

A GROUP OF CHURCHES BY THE ARCHITECT OF GREAT WALSINGHAM¹

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SUMMARY

A group of nine churches concentrated in central Norfolk show features that are established to be the work of the same anonymous architect. Close similarities are found in measurements and design of window tracery and mouldings in the aisled naves of Great Walsingham, Beeston St. Mary, Tunstead and Beetley, the nave and choir of Little Fransham, Houghton-le-Dale Slipper Chapel, the south porch and upper stage of the tower of Rougham, the north aisle of Narborough, and the west window of Mileham. Comparison with better-documented Norfolk churches suggest dates within the 1340s and 1350s.

INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly coming to be recognised that an essential prerequisite for any understanding of the dissemination and inter-action of architectural ideas in the middle ages is the identification of the work of individual architects.² The value of pursuing the recorded names of craftsmen through the documentation of building operations has by now been well established,³ and recent studies have greatly amplified our knowledge of the work and movements of a number of these architects. Along with this there has been a developing interest in architectural theories and methods of design, based chiefly on examination of surviving medieval drawings and treatises throughout Europe, as a result of which we now have a clearer understanding of the way in which architects approached their work.⁴ Yet, although the conclusions arrived at in these studies certainly have a general application, it is inevitable that there has been a concentration of interest on those building operations of the greater religious foundations for which the documentation is more extensive. By contrast, for the majority of parish churches little or no record of their construction has survived and consequently such methods of study can seldom be applied to them. Nevertheless, since the greatest proportion of the work of later medieval architects in England was concentrated in parochial architecture, it is clearly as important to determine the contributions of the individual, although usually anonymous, designers in these lesser operations, as it is to identify the work of their counterparts who designed the cathedrals and abbeys erected during previous centuries. But in the absence of documentation which might give the names of craftsmen, the primary evidence for any attempt at identification of individual architects must be the fabric of the buildings themselves, and the problem consequently arises of establishing how far it can be possible to arrive at a sufficiently complete understanding of an architect's personal style from the character of one of his buildings to be able to detect the same characteristics in his other works.

It is not to be expected that the affinity between an architect's buildings will necessarily be immediately apparent, since both the planning and overall forms of a church were conditioned by factors which were to a greater or lesser extent outside his direct control. Of these external conditioning factors which must be taken into account in assessing the extent of the architect's personal contribution, the most obviously significant was, of course, the amount of money available for the work, since this regulated both the scale and the decorative

character of the finished building. It was an equally important factor that architects were seldom given the opportunity to design a complete new building on a clear site, and there was usually a requirement to retain parts of an existing structure, whilst possibly also building around other parts which were to be retained in use.⁵ Inevitably this led to differing solutions in responses to the particular problems of the site. A third factor was the extent to which the patrons of the work chose to dictate the building's form. It is difficult to assess from the relatively few contacts which have survived how far their terms were the formal expression of agreement reached after discussion between architects and patrons, rather than simply a series of instructions from the latter to the former, as they appear on first reading; but it is clear that the requirements and preferences of those who held the purse strings must always have been a major influence on the form of the finished building.⁶ For all these reasons it is hardly to be hoped that an architect's personal predilections will be invariably evident in the superficial appearance of his buildings; it is, rather, in those details which required his particular technical expertise, and were beyond the interference of the patrons, that the relationships between his works should be looked for.

From this it follows that any attempt to identify these architects must require precise study of the details of their buildings, and yet, if the indications of authorship cannot always be expected in the general aspect, how can the choice of buildings which might reward such close investigation be made? Fortunately this problem is possibly less daunting than it might at first appear: the regional characteristics which have been observed in the design of churches suggest that many of the architects responsible for their design, in the later middle ages at least, tended to work within relatively limited areas, and so attempts to identify these individuals may be founded initially on a basis of regional studies. But if such an approach is to be adopted, it is clearly essential that an adequately large number of buildings is examined within any region under consideration if there is to be a reasonable hope of tracing sufficient specimens of the work of its architects to make identification admissible, and if the risk of common regional usages being misinterpreted as evidence of personal style is to be eliminated. Norfolk is an area which might be expected to lend itself particularly well to study of this nature, since it has relatively clearly defined geographical limits, and there is a recognised regional character to many of its buildings. It also has the advantage of containing an enormous number of churches of late medieval date; indeed, it may be said that the increased lay patronage of parochial buildings at the expense of the greater foundations, which is characteristic of the later middle ages in England generally, is nowhere more apparent than in this part of East Anglia. For these reasons it was selected as a suitable field for research, in the course of which measurement, analysis and comparison of the constituent elements of about 150 churches, along with more or less detailed examination of all other churches within and immediately around the county has been undertaken. This has revealed a significantly high number of instances of the repetition of sets of identical, or closely comparable details placed in similar relationships to each other in two or more churches, to an extent that is difficult to account for unless common authorship of these buildings is assumed. As a demonstration of this one group of nine churches will be discussed in some detail, all of which contain work showing unambiguous parallels with the other members of the group, and which it is argued may therefore be claimed as attributable to the same architect.

The buildings to be discussed are the aisled naves of Great Walsingham, Beeston St. Mary, Tunstead and Beetley; the nave and choir of Little Fransham; Houghton-

le-Dale Slipper Chapel; the south porch and upper stage of the tower of Rougham; the north aisle of Narborough; the west window of Mileham. With the exception of Tunstead and Narborough all of these churches are concentrated at the heart of the county within the Hundreds of Launditch and North Greenhoe, which, according to the returns for the Lay Subsidy of 1334, formed part of one of the relatively wealthy areas of Norfolk.⁷

St. Peter at Great Walsingham has been described aptly as 'a singularly beautiful church',⁸ despite the fact that it has been without a structural choir since at least 1593.⁹ The four-bay nave is flanked on both sides by an aisle, against each of which is a porch which can be seen to be secondary to the main fabric. At the west end is a simple tower, which, on the evidence of its arch, is probably slightly later than the nave; however, it incorporates a west window which clearly belongs to the nave building campaign, and was probably re-used. One of the most striking features of the building is the clerestory of circular windows, although this is a feature found in several other Norfolk churches and is not in itself of particular significance.¹⁰ Beeston St. Mary has an aisled nave which shows many notable similarities with Great Walsingham, and these two churches are the only members of the group under discussion which are patently related to each other in their overall forms. However, Beeston's appearance has been considerably altered by the rebuilding of the clerestory in about 1410,¹¹ although the blocked roundels of many of the original openings are again in evidence now that the majority of the surface rendering has fallen away. St. Mary at Tunstead is one of the outliers of this group, and it seems that local usages may have led to differences of design as compared with Walsingham and Beeston on a number of points. The most apparent difference from the others is its sheer size, the nave being five large bays in length; possibly this should be seen as an early indicator of an inter-parochial rivalry for size in an area of Norfolk which also built the vast churches of Worstead and North Walsham. Tunstead is unusual in having a blind wall rising above the aisle roofs rather than a clerestory; there are some internal clues that a clerestory may have been intended originally, although, since nearby North Walsham was also to be built without a clerestory, this may have been another instance of an architect giving way to local preference, and certainly the large aisle windows admit ample light into the nave. The choir and tower are both probably later than the nave, although it is unlikely that there was any great gap of time separating their construction, and the south porch is modern.

