

Introduction

This paper, more an exploration than a definitive study, presents a synthesis of various kinds of evidence, much of it already well known, in an attempt to reinterpret certain aspects of early medieval liturgical practice and to stimulate the recognition of further evidence which might have a bearing on the questions discussed here. In keeping with the tenets of modern church archaeology, of which Dr Taylor has been such a prominent advocate, evidence will be considered from the various branches of the discipline: from excavation, from documents, and from the art-historical study of the standing buildings and their furnishings - for the last of which, incidentally, there seems to be no convenient term that is not either slightly pejorative (eg 'church-crawling') or ambiguous (eg 'ecclesiology', which historically has acquired a meaning beyond its literal one).

For a paper which is offered as a token of esteem and gratitude to the recipient of this volume there could be no better starting point than the article on the altar position in Anglo-Saxon churches by the honorand himself (Taylor 1973). Dr Taylor began by restating his earlier argument (1968) that the masonry foundation at the east end of the nave at Reculver, Kent, should be interpreted as an altar base, and more specifically the base for the principal altar of the church (Fig 77). This argument is persuasive, especially in view of the feature in the apse which is reasonably regarded as a clergy bench, but the interpretation of the foundation is nevertheless not without its problems. The first of these is its overall size. Scaling from the published plan (Peers 1927, fig 4) yields maximum dimensions of 2.085m x 0.915m, which is larger than the 'standard' altar of 1.20m x 0.70m suggested by continental evidence. While the east-west dimension is acceptable, the north-south measurement is considerably longer than appears to be required, although it would be possible to argue that the parts of the foundation projecting beyond the altar were intended to support posts for an altar canopy of the sort attested at Winchester, Hampshire. This could also be the solution to the second problem, which is that at the accepted date of the Reculver church the altar may still have been of the primitive 'cubic' shape, ie square on plan, which would not of itself require a rectangular foundation. This type of altar continues to be shown in manuscript illustrations and on ivories until the 12th century, though it is attested by archaeological evidence only at the Old Minster, Winchester. Here there was a roughly square foundation, again at the east end of the nave (Taylor 1973, 54 & fig 2; Biddle 1970, 315). Around this foundation were four postholes, interpreted as supports for a canopy, as mentioned above (Biddle 1968, 270). After discussing these examples, Dr Taylor's paper presented some literary evidence and parallel instances of nave altars from mainland Europe and the Near East.

Additional evidence for the altar position

In the dozen years since the appearance of that paper further evidence has inevitably come to light. On the Continent, the little church on the Frauenberg just outside Bad Hersfeld, Hessen (West Germany), excavated as long ago as 1929 but published in a fairly inaccessible journal, is now generally available in the pages of the corpus *Vorromanische Kirchenbauten* (Oswald *et al* 1966-70, 80). Here the excavator uncovered an altar base west of the chancel arch; the dimensions of this foundation, approx 2m x 0.80m (dimensions not quoted in text), are close to those of the corresponding feature at Reculver, and one is tempted to speculate on the possible significance of this in view of the fact that Hersfeld was in an area of intense Anglo-Saxon missionary activity. (For the location of Hersfeld and the archaeology of the mission see Parsons 1983.) Apart from this tangible evidence, a further review of the altar position has appeared, which reinforces and extends Taylor 1973 ('Altar und Altarraum . . .', Gamber 1976, 140-51).

In this country, perhaps the most dramatic evidence has come from the excavation of St Paul-in-the-Bail, Lincoln (Gilmour 1979). Here in an early church consisting of nave and stilted apse (now thought to be Roman in date: B G Gilmour, pers comm) there was an important burial furnished with a hanging bowl; the body had been subsequently exhumed. The grave implies an altar

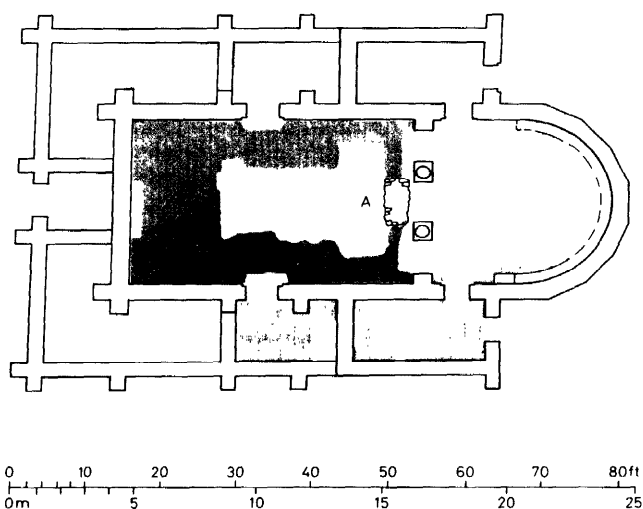


Fig 77 Reculver, Kent: plan of pre-conquest church; shaded areas represent surviving flooring of ?8th century date (scale 1:300; based on original of Peers 1927, fig 4, courtesy Directorate of Ancient Monuments)

position analogous to those at Reculver and Winchester. On Barry Island, South Glamorgan, an excavated chapel dated to the 12th century had a feature in front of the chancel arch which is interpreted as an altar surround. Within the enclosed area a small relic chamber (see below, p 113) serves to confirm this interpretation (Knight 1976-8,446). Possibly associated with this complex was a lined posthole of modest dimensions, aligned with the north respond of the chancel arch. This may represent the corner of an altar canopy and is comparable with a surviving posthole in a similar position in the early church at Raunds (Fig 78).

The interpretation of the pre-conquest churches excavated at Raunds, Northamptonshire (Boddington & Cadman 1981), remains hypothetical because of later disturbances in the crucial areas. Nevertheless I argue elsewhere that the altar in the second phase of the first church was probably at the east end of the nave and covered by a canopy, while a narrow foundation at the east end of the chancel may have been the base of a clergy bench (Parsons forthcoming). The projected arrangement, shown here in Fig 78, may date from the late 9th or 10th century (Cadman *et al* 1983,16-18). This church was replaced *c* 1050 by an entirely new structure with a relatively much longer chancel; by this date there was room for an altar to the east of the chancel arch, but the destruction of the floor levels in the chancel makes it impossible to be dogmatic about the 11th century altar position. The earlier arrangement has certain implications for how the church was used, and these merit brief discussion here. Fig 78 shows that the altar canopy would have been as wide as the chancel arch, and even if the altar itself were moved as far west as the canopy would allow there would have been little space for movement around it. One must therefore imagine the priest approaching the altar from the bench in the chancel and not entering the nave, but celebrating on the east side of the altar, facing the congregation over it.- Communion would presumably be administered by assistants in the nave, who could

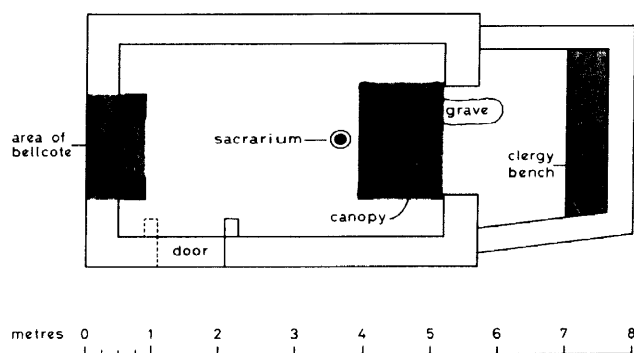


Fig 78 Raunds, Northamptonshire, early church: diagrammatic interpretation plan of phase 2 (scale 1:100)

Note: further study of the Raunds material since this paper was written suggests that the sacrum went out of use as an abluion drain before this phase (see p 112 below). It could possibly have remained in use as a container for relics.

approach the sides of the altar to receive the elements. There is evidence from the Anglo-Saxon period, if not for westward celebration, at least for the celebrant facing the people across the altar. This is explicitly stated by Eadmer in his description of St Mary's chapel in Canterbury Cathedral (Taylor 1969, 106, 129, paras 15 (i) & (j)). The 13th century liturgist Durandus is quoted for the survival of this practice two centuries later (Sauer 1924, 156), though my understanding of the text is that this applies only in the case of churches with a main entrance at the east end. The liturgical procedure suggested for Raunds would have been appropriate at Reculver, where there was also no room west of the chancel arch to walk around the base (see Fig 77). In this case, however, it would have been possible for the celebrant to enter the nave by one of the flanking arches and to celebrate eastward from the position marked A on the plan, unless those side arches were screened in the manner suggested for the comparable church of St Pancras, Canterbury (Parsons 1969,179-80). It may be noted that at the Old Minster, Winchester, the space directly west of the massive inserted chancel arch was also restricted and there were no flanking arches offering alternative access from chancel to nave (Taylor 1973, fig 2). However, the plan shows that the altar canopy narrowed markedly towards the east, and the trapezoidal setting of the supports may have been intended to allow passage between the canopy area and the responds of the chancel arch.

