

# St Mary, The Hythe, Maldon, Essex: The Anglo-Saxon Minster and Romanesque Cruciform Church

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*A survey of the north nave wall of St Mary's church in the Hythe area of Maldon suggests that the lower part of the wall is not only of Anglo-Saxon date, but earlier within that period. The construction technique of the primary wall is somewhat comparable to nearby St Peter's, Bradwell on Sea, while the implied dimensions of the primary church are very close to those of Reculver in Kent. The latter two churches are of late 7th century date. The early church at Maldon is associated with an adjacent 8th-9th century settlement site. The presence of loomweights at the settlement indicates a female component, and by extension, it is suggested that the site was that of an undocumented double minster of monks and nuns headed by an abbess. The church was first documented in 1068, when a large land endowment is evidence of its minster status. At about this time or shortly afterwards, the church was rebuilt as a substantial cruciform structure. The transepts and chancel of the latter have been lost, but their form could be retrieved by resistivity survey.*

## **Introduction**

Maldon, situated on the Blackwater Estuary on the east coast of Essex, is now a moderately-sized market town. At the time of the Domesday Survey, however, it was the home to 180 burgesses (Williams and Martin 2002, 973) and the second most important place in the shire after Colchester. Maldon's main claim to fame in the Anglo-Saxon period was as the location for a battle in 991 in which Brythnoth, Ealdorman of Essex was killed (ASC A, E), the battle inspiring the epic poem *The Song of Maldon* which survived in a collection of manuscripts compiled by Sir Robert Cotton in the 17th century (Scragg 1993, 19). The settlement was first documented in 912, when Edward the Elder is recorded as having camped there while a fortified *burh* was established at nearby Witham. Four years later, a *burh* was established at Maldon itself (ASC A, D). That there was a pre-existing religious focus here is indicated by the place-name *mael dun*, 'hill marked by a cross' (Watts 2004, 393). Furthermore, St Mary's church, Maldon, when first documented in 1068, possessed two hides of land (Powell 1997, 142). Large endowments

such as this are seen as an indicator of minster status (Blair 1985, 106). A minster can be defined as any kind of early English Christian community 'strict or lax, well-documented or obscure' (Blair 2005, 3). At Maldon, the recorded endowment might suggest that an early minster pre-dated Edward the Elder's *burh*. The suggestion is supported by the 2007 rescue excavations at the former Croxley Works site adjacent to the church, which produced unequivocal evidence of middle Saxon settlement (Ennis 2009).

The church (Fig 1) and its relation to an adjacent middle Saxon occupation site was studied by the writer as part of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of MA of the University College London in 2018 (Secker 2018). The latter explored the evidence for pre-Viking minsters in north-eastern Essex, including Maldon. It was particularly fortunate that while the church was being studied, stripping of the internal plaster took place. Prior to this, the external fabric of the nave was recorded. Following the exposure of the masonry of the lower part of the north, west and south internal walls of the nave, the north wall was recorded, with the exception of its



*Fig 1*  
*St Mary, Maldon: general view from north (Photo by D. Secker)*

westernmost part which was obscured by the organ and other church furniture. Similar obstructions inhibited the recording of the west and south walls, but the character of the masonry was noted.

This paper is concerned with the Anglo-Saxon minster church and its Romanesque successor. Later work is only discussed when it relates to these phases. Before the structure itself is explored, the documentary history of the medieval church is outlined. Following an account of the recorded fabric and an assessment of the structural evidence for the Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque churches, the topographical context and archaeological evidence of the Hythe area of Maldon is examined. The church is then discussed in relation to other early minsters in the Thames estuary area and the Romanesque rebuilding of St Mary's appraised. In the latter case, it is concluded that a future resistivity survey could clarify the form of the lost transepts and chancel of the church.

### *Historical background*

St Mary's is first documented in 1068, when William I confirmed the grant of the latter together with its tithes and two hides of land by the priest Ingelric to his collegiate foundation of St Martin-le-Grand, London (Powell 1997, 142; Taylor 2002, 236-37). Ingelric, whose name suggests he was German, was a high-ranking clerk of Edward the Confessor. Following the Conquest, the former's already substantial estates were added to by the new king. Ingelric is last heard of in Easter 1069 and may have died in the early 1070s

(Taylor 2002, 222-31). Shortly after this, St Martin's estates were seized by Count Eustace II of Boulogne, but these, including Maldon, were restored in 1075 x 1085 (Powell 1997, 142; Taylor 2002, 237-38). In Domesday, the St Mary's estate, which was then valued at 2 hides and 30 acres, was held by St Martin's for the count, though the church itself is not explicitly mentioned (Williams and Martin 2002, 991). Eustace II (d.1087) was succeeded by his son, Eustace III who became a monk at Cluny in c.1125. Shortly after that date, St Mary's and its lands were granted by Henry I to Theobald de Blois, brother of both the future King Stephen and the bishop of Winchester, Henry de Blois. By the early 1140s when Maldon was held by Geoffrey II de Mandeville, Earl of Essex (d.1144), the church was administered by the bailiff Walter of Provins. Walter appears to have deprived St Martin-le-Grand of its land in Maldon and given this land to the sons of the vicar Wadlac. The land was however restored to St Martin's and presumably Theobald by King Stephen in c. 1147, a result of pressure from the dean of St Martin's and Henry de Blois (Powell 1997, 142-44). In 1158, all churches in the possession of St Martin's became prebends, that of St Mary's being held by two canons (Denton 1970, 39). By the later medieval period, St Mary's was one of a number of royal free chapels which were distinguished by their immunity from episcopal jurisdiction (Denton 1970, 15-22). Both St Martin-le-Grand and St Mary's were appropriated by Westminster Abbey in 1503 for the endowment of Henry VII's chapel there (Powell 1997, 142).

### *St Mary's church*

The church was described by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments for England (RCHME 1921, 175-77). Its development is only briefly summarised here. Romanesque and earlier work that is the subject of this paper is restricted to the nave (Fig 2). The west tower was added in c.1300 and the north porch in c.1400. New windows were inserted into the nave in c.1400 and 1500. The present chancel is early 19th century but on the site of a 14th-century structure, while the south aisle is an entirely Victorian addition of 1885-7. An octagonal church hall (omitted from Fig 2) was added to the south of the church in 1992-93 (Betley and Pevsner 2007, 580). Limited excavation around and to the east of the 19th-century chancel revealed flint rubble walls in a lime mortar which extended at least two metres beyond the east wall of

