to have been particularly enamoured of visible contrasts. Grand wall arcades frame the east and west walls of both transepts, but all four compositions are different. The north transept east wall has the most elaborate system with complex arch mouldings and detached, ringed shafts. The south transept east wall and the north transept west wall retain the ringed shafts but revert to chamfered arches; they differ only in the former's continuation of the shafts' ring moulding as a string-course across the entire wall. The south transept west wall, finally, has chamfered shafts to match its chamfered arches, and moulded imposts instead of full capitals. Whether this steady diminution in pretension is due to impatience, a budget crunch, or a conscious aesthetic of contrast is difficult to say, but the Cliffe transepts certainly demonstrate a tolerance for variety, if nothing else.

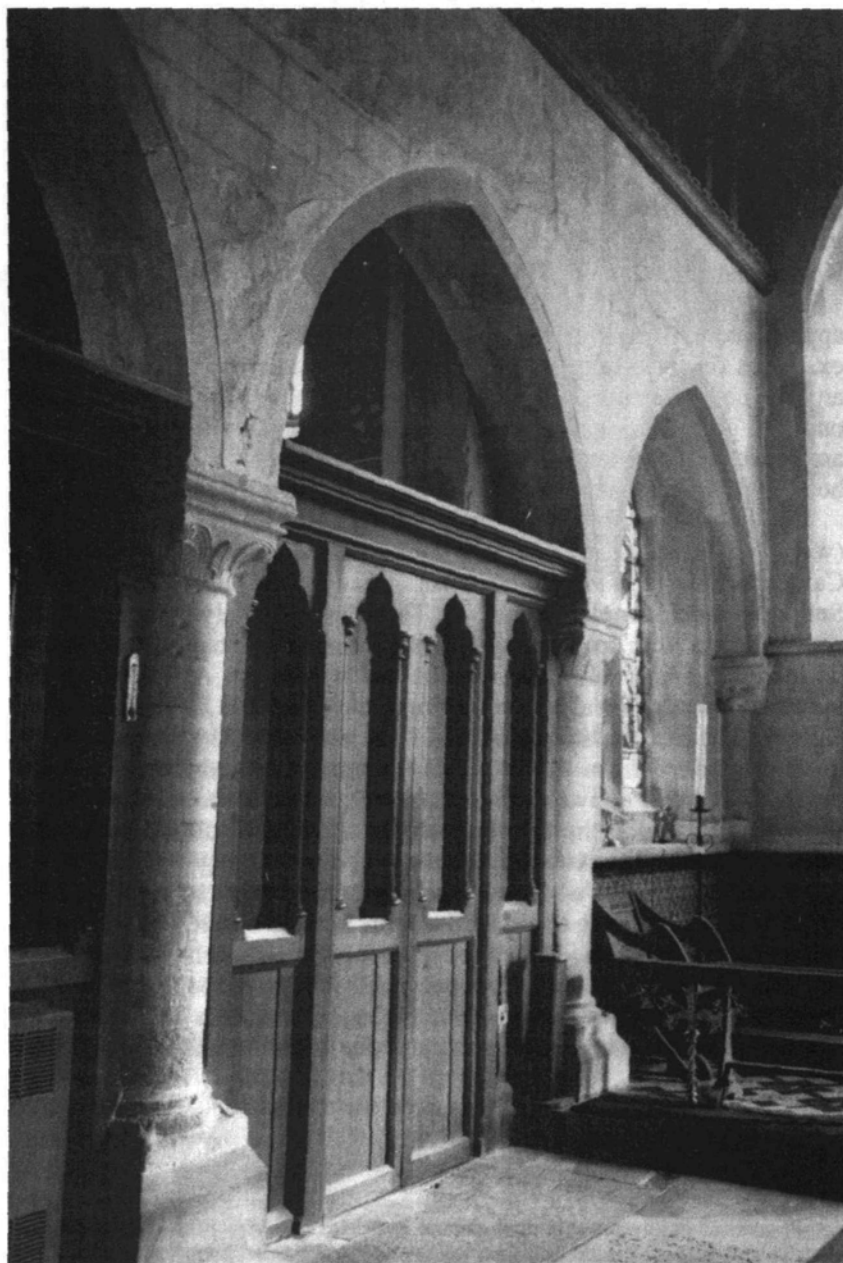
⁹ These juxtapositions can of course also be seen as further examples emphasizing the greater liturgical importance of the east end. At Horton Kirby, the shafts of the chancel windows support chamfered arches, which provide a subtle correspondence with the chamfers of crossing and transepts. The chancel was originally twice as long as at present.