It thus seems fairly well established that some - if not all - early medieval churches had their main altar at the east end of the nave, and this possibility must always be borne in mind when excavating appropriate sites. It is equally clear that by the end of the Middle Ages the place of the high altar was at the east end of the chancel, indeed in many cases right against the east wall, perhaps even integral with the masonry of the wall. (The evidence of churchwardens' accounts at the Reformation is that, when the medieval altars were removed, the east wall had to be made good.) What is not clear is by what stages the shift of the altar position took place and at what dates. Was it a once-for-all move, perhaps by papal or episcopal fiat, or was there a gradual drift eastward as liturgical fashion changed? It may be that by the 11th century it had become usual for the altar to be placed just inside the chancel. A feature interpreted as an altar platform was discovered in this position in the wooden church of this date excavated on the Anglia TV site in Norwich (B S Ayers, pers comm). This tends to confirm the implication of the 11th century chancel at Raunds, mentioned above. An excavated church which seems to give evidence for progressive moves east is St Mark, Lincoln, where the 11th century chancel shows two altar positions, one near the chancel arch and the other at the east end. The evidence consists of long pits running north-south across the chancel; these appear to be either robbed out foundation trenches or the remains of reliquary pits under former altars (Colyer 1976, 6 & fig 1). Unfortunately there is no positive proof of the construction/demolition sequence or any dating evidence for either feature, but the moving of the altar position and the use and abandonment of the second altar must all have occurred before the reconstruction of the church with an extended chancel in the 13th century. It will emerge below that other evidence suggests the 12th century as the time when these changes were taking place. By the 13th, the abandonment of the apse, still fairly popular in the

'Norman' period, and the almost universal adoption of the square-ended chancel may be symptomatic of the need for a straight wall against which to place an eastern altar. Nevertheless there are still chancels in the 13th century containing features that argue very strongly for a free-standing altar some way west of the end wall. On the other hand, the church of St Martin at Thetford in Norfolk seems to have had an altar at the eastern end of the chancel c 1030, if A B Whittingham's date can be upheld (in Knocker 1965-9, 130). There is perhaps no universal pattern. Developments may have taken place at different times and at different rates in different areas, and it may be that the policies of diocesan bishops varied from see to see. It is possible, however, that the change was a much more random one, and that the controlling factor was the ecclesiastical fashion of individual celebrants, so that one might have at one and the same time a 'progressive' church with an eastern altar and a 'conservative' church with a nave altar in adjacent parishes of the same diocese.

If the history of the altar position proves to be as involved as these considerations imply, it will be a very long time before sufficient reliable evidence accumulates from excavations to unravel it. An alternative approach, through the study of liturgical fittings incorporated in the standing fabric, offers the prospect of more immediate results. The presence of certain features associated with the service of the altar implies particular liturgical practices, while their absence may be used - with due caution - as negative evidence for other kinds of liturgical convention. Examples of such ritual furnishings will be discussed in the following section.

Liturgical furnishings and fittings

The rationale of this study is simply that furnishings, whose position is determined in relation to an altar and which become permanently fixed by incorporation as architectural features into the fabric of the building, continue to provide evidence for the original position of the altar even after its removal. Five types of liturgical fitting will be considered in ascending order of their potential usefulness in reconstructing early altar positions: Easter sepulchres, sedilia, aumbries, squints, and piscinas.

Easter sepulchres

(Cox & Harvey 1907,74-8; Bond 1916,220-41; Cox 1923, 267-73)

These are typically recesses in the north wall of the chancel, at the nearest point to the north end of the altar. They are frequently found very close to the east wall, implying that the altar was placed against that wall. Many of the best-known examples, which have ornate sculptural treatment, such as Heckington, Lincolnshire, or Hawton, Nottinghamshire, are of 14th century date, and are therefore evidence only for the final stage of the development of the altar position. Comparable evidence for the early medieval period is unlikely to be forthcoming, since the Easter sepulchre seems to have been a portable object placed upon the altar itself, as described by *Regularis Concordia* of c 973:

*sit autem in una parte
altaris, qua vacuum
fuerit, quaedam
assimilatio sepulchri
velamenque quoddam
in gyro tensum. . .*

on that part of the altar where there is space for it there shall be a representation as it were of a sepulchre, hung about with a curtain. . .

(Symons 1953,44, para 46)

The tradition of making a temporary sepulchre of perishable materials apparently persisted throughout the Middle Ages (Cook 1954, 171), and the built-in type is a relatively uncommon feature.

Sedilia

(Cox & Harvey 1907, 67-74; Bond 1916, 176-203; Cox 1923,266-7)

These are groups of clergy seats built into the south chancel wall. They may consist of an undivided bench seat in a broad recess or of any number of discrete stalls, up to a maximum of five; the most usual number is three, interpreted as a seat each for the priest, a deacon, and a subdeacon at the Mass. Their position is usually toward the east end of the south wall of the chancel, chapel, or aisle which they serve; this would be consistent with westward celebration at a free-standing altar to the west of the stalls, but sedilia are usually associated with a piscina immediately to the east of them. A piscina near the east wall would be rather far removed from a free-standing altar in view of the expectation that the piscina should be 'near the south corner of the altar' (see below). It therefore seems that the common arrangement of sedilia plus more easterly piscina indicates an altar at the east end. This must certainly be the implication of the many sedilia with graded seats (about which much nonsense has been written in the standard literature). Where the evidence is preserved it seems clear that the progressive stepping up of the seats of the stalls was intended to accommodate equivalent rises in the floor level toward the east, and this makes sense only in connection with an easterly altar position.

Sedilia are common in parish churches from the 13th century onward, but rare in the 12th and non-existent before that. The explanation of differential survival seems unlikely. If this were the case, one would expect a few earlier 12th century and some 11th century examples in proportion to the number of surviving chancels from this period. But there is nothing; the handful of 12th century sedilia mentioned in the literature are all datable to the end of the century, and it is as though sedilia were suddenly introduced at this time and then immediately flourished in the 13th century. Before this period there must have been a different arrangement for clergy seats. One obvious possibility is that earlier stalls were free-standing, either of wood or of stone. A certain amount of evidence exists for stone seats in the pre-conquest period (Taylor 1978, 1066; Whittingham 1979; see also Cramp, this volume, pp 101-4), and although the known examples seem to have been seats for high-ranking clergy it is quite likely that similar chairs, perhaps of less expensive materials, would have been provided for the clergy in local churches. The alternative to individual chairs is the clergy bench of Early Christian tradition as represented in this country at Reculver (see above) and Hexham (Taylor & Taylor 1965, 306). The interpretation of Raunds offered above has introduced the idea that such a bench might also have been

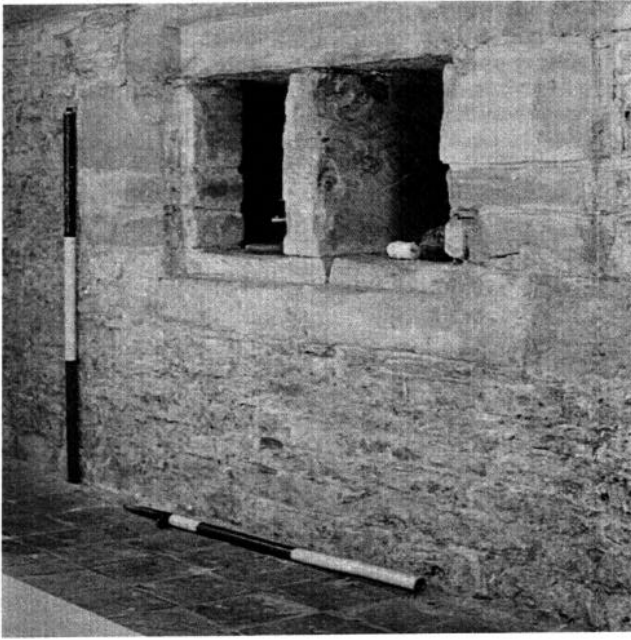


Fig 79 Normanton-on-Soar, Nottinghamshire, St James: chancel east wall, showing aumbry (imperial scales)

constructed against the east wall of a square-ended chancel. If this sort of arrangement had regularly existed in parish churches until the late 12th century, it is easy to understand why evidence for it does not survive: chancels were frequently reconstructed in the later medieval period, either in a major way to extend them eastward or more restrainedly for the insertion of the big east windows which became popular from *c* 1300 on. Clergy benches would certainly have been demolished in a major extension programme and they may well have been tidied away in the course of putting in an east window. Apart from these structural changes, the very act of moving the altar to a position against the east wall, possibly accompanied by alterations to floor levels and the construction of a platform for the altar, would almost certainly have led to the demise of a bench in this position.

Whatever the truth about the seating arrangements before *c* 1150, the earliest surviving sedilia are in the position which was to remain standard for the remainder of the Middle Ages. Examples such as St Mary de Castro, Leicester, with its one waterleaf capital, show that the altar had reached a position toward the eastern end of the chancel, if not actually against the east wall, by a date in the last three decades of the 12th century (but see the suggestion in Brandwood 1984, 17, that the sedilia may not be an original feature).

Features in the east wall

There are a few cases where fittings in the east wall, to which access was required, indicate that the contemporary altar must have been free-standing. In a few churches aumbries are found in the wall behind the altar. Aumbries are small built-in cupboards, originally provided with doors, which may have served a variety of purposes, most of them directly connected with the liturgy (Cox & Harvey 1907, 314-16; Bond 1916, 204-11; Cox 1923, 274-S).