The church of St. Mary Magdalene at Beetley is a smaller building than these three, and here it is the nave and the window inserted in the west wall of the tower which are to be considered. The nave was originally flanked by a contemporary north aisle, although this is now ruined and walled-off, leaving the piers and arches of the arcade only partially exposed. The diminutive church of St. Mary at Little Fransham has also lost part of its medieval fabric, following the collapse of the west tower at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but here the aisle-less nave and choir have both survived relatively intact, apart from some unfortunate alterations to the roof levels. The Slipper Chapel at Houghton-le-Dale is another tiny structure, although the elaborate decoration of its west front, which gives it an almost shrine-like appearance, marks it out as a building with a special purpose connected with the Walsingham Pilgrimage. Following the Reformation it was adapted to a succession of different uses, and was eventually allowed to fall derelict until being purchased by Miss Charlotte Boyd in 1894, and restored for use in the revived Pilgrimage: because of the extent of the necessary restoration many of the details have to be regarded with considerable

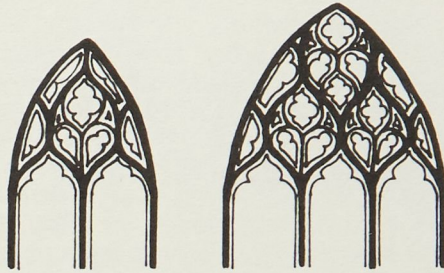
caution, although care seems to have been taken to follow the surviving indications of form. At St. Mary, Rougham only the south porch and the top stage of the tower can be included with this group of buildings, and both are structures of the simplest kind. The church of All Saints at Narborough is a complex building with a nave which retains evidence of its Norman origin, but here it is the north aisle which is of immediate concern. At St. John the Baptist at Mileham only the west window can be related to the other members of the group, and this is simply an insertion in an existing wall.

TRACERY

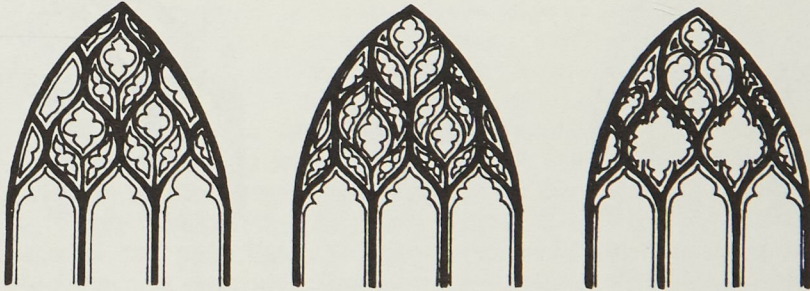
With the exception of Tunstead and Houghton Slipper Chapel these churches are all rather unassuming structures, and on first inspection there is little either to distinguish them from other contemporary churches in the area, or to suggest that parts of each are the work of the same creative mind. Closer examination of the exteriors, however, reveal two valuable points of comparison. One of these is that Great Walsingham, Beeston, Beetley and Little Fransham have very similar, rather broad buttresses which are divided into two approximately equal stages, with four layers of coping to the top and two to the intermediate off-set, and with base mouldings which are unusual in being confined to the leading face without being returned down the sides. But it is the second point of comparison, the design of the window tracery, which provides the clearest external clue to the possibility of relationship between these churches. It should be said here that, in any attempt to identify the work of medieval architects, tracery must always be regarded critically; since the windows were usually a major decorative focus of a church they were also amongst the most likely candidates for imitation by other architects. This is amply illustrated by the contract for Walberswick church tower in Suffolk of 1425, which stipulated that the windows of that tower should be modelled on the pattern of those at Halesworth, about eight miles to the west.^{1 2} If patrons could demand such direct plagiarism it is clearly necessary to exercise considerable circumspection with regard to tracery, and it should seldom be looked to for more than preliminary, or supporting, evidence of a relationship between buildings.

However, in the case of this group of churches the evidence of the tracery is exceptionally convincing. In most of the windows it takes the form of a basic network of reticulation within which is a secondary tracery of a variety of patterns set at a subordinate level. The simplest variety is found in the two-light windows of the aisle flanks at Great Walsingham and Beeston, on the south side of the choir at Little Fransham, and on the east and west faces of the top stage of the tower of Rougham. Within the single reticulation unit of these windows is an ogee quatrefoil reflecting the containing unit, the base of which rests between two round-headed daggers. An interesting factor at two of these churches is that this type is employed in combination with a much simpler variety of tracery which might not be thought likely to be associated with it. Nevertheless, this second tracery type, with a configuration of a quatrefoil and two twisted mouchettes, is found on the north aisle of the choir at Little Fransham, and on the north and south sides of Rougham tower, at both of which it was apparently held to be a suitable contrast for the more complex type; it was also used on its own along the south side of Beetley nave. The two types, therefore, are plainly associated, particularly since the widths of all examples of which it has been possible to obtain dimensions, at Great Walsingham, Beeston, Beetley and Little Fransham, are between 57 and 58 inches, suggesting that the same templates

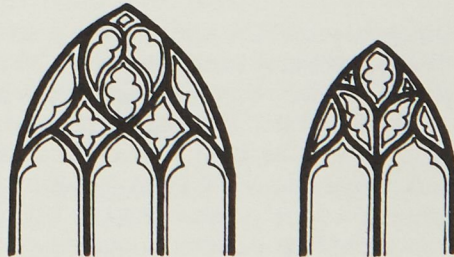
not to scale



Beeston-aisles Beetley-W.window
 Lt. Fransham-choir Lt. Fransham-E.window
 Rougham-tower Gt. Walsingham-W.window
 Gt. Walsingham-aisles



Beeston-aisle ends Houghton-W.window Tunstead-aisles
 Mileham-W.window
 Gt. Walsingham-aisle ends