Variety is still more evident when comparing the treatment of related forms in different churches. Kent parish church designers in the thirteenth century demonstrated impressive flexibility in manipulating what was, after all, a relatively restricted vocabulary. There is none of the standardization frequent in Perpendicular design, not to mention classical. There was no ideal or standard model, no abstract sense of what constituted the perfect parish church design, or if there was, it was not a shared sense, but varied from mason to mason. This endemic variety becomes quickly obvious when comparing any major feature of Kent parish church design in several buildings.

Given their originality and narrow geographical range, it might be appropriate to begin with the full-height chancel arcades.¹⁰ The surviving examples of these fall into two general groups. In the first, these wall arcades continue real chancel arcades opening to aisles or side chapels onto the projecting walls of an aisleless sanctuary. In the second, there are no true choir aisles, and the wall arches exist entirely on their own. In both cases these arches generally enclose lancet windows.

The first group includes Stockbury, Selling, Ulcombe, and Ash (west), in descending order of elaboration. Stockbury, with its Canterbury-derived vocabulary, has already been described (Plate I). Selling is much simpler (Plate VI). There an absolutely plain arcade on coursed piers with foliage capitals is continued one bay to the east by an identical arch framing a (rebuilt) lancet window. At Ulcombe, the aisleless sanctuary is also one bay long, but there it is an addition to an earlier choir arcade with plain arches like Selling's. The sanctuary arch is distinguished from these by being chamfered and having a hood mould. The hood allows the arches to be picked out more easily from the west and leads the eye directly to the spectacular east lancets described above. At Ash, finally, there is again a single aisleless east bay, here preceded by a single open bay. Both arches and piers are very plain, with only small chamfered edges, but the eastern blank arches are again distinguished by hood mouldings, as we have seen. The stylistic distance between Stockbury and Ash is probably as much a matter of money as of taste, but the comparison is instructive in showing how radically different the same motif might be treated by different masons.

¹⁰ In addition to this group in north-central Kent, there are also examples in Surrey at Merstham, Merton, Coulsdon, and Chertsey (of the late medieval period), and at Battle in Sussex. Similar, but presumably unrelated, schemes may be found elsewhere in the country, as at Weston in Lincolnshire, or at Alconbury, Great Gidding, and Molesworth in Huntingdonshire.



Selling. North chancel arcade.

Buildings of the second group include Sittingbourne, Hartlip, Lower Halstow, Rainham, and Ham.¹¹ Sittingbourne is the largest and grandest of these with two bays of moulded arches supported on ringed monolithic shafts at the outer ends and a corbel in the centre (Plate IV).¹² At Hartlip, perhaps one of the earlier examples of these arcades, there are also ringed monolithic shafts with foliage capitals supporting arches with corner rolls (Plate III).¹³ There were at least three bays of these arches and following them a single lancet on each side. Hartlip is unique in setting the window beyond, rather than inside, the arcades. It rises higher than the latter and the last capital of the eastern arch is adjusted in height to support it. There is also a corner piscina on the south side to complicate matters further. Altogether, Hartlip is one of the most complex examples of these choir arcades. Much simpler is Lower Halstow, where three bays of slightly chamfered arches frame plain lancets without any articulation. All attention is concentrated on the detached shafts and their moulded capitals.¹⁴ Rainham is slightly grander, with four bays of arcading. The arches are more sharply pointed and outlined by hood mouldings. The arch chamfers are, unusually, reflected in the shape of their supporting capitals and abaci. The Rainham shafts are coursed rather than detached, and project markedly from the wall. None of these four articulations have much to do with each other, nor with those of the first group either, for that matter. In spite of their proximity of place and date, no master copied any other, although they were all interpreting the same feature.

One can do the same sort of comparison with the Kent dado arcades and come to the same conclusion. Alkham and Bapchild are both buildings with north choir aisles decorated with dado arcades. At Bapchild the arches are broad, two-centred, moulded with a corner roll, and supported on detached shafts with foliage capitals. At Alkham, the arches are completely moulded, trefoiled, and supported on detached shafts with moulded capitals (Plate VII). They are furthermore divided into three groups of three by sections of blank wall. This comparison

¹¹ Tonge also has the beginning of a chamfered wall arch visible in the south-west corner of the chancel, but the remnants of exterior arches on both north and south sides suggest true arcades may have been planned or built at Tonge.

¹² The south side of Sittingbourne chancel was turned into a true arcade when a chapel was added in the fourteenth century. Parts of the original blank arches appear to have been incorporated into the arcade.

¹³ The early date of Hartlip is suggested by the square abaci and the vestigial scallops of some of the capitals.