They range from the storage of communion vessels and altar furniture to the safe-keeping of relics and, possibly, the reservation of the sacrament. Chancel aumbries are usually to be found in the north wall, though examples in the south wall are not uncommon. What is rare is the aumbry in the east wall. Those which are well to one side of the axis of the chancel clearly have no implications for the altar position, but the few in the centre of the east wall, such as that of Normanton-on-Soar in Nottinghamshire (Fig 79), could not have been used - for whatever purpose - if the altar were placed against or near the east wall without awkward and undignified reaching over the altar itself. Cox 1923 gives a list of nine other churches with aumbries in the east wall, though they are not directly behind the altar in every instance. At Bibury, Gloucestershire, he refers explicitly to 'the high altar standing clear of the wall' (Cox 1923, 275). At Martock, Somerset, the aumbry is level with the floor (Cox & Harvey 1907, 315), and it would have been impossible to use it were the altar not free-standing.

A similar deduction can be made at Hallaton, Leicestershire, where there is a door near the centre of the chancel east wall. The purpose of this door is unknown, but the survival of one or two stair treads within the wall thickness suggests that it may have led into an external newel stair serving a room above the chancel. At all events the door could not possibly have been used without the altar standing free some distance from the wall.

The excavation of the church at Hickleton, South Yorkshire, has produced evidence which may be comparable with this. Here the chancel was doubled in length in the 13th century. The eastern third of the extension was divided from the rest of the chancel by a feature standing proud of the floor and consisting of a rubble core faced with limestone blocks. It ran from the south wall to a point just beyond the axis of the chancel, and beyond it to the east a floor of rectangular stone flags covered the whole area between the north, east, and south chancel walls (approx 3.50m north-south by 1.40m east-west) (R E Sydes, pers comm). Although there is no matching feature on the north side of the chancel, where there was considerable disturbance at a later date, one possible interpretation is that there was originally a substantial screen enclosing a narrow sacristy or vestry behind the altar. Surviving screens of this sort are to be found at Tideswell and Sawley, Derbyshire (in the chancel) and at Rushden and Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire (in aisle-end chapels). Of these, perhaps Tideswell is the best known, an imposing example in a big chancel; the vestry is entered by doorways at either end of the screen, leaving the central part free to act as an altar reredos. At Hickleton the door would have been close to the centre, in a very similar position to the door in the east wall at Hallaton, and a similar conclusion about the placing of the altar would follow.

What is particularly interesting about these examples is that they are nearly all of the 13th century; other evidence suggests that the altar had reached its most easterly position by this date. Either that evidence needs reinterpretation or there was a fairly lengthy period of transition, say from *c* 1150 to *c* 1250, before the altar position became standardized against the east wall. In this connection it is worth noting the apparently late 12th century arrangements at St Mary in Tanner Street, Winchester, discussed below.

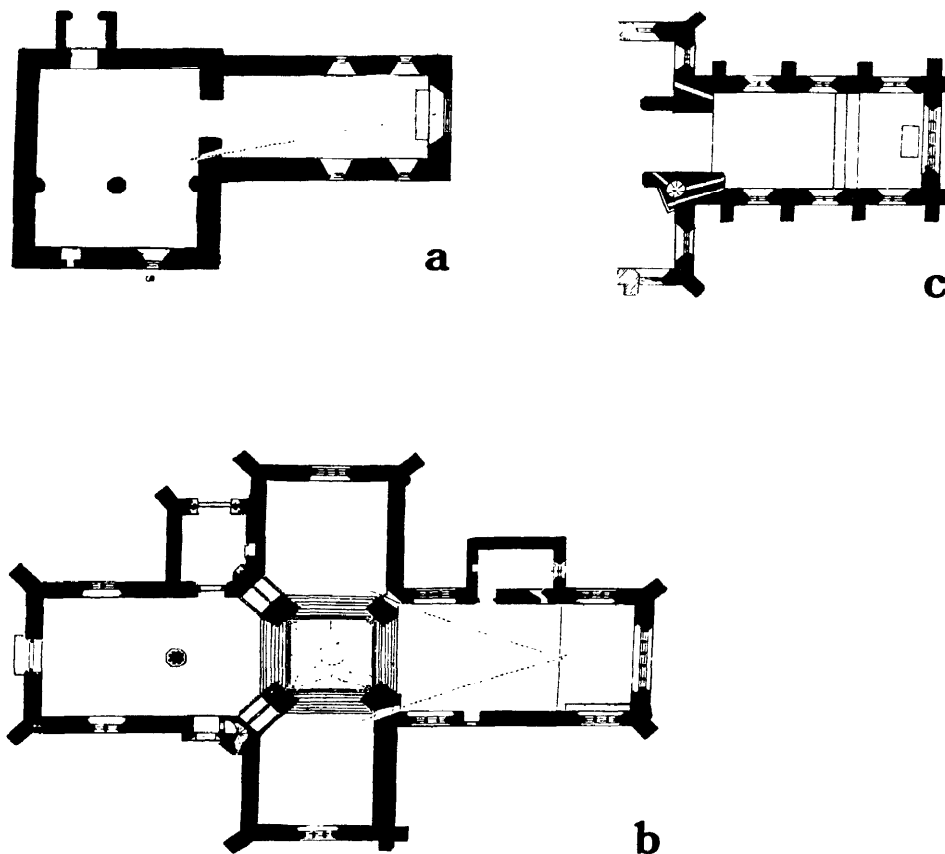


Fig 80 Oxfordshire squints compared: a, Newnham Murren, *St Mary*; b, Minster Lovell, *St Kenelm*; c, Great Haseley, *St Peter* (wrongly captioned 'Charlton, Wilts' in Bond 1916) (ultimate source: J H Parker in *Archaeol J*, 3, 1846, 299-308 for a and b, *Glossary*, 5 edn, for c)

Squints

(Cox 1914,97-78; Bond 1916,242-54; Cook 1954,181-3) There is considerable divergence of opinion about the exact purpose of squints, and this is not the place to resolve it. Most commentators agree, however, that squints are normally arranged to afford a view of the main altar, and that is sufficient definition for the present argument. It is normally assumed that the sight-lines through squints lead to the middle of the east wall of the chancel, but in fact this is often not the case. Fig 80 reproduces plans first published by J H Parker. The plan of Newnham Murren, Oxfordshire (Fig 80a), shows a sight-line which can only be described as speculative; a truer line - at least according to the plan - would lead to a position much nearer to the centre of the chancel. A visit to the church after this paper was written (September 1985) has confirmed that the actual sight-line runs from the centre of the south arcade pier to a point near the north-east corner of the chancel. At Great Haseley, Oxfordshire (Fig 80c), there are several squints; those on the south side seem to be directed towards the centre of the east wall, but that on the north side looks at a point rather further to the west. In the case of Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire (Fig 80b), the original drawing shows the

lines of the squints converging on a point only about two-thirds of the way up the chancel, and one could even argue for a more westerly position. Great Bookham, Surrey, is also quoted as an example, where the high altar 'subsequent to the construction of the squint, had been moved eastward *on the lengthening of the chancel*' (Bond 1916, 250; my emphasis). Bond offers this as the sole explanation of apparently misaligned squints, and no doubt it is a correct one in many instances. The alternative explanation, that the altar has been moved within an already full-length chancel, must also be seriously considered. Clearly each case must be treated on its merits, and the internal chronology of the building must be established before arriving at a final conclusion.

In some cases the meaning of the evidence is quite clear even though the actual date may be in doubt. At Kingston Buci, West Sussex, the squint in the north wall of the chancel is placed near its west end (Fig 81). Although a later door has destroyed part of the splay, it can be clearly seen that the squint was directed not toward the east end, but almost due south, indicating an altar position close to the chancel arch. Squints in this position exist elsewhere, eg at Oadby, Leicestershire, and presumably afforded a view of the altar from a vestry or side chapel.



Fig 81 Kingston Buci, West Sussex, St Julian: chancel from north, showing squint

Squints have so far not been used as evidence for changes in altar position but potentially they are of the greatest value, and a systematic examination of them would repay the effort required for it.

Piscinas

(Cox & Harvey 1907, 60-7; Bond 1916, 143-62; Jessiman 1957-8)

The older literature describing and illustrating piscinas as architectural features is very often confused and sometimes actually misleading when dealing with the liturgical background (Bond 1916 excepted). It is not possible to discuss the issues at length in this paper, though some of the information is summarized in the section on 'The prehistory of the piscina' below. For a full treatment of the subject, however, the following are recommended. The substantial article on the uses of the piscina in the *Ecclesiologist* is a detailed and sober account of the texts, and has stood the test of time (Anon 1848). Lockton 1920 is a much fuller treatment from the point of view of liturgical practice, and usefully distinguishes between continental and British evidence. Jessiman 1957-8 is more up to date and places rather more emphasis on the forms taken by the piscina. The discussion by Rohault de Fleury (1883, 140-4) is necessarily briefer, but contains useful references to texts as well as to Continental piscinas.

The piscina has long been recognized as a prime indicator of medieval altar positions. Since a drain for abluion water was required at or after every Mass, there were few altars which were not provided with their own piscina. Most of these were recessed into the walling, and although they were frequently blocked and sometimes damaged in post-Reformation times, they have on the whole survived as recognizable parts of the fabric. It is therefore possible in many churches to reconstruct the placement of several altars, not only the main altar in the chancel but also subsidiary altars in the aisles, in side chapels, in vestries, and elsewhere in the church. So important was it to have a piscina that examples exist even high up in the responds of the chancel arch, where they would originally have served an altar in the rood loft.