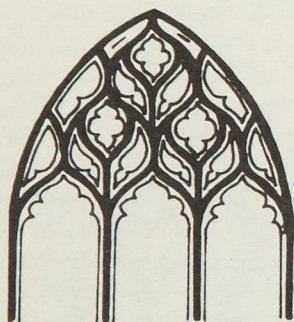


Narborough-aisle end Beetley-nave
 Lt. Fransham-choir
 Rougham-tower

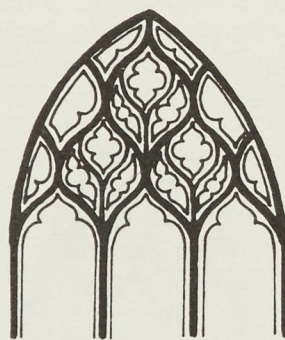
Fig. 1

were employed for cutting both types at all of these churches. An extension of the principles found in the first type was employed in three three-light windows, in which the top reticulation unit contains a more complex configuration: these are the west windows of Great Walsingham and Beetley, and the east window at Little Fransham. A related type of tracery is to be found at the aisle ends of Great Walsingham and Beeston, and inserted into the west wall of Mileham. It should be noted that the widths of these last three windows also show a marked standardization, varying between 71½ and 72½ inches, a very slight difference when allowance is made for discrepancies in the setting.

not to scale



*Ashill
Caston
Thompson*



*Gr. Walsingham
Beeston
Mileham*

Fig. 2

These four types of tracery account for the majority of the windows at six of the nine churches under discussion, and must certainly be considered as a clearly inter-linked range of types in which there is nothing which might discourage investigation of further links between the buildings. Beyond the typological relationship, the coincidence of widths is of particular interest, since this is one of the few instances of such coincidence of both types and dimensions that has been found in Norfolk in the course of measuring the widths of several thousand windows; it must be seen as providing unusually strong presumptive evidence of some degree of common authorship.

Three other tracery types remain to be briefly considered. The west window of Houghton Slipper Chapel has tracery which may be thought of as an elaborated version of the Great Walsingham west window type, although it would be dangerous to trust in the complete integrity of the restoration. A somewhat atmospheric perspective in Britton's *Beauties of England and Wales* may suggest that only the grid of reticulation remained by 1809, without any of the subordinate forms,

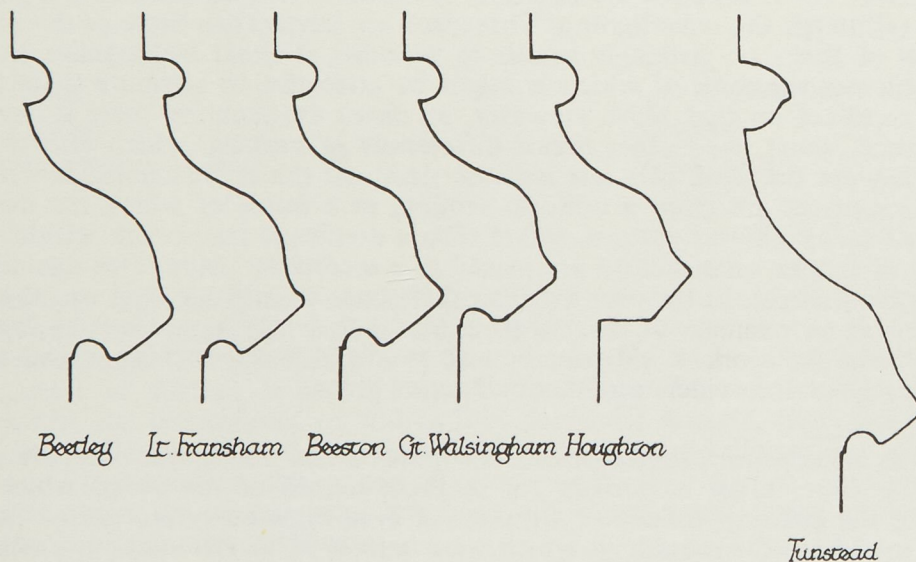
although other views appear to give greater support to the restored state.¹³ Nevertheless it is certainly sufficiently related to the other types to be conditionally included for consideration. The aisle windows of Tunstead are conceived on an altogether grander scale, as befits a large hall church. The top reticulation unit has tracery as in its counterpart in the Great Walsingham west window, but the lower ones are more enigmatic because they are incomplete. Brandon in 1848¹⁴ showed vertical lines connecting the form-piece stubs, but this is contradicted in other depictions of the church, and seems unlikely to be accurate; a combination of two ogee quatrefoils, interlocking with two curved mouchettes within the reticulation unit, was probably the original configuration. The east window of the north aisle of Narborough is of a slightly more commonplace type, being related to examples at Fakenham and Great Ellingham; how far its present form is the result of a harsh restoration in 1865 is difficult to establish, although the window width of 69½ inches is not so far removed from the width of 71½ inches at Mileham to preclude the possibility that the containing arch, at least, is original.

The claims of these last three to belong to the same group as those already discussed are not so inherently clear, although there is certainly nothing in their design which would necessarily exclude them. Nevertheless, it must be reiterated that the evidence of tracery alone should never be taken as more than an indicator of the potential kinship between buildings, and at this point it is relevant to make a brief digression to look at a group of three towers within the Hundred of Wayland, all of which may be attributed to one architect on the combined evidence of the mouldings and tracery.¹⁵ These towers, at Ashill, Caston and Thompson, are handsome, although relatively unambitious buildings, but in each case a fine flourish is attempted in the three-light window above the west door. These windows are as nearly identical with each other as it is possible to be (although the main lights at Thompson are longer than those of the others), and all of them are strikingly similar to windows at Great Walsingham, Beeston and Mileham, because of which it might be attractive to attribute them to the same architect on first sight. However, on closer examination there is one clear difference, apart from other minor differences of cusping, which must suggest that they are the work of a less sensitive designer: this is the manner in which all the form-pieces are given a uniform section, as a result of which the design is reduced to an all-over pattern, rather than a dominant framework within which forms of lighter construction are placed at a secondary plane. This dissimilarity is relatively slight, but shows a telling difference of attitude, and can therefore be seen as an example of the transformations that may sometimes be found to mark derivative work. It may also be seen as an additional warning against relying too closely on the evidence of window tracery alone.