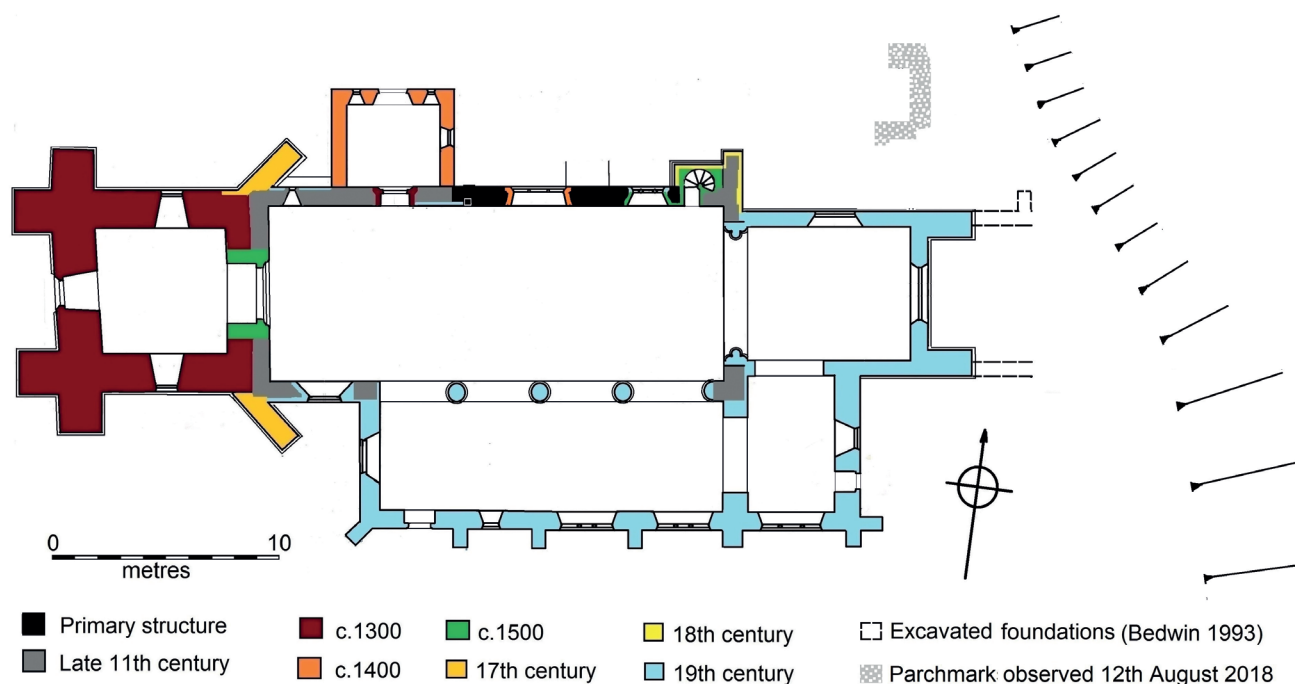


Fig 2

*St Mary, Maldon: phased plan (D. Secker)*

the present chancel, but there was no dating evidence (Bedwin 1993). Further small-scale excavation beneath the modern applied cement plinth of the north wall of the nave revealed the lower courses of an apparently pre-Romanesque wall (Andrews 1999). This walling is described and discussed in more detail below. On a visit to the church by this writer on 12 August 2018, at the end of a spell of hot dry weather, a parchmark north of the church was noted and planned.

### *Nave, external north elevation*

The north wall of the nave is a complex multi-period structure, its fabric and details using a diverse range of building materials (Fig 3). The fabric has been repaired and extensively repointed above the modern plinth. Below the latter are the lowest courses of the early wall revealed in the excavation of 1997 (Andrews 1999). The lowest wall is of mainly Kentish (Hythe) ragstone. The latter is mainly unworked, but there are a few squared blocks of *petit appareil*. The latter, together with the presence of two fragments of pink *opus signinum*, indicate the material has been re-used from a Roman building. Above the plinth are some blocks of yellow Wealden sandstone, also re-used Roman material. Septaria, a nodular conglomerate of limestone and ironstone occurring in the Stour Estuary to the north-east of Maldon, occurs sporadically below the plinth. All the above materials were found at the

Roman town site of Heybridge, on the north bank of the Blackwater from Maldon (Wickenden 1986, 64; Atkinson and Preston 2015, section 1/3-7-6). Only a few flints do not appear to be recycled Roman material. The lower fabric at Maldon is bonded in a hard buff mortar tempered with small flint occlusions 3-5mm across and some crushed shell. Near the west end of the wall is the lower part of a slight protrusion 0.50m wide and 0.05m deep. Above the plinth, some ragstone is used below the large early 15th-century window, but the wall is mainly of septaria and is roughly coursed with Roman brick. Where the fabric is not repointed it is bonded in a friable yellow sandy mortar with large chalk and flint pebble inclusions. The mortar is identical to that bonding the Caen stone jambs of the Romanesque west crossing arch described below.

The wall looking into the 15th-century porch has been limewashed. The building materials are thus unidentifiable with the exception of a small amount of flint rubble adjacent to the western porch bench. It is, however, probable that the wall is of the same mix of flint and septaria as the exposed wall above. The lowest part of the western north wall has been refaced in a mixture of waste material including 19th-century brick, iron slag, and hardcore, probably part of the restoration of 1885-87. Above this is original fabric and a round-headed window with dressings renewed in 19th-century 'Roman' cement. East of the window is an unusually complete fragment of Mayen Lava



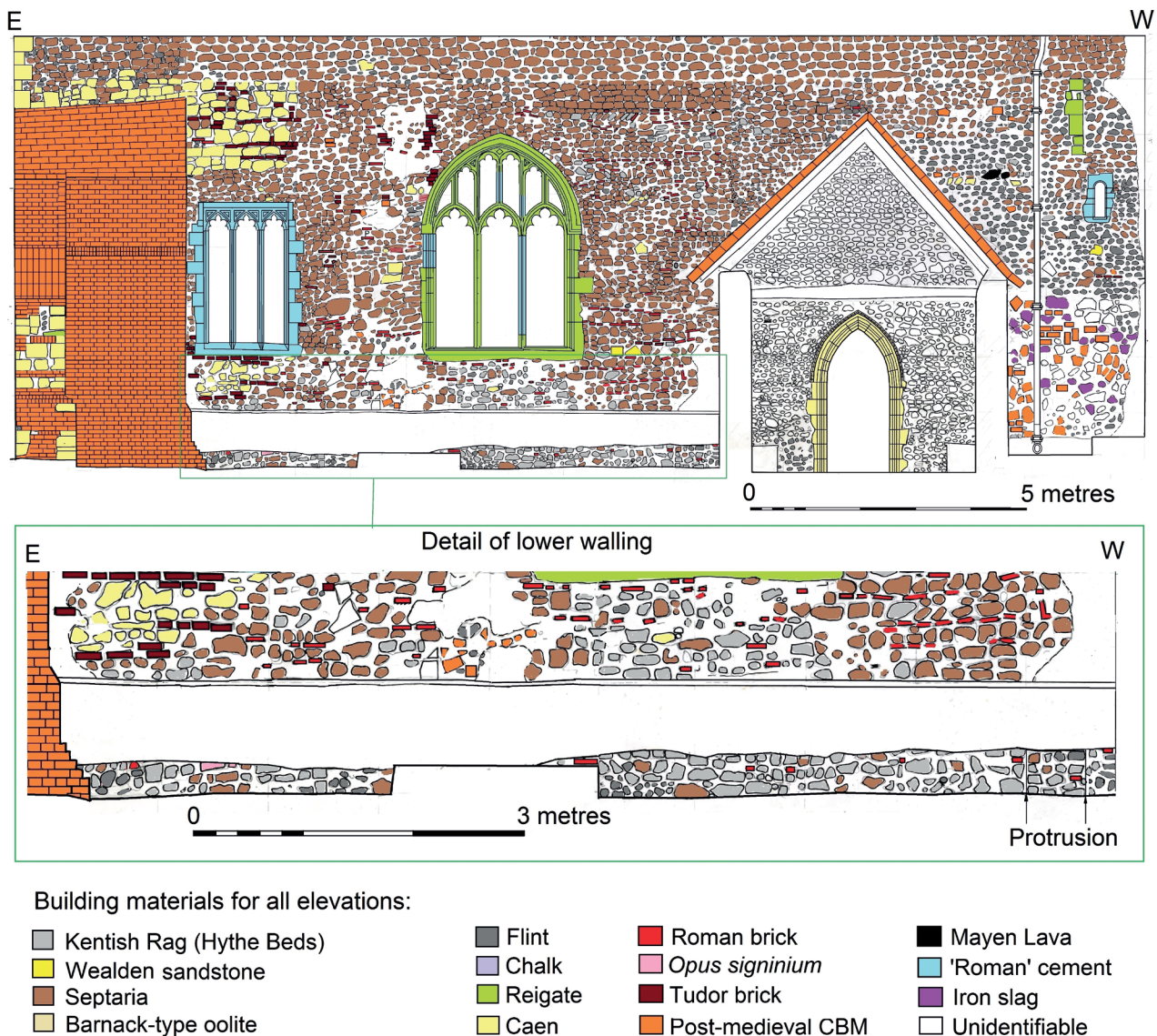


Fig 3  
Nave, external north elevation (D. Secker)

quern, perhaps one of those imported as blanks from the Rhineland but finished in a London workshop operating in c.970-1070 (Freshwater 1996).