Potentially, therefore, early piscinas should be a reliable guide to early altar positions. Unlike sedilia, which seem not to begin until the late 12th century, piscinas are as common in the 'Norman' period as one might expect from the number of surviving Norman churches. Despite the survival of a small number of Anglo-Saxon churches, however, no piscinas are seriously claimed in the literature to be of pre-conquest origin. There is unfortunately no definitive list of Norman examples and assessments of their frequency in the secondary literature vary wildly from 'rare' to 'common'. Bond 1916 gives a select list, which can be augmented from other sources. In the spring and summer of 1983 I investigated about half of the examples on such an augmented list, covering an area from Norfolk through the east Midlands, Oxfordshire and Sussex. This was by no means an exhaustive survey but the following provisional results may give an indication of the position over the country as a whole. Of 25 examples, 5 (20%) proved to be wrongly ascribed to the 'Norman' category, being almost certainly of 13th century date. Of the 20 genuine examples only 5 (25%) belonged to the wall-niche variety. The remainder (75%) were pillar piscinas, thus bearing out Sir Alfred Clapham's claim that this was 'the commonest form in the ordinary twelfth-century parish church . . . judging from the numerous fragments which have survived all over the country' (Clapham 1934, 153). Jessiman, using a different sample, comes to much the same conclusion; of 24 Norman piscinas considered by him 14 (58%) are pillar piscinas (Jessiman 1957-8, 70).

In one sense it is unfortunate that the pillar piscina seems to be the norm in the early post-conquest period. The usual form is that of a shaft with a base and a capital; the top surface of the capital is cut away to form a basin, often in the form of an inverted negative pyramid, at the bottom of which a drain hole connects with a drilling through the shaft and base, originally intended to connect with a soakaway below floor level. The whole piscina may be cut from a single piece of stone, but is more usually built up like a structural column with a separate base, shaft, and head. In some cases the head is carved on all four sides (eg Tollerton, Nottinghamshire (Fig 82)), indicating that the piscina was intended to be free-standing. In others the lack of carving on one side, and sometimes the shape of the shaft (eg South Leigh, Oxfordshire (Fig 83)), shows that the piscina was set against a wall. In either case, however, this kind of piscina was essentially movable, a point of some interest for the discussion of the meaning of *sacrarium* (see below, p 117),



Fig 82 Tollerton, Nottinghamshire, St Peter: pillar piscina (height 900mm)

and it is hardly surprising that they are seldom found *in situ*. Quite often all that remains is the capital, incorporated into a wall niche piscina of later date (eg West Clandon, Surrey). Pillar piscinas are therefore not usually of direct assistance in defining the position of the altar which they originally served. In two instances known to me the piscina head has been incorporated into a niche piscina in the south wall of the nave (West Clandon; Graveley, Hertfordshire) and it may be that this perpetuates their original placing to serve a nave altar. But it is equally possible, since the capitals are so easily portable, that they started life in the chancel and were displaced to a secondary position when a more up-to-date piscina was put in to serve the main altar. The presumably Norman nave piscina at St Martin, Canterbury, cannot be explained away in this manner, however, since it is of the niche type, integral with the south wall. It clearly indicates an altar in the nave, though whether this was centrally placed and whether it was the high altar of the church there is no way of knowing. It might equally indicate a side altar placed against the east wall of the nave to the south of the chancel arch: compare the flanking altars in the most recent interpretation of Stone-by-Faversham, Kent (Taylor & Yonge 1981, 134-6), though these are thought to be 13th century in date.

It is apparent from the figures quoted above that the St Martin's type of piscina is a rarity in the 11th and 12th centuries. There is a comparable example at Horbling, Lincolnshire; at Crowmarsh Gifford, Oxfordshire, the wall niche is relatively shallow and the basin projects, corbel-like, from the wall; while at Iford, East Sussex, the form is hybrid, with a full-depth niche and a basin of slight projection. All of these are in the chancel near the east end, and in contexts which suggest a date late in the 12th century. Since the evidence of these niche piscinas is similar to that of the main sequence of piscinas from the 13th century onward, and since the pillar piscinas are not *in situ* and provide no direct evidence at all, it would appear that this feature is of no more help in fixing early altar positions than the sedilia. However, of all the features reviewed here it is the only one for which the pre-12th century development can be even dimly perceived. It is the one for which further excavation is likely to produce new evidence, since it requires some arrangement in the ground for the dispersion of the water poured into the piscina. A summary of what is known about these underfloor features is offered below as a starting point for future investigations.

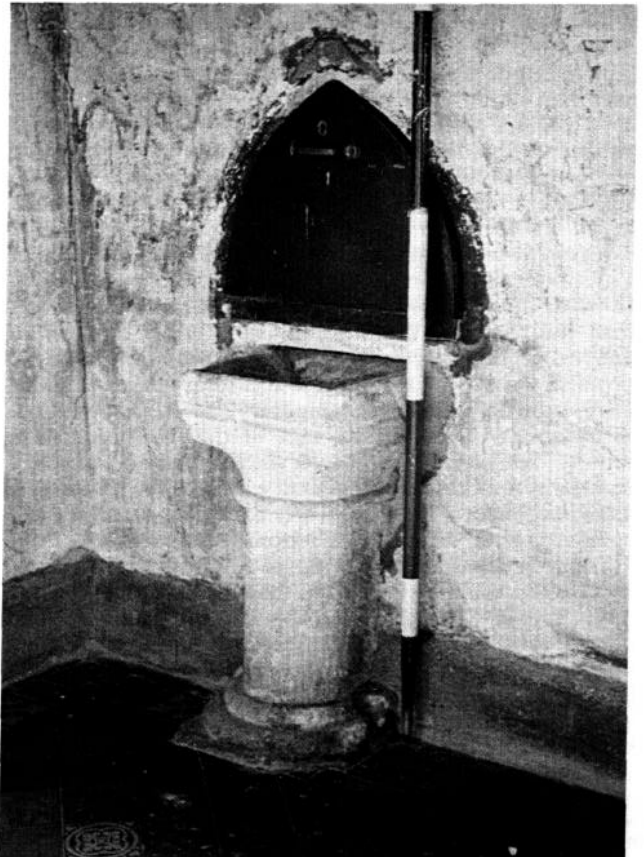


Fig 83 South Leigh, Oxfordshire, St James: pillar piscina (height 660mm)

The prehistory of the piscina: ablution drains and relic pits

The crucial evidence, as far as England is concerned, comes yet again from the excavated pre-conquest church at Raunds. On the axis line of the nave of the period 1 structure, and about one-third of the way from the east end, was a pit containing a broken but complete early St Neots ware pot, 185mm in height. It showed signs of earlier use and had been fractured before being put into the pit. Subsequent silting showed that water had passed through it. The position of this feature is shown in Fig 78. At the time of writing it is still not entirely clear whether it belongs to the second phase of the church and thus relates directly to the arrangements shown in the plan, or whether it was part of the phase 1 church, which consisted of the nave alone. In either case, however, the pit would have been closely associated with the altar, in phase 1 perhaps directly beneath it, and an interpretation connecting it with the liturgy seems called for. The burial of the pot cannot be regarded as random, because it was buried whole and the right way up, as well as in a significant position.

The suggestion proposed for this feature in the excavation report is that it formed the soakaway of a floor drain intended to receive the water from the washing of the priest's hands at the Mass and of the chalice after the service (Parsons forthcoming). There is a parallel for this arrangement in the church of St Mary in Tanner Street, Winchester. Against the south wall of the square-ended chancel was an irregular pit containing a pottery vessel, broken but complete, as at Raunds. The pot, dated 'not later than c 1150', was thought to have been the soakaway for a piscina (Biddle 1970, 303 & fig 8). As originally published, this feature, together with an altar base on a platform against the east wall, was assigned to the late 12th/early 13th century levels, but phase K of the church, which saw the addition of the chancel, was subsequently dated to the late 11th century (Biddle 1975, 312 & fig 15). There seem to be various problems of interpretation here. In particular the position of the soakaway is farther west than the expected place for a piscina and thus in an unusual relationship with the altar at the east end. This problem might be resolved if the two features should prove to be not strictly contemporary, but it is not possible to comment further in advance of the final excavation report. Meanwhile, however, if the altar base is a primary feature in the chancel, it is good evidence for an easterly altar position at a relatively early date, and perhaps to be compared with St Martin, Thetford (see above, p 107).

An even closer parallel with the Raunds pot was found by excavation at Oosterbeek in the Netherlands (Glazema 1949, esp 46-8). It had been placed in a pit at the very centre of a rectangular single-celled building; it was enclosed in a thick skin of mortar with Carolingian potsherds and below it was a further sand-filled pit, possibly of earlier date. Despite the excavator's hesitation, this seems an ideal arrangement for a soakaway, especially since the pot was covered by a pierced stone slab. The position in the centre of the church makes it possible that it was intended for a font, and it is noticeable that the pot is more than twice the size of the Raunds jar (385mm), but an interpretation linking it with one of five altars attested for the church is not out of the question (Dr H Halbertsma, pers comm). As to date, Glazema's sugges-

tion of the second half of the 10th century has been questioned in the literature but now appears to be confirmed (Binding 1970, 577). A related case is the 11th century church at Höllstein, Baden-Württemberg, West Germany, where a round stone block was found in a position closely comparable with that of the Raunds pot. The stone was pierced by a hole interpreted by the excavator as a 'runaway for holy font water' (List 1967, 32, 33). It would be unusual to have a font in front of the chancel arch, and a drain for ablution water is perhaps more likely, though the hole through the stone is rather large (400mm diameter). The form of any drainage arrangements under the stone block is not known.