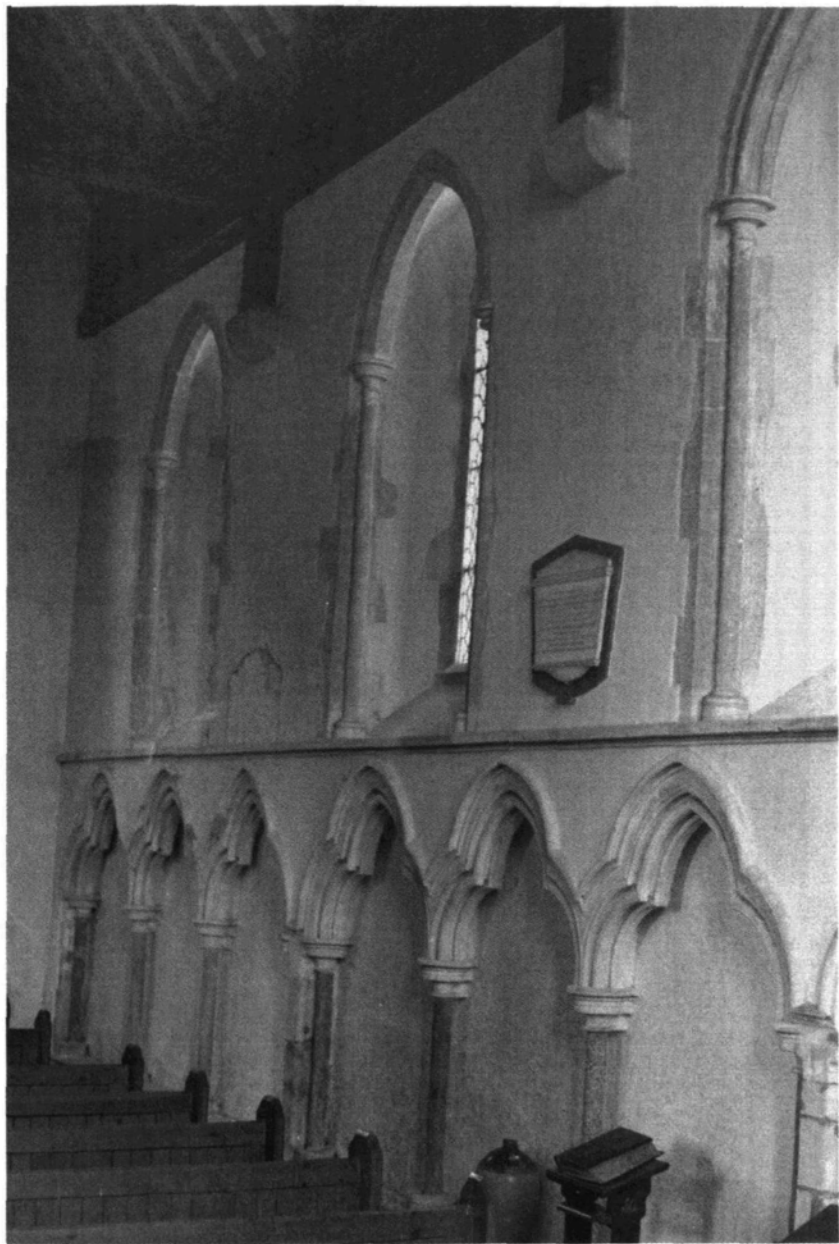
¹⁴ A similar arcade with detached shafts and chamfered arches can be found in the first floor hall of nearby Temple Manor at Strood.

may not be quite fair, as Bapchild is probably a number of decades earlier than Alkham, which may reflect the Canterbury refectory arcades of the 1220s in a general way,¹⁵ but comparing Alkham to Cheriton (Plate II), which is closer in both time and place, leads to a similar conclusion: Cheriton has two-centred moulded arches without any divisions between them. The Cheriton arches correspond with the windows above while those at Alkham do not.