Post-Romanesque alterations include the north doorway of c.1300, with a recycled billet-moulded label, the central and eastern Perpendicular windows of c.1400 and c.1500 respectively and the re-facing of the stairwell of that date with 18th-century brick. A stack of Reigate quoins above the Romanesque window perhaps relates to an opening of c.1400, since Reigate is also used on the Perpendicular window of that date. The stack appears to be truncated by the rebuilding of the wall-head, most obviously to the east where large amounts of Caen stone were re-used. There is evidence, discussed below, that the wall of the Romanesque nave was higher than at present.

### *The interior of the nave*

The plaster of the north wall of the nave was stripped to a height of generally 1.6m above the floorboards to the east of the north doorway and 2.2m to its west (Fig 4). Recording of the fabric was partially obstructed by pews, an organ and benches. Moreover, parts of the wall retained residual 19th-century render: a yellow sandy composition sometimes difficult to distinguish from the Norman-period mortar. The latter was apparent in the walling west of the doorway. The fabric there is entirely of septaria rubble including two courses of particularly large stones. All the material was freshly obtained rather than *spolia*. The west and south walls were obstructed by various pieces of church furniture. It was, however, observed that they were of similar construction to the western north wall.



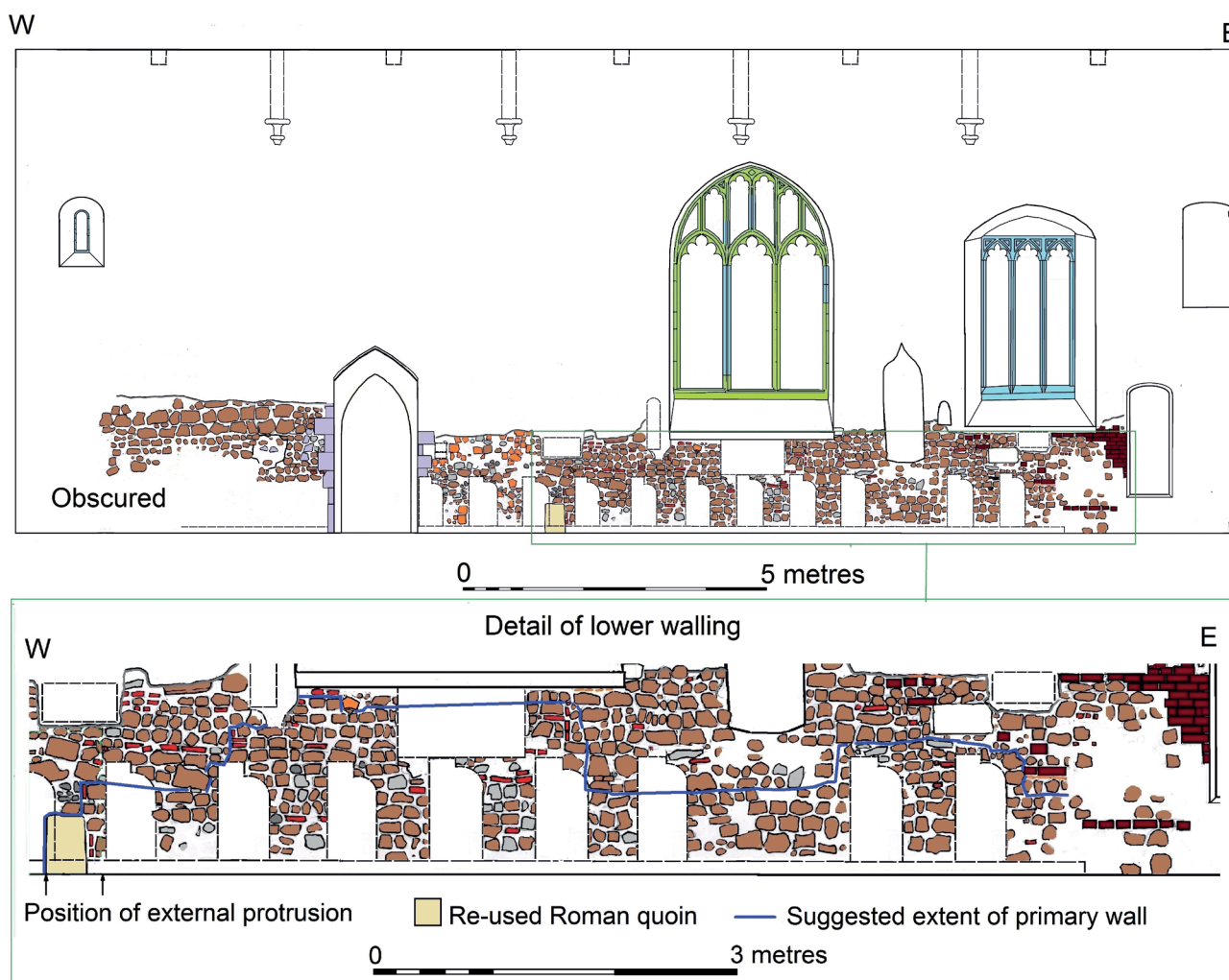


Fig 4  
Nave, internal north elevation. Key to materials as Fig 3(D. Secker)

It is most unfortunate that the wall immediately to the east of the doorway has been repaired with 19th-century debris. East of the repairs is a large rectangular worked block of Barnack-type oolitic limestone; its western edge is aligned exactly on that of the external protrusion noted above. The block almost certainly originated as a quoin of a Roman building. It is over-ridden by large haphazardly-coursed blocks of septaria. The large roughly coursed blocks over-riding the re-used Roman quoin contrast with the regularly laid courses to the east of the quoin. The latter construction method is apparent up to the sill of the c.1400 window. To the east of the sill, the interface between the two suggested phases is less certain, but may have been at about 0.80m above floor level. At the point where the wall is partly obscured by the eastern two nave pews, there is some change in the character of the masonry at a height of 1.10m, above which larger stones are used. Where original mortar was visible, it was all

of the friable yellow sandy type associated with the Romanesque structure. The regular coursing of the lower walling and the way that the Roman quoin is over-ridden do, however, suggest this work belongs to a pre-Romanesque phase contemporary with the external lower courses of walling described above. An unusual feature of the suggested primary work is the sporadic use of vertically set Roman bricks. They clearly do *not* represent the cheeks of putlog holes. The east end of the internal wall has been largely rebuilt in c.1500, as evidenced by the use of Tudor brick.

In the east wall of the nave, the responds for an exceptionally broad (6.25m) Romanesque arch survive outside those of the present chancel arch (Figs 2, 5). The exposed north respond is of widely-jointed Caen ashlar bonded with the same yellow mortar found elsewhere in the structure of the nave. Significantly, the east wall of the nave is 1.05m thick as opposed to 0.90m for the north and south walls. This and other

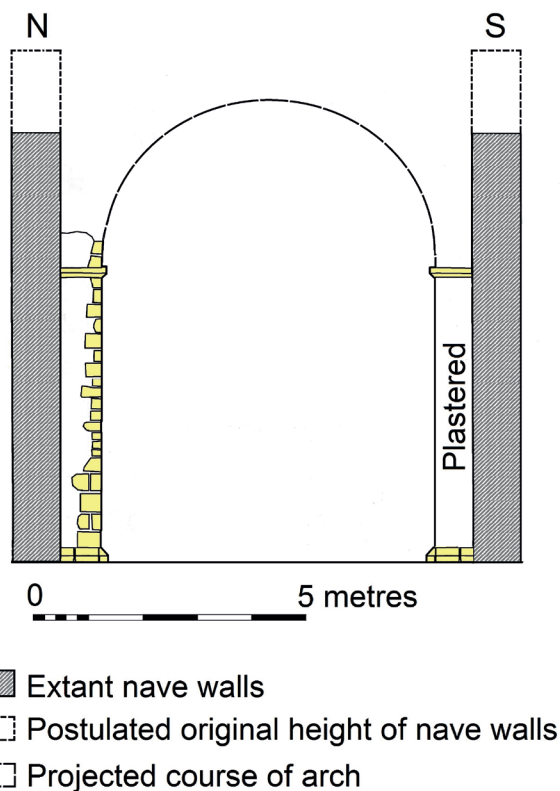


Fig 5  
Reconstruction of Romanesque west crossing arch.  
Key to materials as Fig 3 (D. Secker)

features discussed below suggest a former crossing tower at this point.