Oosterbeek and Höllstein are two of the examples quoted in an important paper on 'Springs, wells and relic pits in churches' (Binding 1975). Professor Binding has brought together an impressive amount of evidence for underfloor features in churches but despite the fact that the starting point for his paper is water, he does not discuss the disposal of the ablution in connection with any of the examples he examines. What he does discuss is the disposal of relics and of what may be termed 'holy rubbish' - candle ends and remains of objects used in the liturgy - in pits or channels under the floor, which he refers to as 'relic graves' or *piscinae sacrae* (Binding 1975, 44). This is presumably the equivalent of the term *sacarium* applied to the Oosterbeek pot by Glazema (1949, 48), but without explanation. In many of the instances cited by Binding there was evidence of burning in the pit, and this characteristic led to a misinterpretation of the Raunds pot in early discussions. It has now been established that the pot had been burnt before burial in the church floor at Raunds, but it may be of significance that the pit appears to have been dug through an area of an earlier floor which had been locally affected by burning. The probable explanation for these examples of burning is provided by the early penitentials, which direct that if the eucharistic wafer is spoilt in any way, it should be consumed by fire and the ashes placed *sub altare* (Lockton 1920, 42-3). I argue elsewhere that this expression may mean 'in front of as well as 'below' the altar (Parsons forthcoming, and see below, p 115). This procedure echoes, perhaps consciously, the placing of saints' relics beneath the altar. In one early instance, recorded by Gregory of Tours in the 6th century, the relics themselves consisted of ashes: the cremated remains of the Ainay martyrs were placed under the altar of the church in Lyon erected in their honour (Vieillard-Troiekouff 1976, 145). In the 7th century the pseudo-Clement extended the ruling of the penitentials to include old altar linen and other worn-out sacred objects; one of the options for the disposal of the ashes was a hole in the floor (Lockton 1920, 118). This injunction was still known c 1200, since it was quoted in the *Gemma ecclesiastica* of Giralduus Cambrensis: *in fossis pavimentorum* (Brewer 1862, 36; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, no 5435). Later in the Middle Ages matter which had come into contact with the sacred elements also had to be burned; various instances in the Sarum Customary and the Hereford Missal are noted by Jessiman (1957-8, 69), who makes it clear that the *sacarium*, the piscina, the reliquary, and 'a place near the altar' were almost indistinguishable as repositories for the ashes. The Constitutions of the Diocese of London, c 1215-22, provided that altar cloths on which communion wine had been spilled should be burned and the ashes placed *in*

sacrario. On the other hand, a corporal stained with communion wine was to be cut up and kept *in loco reliquiarum*. In the case of a fly or spider falling into the chalice, it should be washed as thoroughly as possible and then burned over the piscina and the ashes put into the *sacrarium* (*et postea super piscinam comburi, et . . . sacerdos cineres ponat in sacrario*; Woolley 1915, 294; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1945-60, no 5446).

Water, sometimes mixed with wine, was similarly dealt with in the early Middle Ages. In the order for the consecration of a church the Egbert Pontifical of the 8th century provides for the blessing of water and its mixing with wine. After the aspersion of the altar and the length and breadth of the church, the remaining water was to be poured away at the foot of the altar (*fundit [pontifex] quod remansit de ipsa aqua benedicta ad bassem altaris*; Greenwell 1853, 39). A similar injunction is found both in the Frankish Missal and the Roman Order; in the latter case *ad basim altaris* is interpreted as 'la piscine qui est sous l'autel' (Rohault de Fleury 1883, 140). The same documents contain in the admonition to candidates for ordination as subdeacons the instruction that corporals (the pieces of linen upon which the elements were consecrated) should be separately washed and the ablution water poured away in the baptistery (Greenwell 1853, 15; Lockton 1920, 121; Anon 1848, 359). This parallels another of the options available for the disposal of burnt altar palls, according to the pseudo-Clement (see above; Lockton 1920, 118, etc). It is not immediately apparent whether a separate room, or a baptismal tank, or a font is meant by *baptisterium*. In the Eastern church, a special cistern under the altar (*thalassa*: 'sea') served all these purposes, and was also used for the consignment of damaged images and dubious relics (Anon 1848, 329-30nn; Rohault de Fleury 1883, 141). A circular feature excavated at Emmaus was considered to be one of these (Vincent & Abel 1932, 116-17, 202-4); a similar feature was identified in the Propylaea church at Gerasa, while in Bishop Genesius's church a stone with a hole in its centre under the altar covered a *thalassa* or a relic chamber (Crowfoot 1938, 231 & fig 7,250).

By the late 11th century it becomes a little clearer what should be done with the rinsings of the chalice, which at an earlier date had frequently been collected in a portable basin. The Constitutions of Ulrich of Cluny instruct the subdeacon to pour them away in a hollow place made of brick tiles near the altar (*in caveam de lateritiis tegulis factam in proximo altaris*; Anon 1848, 338; Lockton 1920, 123). Since no piscinas (as now understood) survive from this period, Lockton assumes the hollow place to be in the floor.

Throughout the whole early medieval period there seems to be a marked reluctance to give these features a name, and the instructions frequently refer to a clean or proper place. Ulrich seems to be one of the first to use the word *piscina* in this connection at another point in his text. It seems a most appropriate term if the ablutions of the time were poured into a container under the floor. The link through the early form of baptismal tank with the domestic Roman bath, also called *piscina*, is an interesting one. Also interesting is the use of such features to receive solid waste as well as ablution water, and the continued association of burning with the piscina later in the Middle Ages. In the 8th century and earlier the evidence points to a position under or close in front of the altar for the ablution

drain, a tradition continued by the Eastern *thalassa*. Taking up a suggestion of Jessiman (1957-8, 69), the equivalent expression in this country for the underfloor element, even where there was a piscina of normal height, may have been *sacrarium* (see also above, p 112-13, Constitutions of London). This seems a useful term to apply to excavated features of the kind discussed by Binding 1975, especially where no ablutionary function is suspected, in which case Binding's *piscina sacra* would be potentially misleading. The later medieval usage of the word *sacrarium* is discussed in the Appendix below: eventually it came to mean what is now understood by 'piscina'.

Possible sacraria discovered by excavation

To my knowledge there is no other excavated *sacrarium* in Britain which compares closely with the pits containing pottery vessels at Raunds and Oosterbeek. There are some instances of pits with burnt material in their fill, especially on the main axis of the church. A good example was discovered in the limited excavation in the redundant chapel of St Mary at Brentingby, Leicestershire (Liddle & Hughes 1978-9, esp 5, 11-12, & fig 2). The pit F6 appeared to belong to the early church, which must have been of 11th or 12th century date; it contained not only black and grey ash but also two bone fragments, and was flanked by small areas of burning. A pit in the north-west corner of the nave of St Mary in Tanner Street, Winchester, was also filled with burnt material, and this feature persisted throughout all the changes to the building from phase Q to phase U (Biddle 1969, fig 2).

There are also examples of tank-like structures in church floors. Particularly noteworthy is St Baruch's Chapel, Barry Island, S Glamorgan, where excavation revealed a rectangular cist-like feature in front of the chancel arch and enclosed within what appears to be an altar surround (Knight 1976-8, 44-6). It is interpreted by the excavator as a relic chamber. A timber-lined tank was observed during demolition just inside the chancel of St Nicholas, Colchester (Rodwell & Rodwell 1977, 31), while at Ormesby, Cleveland, a channel running north-south in front of the chancel steps may be comparable with several linear *sacraria* noted by Binding 1975 (Brown 1976, 6). Two large steep-sided pits discovered at Burnham, S Humberside, lay outside the earliest church building, and are presumably not relevant (Coppack 1978). It may be noted that the first stone church at Burnham, apparently of late 10th century date, had its altar close to, but not adjoining, the chancel east wall; in the early 14th century it was moved right up to the wall.

The continental examples discussed by Binding 1975 were drawn largely from the German-speaking and related areas. There are in addition some extremely interesting instances in France, and no doubt a thorough acquaintance with the local journals would reveal more. At Ligugé the abbey church acquired a short crypt with a western antechamber at the end of the 7th century. The plan of the building c 1100 shows an irregular feature in this antechamber, running north-south and labelled *fosse* (Coquet 1978, plan on p 3). There appears to be no description of this feature in the literature. An excavation in the nave of Saint-Bénigne at Dijon, Côte d'Or, revealed 'une impression en creux accompagnée de canalisation, qui semblerait indiquer une cave à buts liturgiques'. After its initial construction this feature was protected by

enclosing walls in succeeding periods (Chronique 1978, 282). Near the apse of Sainte-Croix at Lyon, Rhône, was a disused well filled with potsherds, animal bone, and ashes (Chronique 1976, 346). At Beauvais, Oise, the church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Basse-Oeuvre was altered in the 13th century and a piscina introduced into the wall of a chamber attached to the south transept. At the foot of this piscina was found *une petite fosse à reliques* containing many fragments of plain glass, a bronze ring, and two billets of lead (Chronique 1976, 340). The excavator himself compares this find with that of two relic caskets in the choir of a subsidiary chapel of early 11th century date, one containing an oil flask and the other coins of a late 10th century bishop. This deposit is linked with the consecration of the altar (Chronique 1976, 341). A similar discovery was made in the choir of the chapel of Saint-Benoît at Donzère, Drôme, with the excavation of *l'armoire aux burettes avec lavabo rituel* attributed to the 11th or 12th centuries (Chronique 1977, 272). Unfortunately it is not clear from this brief report whether the *lavabo* was an architectural fixture or a portable basin.

