

THE WRITING ON THE WALL: NEW THOUGHTS ON LONG MELFORD CHURCH

by FRANCIS WOODMAN

THE PARISH CHURCH of Long Melford lies long and low above the village green, a complete work of the last century of Gothic save for a Victorian west tower. Unvaulted, in the English manner, the exterior needs no obvious buttressing system. Rather it glitters with tightly packed Perpendicular-style windows and contrasting black and white fretted and inlaid masonry known as flushwork (Fig. 47).



FIG. 47 – Exterior view of Long Melford Church from the south west.

Much of the architectural history of the church and its patronage is literally written upon the walls, enabling a remarkably complete story of the patronage to be assembled with most of the dates and an impressive cast of local money and gentry. It might be thought that little more, or indeed new, remains to be said but the inscriptions tell only part of the story. The architecture tells another while testamentary evidence helps fill in a few gaps.

Architecturally, the work is a mixed bag. The panelled nave, 1460–95, is somewhat piecemeal and overlong. The chancel was advanced, if not finished, by 1479. The northern chancel chantry chapel contains the tomb of Sir William Clopton (d. 1446) while the southern Martin family chantry chapel was founded in 1484. The smaller north-east Clopton chapel tucked beneath the last bay east of the chancel, dated 1497, offers one of the best-preserved late medieval interiors in England. Of similar date, the eastern Lady chapel, connected yet detached, provides an unique example of liturgical development, its inner sanctuary

surrounded on all sides by a processional aisle. Here we see the discrete Lady church, following the Use of Sarum, the most popular liturgical ‘guide’ of the English Middle Ages, plus the luxury of a covered processional route insulated from the bitter East Anglian winter.

The church was clearly rebuilt according to an overall plan, with provision for chantries flanking the chancel as required (Fig. 48). This suggests a co-ordinated regime from the churchwardens that would have taken them financially beyond the common ‘make-do-and-mend’ tinkering commonly recorded in such accounts. The project must have been a *novus opus*, requiring a management committee with separate financial oversight and recording. Indeed, the complete scheme may have required several stages – the nave, chancel, Lady chapel and the glass, each possibly with its own ‘appeal’ and account book.

Most, if not all, of the stonework elements of the church may be attributed to only fourteen families, through several generations, with many interrelated by marriage. The local and regional gentry are better represented in the glass, other than the Cloptons who owned the adjoining estate of Kentwell. The patronage of yet grander people was not uncommon in this wool-rich area of England. Nearby Lavenham received considerable donations from the de Veres, earls of Oxford, who, with the Bouchiers, earls of Essex, were also patrons of the grandiose church of Saffron Walden, a few miles hence. Great St Mary’s in Cambridge also attracted the de Veres who were, however, trumped by Lady Margaret Beaufort, the king’s mother.

PATRONAGE

The ‘owner’ of the church at Melford was the abbey of Bury St Edmunds, though their participation in the overall rebuilding seems to have been minimal. Not so the rector, John Hill, who appears to have been most liberal in his benefactions.

The record of patronage is two-fold: long dedications inscribed in stone running the length of the exterior at parapet height, and donor portraits in stained glass, formerly in the clerestory but now gathered in the north aisle. Typical of the inscriptions is that along the north side of the clerestory:

Pray for ye sowl of Roberd Spar’we and Marion his wife, and for Thom’ Cowper, and Ma’el his wif, of quos goodis Mastr Giles Dent, John Clopton, Jon Smyth, and Roger Smyth, Wyth ye help of weel disposyd me’ of this dede these se’on archis new repare anno domini milesimo cccc [81]