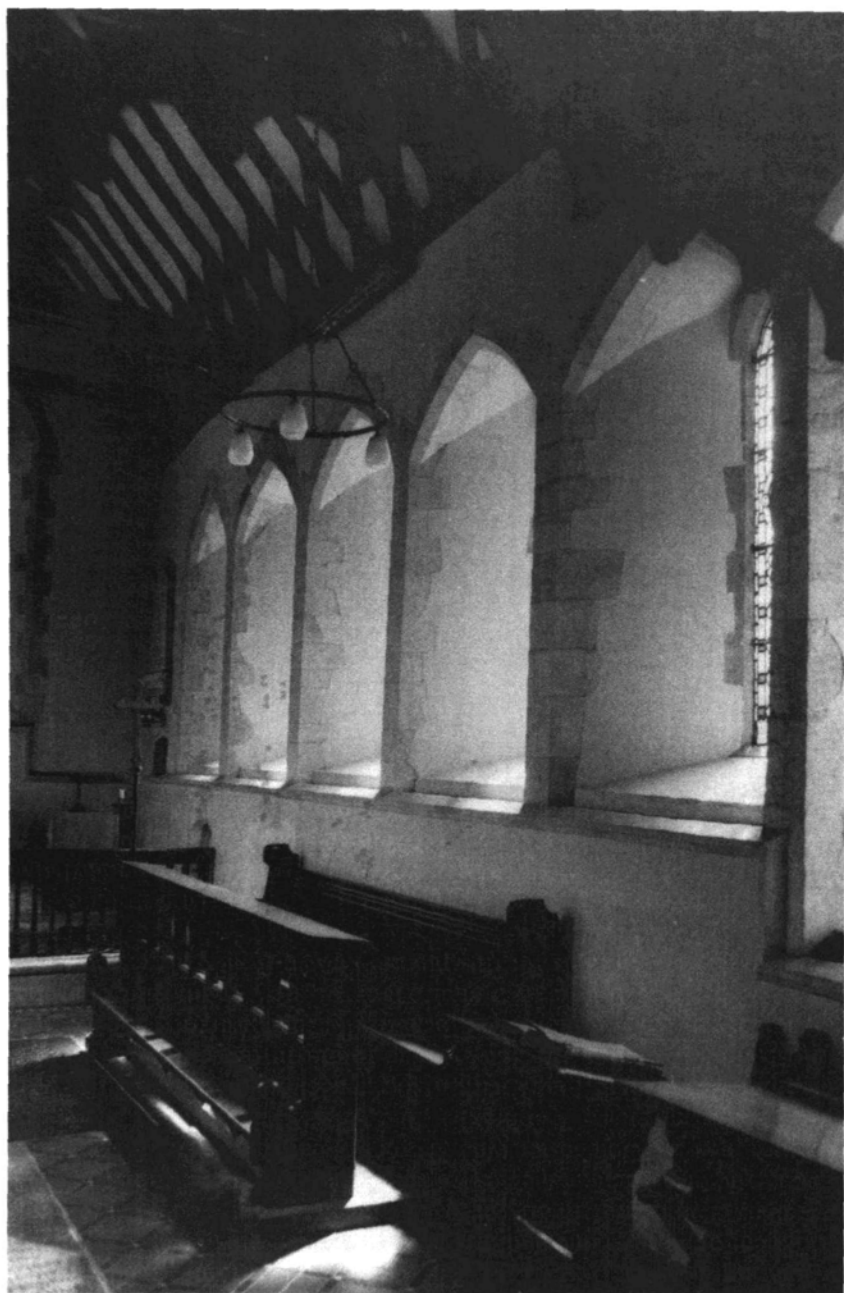
Even chancels lacking exceptional features such as dado or full-height arcades managed to display considerable variety, for example in the placement and spacing of lancets in differently proportioned spaces. Thus, the chancels at Lydden, Lympne, Hastingleigh (Plate VIII), Ickham (Plate IX), and Adisham all contain unarticulated lancets with chamfered rerearches. Lydden chancel is a small space with only two windows per side; these are set relatively high in the wall above a series of rather mysterious chamfered recesses. The arch heads are almost triangular. At Lympne there are also two lancets per wall, but the chancel is wider and the windows are set lower and have more bluntly pointed arch heads. An admittedly subjective characterization might call Lydden tensely vertical and Lympne comfortably horizontal. Whether their creators would ever have thought in these terms is impossible to say, but the differences are there for all to see. Hastingleigh chancel has lancets with sharply pointed heads like those at Lydden, but at Hastingleigh they are set lower in the wall and there are five on each side, packed as tightly as possible to form a horizontal band of windows that could almost put one in mind of Frank Lloyd Wright (Plate VIII). At Ickham (Plate IX) and Adisham, finally, there are also five lancets on each lateral wall, and they are also closely set, although not so closely as at Hastingleigh. Nevertheless, the feeling of these spaces is much different, because they are wider and in particular higher with the lancets emphasizing the verticality of the space. Even with the most basic of architectural motifs, Kent masons could devise the most surprising number of architectural solutions.