MOULDINGS

It has already been suggested that the most certain indications of an architect's personal tastes must be looked for in those details of the design which were outside the patrons' influence. Of these it is now generally recognised that the most useful are the mouldings which were employed to give relief and character to the structural elements for which freestone was employed, such as arcades, door jambs and window reveals. These mouldings are of the greatest importance in the finished appearance of the church, since, in the hands of a skilful architect, they could be employed to reduce the apparent mass of the structure, and to articulate the constituent parts of the building into a unified and homogeneous composition. Yet, although their importance was certainly recognised by contem-

poraries, the nature of their formation, which required precise judgement on the part of the architect, tended to remain unobserved; where we know that patrons professed any interest in mouldings it almost invariably seems that their chief motive was a wish for economy, as when Henry VI forbade 'superfluite of too gret curious werkes of entaille and besy moldyng' at King's Chapel, Cambridge.¹⁶ It seems likely, then, that the most undisturbed expression of an architect's own preference will be found in such minutiae, since we may be reasonably sure that he was entirely responsible for their form. We do know that the design of mouldings required careful preparation before the building operations could begin from references such as that in the Norwich Cathedral rolls of 1323-4, when parchment was purchased 'pro moldis',¹⁷ and at Ely in the previous year we find reference to the purchase of boards for the making of the masons' working templates.¹⁸ We also know that an architect's record of the details he had used could be considered as a valuable possession, and might even be passed onto his heirs, as when Robert Couper of York left his 'exemplar' to his son in 1459.¹⁹ This suggests, as might be expected, that an architect would place confidence in solutions which he had already tried and found acceptable, and that he would therefore tend to look back to them in his subsequent work, unless otherwise instructed. To do so is a natural instinct for any craftsman, but never more so than in the middle ages. It must always be remembered that the skills of medieval masonry were essentially empirical: even those rules which advanced theorists, such as the German Matthias Roriczer,²⁰ expounded have to be understood as attempts at the formulation of tried and tested solutions, and are in themselves evidence of a tendency to rely on methods which had been found to be safe.



plinth courses

1 2 3 4 ins.

Fig. 3

Consequently we do have good grounds for expecting that architects would allow themselves to repeat details from one building to another when their choice was not subject to outside interference, and that in doing so they would provide an identifiable architectural signature. However the validity of this assumption can only be tested by analysis of a sufficiently large number of buildings. In the group of buildings under discussion the tracery types and window dimensions have been seen to point to the possibility of common authorship, but the proof of this will now be looked for in the mouldings.

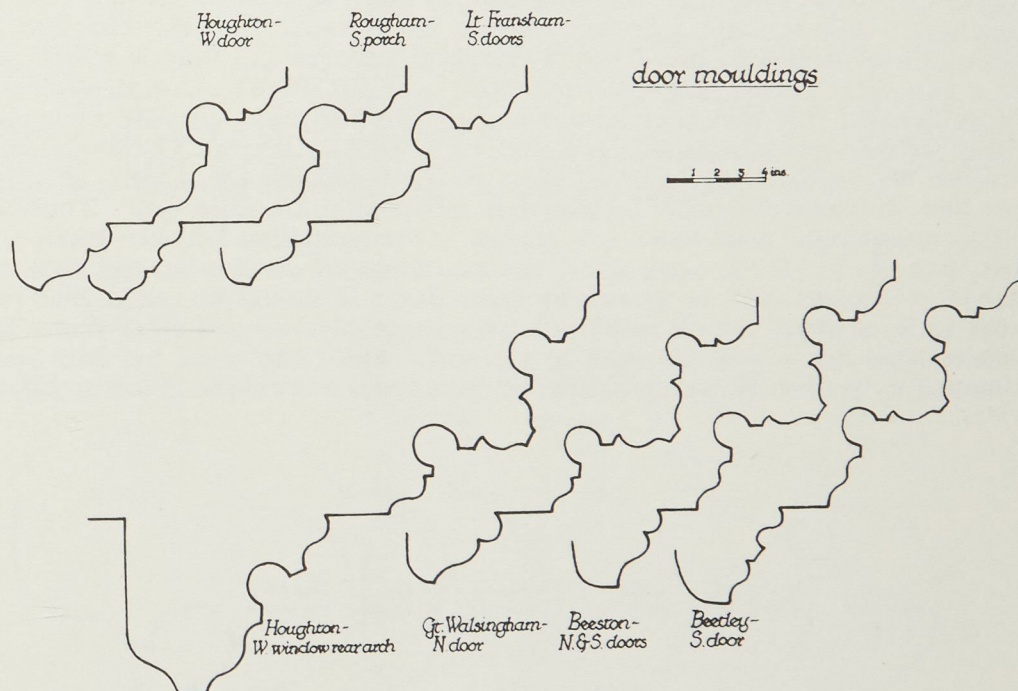


Fig. 4

The first moulding to be examined is that of the plinth course, an element which can often be problematic in an assessment of relationship between buildings since it receives the brunt of the weathering, and if the stone was unsuitable the resultant decay can be so extensive that the profile is either lost, or has been restored out of existence. Beyond this it must be said that architects seldom expended great ingenuity in the design of this feature, and the range of types is generally extremely limited. However, in this group six of the seven buildings which might be expected to have a base course show a marked similarity in its profile, and this is particularly worthy of note since it is a profile of an uncommon form. Apart from that at Tunstead, which is larger than the others in proportion with the church to which it belongs, the other five appear to have been cut from no more than two templates between them. Beetley, Little Fransham and Beeston are too similar for coincidence; Great Walsingham and Houghton Slipper Chapel are very slightly shallower, but closely like each other, except that Houghton has no hollow to its under-surface; an absence which is possibly attributable to the late nineteenth century restoration.

The doorways of these churches provide rather more of visual interest than the plinth courses, and again there is a clear family resemblance between their moulding formations so that, apart from two exceptions, they can all be shown to belong to one of two closely related series. The simpler type, consisting of an ogee and fillet to the inner order, separated from the outer wave moulded order by a three-quarter hollow, is found almost identically in the west door of the Slipper Chapel, the south porch of Rougham and the two south doors of Little Fransham. A slightly more complex formation, with an intermediate triple-filletted roll, is found in the north door of Great Walsingham, the two doors of Beeston and the south door of Beetley; this same formation is also employed in the rear-arch of Houghton's west window, a feature which is not found at the other churches. In two of these, Houghton and Great Walsingham, an ogee and fillet is substituted for a wave in the outer order, but otherwise four out of five of these mouldings are so identical that they may have been cut from the same template, unless the arm of coincidence is to be seen as stretching to unlikely lengths. The south doors of Great Walsingham and Tunstead show greater independence of form, although they have in common a rather massive ogee moulding to the inner order; Tunstead is also exceptional since there is a change in the mouldings between jambs and arch, whereas in all the other doors the mouldings are continuous and show no change at impost level. In examining these doors it should be noted that two types of hood-moulding are employed interchangeably between all of them: the simpler type has a roll and ogee to the soffit whilst the other has two ogees separated by a fillet. However, neither of these types was unique to this architect.