This translates as; ‘Pray for the soul of Robert Sparrow and Marion his wife and for Thomas Couper, and Mabel his wife, whose goodness master Giles Dent [rector at the time], John Clopton, John Smith and Roger Smith, with the help of well disposed men of this [town] did these seven arches new repair in the year of Our Lord, 1481.’ A lost inscription on the north side once read ‘Pray for the soul of master Giles dent, late parson of Melford, from whose goods John Clopton, master Robert Cutler and Thomas Ellis did this arch make and glaze, and the roof over the porch, AD 1481.’¹ Over the north porch may be read ‘Pray for the souls of William Clopton, Margery and Margery his wives, and for the soul of Alice Clopton and for John Clopton, and for all those souls the said John is bound to pray for.’ The south aisle carries the text:

Pray for the soul of Roger Morell of whose goodness this arch was made. Pray for the soul of John Ketch, and for his father and mother, of whose goodness this arch was made. Pray for the soul of Thomas Ellis and Joan his wife, and for the good speed Joan Ellis makes hereof [?]. Pray for the soul of John Pie and Alice his wife, of whose goodness this arch was made and these two windows glazed. Pray for the souls of John Distr[?] and Alice, and for the good speed of John Distr and Crispian makers hereof.

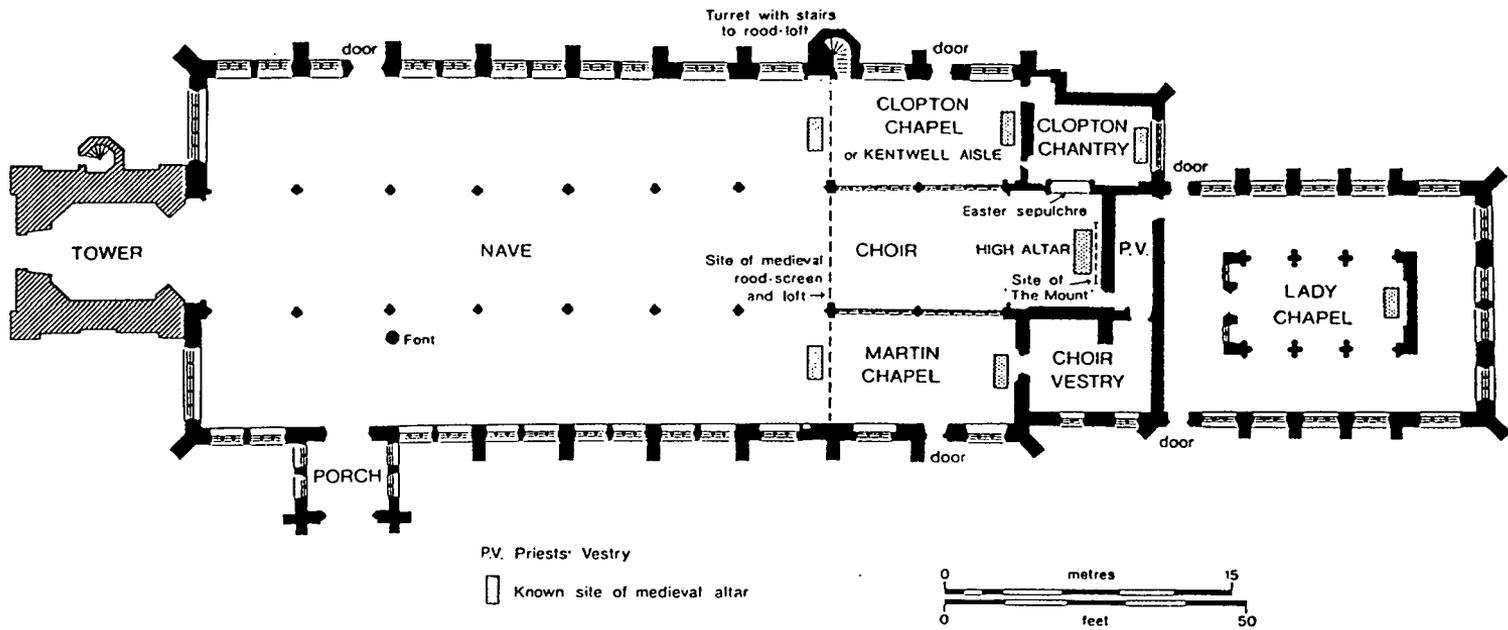


FIG. 48 – Plan of Long Melford Church (after L. Conder).