The same is true of chancels with shafted lancets. At Cobham there are also five lancets per side, but they are comfortably spaced and linked by connecting hoods. Folkestone and Brookland, with three windows per side, are similar. At Preston St. Catherine, however, five shafted windows set in a tight formation reminiscent of Ickham or Adisham give a very different impression, although the vocabulary of

¹⁵ Alkham's dado arcade resembles that in the north walk of the main cloister at Canterbury in being trefoiled, moulded, set on detached shafts, and in being divided into sections by pilaster-like strips of wall.



Alkham. North wall of north chancel chapel.



Hastingleigh. South chancel wall.

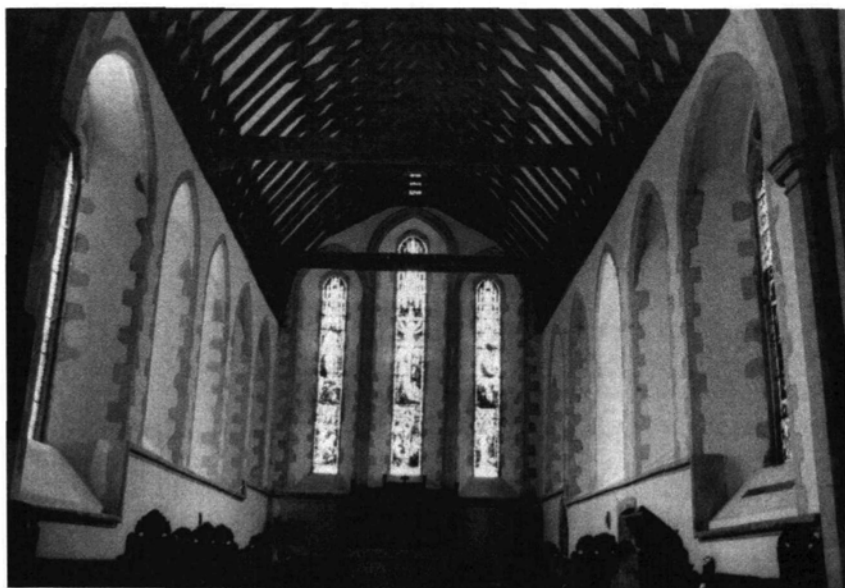
shafts, moulded capitals, chamfered arches and connected hoods is identical to Brookland or (except for the arches) Cobham. Eastry is closest in effect to St. Catherine because of the number of windows, their close placement, and their connected hoods, even though the Eastry windows lack shafts. Individual motifs, then, were constantly being adjusted in subtle or not so subtle ways to create individual designs.

Even nave and choir arcades, at first impression so uniform in Kent, sometimes show the same concerns. The naves of the marsh churches at Lydd and Brookland, for example, both achieve a similar aesthetic effect through a long repetition of identical forms: low round (Lydd) or octagonal (Brookland) piers and arches chamfered in two orders.¹⁶ At Brabourne or Faversham St. Mary (transepts) the same forms are used to very different effect: piers are high and thin and space flows freely. Perhaps the best example of this aesthetic is in the fourteenth-century choir of New Romney, where the attenuated octagonal piers have only half the section of the double chamfered arches they support. The broad proportions determined by the Romanesque nave and its thirteenth-century aisles also enhance the feeling of complete openness in the choir. While thirteenth-century piers in Kent almost never depart from the round or octagonal, there are some interesting manipulations of the chamfered arches they support. In particular, there is a series of buildings in east Kent with arcades of a single very broad chamfer with a surprisingly monumental appearance: the naves at Woodchurch, Eastry, Ash (east), Minster-in-Sheppey, and Hythe (where there are rolls at the corners of the chamfer), and the chancel at Sandwich St. Clement. At the opposite extreme from these is the chancel at Westwell where the choir arcades sport triple chamfers, a unique case in Kent.

AN AESTHETIC OF RESTRAINT?

Westwell brings us to a final consideration concerning the design of Kent parish churches in the Early English period. There seems to be, in many Kent churches, a conscious aesthetic of austerity and restraint. While the paucity of good local stone in Kent and the expense of imported substitutes must always be kept in mind, the