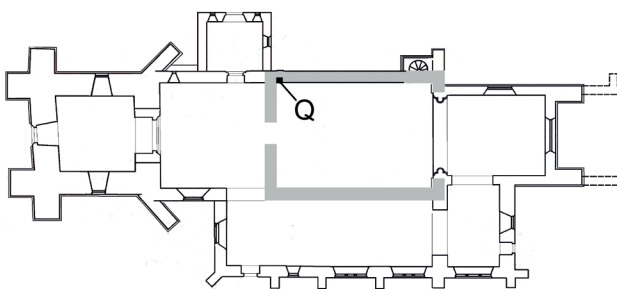
### Structural interpretation

Before the 19th-century re-buildings, three major structural phases are evident (Fig 6). The earliest is represented by the vestiges of a short but broad Anglo-Saxon nave (a). After the Conquest, the nave was rebuilt and extended to the west, while transepts, a crossing tower, and an assumed chancel were added to the east (b). In c.1300, the latter together with the tower and transepts were demolished and replaced with an elongated rectangular chancel; the present west tower was built (c). The evidence for each of these phases is now discussed, though in the case of the last, only in so far as it relates to the first two.

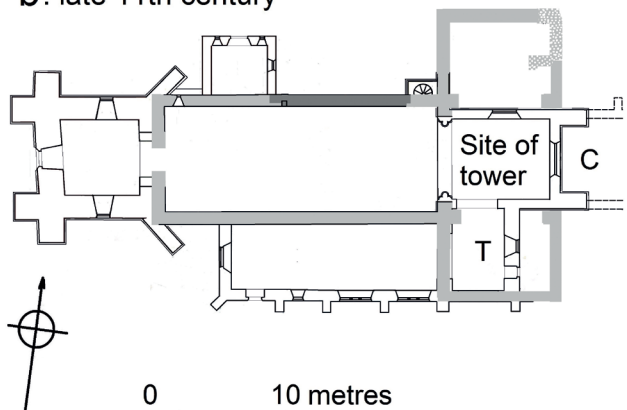
### Anglo-Saxon evidence

The first notable feature of the fabric of the eastern part of the north wall of the nave is that the pre-Romanesque mortar visible externally is not evidenced

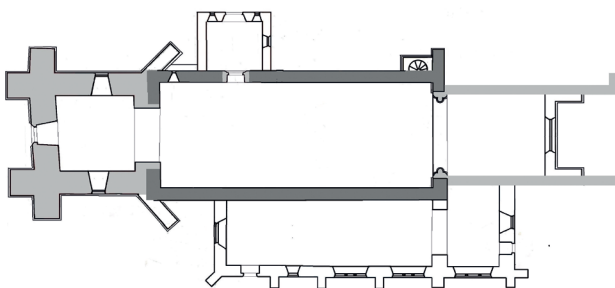
a: 8th century



b: late 11th century



c: c.1300



- New at each phase
- Retained from previous phase
- Present church
- ▨ Parchmark
- Q: Roman quoin
- T: site of transept
- C: assumed site of chancel

Fig 6  
Development of church up to the 14th century (D. Secker)

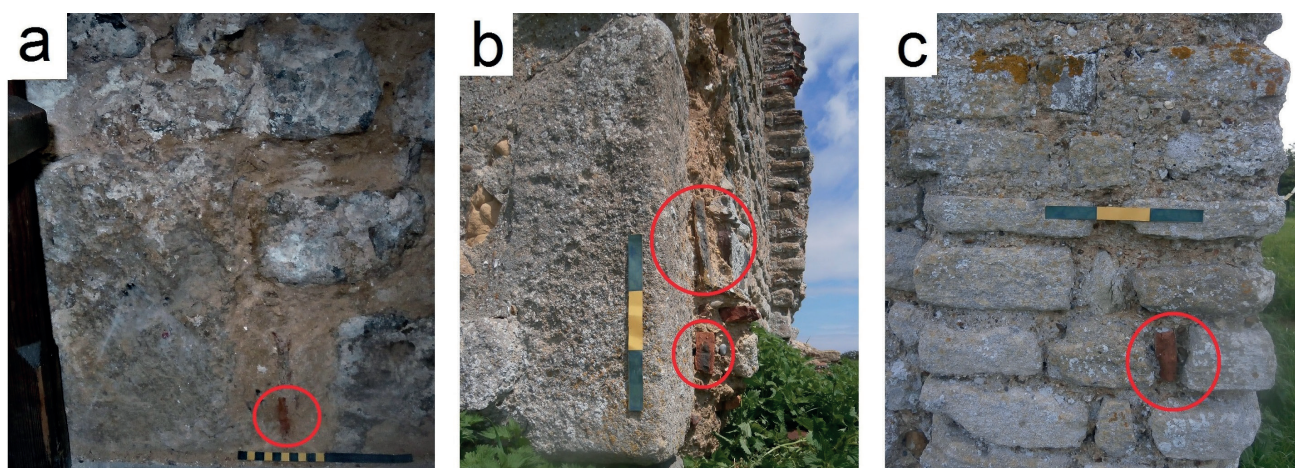


Fig 7

Vertically-set Roman brick (circled) at (a) St Mary, Maldon, adjacent to re-used Roman quoin (b) St Peter, Bradwell on Sea, re-entrant between south-west quoin and former buttress (c) St Peter, Bradwell on Sea, respond of north porticus. Scales: 0.2m for Fig 6a; 0.3m for Figs 6b-c (Photos by D. Secker)

internally. This might suggest the wall was thickened as part of the Romanesque rebuilding, but there are two reasons to believe that the Anglo-Saxon wall was of the same width (0.90m) and that the internal wall was merely repointed. Firstly, the construction technique of the lower part of the wall is different, being more regular (Fig 4). Secondly, the western edge of the external protrusion is exactly aligned on that of the re-used Roman quoin. The latter could not have been the east jamb for a doorway, since there is original mortar on the exterior west of the protrusion indicating a solid wall. A recess at this point is possible, but the position of the west end of the quoin is notable. The distance between the latter and the east end of the nave is exactly  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times the width of the nave. This appears too precise to be accidental. It is suggested here that the quoin was deployed to demarcate the north-western corner of the nave.

An Anglo-Saxon nave of 1.5:1 proportion is therefore proposed (Fig 6a). The internal dimensions of 11.43m x 7.62m, are remarkably similar to those of 11.32m x 7.38m occurring at the late 7th-century nave at Reculver, Kent (Taylor and Taylor 1965, 246-48). The quoin at Maldon is adjacent to a vertically set Roman brick (Fig 7a). Bricks set in this position, as mentioned above, occur sporadically in the lower north nave wall at Maldon, but also at the nearby well-known late 7th-century church of St Peter-on-the-Wall, Bradwell-on-Sea. There, examples include two in the re-entrant between the south-west quoin and the scar of the western south buttress (Fig 7b), and one in the west respond of the north *porticus* doorway (Fig 7c). As at Maldon, none of the vertical bricks at Bradwell

relate to putlog holes. This writer has not noticed the technique in any of the large number of Saxo-Norman churches in Essex which re-use Roman brick; there, vertical brick is *only* used for putlog holes.

The evidence at Maldon therefore suggests an early nave of somewhat similar construction to Bradwell but with the internal dimensions of Reculver (Fig 6a). There are however two differences. Firstly, while the mortar at Bradwell bears some comparison with the early external mortar at Maldon, the former is much coarser, with flint occlusions up to 30mm across. Secondly, the nave walls at Maldon, at 0.90m thick, are considerably more substantial than Reculver (0.70m) and Bradwell (0.74m, not 0.83m as stated in Taylor and Taylor 1965, 93). The middle Saxon church at Wing, Buckinghamshire, does however possess walls 0.90m thick (Taylor and Taylor 1965, 672). Typologically, Maldon might be regarded as a slightly later derivative of the first two churches. On these grounds, an 8th century date is suggested for the primary fabric. This is supported by evidence from the adjacent middle Saxon settlement site discussed below.