A lost inscription on the inside of the north nave arcade once read; 'Pray for the souls of Roger Morell, Margaret and Katherine his wives, of whose goodness the said Katherine, John Clopton, master William Qwaytis and John Smith, did these six arches new repair; and did make the table of the High altar, AD 1481. Pray for the soul of Thomas Couper who these two arches did repair. Pray for the soul of Lawrence Martin and Marion his wife.'

The three chancel chapels were chantry foundations, the inscription on the exterior of the south reading; 'Pray for the souls of Lawrence Martin and Marion his wife, Elizabeth Martin and Joan, and for the good estate of Richard Martin and Roger Martin and the wives and all the children whose goodness ... [missing] 1484.' The two northern chapels both belonged to the Clopton family, the smaller, eastern chapel retaining a painted interior of considerable interest. An inscription now lost recorded that John Clopton built the first four piers from the east end on the north side, that is the free-standing pier, the transition pier from chancel to nave (pier 1) and piers 2 and 3 on the north side (see Fig. 48).

The extensive Lady chapel is surrounded by the following inscription:

Pray for the soul of John Hill, and for the soul of John Clopton Esquire, and pray for the soul of Richard Loveday, butler of John Clopton, of whose goodness this chapel was embattled by [their?] executors. Pray for the souls of William Clopton Esquire, Margery and Margery his wives and for all their parents and children, and for the soul of Alice Clopton, and for John Clopton and all his children and for all the souls the said John is bound to pray for, who did this chapel new repair AD 1496.

It ends '*Christ sit testis hec me no' exhibuisse ut merear laudes, sed ut spiritus memoretur.*' This somewhat opaque inscription has been kindly translated for me by Dr David Butterfield of Christ's College, Cambridge, as: 'May Christ be a witness that I displayed/produced these things not to earn praise but in order that the spirit [either his or Holy] be remembered.' The adjoining schematic programme makes clear the attraction of the southern flank of the church to the local patrons. This was the approach from the town and therefore highly desirable (Fig. 49).

Commemorative writing on the wall was perhaps more common than is currently believed. Neighbouring Glemsford has work of the period closely related to Melford. The two chancel chantry chapels carry inscriptions, that on the south side to 'John Golding, Joahn hys wife, the Founders of thys Chapel', and on the north side 'John Mondes and Margaret his wife', and dated 1525. Both chancel chapels are the products of the same architectural hand as the Martyn and Lady chapels at Melford, the Golding aisle being similar in date, and funded from Golding's will of 1495.²

The nearby church of Hessett, Suffolk, carries an inscribed text relating to the patronage of John Hoo (d. 1492), and his wife who 'hath mad y chapel aewery deyl heyteynd y westry & batylementyd y hole' [made the chapel ... heightened the vestry and battlemented the whole [church]]. It did not just occur in England. In Brussels for example, the church of Notre Dame du Sablon formerly carried painted inscription inside the fabric with names of individual donors and guilds responsible for the late medieval reconstruction. Unfortunately they were 'cleaned away' in the nineteenth century.

The surviving stained glass at Melford is now gathered in the north nave aisle and consists of donor portraits and armorial bearings, with some additional religious symbols and figures. Though possibly misleading, the glass donors are all socially superior to the patrons of the fabric, and include a duchess of Norfolk and a countess of Surrey. This may be the result of accidental survival but, other than the Cloptons, common to both sets and connected to some if not most by marriage, the churchwardens seem to have had a different target group when it came to the begging letters for the glass. Of course, the missing aisle glazing may have fully complimented the patronage of the local townspeople, the survival of so much 'gentry' glass