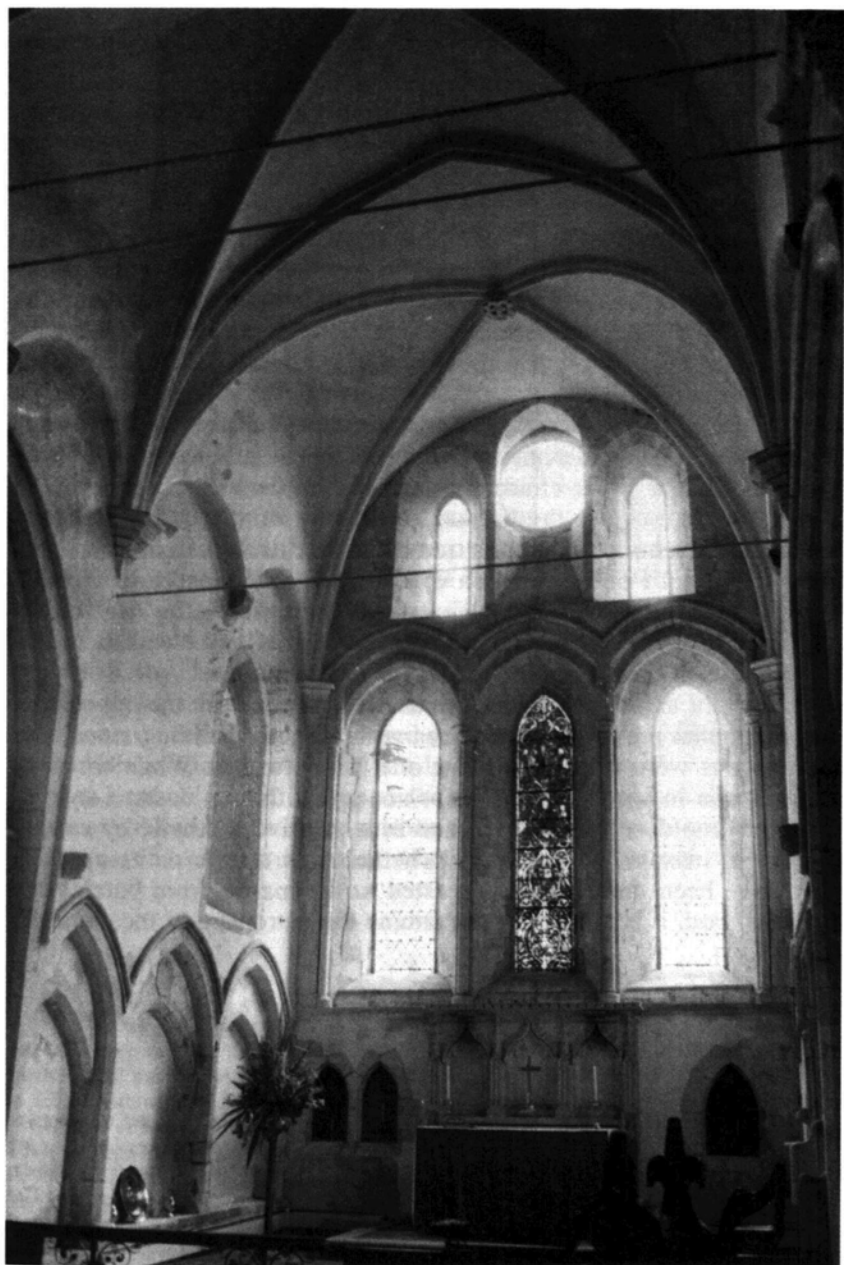
¹⁶ The Lydd arcades are not homogeneous, but show several changes in detailing probably related to a long period of construction complicated by the presence of early buildings on the site. See G. Livett, 'Lydd Church,' *Arch. Cant.*, xlii (1930), 61–72.



Ickham. Chancel from west.

plain lancet chancels of large buildings such as Ickham or Adisham certainly support this thesis, for these are all buildings of a certain size whose patrons, as we shall see, could probably have afforded a more luxurious design, if they had so desired. Plain arcades in buildings with contemporary chancels of greater elaboration, as at Woodchurch or Eastry, may suggest the same thing. Westwell is a more complicated case (Plate X). Its chancel, with a double tier of east windows, dado arcades, and, most unusually, a vault, not to mention the *sui generis* screen that separates it from the nave, could not easily be called austere, but what is curious about it is how many of these features are moulded only by chamfers. The lower tier of east windows, it is true, is shafted, but their arches are chamfered in two heavy orders, of which the second springs from a chamfered vertical extension rising above the capitals of the window shafts.¹⁷ This

¹⁷ For the experimentation with vault or arch springers characteristic of certain buildings in thirteenth-century England, see V. Jansen, 'Dying Mouldings, unarticulated Springer Blocks, and hollow Chamfers in thirteenth-Century Architecture,' *J.B.A.A.*, cxxxv (1982), 35–54.