From *sacrarium* to piscina

It is apparent that there is an impressive amount of evidence for underfloor *sacraria*, usually close to the altar, sometimes clearly used for disposing of ablution water; in some cases where the matter to be disposed of was solid, there is a demonstrable connection with a conventional piscina. What is not yet established is the process by which *the sacrarium* became a piscina of the type familiar from the 13th century onward, but it is possible to postulate two developmental sequences which future investigation may confirm or amend.

Form sequence

i The first stage is the floor level drain implied by the Constitutions of Cluny, and represented archaeologically by the Raunds and Oosterbeek pots. The dating of these and the lack of evidence for any kind of piscina before c 1100 suggest that this was the common form until the 11th century.

ii It may be assumed that the introduction of the pillar piscina was merely a matter of greater convenience and dignity for the user of the drain, normally the subdeacon. The *raising* of the receptacle for the ablutions by the simple expedient of placing it on a shaft over the drain would mean that the subdeacon could empty a handbasin or a chalice into it with ease, and the celebrant could wash his hands actually *over* the piscina in a dignified manner. An intermediate stage between the floor drain and the full height piscina is represented by the dwarf pillar piscina at Bintree, Norfolk (Fig 84). This is fashioned from a single stone and stands only 397 mm (15½ in) high. It was perhaps this kind of piscina which was considered unsuitable at the visitation of Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex, in 1251, when the complaint was made *Item lapis sacrarii nimis humilis est et exaltandus* (Simpson 1895a, 27; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, no 4496). Although it is possible to read this in a figurative sense as meaning that the stone was poor in appearance and needed improving, the literal translation' is perhaps to be preferred: *the sacrarium* stone is too low and needs raising.

iii The full-height pillar piscina and the sill level of



Fig 84 Bintree, Norfolk, St Swithun: dwarf pillar piscina (height 397mm; courtesy National Monuments Record)

niche piscinas in the wall typically measure just under a metre from the floor. The range of complete pillar piscinas measured by me is 660-995mm. The example at Finchampstead, Berkshire, incorporated into a modern recess, is only 605mm high, and may belong to category ii.

Position sequence

a The earliest position for the disposal of ablutions and 'holy rubbish' was, according to the documents, 'at the base of the altar' or even *sub altare*. Though it sounds unlikely, the latter expression may be literally translated. The form of the altar excavated at Barton-on-Humber, with two pedestal supports towards the north and south ends of the altar slab (Rodwell & Rodwell 1982, 299 & fig 6), would allow the construction of a *sacrarium* in the floor below the centre of the slab. Unfortunately later disturbance of this area at Barton had destroyed any evidence there might have been. Another form of altar which would allow the use of a drain immediately below is the table type. Several of the earlier manuscript illustrations collected by St John Hope show altars on legs, the feet of which can be seen below the altar hangings (Hope 1899, pls II & III). Nevertheless, there clearly were also altars with solid bases and substructures, best illustrated by the square foundation in the Old Minster,

Winchester. In these cases the *sacrarium* must be sought directly in front of the altar in a central position. The Latin *sub* may have had the same force as 'beneath' in English sources, such as the 15th century contract for the nave at Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire, where it means 'to the west (of)' (Salzman 1967, 506-9). The evidence at Raunds, Oosterbeek, and Barry Island fits very well into such a context.

b By the time of the Constitutions of Cluny (late 11th century), the directive is less specific, and the *sacrarium* has only to be *in proximo altaris*. If the Early Christian tradition of westward celebration had persisted then a drain placed centrally in front of the altar, even if surmounted by a pillar piscina, would have been well out of the priest's way during the performance of the mass. In the case of a priest standing in front of the altar, celebrating eastward, a *sacrarium* in this position would have been quite impossible and a more convenient place would have to be found. This may be the reason behind Ulrich of Cluny's more general directive. It had already been customary to have the separate bowl for the ablutions actually on the south end of the altar, and it is no surprise to find that other ordinances specify a position to the right of the altar for the *sacrarium*/piscina. The *Gemma ecclesiastica* of Eiraldus Cambrensis echoes the wording of earlier documents: *piscina quoque decenter secus dextrum altaris cornu* (Brewer 1862, 36; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, no 5435). It would presumably be in this position that one would originally have found pillar piscinas, such as the one at Tollerton, Nottinghamshire (Fig 82), which were decorated on all four sides and obviously intended to be free-standing. The curious small altar at Asthall, Oxfordshire, which has four legs and a piscina incorporated into the south-western one, is presumably a rather idiosyncratic example of this stage of development (Bond 1916, 8).

c Before the final incorporation of the piscina into the south wall there was a probably brief intermediate stage during which pillar piscinas were designed to be placed against the wall, and were decorated on only three sides accordingly. This is the type called 'half-pillar' by Jessiman (1957-8, 56, 57). Some examples have a shaft designed to fit against the wall, as at South Leigh, Oxfordshire (Fig 83), where its section is not circular, but a stilted semicircle. This type continues into the 13th century and occasionally beyond, but it becomes an integral part of a design whose principal feature is a full wall niche.

d The final stage of development is the simple niche in the wall without any pillar-like element protruding from the surface of the wall. It is the normal type from c 1200.

The two sequences have been treated separately because there is no guarantee that they synchronized with each other. It is possible to imagine, for example, a *sacrarium* in the 'primitive' position in front of the altar surmounted by a fully developed pillar piscina. Conversely, it would be possible for the position to change without any development of form, resulting in a floor drain without any piscina serving it to the south of the altar. There is at least one actual example of this combination surviving at Monkton in Thanet, Kent, where a floor-level drain is incorporated in a niche in the south wall (Bond 1916, 150). Other instances of surviving floor drains south of the altar are discussed below.

Floor drains in the later Middle Ages

The development of the niche piscina did not lead to the total disappearance of the drain in the floor. There is widely quoted in the literature an injunction in a 13th century document to the effect that in the absence of a piscina there should be a floor drain to the south of the altar (eg Bond 1916, 154). These unattributed references seem to derive from the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1799 (n 7 on pp 837-8), which mentions 'Lincoln Injunctions', supposedly in a Bodleian manuscript. Enquiries at the Bodleian Library have so far failed to identify this document. There is archaeological evidence, however, for floor drains at this period, principally in monastic churches. In the Nine Altars Chapel at Fountains Abbey there is a drain in several of the bays (Hope 1900, 296-8 & folding plan) and St John Hope refers to further examples at Furness, Rievaulx, Kirkham, and Langdon. Another example was found in the south chapel of the south transept of the abbey church at Bardney (Brakspear 1922, 25 & p11), and it is probable that a thorough search of the literature would reveal further instances. In a secular context, there are several in chapels in Lincoln cathedral: one in each of the transept chapels immediately flanking the crossing, where they are let into the top of the plinth supporting blind arcading shafts perhaps as secondary features, a little behind as well as to the south of the altar; and a third example in the Morning Chapel (beyond the north aisle at the west end) almost directly below a big double piscina of 13th century date.

The association of drain and niche piscina occurs frequently in the limited number of parish church examples. Many of these are to be found for some reason in Norfolk. The famous double drain in the chancel of St Andrew, Barton Bendish, is surrounded by a medieval tiled floor, possibly of much the same date as the Decorated piscina in the wall above. The tiles appear to overlap the stone forming the drains, which may therefore be earlier than the piscina, but a full investigation would be required to establish this. At Wilton, also in the chancel, a big square drain cover against the south wall is again directly below a 14th century piscina. At Tilney All Saints the drain cover in the south-east chapel (now a vestry) is small and rectangular, and once more below the piscina (cinquefoil-headed). At Hevingham the rectangular slab was originally in the south transept but has been lifted during the present incumbency. A fifth example, at Burnham Overy, has not been inspected by me. Outside Norfolk, drains have been noted only in Rutland (now Leicestershire). The example in the south aisle of North Luffenham church takes the form of a standard 14th century piscina set below a window with the bowl almost on a level with the modern altar platform. There are two examples at Little Casterton. One is in the modern chancel extension, and is claimed to have come from the demolished medieval church at nearby Pickworth; the other is an *in situ* example in the north aisle, against the east respond of the north arcade (VCH Rutland, 2, 240-1). There appears to be a further instance, not noted in the literature, in the chancel at Everdon, Northamptonshire, where what may be a floor drain slab is let into the eastern stall of the sedilia. This seems to be a secondary arrangement rather than an original piscina bay. There are further examples of slabs lying loose, eg in All Saints, Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, and St Martin's, Wareham, Dorset. No doubt this list could be extended by