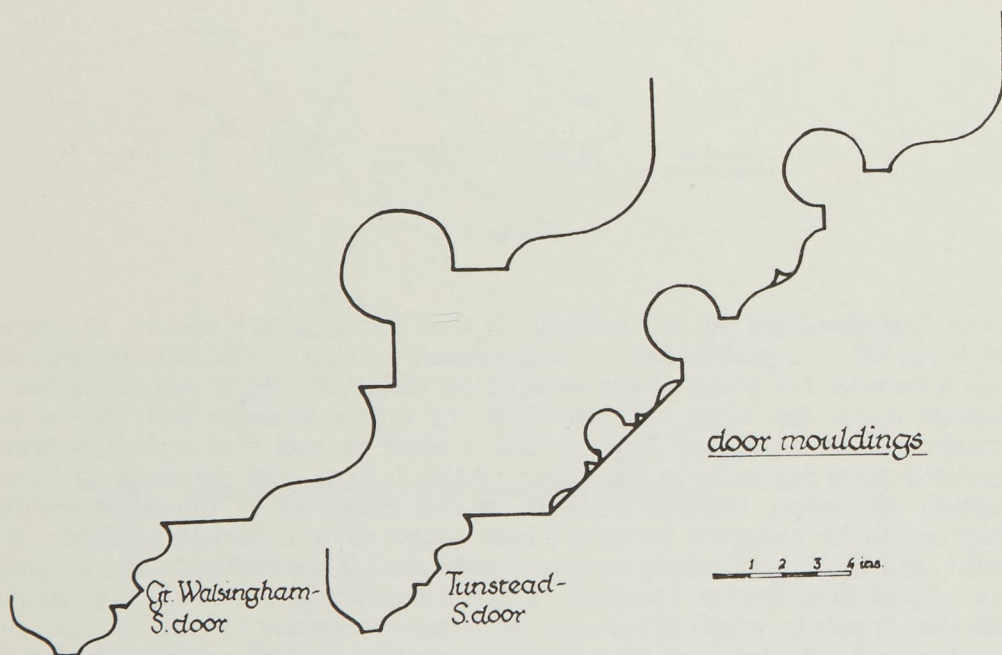


Fig. 5

The economical use of freestone, which was imposed on nearly all architects working in Norfolk because of the need to import all such stone from outside the area, inevitably limited the number of features on which a display of moulded stonework was permitted. In this group economy was taken so far that, for example, except at Tunstead, the tracery was set on the outer face of the wall, allowing none of the usual moulded splay apart from the hollow chamfer which corresponded to the mullions and form-pieces. There is the same economy internally as externally, and with few minor exceptions, such as the niches in the arcade spandrels at Tunstead, the only moulded stonework is that of the nave arcades and the choir and tower arches. However, the details of these arcades and arches provide what is probably the most convincing proof of relationship between six of the nine churches under consideration. Of the other three, Mileham and Houghton have no comparable features, and at Rougham the tower arch shows no affinities with the details of the other members of the group, suggesting that this tower was started by another architect, but finished by the Great Walsingham architect at the same time he was working on the porch.

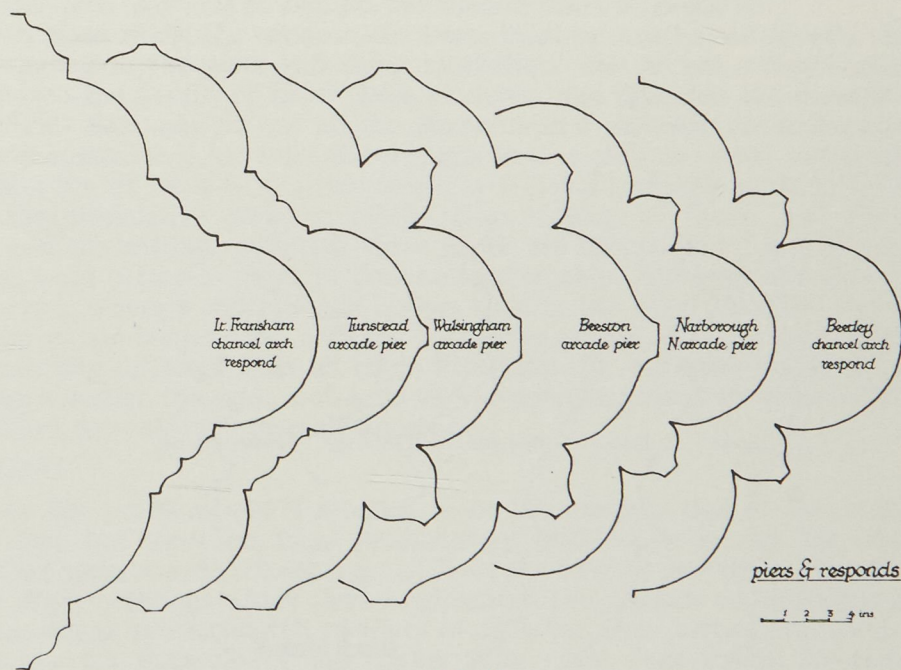


Fig. 6

The piers and responds of these churches are unusually finely proportioned in their ratio of height to girth, and in the depth of the caps and bases in relation to the shafts of the piers. But it is in the carefully contrived manner by which all of the constituent elements are integrated into a unified design that the consummate skill of this architect is chiefly apparent. In all cases the piers and responds are of basically quatrefoil section, although there is some variety in their form. All of them have intermediate mouldings between the principal shafts: at Little Fransham and Tunstead there are bracket mouldings, but at the others there are

filleted rolls, and at Tunstead, Great Walsingham and Beeston the shafts themselves are filleted as well. The most obvious similarities of type are to be seen between Great Walsingham and Beeston, and between Narborough and Beetley; but they are all clearly related to each other by the way in which the subsidiary mouldings are extended beyond the main shafts to penetrate into the caps and bases. By this means all of the elements of the pier interlock, although each retains its distinct form because of the unbroken continuity of the abacus and lower base mouldings. The arches supported by these piers are invariably of two orders, with a hood mould towards the central vessel. Except at Tunstead, where the orders are carved with bracket mouldings which reflect the intermediate mouldings of the piers, all of these churches have a simple wave moulding to each order. A very interesting feature which is common to all the members of this group is that the arch orders do not commence immediately above the abacus as was customary, but instead they develop from a short vertically-sided stock, the polygonal section of which continues the plan of the abacus. By this means the form of the pier is extended up into the arch springing to create a transitional member in which the differences between pier and arch are reconciled, a treatment which shows fine sensitivity.