Westwell. Chancel from southwest.

arrangement causes the inner arch to appear suspended, as it were, behind the springer block of the outer. This sophisticated design becomes a *leitmotiv* in the chancel, appearing in the dado arcade, where the outer order is now continuous, and in the choir arcade itself, where the first chamfer of the arch retains its visual integrity and the third is coterminous with the vertical springer block, but the second disappears into the latter without any resolution. The junction of arcade and dado arcade makes clear the consistency of the entire system, for the outer order of the former's eastern arch is brought unbroken to the ground to become the jamb of the first of the dado arches. Even the hood mould continues without a break. Crowning the whole chancel is a very strange vault, with pyramidal lateral webs resting on a kind of lobed wall arch, itself supported by corbels. It is hard to know what to make of this, except that its designer had again avoided using conventional shafts or capitals. Westwell chancel is one of the most original designs in Kent, but it has no close relations in either parish or great churches. It is a complex and sophisticated design, but it eschews the normal vocabulary of shafts, capitals, and mouldings, to build a composition almost entirely of chamfers, the most basic motif of Kent parish church design. Whether or not there is any intended irony here, Westwell exemplifies the originality possible in parish church design, and the lack of any standard model of architectural excellence.¹⁸

One might argue that abundant chamfers result from the expense of more complex mouldings in an area without good building stone, and that masons were making the best of a bad situation. While this may well be true in some cases, it does not prove that an austere style of chamfers could not have been seen as a positive aesthetic by certain patrons or masons. To determine whether such a style or its opposite may have been imposed or suggested to the mason from outside the building yard, it is necessary to examine the patronage of the churches in question.

¹⁸ Another impressive use of chamfering can be seen in the crossing and transepts at Horton Kirby. There the jambs and arches of the unusually high and narrow crossing are chastely moulded with slight chamfers and are separated only by an impost moulding. From within the crossing the viewer sees a serried group of four vertical chamfers. The transepts continue this vocabulary for the unusual niches, really shallow pointed barrel vaults, that enclose the eastern lancets. Here an even slighter impost separates jamb and arch. Continuous chamfers also define wide dado arches against the end and west walls. Once again an original and ambitious design is handled entirely without shafts and capitals.

PATRONAGE

Westwell belonged to the monks of Christchurch, Canterbury. The Cathedral Priory also owned the churches at Adisham and Ickham, both large, but plain, lancet designs.¹⁹ Eastry and Lydd are again relatively plain in detail, but large in scale, and the former is sophisticated in design.²⁰ Both belonged to the archbishop, as did, indirectly, the church at Eynsford which possesses a south transept full of unarticulated lancets. Lymgne, yet another of the plain lancet churches, belonged to the archdeacon of Canterbury, who had his castle next door. Adisham and probably Eastry stood on the sites of Anglo-Saxon Minsters and might, therefore, be expected to show some architectural sign of their former eminence. That all these buildings were designed in a relatively restrained style of Early English Gothic may, therefore, be significant. Was there a conscious policy among those of the Cathedral establishment of patronizing designs of a certain austerity?²¹

There are two objections to this theory. The first is that buildings outside of Christchurch control show a similar aesthetic. Littlebourne, next-door to Ickham, but belonging to rival St. Augustine's, has a chancel lit by four tall unarticulated lancets each side. Northbourne, another St. Augustine church, has triple side lancets that also lack articulation, although they possess trefoiled reearches. Finally, neither Horton Kirby, Hastingleigh nor Lydden, all striking examples of the austere style, belonged to Christchurch; the first two were held by local secular lords and the last belonged to nearby Langdon Abbey. Most of the buildings so far mentioned are located in a relatively small section of east Kent. Might it be better, then, to talk of a regional school of masons employed by various patrons with churches in the area?

The second objection is that other churches in the gift of both the

¹⁹ A direct sign of this ownership at Ickham may be the presence of western windows on each side of the chancel with two lancet lights surmounted by an unencircled quatrefoil, a tracery pattern identical to that at the archbishop's palace in Canterbury of c. 1220. Although Ickham belonged to the priory and not the archbishop, the physical proximity of their buildings surely led to familiarity on both sides and perhaps on occasion to the use of the same masons.

²⁰ One example of the sophistication of the Eastry design is the way the trefoiled arcade on the west wall of the tower reflects the trefoiled east chancel lancets at the other end of the church.