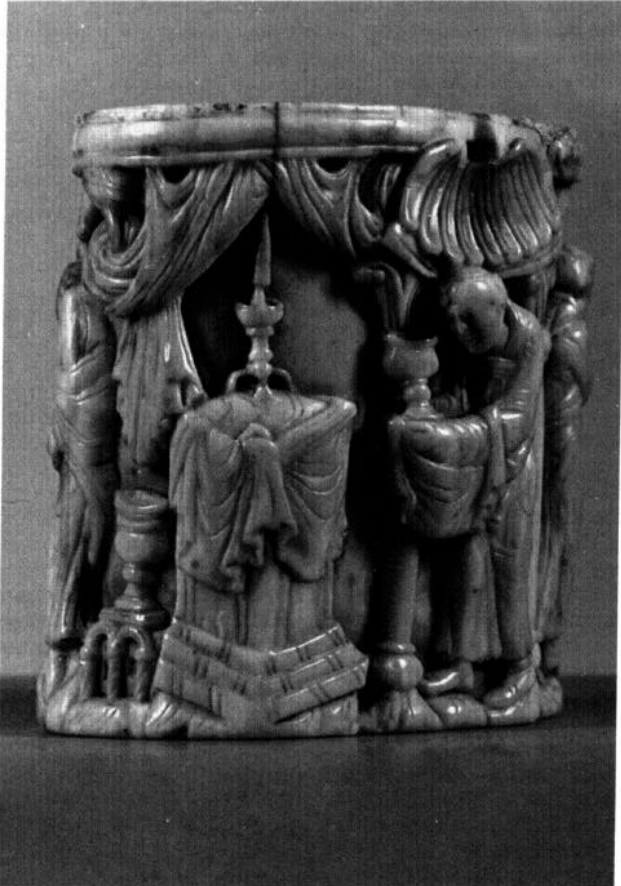


Fig 85 11th century ivory box, showing possible representation of a pillar piscina (height 65mm; Crown copyright; courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum)

anyone with first-hand knowledge of churches in a specific area. Nothing is so far known about the nature of the soakaway beneath any of the examples noted here.

Contemporary illustrations

Returning briefly to the arrangements for the disposal of ablutions before the development of the niche piscina, it follows from the arguments above that there was a period, perhaps quite a brief period, during the 12th century when free-standing pillar piscinas would have been in fairly common use, either to the south or even just in front of the altar. If this was any more than a passing fashion, it might be expected that illustrations of this arrangement would appear in manuscripts or other media of the period. In fact, manuscripts have not so far produced any evidence of this kind, but there are two possible examples, one in ivory and the other in glass. An oval walrus ivory box in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Beckwith 1972, no 19; Arts Council 1984, no 191; Backhouse *et al* 1984, no 116) has been variously dated from the second half of the 10th to the early 12th century. It is carved with scenes

once tentatively identified as a miracle of St Lawrence but claimed more recently as a version of the *visitatio sepulchri* (Heslop 1981), though neither interpretation is without its problems. One scene shows a cleric with a chalice in his hands approaching a square altar (Fig 85). On the far side of the altar, and interpreted by Beckwith as forming part of the next scene to the left, is an object described as 'a large chalice on an arcaded stool' (Beckwith 1972, pls 25 [reversed], 44, 45). This explanation, which Heslop does not enlarge upon, seems a little unlikely, and it is possible to see this object as a low pillar piscina of the Bintree type on an architectural plinth. Any further deductions, for instance about the position of the piscina relative to the altar, are not appropriate because of the designer's problems of layout on the tight curve of the end of an oval box, and because the cleric is not necessarily celebrating at the altar, so no orientation need be implied.

The other, perhaps rather more convincing, example comes from a 13th century window in the cathedral at Bourges, Cher, France, showing the invention of the relics of St Stephen. In the lower quadrant of the centre roundel the priest Lucian is kneeling at an altar (Focillon 1969, pl 63). In the left-hand corner of the picture is a moderately large chalice-shaped object. It may represent a pillar piscina on the south side of the altar, in which case Lucian is kneeling (?celebrating) to the east of the altar, facing west. However, the legend of the Invention begins with Lucian sleeping in the baptistery, guarding the sacred vessels, and the object may be intended to represent a font as a means of identifying the scene. The shape is not entirely convincing (though it would be in a 17th/18th century context), but perhaps such distinctions may not have been of any significance to the 13th century artist in view of the piscina - *sacrarium* - *thalassa* - baptistery confusion.

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APPENDIX

The meaning of *sacrarium*

Disregarding metaphorical usages, the general meaning of *sacrarium* appears to be 'holy place or building'. The supplement to the *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* quotes an example of the word being glossed 'haligern', which otherwise has that meaning (Toller 1921, 503). Not surprisingly, *sacrarium* is used more specifically to mean 'church' or a particularly holy part of it (eg sanctuary, chancel). This is attested in the early 9th century by Æthelwulf's poem *De abbatibus* (Campbell 1967, 13, line 119). A century earlier Bede had described the burial place of Abbot Sigfrid at Monkwearmouth in relation to the *sacrarium* of the church (*HA*, 385, section 20); the most recent translation of the *Lives of the Abbots* renders this as 'a spot just south of the sanctuary' (Farmer 1983, 206). It is not likely that the word refers to the church as a whole, since Bede consistently uses *æcclesia* for this elsewhere in the passage. The exact meaning of *sacrarium* is less clear, however, when the usage is apparently more specific than this. In the European literature there is an almost universal assumption, presumably based on the usage in Continental sources, that it means 'sacristy', the room set aside for the safekeeping of liturgical vessels and for the preparation of the eucharistic species. As far as German scholarship is concerned, this view is conveniently represented in the index to Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955–60, where *sacrarium* is glossed *Sakristei*, while on the French side *sacristie* is the second of two architectural definitions given to the word in the glossary to the *Nuit des Temps* series (Oursel 1983, 384). The British sources do not apparently allow for such precision in the interpretation, for the *Medieval Latin Word-List* gives a variety of meanings, ranging from 'sacristy' to 'tabernacle' and finally 'piscina' (Latham 1965, 415). The first entry here, 'cemetery', is rather surprising, and presumably refers to Bede's account of the miracles of St Oswald's relics; the water in which the saint's bones had been washed was poured away, and thereafter the soil which had received the ablution was found to have healing powers (*HE*, iii, 11). The water was poured away *in angulo sacrarii*, and since the miraculous soil (*ipsa terra*) is referred to later in the chapter by the expression *de pulvere pavimenti*, the location was presumably indoors rather than in the cemetery, though the latter interpretation is given as an alternative in the standard translation (Colgrave & Mynors 1969, 247, n 3). The word used in the main body of the translation is 'sanctuary', though 'sacristy' may be thought more likely in view of the widespread evidence, on the continent at least, for the use of this room in connection with the disposal of ritual ablutions arising from liturgical uses (Lockton 1920).

The bulk of the evidence for the use of the word *sacrarium* comes from the post-conquest period. It can be divided into four categories, depending on the degree of precision afforded by the context for the meaning of the word. To the first group belong the unspecific references for which a variety of interpretations could be argued, but which would not be inconsistent with the 'sacristy' meaning. The second group includes references occurring in the context of lists of chancel furnishings, where the 'sacristy' interpretation is less likely, and would require a degree of special pleading. In the third group the usage implies that *sacrarium* is a relatively small object,

potentially portable, and in some cases provided with a cover or lid. Many examples in the first three groups imply that the *sacrarium* was associated with ritual ablution; the fourth group consists of references which specifically mention the disposal of ablution water in terms that cannot possibly apply to a sacristy. In this case *sacrarium* can only mean the drain, or piscina, itself. The evidence is presented below in more detail, category by category.

- 1 The examples in this group all have some connection with ablution, but none so explicit as the Hereford Missal, which directs that the priest *eat ad sacrarium et lavet manus suas* (shall go to - or into - the *sacrarium* and wash his hands; Henderson 1874, 135). This could mean that the priest entered the sacristy, but alternatively it could mean that he went to a piscina or similar arrangement within the body of the church. Around 1200 Alexander Neckam's *De utensilibus* also refers to the ablutionary function of the *sacrarium* with the gloss *hic presbyter lavat manus* (Wright 1857-73, 119). Two less specific examples come from records of visitations undertaken on behalf of the chapter of St Paul's cathedral in the middle of the 13th century. In either case the reference occurs in an inventory of church effects without any part of the building being specifically mentioned. At Furneaux Pelham the entry reads: *Item ad sacrarium sunt parva manutergia de crismalibus* (there are small chrismatory towels in - or for - the *sacrarium*; Simpson 1895a, 19; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955–60, no 1802). Since many of the items listed must have been stored 'in the sacristy', it is unlikely that *ad sacrarium* is used to mean that in this instance; the reference is presumably to an aumbry, probably in the chancel, where the vessels with holy oil were kept. The towels, incidentally, are not those used by the priest for the normal ablution, a towel for which is separately mentioned two sentences previously. The same distinction is made in the Brent Pelham inventory, where the item reads: *nulle palle ad sacrarium nec ad manus sacerdotis* (no cloths for the *sacrarium* or the priest's hands; Simpson 1895a, 21; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955–60, no 413). A third example comes also from the St Paul's visitations in 1252. The inventory for Aldbury church includes the item *manutergium unum ad sacrarium integrum et sufficiens et aliud parvum ad lectorium* (an undamaged and proper towel for the *sacrarium* and another small one for the lectern; Simpson 1895a, 17; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955–60, no 93). The association with the reading desk suggests that *the sacrarium* is also an item of chancel furniture, rather than a sacristy. It is thus a possible candidate for inclusion in the second group.
- 2 The St Paul's visitations also provide evidence for *sacrarium* in the context of lists of furnishings, where to regard it as meaning 'sacristy' would constitute wilful misinterpretation. The Belchamp St Paul inventory of 1297 mentions *sacrarium honestum* without giving any idea whether it was a tabernacle, an aumbry, a piscina, or some other article of furnishing. The items immediately before and after refer to the altar, so that some such interpretation is likely (Simpson 1895b, 37; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, no 295). The same expression occurs in a