### *The Romanesque church*

There is a distinct contrast between the relative abundance of *spolia* in the upper eastern part of the Romanesque nave compared with its near absence in the west, where the septaria and flint appears to have been freshly obtained (Figs 3-4). This suggests that while the former was a rebuilding of the Anglo-Saxon structure using existing materials, the latter was an entirely new creation (Fig 6b). It is unfortunate that



the only Romanesque detail from this area, the small round-headed window, was externally renewed in 'Roman' cement while the splay remains plastered. At the east end of the nave, however, the north respond of the former archway remains exposed (Fig 5). It is composed of large variably sized Caen ashlar blocks with wide joints. If the course of the former arch is projected, its crown rises above the present wall-heads of the nave. The implication is that the walls were originally higher and it is postulated that their original height was equivalent to the width of the external walls of the nave. The construction technique of the respond is characteristically early Romanesque. In cathedrals and greater monastic churches, ashlar became more regular in size and joints finer after c.1090 (Alexander 2007, 66-68). A date before c.1100 would be appropriate for the work at Maldon, but there is a complication: in the 17th-century south-east buttress of the west tower are a considerable number of *ex-situ* fragments of chevron ornament (Fig 8a). They appear to be from a string-course, suggested by strong similarities with stones from a string course, dating to c.1140-50, which were re-used in the 17th century west tower of St Peter, Northampton (RCHME 1985, 65-66;

WS 1). The ornament at Maldon may have pertained to an upper stage of a central tower. There is compelling evidence that such a structure existed: firstly, the east wall of the nave is 1.05m thick as opposed to 0.90m for the north and south walls. Secondly, the width of the former east nave archway is such that the adjacent cell must have been as wide as the nave. Thirdly, some tothing for a north wall of the crossing survives (Fig 8b). Fourthly, the adjacent and much-repaired buttress (Fig 8c), which is the same width as the nave walls, appears to represent the truncated west wall of a north transept (Fig 6b). Fifthly, the parchmark noticed in August 2018 appears to represent the north-eastern corner of a north transept.

The eastern part of the implied crossing tower has been lost. Excavation to the east of the 19th-century chancel did, however, reveal flint foundations 0.65m thick in lime mortar which extended at least two metres east of the present structure (Fig 6c). There were also the footings of a north buttress (Bedwin 1993). While it might be tempting to interpret these features as the remains of the Romanesque chancel, the excavator's account does not support this. The *de novo* Romanesque work at the west end of the nave, as has



Fig 8

(a) Romanesque chevron ornament re-used in south-east buttress of west tower (b) Tothing (circled) at junction of north nave and chancel walls (c) buttress at east end of north wall of nave, probably originating as west wall of north transept (Photos by D. Secker)

been seen, is of septaria in sandy mortar. On the other hand, this writer has observed mortar fitting Bedwin's description in the c.1300 west tower. The foundations are thus best interpreted as those of a structure contemporary with the tower. This would beg the question as to why no foundations of a Romanesque chancel which must have existed in this area were found. It is most likely that they were completely robbed out when the 14th-century chancel was built and any robber trenches overlain by grave-earth. Bedwin's excavation was of a very superficial nature and is unlikely to have detected such features. While only future archaeological intervention can establish the dimensions of the transepts and presumed chancel, and any eastern cell of the Anglo-Saxon church may have been completely lost, recent excavations have revealed important Anglo-Saxon evidence in the vicinity of the church, which is now described and appraised.

## Discussion

The structural evidence of an early church at St Mary's is synthesised with the recent archaeological discoveries in the Hythe area of Maldon which support the theory that there was a middle Saxon minster here. The minster is then discussed in relation to other examples in or around the Thames estuary. The late Saxon and Romanesque evidence is then explored in the context of Edward the Elder's *burh* of 916, which was to become a thriving town by the Norman Conquest.

### *Evidence for an undocumented middle Saxon double minster*

The Hythe was a quayside and warehousing area serving the medieval town (Medlycott 1999, 25). It comprises a rectilinear area bounded by North Street, Mill Road and St Mary's Lane (Fig 9). Excavations at the former Croxley Works site indicated at least two phases of middle Saxon occupation (Ennis 2009). During the first phase, settlement was associated with an inverted L-shaped ditch 1.7m wide which produced Ipswich ware as well as Roman brick and a fragment of possible limestone. During the second phase, the suggested internal ditch was backfilled, but pits were subsequently cut into the fill; there was some evidence of contemporary adjacent post-built structures. A pit producing Ipswich ware also contained eighteen loomweights, while seven fragments of septaria associated with a spindle whorl and Ipswich ware

were found in the fill of another (Ennis 2009, 8-20, appendix 2 and fig 3). The loomweights are indicative of female craft activity, while the lack of Roman pottery on the site led the excavator to suggest that the Roman brick and septaria were being imported as building materials (Ennis 2009, 24). In the Anglo-Saxon period as a whole, only ten of several thousand known secular buildings were of masonry construction (Shapland 2013, 22). It is thus highly likely that the waste building materials found at the Croxley Works site relate to the construction of St Mary's. The features producing both Ipswich ware and waste building materials probably relate to the construction of the Anglo-Saxon structure described above. The most likely provenance for the material was the Roman town at Heybridge on the northern side of the Blackwater estuary (Fig 10a). Kentish rag, *opus signinum*, and Wealden sandstone, as well as Roman brick, all occur in debris at Heybridge (Wickenden 1986, 11-15, 21, 64). More recent excavations elsewhere within the Roman town site have revealed an increasing amount of the same materials (Atkinson and Preston 2015, section 1/3-7-6).

The dating of Ipswich ware is key to dating the early church. The type of pottery under discussion is of importance as being the first mass-produced and hard-fired pottery to be manufactured since the Roman withdrawal. A starting date of c.720 for the production of this pottery is now generally accepted, while its use declined in the 9th century (Blinkhorn 2012, 1-8). It has, however, most recently been suggested that production of Ipswich Ware began in c.690 (Wade 2013). At the Royal Opera House site in the middle Saxon *emporium* of *Lundenwic*, early excavated phases produced a mixture of Ipswich ware and typologically earlier chaff-tempered wares; the former appears to have been introduced in c.725-50 (Malcolm *et al* 2003, 57-109, 234; Blinkhorn 2012, 5). At Barking Abbey, Ipswich ware occurred in the backfill of a mill leat dendro-dated to AD 705; elsewhere on the site both Ipswich and chaff-tempered wares occurred in contemporary contexts (Redknap 1991; Blinkhorn 2012, 6). By contrast, at the Croxley Works site in Maldon, chaff-tempered wares are absent. While this might support a 9th century date for the site, Maldon's proximity to Ipswich may suggest it was receiving the pottery at the same time as it was being introduced to more distant Barking and *Lundenwic*.

It has been suggested above that the design of the primary church at Maldon was influenced by Reculver and Bradwell. This too would be consistent with a date