²¹ For the theory that certain patrons of the Early English period evinced a conscious desire for a restrained style of architecture, see V. Jansen, 'Lambeth Palace Chapel, the Temple Choir, and southern English Gothic Architecture of c. 1215–1240,' in *England in the Thirteenth Century*, Proceedings of the 1984 Harlaxton Symposium, 95–9.

archbishop and Christchurch Priory show a very different style. The archbishop, for example, was the patron of Woodchurch, with one of the most heavily articulated chancels in Kent and of Faversham St. Catherine, with its shafted lateral lancets and its east windows with double orders and foliage capitals. Then, there is the possibility of his involvement with Hythe, by far the most traditionally lavish of all the Kent parish churches of the period. The patronage of the Cathedral Priory is still more varied: in addition to Westwell, Adisham, and Ickham, they owned Godmersham, with shafted east lancets, Lower Halstow, with its full-height chancel arcades (albeit with chamfered arches on detached shafts), and Cliffe, with its multifariously moulded transept arches described above, as well as a large nave with a clerestory. The arcading at Cliffe and Lower Halstow belongs to a regional group, and Westwell, while full of chamfers, is not in the same class of austerity as Adisham or Ickham. Here again, it may simply be that patrons picked convenient local teams to do the job.

Before accepting this pragmatic conclusion as the most likely scenario, it may be worth drawing attention to one further grouping. The unusually broad single chamfers described above as one of the more original variations of Kent arcades, are all found in buildings with some connection with the archbishop. Woodchurch, Ash (east), Eastry, and possibly Hythe he controlled directly; Minster-in-Sheppey, although an independent priory, also had strong ties with the archbishop, and Sandwich St. Clement belonged to the archdeacon. These buildings are too much spread about to be labelled a regional group; was there rather some favourite mason employed at all of them?

Unfortunately for those who like to see patrons making aesthetic decisions, there is no other feature or design practice in Kent parish churches of this period that can be clearly linked to some specific patron. Dado arcades, for example, are found in two churches (Alkham and Upchurch) with (different) monastic patrons, in four (Bapchild, Eastling, Cheriton, and Cooling) with secular patrons, at Dover St. James, connected to Dover Castle, and at Christchurch Priory's Westwell. The full-height chancel arcading of north-central Kent is found in two churches belonging to Christchurch Priory (Lower Halstow and Cliffe), in two churches belonging to Leeds Priory (Rainham and Stockbury), at Sittingbourne, belonging to the nuns of Clerkenwell; at Selling, belonging to St. Augustine's, at Ash (west), belonging to the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, at Ulcombe, belonging to the archbishop, and at Hartlip, belonging to a secular patron. It is especially interesting that Stockbury, architecturally under the influence of Canterbury to a greater extent than most Kent parish churches, should have no institutional connection to the cathedral establishment. One could perform the same operation for buildings

with shafted lancets with the same result. Linking patrons to a particular style of parish church design is very difficult to do.

Nevertheless, it needs to be said that while the great patrons of Canterbury, including the archbishop, Christchurch Priory, and St. Augustine's Abbey, may have patronized masons working in various versions of early Gothic style, they do seem to have encouraged and presumably financed, a number of the most ambitious churches in the county. Hythe, Woodchurch, Eastry, Reculver (with its twin-towered façade), St. Nicholas-at-Wade, Preston St. Catherine, and Lydd were all archbishop's churches; and Minster-in-Thanel (with its three large subordinate chapels of St. Lawrence, St. John, and St. Peter), Selling, Faversham St. Mary (with its highly unusual western transept aisles), and Brookland belonged to St. Augustine's Abbey. These buildings all stand out as architecturally significant in the list of early Gothic parish churches in Kent and testify to a lively concern for parish church provision and improvement by their owners.²² It may be that the completion of major reconstruction projects at the Cathedral and St. Augustine's freed up money and energy for the smaller buildings, but whatever the reason, the record is an impressive one.

POSTSCRIPT

The introduction of traceried windows in the early fourteenth century did not radically alter the forms or aesthetics of parish church architecture in Kent. The naves of Barham or Newington still use octagonal piers and chamfered arches; the proportions, as at New Romney, may be slighter and suggest a more open space, but there is no substantial change. As grand an example as the chancel at Chartham, with its very up-to-date traceried windows and stained glass, is otherwise little different from the lancet chancels discussed above; even the connecting hood moulding is there, although now it is given a stylish trefoiled form. The period of maximum creativity and

²² By the fourteenth century the patron was responsible only for the upkeep of the chancel, while the parishioners had to deal with the nave, which often led to striking contrasts in ambition between the two among churches reconstructed in the later Middle Ages. In the thirteenth century, however, it is not clear that this division in responsibility yet existed. In the buildings cited here, nave and choir seem to be part of an overall building programme at Woodchurch and Eastry, while at Lydd and Brookland the naves are contemporary with the chancels, although not of a single build. For the complexities of who might be responsible for what parts of a church in the thirteenth century, see R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, 275–96.

experimentation in Kentish parish church architecture was between *c.* 1170 and *c.* 1260; the evidence still dominates much of the Kent countryside.

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