similar context in the Sidbury inventory of 1301 recorded in the register of Waiter de Stapeldon, bishop of Exeter (Hingeston-Randolph 1892, 368; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, no 4233). The Register of St Osmund, c 1230, refers to the *sacrarium* as *sufficiens* in the context of a list of altar furnishings and vestments (Jones 1883, 291), and a later Salisbury inventory includes *sacrarium insufficiens* in a similar context (Jones & Macray 1891, 370). About 1315 a comparable Canterbury inventory lists *j. tersorium ad sacrarium* (Legg & Hope 1902, 77), while some 50 years later the York fabric rolls record *unum bonum manutergium pro sacrario* (Raine 1859, 275). The St Paul's visitations of the mid 13th century provide another instance of *sacrarium* in the context of an inventory of furnishings; the Westley list includes the interesting description *contritum et dampnatum* (worn or broken and blocked up; Simpson 1895a, 9; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, no 4566). These adjectives serve to reinforce the suggestion that 'sacristy' is not meant, for a building is not likely to be described as 'crushed' or 'eroded' (*ruinosus* is the commonest description for fabric in disrepair), nor would it be 'blocked up', though a doorway into it might be. The list goes on to record a basin (*pelvis szagnea*) provided for the *sacrarium* (Simpson 1895a, 10), which is at least consistent with an interpretation of this feature as a piscina, though of course it does not rule out the meaning 'sacristy'.

- 3 Examples in the third group make it even more clear that an article of furniture and not a building is intended, and in some cases its purpose and something of its form are apparent. The synodal decrees of bishop William de Blois for the diocese of Worcester in 1229 include under the heading *De ornatu chori* the expression *unum sacrarium immobile*, repeated by his successor Walter de Cantilupe in 1240 under the heading *De munditia ecclesie* (Powicke & Cheney 1964, 171,296). The adjective *immobile* (fixed) implies that whatever *sacrarium* is, it could potentially be a portable object, and certainly not a sacristy. Bishop Peter Quivel's 1287 Exeter statutes, which derive from Walter de Cantilupe's, improve on the description: *sacrarium lapideum et immobile* (Powicke & Cheney 1964, 1006). What sort of object could be potentially portable, yet made of stone? Of the various suggestions made above in the discussion of the second group, the aumbry must be discounted because it is essentially part of the masonry fabric, and there would be no call to describe it as *immobile*. In theory a tabernacle is possible, though experts on the subject of eucharistic reservation regard the use of a tabernacle as rare in England, despite its popularity in various parts of the Continent (Dix 1942, 31-44; King 1965, 71, 87). Dix accepts the Exeter injunction as a reference to the Continental kind of tabernacle (1942, 43) but does not think that instructions to instal such tabernacles were carried out in England. There is, however, the well-known example in the south wall of the chancel at Stanford in the Vale, Oxfordshire (formerly Berkshire), which is undoubtedly a fixture (Bond 1916, 174, 211; Cook 1954, 37). It is fair to say that Bond

regards this feature as an aumbry, while Cook describes it as a reliquary. This latter interpretation suggests another possible meaning for *sacrarium*. A reliquary is certainly an object which was frequently portable, though fixed stone examples are also known, such as the one found in Brixworth church, Northamptonshire, in 1809 (Dryden 1893, 79-82). This example is of particular interest, since it is made from two separate pieces of stone, one of which serves as a cover or lid, which could have some bearing on the literary references discussed below.

There is a fair amount of evidence, again from the St Paul's visitations in 1297, for the covering of the *sacrarium*. The references are general for the most part: *velamen decens* (or *competens*) *ultra sacrarium* (Simpson 1895b, 46, 44, 41; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, nos 94, 415, 1804). In one instance the altar is also mentioned: *velamina ultra sacrarium et altare* (Simpson 1895b, 26; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, no 2223). The use of the word *velamen* shows that the covering was, at least originally, of cloth, and this presumption is reinforced by the mention in the last quotation of the altar, where presumably the normal altar covering of linen is meant. The use of *ultra* in the sense of 'over' or 'above', rather than 'beyond', is attested in other contexts. What is clear from these extracts is that the sacristy and its roof are not intended. A final example from the same source refers to *velamen lapideum*, a stone cover (Simpson 1895b, 55; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, no 1271). There is, of course, no way of knowing whether this refers to fixed tabernacle work of the kind which surmounts the feature in the chancel wall at Stanford in the Vale, or to a removable lid such as that on the Brixworth reliquary. A further reference to covered *sacraria* occurs in the statutes of Richard Poore, bishop of Salisbury, as reissued by him 1228 x 1236 after his translation to Durham. They are thus 60 or more years earlier than the St Paul's records. The two main manuscripts include the instruction *habeatque sacrarium supra se honestum operculum* (the *sacrarium* shall have a proper cover on it; Powicke & Cheney 1964, 80, *nb*). Since this sentence immediately follows the instructions for the washing and drying of the priest's hands after the Mass, one may reasonably conclude that in this case *sacrarium* means 'piscina'. The later Salisbury statutes of 1238 x 1244 contain even clearer evidence for this interpretation. The instruction is quite unequivocal: *unum sacrarium immobile cum manutergio ad manus sacerdotis post communionem tergendas* (a fixed *sacrarium* with a towel for drying the priest's hand after the eucharist; Powicke & Cheney 1964,379). There can be no doubt that what is referred to in these cases is a piscina.

- 4 The evidence of the Salisbury statutes is so incontrovertible that it could equally form part of the fourth group: explicit references to the disposal of the ablution. These examples stand out, however, because of the detail of their description and the clarity with which they describe the function of the *sacrarium*. The late 13th century observances of the Augustinian priory at Barnwell include instructions

for the washing of the corporals and towels by the sacrist, who was to dispose of the water in the following way: *singulas lavaturas in sacrarium versare* (Clark 1897, 70; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955-60, no 192). The use of the accusative case is crucial. The sacrist was instructed to pour away the water not *within* a sacristy, chancel, or some other part of the church building (which would require *in sacrario*), but *into* the *sacrarium*, which must therefore have been a drain or piscina (Clark 1897, 243). Although the wording is different, the Barnwell usage is identical to the much earlier directive contained in Lanfranc's Constitutions (1070 x 1089). This indicates that not only the water in which the corporals had been washed but also the rinsings of the chalice were to be dealt with in the same way: *aqua qua lavantur, sicut et calicum in sacrarium proiciatur* (Knowles 1951, 83). There can be little doubt that a piscina or its equivalent is meant.

The trend of the literary evidence is therefore clear, and even in the non-specific examples the translation 'piscina' would make perfectly good sense, although in some instances 'aumbry' or 'reliquary' might be preferable. In cases where towels or ablutions are specifically mentioned, 'reliquary' seems unlikely, however. By the end of the Middle Ages the meaning was sufficiently well established for *sacrarium* to be listed in the *Catholicon Anglicum* as a translation for 'lavatory' (Herrtage 1882, 210). Whether one may extrapolate from these mainly 13th century and later examples to Bede's account of the miracles of St Oswald is less certain, though a drain would obviously not be out of place in the context of washing the saint's bones. It must be noted, however, that a near-contemporary document, the Pontifical of Egbert, uses *sacrarium* in the sense of 'sacristy'. It might be possible to argue about the meaning where the word is first used, in the bishop's charge at the ordination of a subdeacon. Enough of the oblations should be placed upon the altar for the needs of the people, so that nothing is left to moulder in the *sacrarium* (*ne aliquid putridum in sacrario remaneat*; Greenwell 1853, 15). In the Mass for the dedication of a church, however, the meaning is clear: the bishop goes *into* the *sacrarium* to vest, along with the other clergy (*revertatur pontifex in sacrarium, et induant se. . . vestimentis, ipse et ceteri ordines*; Greenwell 1853, 48), and there can be no doubt that the sacristy is meant. This usage is attested later in the Anglo-Saxon period by the *Regularis Concordia* of c 973. On Good Friday the abbot is to enter the church for private prayer, after which he vests and goes from the *sacrarium* to the altar (*dum. . . indutus fuerit, veniens de sacrario ante altare. . .*; Symons 1953, 41). Once again, the reference to vesting makes it certain that 'sacristy' or 'vestry' is the correct meaning.

There appears to be no English evidence before the Norman conquest for the use of *sacrarium* to mean 'piscina'. The earliest example quoted above is that of Lanfranc's Constitutions in the late 11th century, and this may be an indication both of the time at which the new meaning appeared and of the route by which it was introduced. Only a study of Norman or perhaps north Italian sources could confirm or refute this suggestion.

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