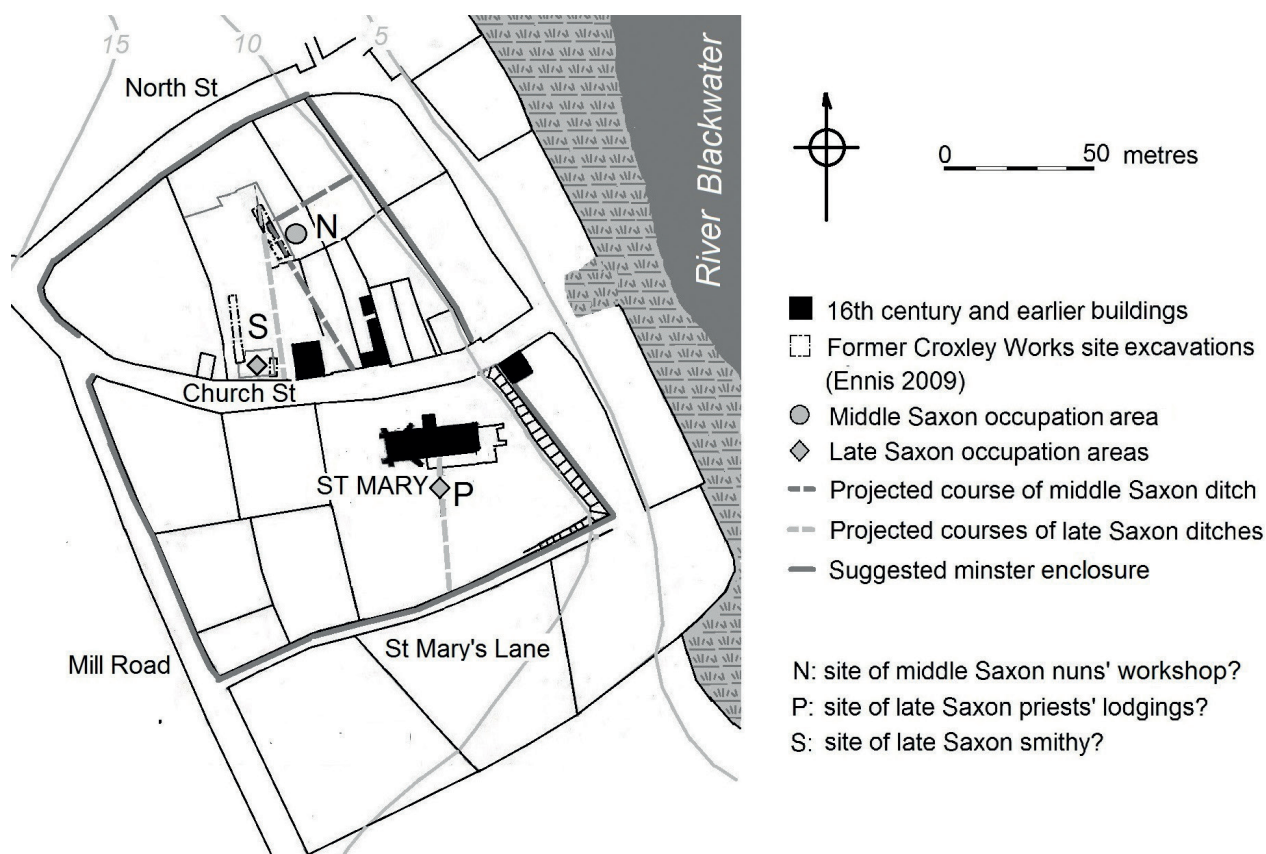


Fig 9

*The Hythe: Anglo-Saxon archaeological evidence (D. Secker, partly based on the 1872-90 Ordnance Survey map)*

in the earlier 8th century. It appears to be more than coincidence that contemporary loomweights occur so close to a minster church dedicated to St Mary (Fig 9). Given that the loomweights suggest female-gendered craft activity, the site might be interpreted as an undocumented double minster of nuns and monks or priests headed by an abbess, a type of foundation popular in the later 7th and early 8th centuries (Yorke 2003, 17-46). At the well-documented double minster of Barking (*HE* IV, 6-10), an excavated timber structure initially interpreted as a church was associated with no burials but much weaving paraphernalia (Hull 2002, 160-61). The structure was thus more likely to have been a workshop. The pit in which the Maldon loomweights were found was adjacent to a group of postholes associated with wicker-impressed baked clay (Ennis 2009, 9). The greater part of this structure lay beyond the limit of excavation, but was possibly also a workshop.

The primary ditch at Maldon is of similar width and date to those excavated at the site of the double minster at Lyminge in Kent, (Thomas 2010a). At Maldon, the western arm of the ditch was aligned parallel to Mill Road to the west and the break of the slope to the

River Blackwater to the east. The springing of the north ditch was parallel to St Mary's Lane and North Street. The alignments raise the possibility that the streets perpetuate boundaries which were created when the ditch was still open, the latter representing an internal subdivision within a trapezoidal minster enclosure with dimensions of about 160m by 120m.

Though St Mary's was not documented until 1068, there is indirect textual evidence which may relate to its foundation. Maldon is situated at the neck of the Dengie Peninsula which is mentioned at a much earlier date (Fig 10b). In 706 x 745, but probably earlier within this range, King Swæfred of the East Saxons granted 70 hides in the *regio* of *Deningei* to Ingwald, Bishop of London (S 1787; Kelly 2004, 145). It is, however, clear that the grant to the bishop could only have been of the eastern quarter of the *regio*, which may have extended almost as far west as Chelmsford (Rippon *et al* 2014, 198-200). The land allocated to the bishop may have been roughly equivalent to the Domesday estates of Southminster, Tillingham, Asheldham, Down, and Bradwell, though much of the land was in the possession of thegns by this time and amounted to over 80 hides (Table 1). The



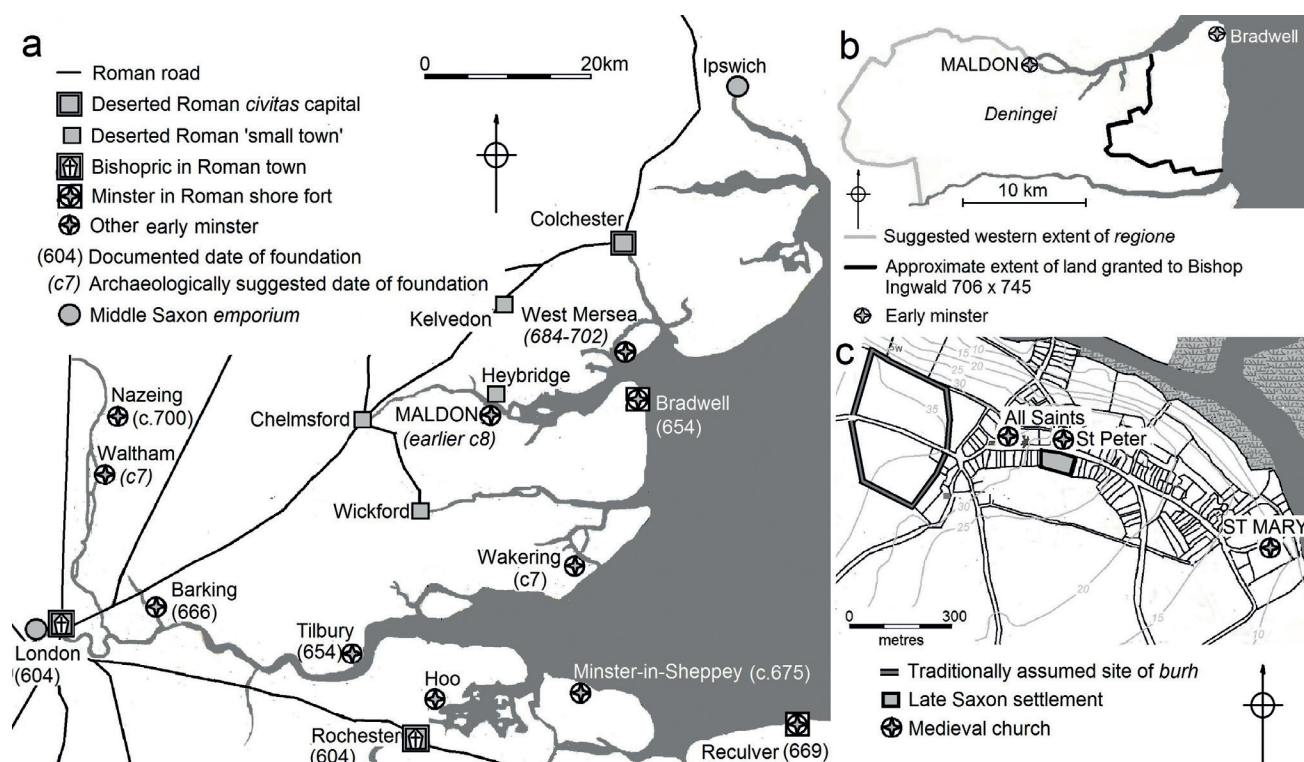


Fig 10

(a) The early church in the Thames Estuary and Essex Coast (b) The Dengie Peninsula in the 8th century (c) Maldon, showing late Saxon settlement and medieval churches (D. Secker)

grant would presumably have included the minster at Bradwell-on-Sea (*Ythnacaester*) founded by St Cedd in 654 (*HE* III.22). This implies that Bradwell was held by the king after Cedd's death in 659 (*HE* III.23). In this context, it is worth reviewing the evidence for the date of St Peter's church there. The latter has traditionally been attributed to Cedd (e.g. RCHME 1922, 14). An alternative suggestion is that the church was a secondary building erected under the influence of Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury, after 669 (Rigold 1977, 73; Fernie 1983, 38). The latter interpretation is accepted by this writer, not least because Bradwell is architecturally derivative of Reculver, founded in 669 (*ASC* A, E). If Bradwell was a royal possession by the early 8th century, St Peter's may well have been a commission of the famously pious king Sæbbi who died in 693-4 (*HE* IV.11). Swæfred's grant to Ingwald would presumably have entailed the loss of Bradwell, and this might have motivated the king to found a new minster at Maldon. The material culture at the latter, however, may suggest it was headed by an undocumented female member of the East Saxon royal house.