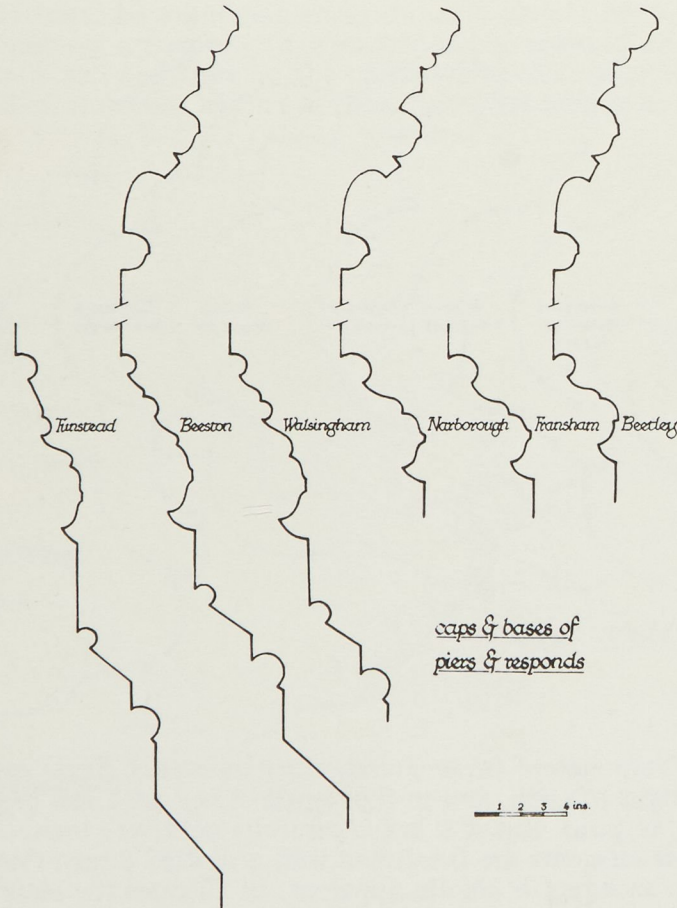


Fig. 7

With regard to the mouldings of the caps there is little that needs to be said. Measured sections have been obtained of only three of them, and although these show plain similarities of sequence and scale it must be said that the sequence is akin that in other churches of the fourteenth century. However, the bases show an altogether more original approach to design in the strangely fluid downward progression through the formation. This is particularly true in the closely related bases of Tunstead, Beeston and Great Walsingham, in all of which the formation is almost identical, culminating in a depressed filleted roll. As was common there is a marked contrast between the form of the bases and their supporting sub-bases, the latter being made up of a series of stages separated by canted faces, with horizontal rolls at the angles, resulting in a widely spreading general profile. Although none of these bases appears to have been cut from the same template as another, the repetition of this remarkable form and of closely similar dimensions is so immediately apparent that it would be difficult not to conclude that, in each case, the template must have been derived from a shared source, which was presumably the architect's own record of his earlier work. At Narborough and Little Fransham the bases are rather less elaborate, but the ogee-section moulding above the filleted roll shows the same curvilinear character as in the other bases, and the same may also be said for the simpler bases of Beetley.

This close similarity between the bases must be seen to corroborate the indications noted in the piers and other mouldings, that it was a single mind which conceived the details of all of these churches, and provided the masons with the templates necessary to cut all the elements to a precisely pre-determined form. Simple coincidence, or even direct plagiarism, might have been called upon as an explanation of some of the resemblances of detail had they appeared in isolation; but the cumulative evidence of the clear kinship of forms, and the parallels between the manner in which these forms are invariably set in relation to each other, must certainly point to common authorship. Although in a church such as Tunstead, where a more liberal budget than at the other churches encouraged a greater expansiveness and a richer decorative veneer, the end result may appear superficially different from at Little Fransham, for example, yet in the majority of the minutiae the same well-tried and favoured solutions are resorted to at both churches, as at all the others of the group.

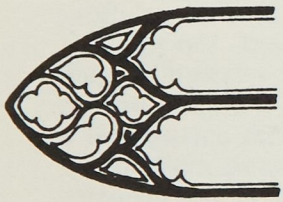
DATING

One last problem which remains to be discussed is that of the date of these churches, but since no firm documentary evidence is known for any of the building operations the likely range of dates can only be determined by comparison with other buildings which show analogous forms. Writers on individual members of this group have suggested a variety of dates for them, although there has been a tendency for these to be late rather than early. Joan Evans, for example, in discussing Houghton Slipper Chapel, considered it to be 'Decorated that is a little thin and rigid',²¹ pointing to it as evidence for the late survival of Decorated architecture in Norfolk, in which she was following, and has since been followed by, other writers. Munro Cautley has suggested that the arcades of Beeston were rebuilt in the fifteenth century, and yet had no hesitation in ascribing the virtually identical arcades of Great Walsingham to the fourteenth century.²² Sir Nikolaus Pevsner has shown greater consistency in dating all of these churches to the fourteenth century, although the sophisticated details of the caps and bases at Beeston and Tunstead led him to suggest dates within the second half of the century on the basis of the conservatism which is usually expected in Norfolk.²³ All of this is sufficient to show that there is no consensus of opinion on the dates

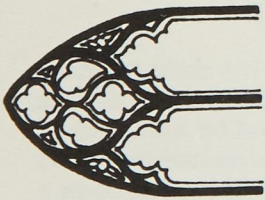
parallels for
Great Walsingham-type

tracery

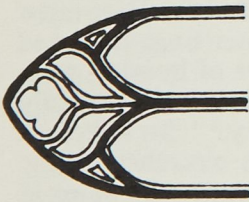
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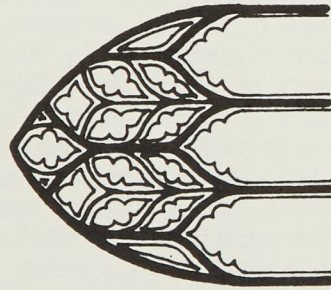
Eising-W window
c. 1347



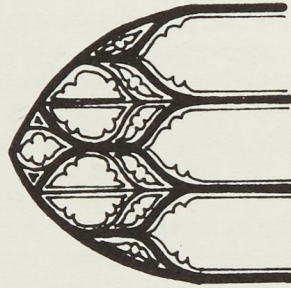
*Hingham -
S. nave aisle*
1316 x 59



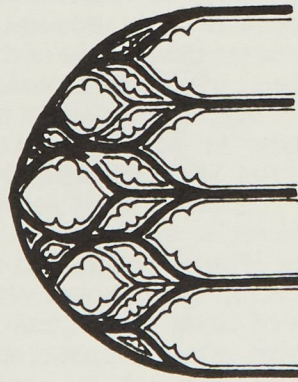
*Norwich - bishop's
palace, porch of
Salmon's hall*
1318-25



*Burnham Norton -
Carmelite priory gate*
c. 1353 ?