If the foundation of a minster at Maldon was partly a result of Bradwell being granted to the bishop of London, the topography of the former is perhaps

significant (Fig 11). It has been suggested above that the present street pattern may preserve the outline of a minster enclosure, with St Mary's occupying the south-eastern quadrant of the latter. The size and indeed the orientation of the postulated enclosure are comparable with those of the Roman shore fort of *Othona*, or Bradwell-on-Sea, in which St Cedd's minster was founded (RCHME 1922, 14). Furthermore, at Bradwell, fragments of a structure, perhaps a successor of Cedd's original church, were observable within the south-eastern quadrant of the fort in 1864 (Rigold 1977, 63). Whether this was indeed another church is debatable, but its position within the fort is paralleled by that of St Mary's within its suggested enclosure. Rectilinear minster enclosures have been suggested in Dorset on topographical evidence, where it has been suggested they imitated Roman forts (Hall 2000, 49-84, esp. p76). It is tempting to see the putative enclosure at Maldon as being modelled on the Roman fort *enceinte* at Bradwell, since as is argued above, the motive behind the foundation of a minster at Maldon may have been to compensate for the transfer of Bradwell from the king to the bishop of the East Saxons.

Manor	Hides	Virgates	Acres	Owner TRE	Owner 1086	Reference*
Southminster	30	-	-	Bishop of London	Bishop of London	975
Tillingham	20	-	-	St Paul's	St Paul's	978
St Peter's	1	2	20	Thorkil	St Valery	984
Dengie	2	2	-	Thorkil	St Valery	984
Dengie	2	2	-	Sigeric	Knight of Odo	986
<i>Hackfleet</i> (Bradwell Quay)	2	1	-	Alweard	Knight of Odo	986
Asheldham	-	2	37	Godric	Swein	1003
Down	2	-	20	Moding	Eudo	1006
St Peter's, Bradwell	1	2	-	Ingulf, a freeman	Hugh Montfort	1009
Down	14	-	-	Siward	Rannulf Peverel	1026
Down	5	-	-6	8 freemen	Rannulf Peverel	1026
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>71</b>	-	-	-

\* Williams and Martin 2002

Table 1

*Estates in the eastern part of the Dengie Peninsula in Domesday*

### *Maldon and middle Saxon minsters in the Thames estuary region*

It has been seen that the earliest structure at St Mary's appears to be derivative of the nearby late 7th-century church at Bradwell and the more distant one at Reculver (Fig 10a). The latter two were one of a number of foundations on the Thames estuary, Essex coast and lower Lea valley which were established in the second half of the 7th century (Table 2). Many were directly documented by Bede, and in Reculver's case the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. At Wakering and Minster-in-Sheppey early foundations can be implied from later documentation (Witney 1984, 6-8, 10-12). A double minster at Nazeing was unusually first evidenced

archaeologically and then by a long-lost charter (Huggins 1978, 1997). The early minster at Waltham, however, has only been revealed by excavations (Huggins and Bascombe 1992, 289-96). Had these not taken place we would still be assuming on documentary evidence that Waltham had been founded in the early 11th century (Blair 2005, 357). Another minster which is only documented in the late Saxon period, in 962 x 991, is at West Mersea (S 1494). It appears, however, to have had considerably earlier origins. The causeway to Mersea Island was constructed of piles which have been dendro-dated to 684-702 (Crummy *et al* 1982). The lowest courses of the north nave wall of the church show a comparable construction technique to Bradwell and may be similarly early (Secker 2014, 15-24).

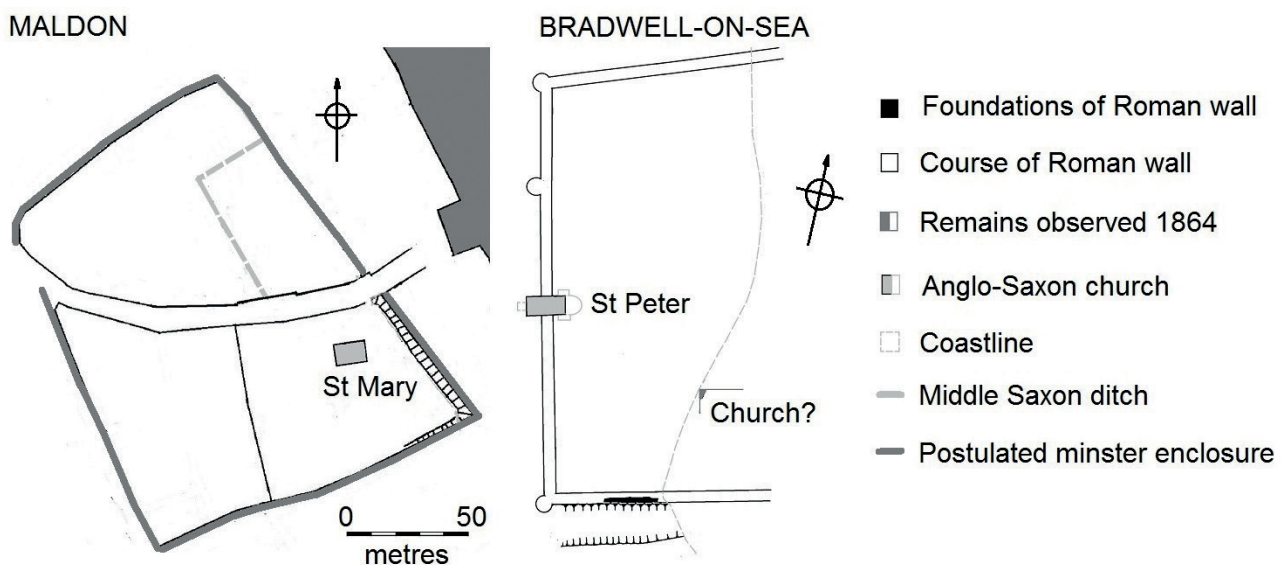


Fig 11

*Reconstructed plan of the suggested minster enclosure at St Mary's, Maldon compared with the Roman shore fort and churches at Bradwell-on-Sea (D. Secker; Bradwell adapted from RCHME 1922 with modifications)*

Foundation	Date	Type of foundation	Evidence	References
Rochester	604	Episcopal seat	Documentary, archaeological	HE II.3; Livett 1889
London	604	Episcopal seat	Documentary	HE II.3
Tilbury	654	Clerical minster	Documentary	HE III.22
Bradwell-on-Sea	654	Clerical minster	Documentary, structural	HE III.22; Taylor and Taylor 1965, 246-48
Barking	666	Nunnery/double house	Documentary	HE IV.6
Reculver	669	Clerical minster	Documentary, structural	ASC A, E; Taylor and Taylor 1965, 246-48
Minster-in-Sheppey	c.675	Nunnery/double house	Documentary, structural	Witney 1984; Taylor and Taylor 1965, 429
Wakering	c7 <sup>th</sup>	Probable clerical minster	Documentary, archaeological	Witney 1984; Dale <i>et al</i> 2010
Waltham	c7 <sup>th</sup>	Probable clerical minster	Archaeological	Huggins and Bascombe 1992
Nazeing	c.700	Nunnery/double house	Documentary, archaeological	Huggins 1978; Huggins 1997
Maldon	c8 <sup>th</sup>	Nunnery/double house	Archaeological, structural	Ennis 2009; this paper