*Norwich cathedral -
N. cloister walk,
2nd bay from W*
c. 1355



*Ely cathedral - choir gallery,
3rd bay from W*
1322 x 38

Fig. 8

of these churches, and here it must be said that the suggestions which will be made below can be no more than tentative.

Since the characteristics of window tracery are most easily defined, this aspect of the churches will be considered first. Tracery composed of reticulation units or similar forms, containing secondary tracery, is found in isolated examples throughout the country, but the greatest concentration is certainly within the eastern counties, and for the present purpose analogies will not be looked for outside this area. Possibly the earliest example of tracery in the area in which the seeds of the idea may be seen is to be found in the surviving porch of the hall built by Bishop Salmon at Norwich between 1318 and 1325,²⁴ although the manner in which the containing form in this window spreads laterally above the light heads shows that the architect did not conceive of it as a unit which could be multiplied through a larger field. A related example, which is rather closer in spirit to the Walsingham type, is to be found in the gallery of Bishop Hotham's choir at Ely cathedral, in the third bay from the west: within the tracery field of these four-light windows the forms to either side of the central motif each contain a quatrefoil and a pair of mouchettes on a subordinate level, much as in the aisle windows of Great Walsingham. The Ely tracery can be dated to between the collapse of the Romanesque tower in 1322 and the recorded completion date of the choir of 1338;²⁵ some indications that these windows belong with a modification of the original scheme for the choir gallery may be taken to suggest that they should be placed nearer to 1338 than 1322.²⁶ Related tracery may also be seen in the second bay from the west of the north cloister walk at Norwich, the commencement of work on which has been dated to about 1355,²⁷ although the vertical form pieces in this tracery are probably not trustworthy. Another window which shows some similarities with the Norwich and Ely tracery is that in the upper floor of the gatehouse to the Carmelite Priory of Burnham Norton; this gate is usually dated to about 1353 since it has been associated with an extension of the priory precinct of that date.²⁸ These last two examples of tracery show a particularly close similarity with the west window of Houghton Slipper Chapel in the use of elongated containing forms, and the more complex pattern of secondary tracery.

All of these windows have sufficient in common with the Great Walsingham types of tracery to make comparison acceptable, and other examples such as the west window of St. Mary at Elsing, which was presumably part of the rebuilding undertaken by Sir Hugh Hastings before his death in 1347, support the range of dates between the 1330s and 1350s which is indicated by the comparable buildings looked at so far. One last parallel may be cited which is possibly more convincing than those looked at already, and that is with two identical windows in the south aisle of St. Andrew at Hingham which contain a configuration very like that at the head of the three-light windows at Walsingham, Tunstead, Beetley and Little Fransham. Unfortunately the building of Hingham is only very insecurely dated by a tradition which ascribes the whole church to the rectorate of Remigius of Hethersett, between 1316 and 1359.²⁹ Few would quibble that the nave does indeed belong to that generous time-span (although there are grounds for considering that the choir may be a little later),³⁰ but more specific evidence for dating would have been preferable for our present purpose; on stylistic grounds a date around the middle of that period is probably most likely for Hingham nave.

Turning to the details of mouldings there are few significant analogies for the purpose of dating that can be made for the majority, but it is possible to trace

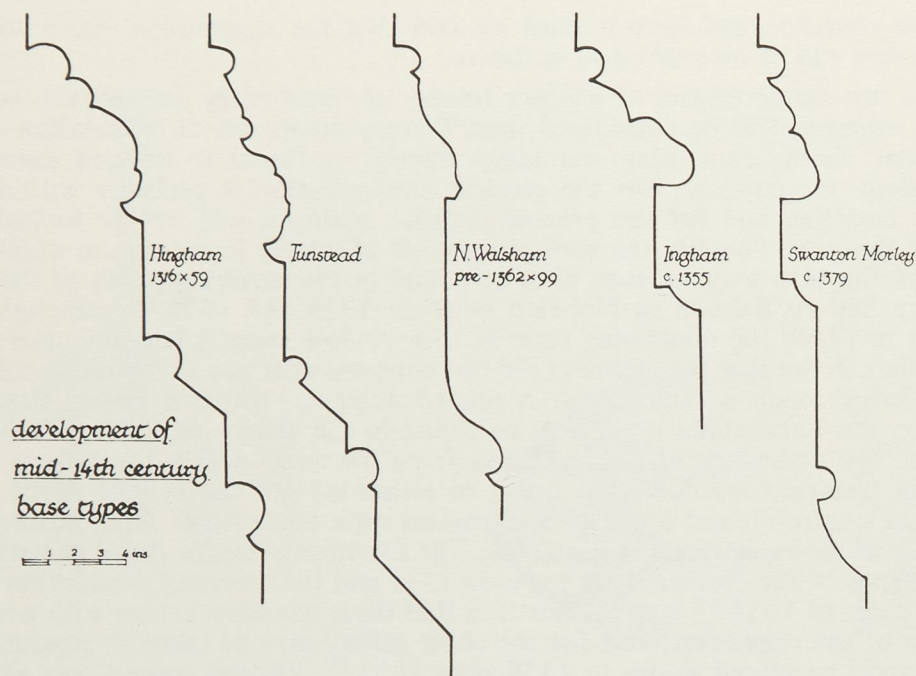


Fig. 9

some sources for the design of the arcade piers. The idea of penetration of the caps by the intermediate pier mouldings was not entirely new to Norfolk, since it had already been employed in the north-west of the county at Snettisham, where these mouldings are continued unbroken through the caps to be taken around the arches. Snettisham is entirely exceptional, however, in having been directly inspired by the choir of Ely cathedral,³¹ but it was probably not long after it had been constructed that rather less adventurous experiments were being made by the architect of Hingham. The arcades of Hingham are extraordinary for their use of a systematic alternation in the design of the caps, but, in one of the two variants, the intermediate shafts of the basically quatrefoil piers are carried up into the cap until they are submerged into the bell mouldings. Such a relationship between the parts may be thought to fore-shadow the treatment of the intermediate mouldings and caps in the Great Walsingham group, and some further support for the idea of relationship between Hingham and the Walsingham group may be seen in the sub-base mouldings of the former. These show a rather simpler version of the unusual punctuation of the stages by horizontal rolls and angled faces which has already been noted at Great Walsingham, Beeston and Tunstead. One further, but more tenuous parallel between the Walsingham-type piers and Hingham may be suspected in the south door of Hingham, where the vertical lines of the jamb arrises are extended up through the arch springing to create an interpenetration not unlike that in the arch springings of the arcades of this group.