Table 2

*Evidence for early Saxon minsters in the Thames estuary and surrounding area*

The presence of Ipswich Ware at Maldon places the minster within a coastal network of important sites where this fabric is found (Blinkhorn 2012, 77-79, who unfortunately does not acknowledge the Croxley Works site). Significantly, Maldon is midway between the middle Saxon *emporia* of Ipswich and *Lundenwic*. Between Maldon and London, a major consumer of Ipswich ware was the minster at Barking (Redknapp 1991). In contrast to Maldon, that establishment is well-documented by Bede (HE IV, 6-10). The distribution of these settlements suggests a network characterised by *emporia* connected by secondary centres based on minsters. Ipswich ware has been recovered from many of them including at Bradwell, Waltham, and West Mersea in Essex, and Minster-in-Sheppey in Kent (Blinkhorn 2012, 77-80). It is, however, largely absent at Wakering, where only one sherd has been found (Blinkhorn 2012, 78), and the pottery is mostly chaff-tempered (Dale *et al* 2010, 210-12). Does this mean Wakering was bypassed by the trade network? Notably Maldon is situated near the modern navigable limit of the Blackwater, but also close to the London-Colchester Roman road. Maldon was also slightly later than the other minsters in the region (Table 2). This may mean it was established, among other reasons, to provide a node where a maritime communication link with Ipswich was connected to a land one with *Lundenwic* and Barking which avoided a longer boat journey around peninsular south-eastern Essex.

### *The later Anglo-Saxon period*

At the Croxley Works site, later Saxon occupation was far less intense, the decline being interpreted as

representing a westward shift to Edward the Elder's *burh* (Ennis 2009, 26). The latter is traditionally supposed to have been to the west of the town (Fig 10c). This assumed site of the *burh* is problematic, not least since limited excavation in the area has produced Iron Age and Roman evidence but negligible late Saxon material (Brown 1986). A more likely site for the *burh* centres on the late Saxon structures excavated opposite St Peter's church (Haslam 2015, 184-88). That church was only first documented in 1180, when it and All Saints were granted to nearby Beeleigh Abbey (VCH 1907, 172). The location of St Peter's, however, may suggest it was founded by Edward the Elder to serve the *burh*.

The fortunes of St Mary's were perhaps revived by the 11th century expansion of the town as evidenced by the 180 burgesses mentioned in Domesday (Williams and Martin 2002, 973). This development is archaeologically evidenced at the Hythe, where late Saxon occupation occurs in two areas (Fig 9). On the Croxley works site, a structure associated with a roughly north-south running ditch and a pit producing iron smithing slag dates from this period (Ennis 2009, 7, 19). The contents of the pit suggest the structure was a smithy. While it is argued above that the middle Saxon occupation relates to a minster community, this is less likely for the late Saxon phase. The putative smithy is more probably a product of urban growth. By this time, any 'precinct' may have been restricted to the present churchyard. South of the church, test-pitting in advance of construction of the new church hall uncovered a possible north-south running ditch producing late Saxon Thetford and St Neots wares as well as a sherd of imported French or Rhenish pottery. The excavator suggested the pottery may have related



to occupation prior to the construction of the church or the construction of the church itself (Andrews 1989). Both these interpretations appear unlikely. Firstly, the evidence discussed above suggests the church is far older than the ceramic and secondly, the presence of high-status imported ware makes it most unlikely the finds represent 'builders lunches'. An alternative possibility is suggested by the prebend of St Mary's held by two canons in 1158 (Denton 1970, 39). Was this a new arrangement or did it perpetuate a late Saxon one, the clerics of that date having lodgings south of the church? If so, it would imply that the suggested middle Saxon double minster had become a male clerical minster by the late Saxon period, a common enough phenomenon (Yorke 2003, 47-48). A priests' lodging in this position would be comparable to that excavated at Bishopstone in Sussex. There, the rebuilding of the minster church in the late 10th century appears to have been contemporary with the latest phase of the timber-built complex north of the church, comprising two aisled structures (Blair 2010; Thomas 2010b, 57-61, 189-91). The structures have been interpreted as lodgings for minster priests (Blair 2015, 194-95). No late Saxon phase is apparent in the present structure of St Mary's church. While one cannot be precluded, the form of middle Saxon minster churches could remain unchanged for centuries. At Reculver, for instance, there were no alterations between the addition of secondary *porticus* in the 8th century and the addition of the surviving twin west towers in the late 12<sup>th</sup> (Fletcher 1965, 25).

### *The Romanesque rebuilding*

Following the Norman Conquest, St Mary's was rebuilt as an aisleless cruciform church (Fig 6b). The church falls within Malcolm Thurlby's category of minor cruciform churches, though they are only 'minor' in relation to cathedral and greater monastic churches (Thurlby 2002, 239). As a minster rebuilt in this form within the century following the Conquest, St Mary's was typical rather than exceptional. In size and form, the church can be compared with early 12th-century Bicester in Oxfordshire (VCH 1959, 46). The latter appears to have originated as a middle Saxon minster (Blair 2002).

If, as is possible, St Mary's retained its 8th-century form up until the Conquest, rebuilding would be desirable at this time if only because the existing church would appear hopelessly anachronistic. It is also significant that this was the only church to be mentioned by name in the confirmation charter of St

Martin-le-Grand (Taylor 2002, 237). St Mary's was thus the most important church then in St Martin's ownership and the rebuilding would reflect this status. The new church was possibly initiated by Ingelric, though it is unlikely he would have completed the project before his death in the early 1070s. St Martin's, Chipping Ongar, also in Essex, was not a possession of St Martin-le-Grand, but the manor and by implication the proprietary church was held by Ingelric and subsequently Eustace (Williams and Martin 2002, 992). The use of Caen stone for dressings at St Mary's is paralleled at Chipping Ongar and it is suggested that the stone was imported through Maldon (Secker 2013, 100-4). There may be a historical context for the *ex situ* chevron ornament (Fig 8a). It has been noted above that in the 1140s, the estate of St Mary's was being asset-stripped by the bailiff Walter of Provins before being restored presumably to Theobald of Blois in 1147 (Powell 1997, 142-44). It was perhaps the case that the church was neglected under Walter and underwent some restoration under Theobald; the sculpture is consistent with this date.

### *Conclusion*

A combination of the stripping of some of the internal walls of the nave of St Mary's and earlier rescue excavations nearby have allowed greater understanding of the origins of both church and settlement. The evidence suggests that a double minster headed by an unknown abbess was founded in the 8th century. The foundation centred on a church which was designed following precedents at Reculver and Bradwell-on-Sea, and constructed using materials from the neighbouring Roman town site at Heybridge. In the 10th century, the focus shifted to Edward the Elder's *burh*, but the minster appears to have survived as an establishment of male clerics. Their successors may have been two canons mentioned in 1158 (Powell 1997, 142). By this time, St Mary's had been rebuilt as a substantial aisleless cruciform church and the Hythe area was subsumed within the then-burgeoning town.

There are aspects of St Mary's which require clarification. Foremost among these is the form of the eastern part of the Romanesque church. Here, it is worth noting that the area north and east of the present building is largely clear of graves. There is ample scope for resistivity and/or ground-penetrating radar (GPR) surveys, which could clarify the nature of the former transepts and whether the chancel was rectilinear or apsidal. The form of any eastern cell of the Anglo-

Saxon church would be more difficult to recover. An apse might be assumed on analogy with Bradwell and Reculver (Taylor and Taylor 1965, 91-93, 246-48), but only GPR or excavation might establish this. St Mary's, Maldon was suspected as an early minster due to its large endowment of two hides in Ingelric's grant of 1068 to St Martin-le-Grand (Powell 1997, 142). Similarly-endowed churches are worthy of scrutiny and where alterations such as the removal of internal plaster take place, opportunities can be seized to understand the structural origins of these places.

### Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to Father John Dickens and the churchwardens of St Mary's who first informed me that plaster removal would be taking place, and without which knowledge of the church would be much poorer.

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