In general it may be said that the similarities between the Walsingham group and Hingham are sufficiently clear for the latter to be seen as a possible prototype for several of the Walsingham group's more significant features; unfortunately, the vagueness of its dating limits its usefulness for our present requirements. The tracery analogies discussed above have indicated a period roughly between

the 1330s and 1350s for this group, although with a greater likelihood of the 1340s and 1350s, and all that can be said about Hingham is that its traditional dating would not be inconsistent with this. Such general indications of date range may be corroborated when the form of the bases is seen in relation to others in Norfolk. The depth of the bases in the larger churches of this group has been seen by some writers as being essentially of late gothic type, despite the fact that there is none of the distinct separation of the main base mouldings from the sub-base in the manner which was to be characteristic of parochial late gothic bases, and was probably first seen in Norfolk in a firmly datable context during the 1370s at Swanton Morley and Attleborough.^{3 2} It would be over-simplistic to make too much of this difference of form if it were not possible to detect a clear development towards bases of the Swanton Morley type in a number of churches which continue the ideas found in the arcades of the Walsingham group, in the relationship between the constituent elements, and which appear to be typologically later than the Walsingham group. North Walsham, about five miles to the north of Tunstead, has piers with a similar combination of filleted shafts and filleted rolls as at Great Walsingham and Beeston. But at North Walsham the bases are much closer to late Gothic types in their increased height, and in the strict separation of sub-base and main base (although the mouldings are unusual in having a circular rather than polygonal plan). The nave here has very approximate *terminus-ante-quem* provided by the south porch which, on the evidence of heraldry, must have been added to the nave between 1362 and 1399.^{3 3} One other, but rather more closely datable building campaign which might be cited is the reconstruction of Ingham, following a license of 1355 which permitted Sir Miles Stapleton to enlarge the parish church in order to house a community of Trinitarians.^{3 4} The nave piers of Ingham have a similar plan to those of Beetley and Narborough, but the bases, with their widely projecting and undercut upper mouldings, and the simple quarter hollow above the sub-base, are very much closer to such as Swanton Morley than to those of the Walsingham group.

Such comparisons, although not entirely conclusive, suggest that Great Walsingham, and the other churches which have been here attributed to the same architect, are unlikely to have been constructed much later than the 1350s, and this therefore provides some support for the range of dates advanced above.

February 1978

¹Based on research submitted by the writer to the University of East Anglia as a PhD thesis, *Later Gothic Architecture in Norfolk: an Examination of the work of some individual Architects in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries*, 1975.

²Although the description 'master mason' would be historically more correct, the connotations of the description 'architect' appear more appropriate in this context since this paper is concerned with the design rather than with the structural techniques of medieval building.

³The pioneering English work in this field was by such as Wyatt Papworth and W. R. Lethaby; the only attempt so far to collate all the available information is John Harvey, *English Medieval Architects*, 1954.

⁴Notably Lon R. Shelby, 'Mediaeval Masons' Templates', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 30, 1971, and 'The Geometrical Knowledge of Mediaeval Master Masons', *Speculum*, vol. 47, 1972, and François Bucher, 'Design in Gothic Architecture, a Preliminary Assessment', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 27, 1968.

⁵It should be remembered that churches were seldom rebuilt entirely in one operation: whilst the choir was usually the responsibility of the rector or the body to which the rectory was appropriated, the nave was the responsibility of the parish. Additionally such essentially extraneous structures as porches, chapels and towers tended to be added haphazardly as funds became available.

- ⁶See the contracts published in L. F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540*, 1952.
- ⁷Rev. W. Hudson, 'Assessment of the Townships of the County of Norfolk for the King's Tenths and Fifteenths as settled in 1334', *Norfolk Archaeology*, vol. 12, 1895.
- ⁸Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, North East Norfolk and Norwich* 1962, p. 140.
- ⁹The year of Bishop Edmund Scambler's visitation; see Rev. J. F. Williams, 'An Episcopal Visitation in 1593', *Norfolk Archaeology*, vol. 28, 1942-5.
- ¹⁰Other churches which have, or had, windows of circular form in the clerestory are Billingford, Cley, Heacham, Frettenham, Heydon, Ingham, Ingoldisthorpe, Snettisham, Terrington St. John and Weston Longville.
- ¹¹An inscription recorded the glazing of the clerestory by members of the Guild of the Virgin Mary in that year.
- ¹²British Library Add. Ch. 17634, published by Rev. C. Chitty, 'Kessingland and Walberswick Church Towers', *Suffolk Archaeology*, vol. 25, 1950.
- ¹³See, for example, the etching in J. S. Cotman, *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1818.
- ¹⁴J. R. and J. A. Brandon, *Parish Churches*, 1848.
- ¹⁵See writer's unpublished thesis pp. 160-2 and 184-8.
- ¹⁶Henry VI's 'will' of 1447-8, published in R. Willis and J. W. Clark, *Architectural History of the University of Cambridge*, 1866, vol. 1 p. 368.
- ¹⁷E. Fernie and A. B. Whittingham, 'Norwich Communar and Pitancer Rolls 1282-1330', *Norfolk Record Society*, vol. 41, 1972, roll 1040.
- ¹⁸Ely Sacrist's Roll, 16 Edward II.
- ¹⁹Prerogative Court of York, vol. 2, 415, ref. to in Harvey, p. 75.
- ²⁰*Geometria Deutsch and Buchlein von der Fialen Gerechtigkeit*, of about 1486.
- ²¹Joan Evans, *English Art 1307-1461*, 1949, p. 36.
- ²²H. Munro Cautley, *Norfolk Churches*, 1949, pp. 173 and 260.
- ²³Nikolaus Pevsner, *Buildings of England, NW and S Norfolk*, p. 86 and *NE Norfolk and Norwich*, p. 334.
- ²⁴License to purchase the land was obtained in 1318, and Salmon died in 1325.
- ²⁵Wharton, *Anglia Sacra*, vol. 1, p. 644.
- ²⁶See writer's thesis pp. 133-6.
- ²⁷E. Fernie and A. B. Whittingham, roll 1055.
- ²⁸Pat. 27 Ed III pt. ii, m.2.
- ²⁹Francis Blomefield, *Essay Towards a Topographical History of Norfolk*, vol. 2 (2nd ed.), p. 427.
- ³⁰See writer's thesis p. 192 ff.
- ³¹*Ibid* p. 121 ff.
- ³²Swanton Morley nave is dated to before 1379 by a bequest of William, Lord Morley, which referred to the building as having been begun; Attleborough nave can be seen to pre-date the N transeptal chapel commenced for Thomas Chanticleer before his death in 1379.
- ³³See Rev. C. H. W. Page, 'Recent Work: North Walsham Church', *Norfolk Archaeology*, vol. 27, 1938, p. 437ff.
- ³⁴*Calendar of Papal Registers*, iii, 56.