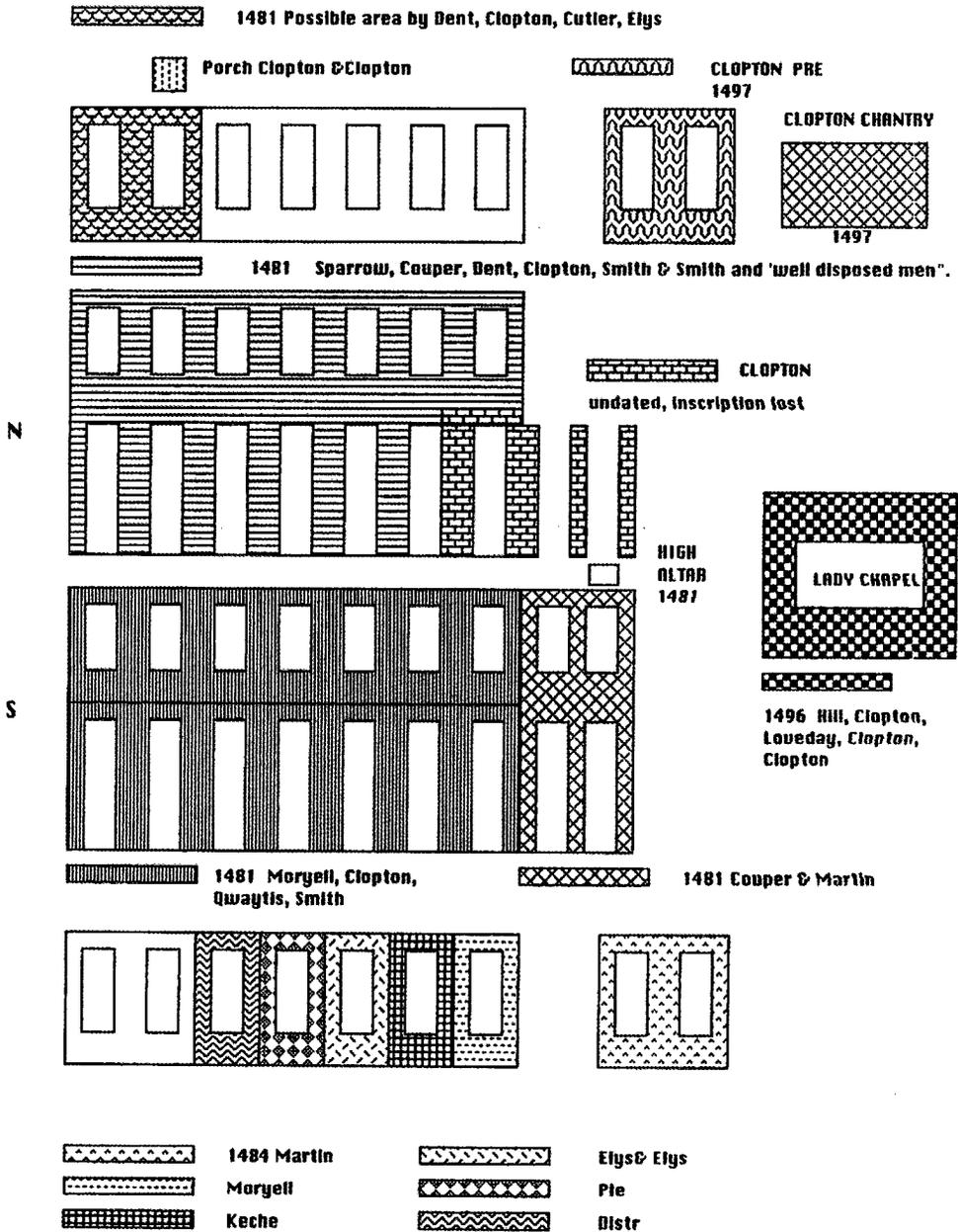


FIG. 49 – Long Melford Church – schematic elevations by patronage.

being more a matter of the inaccessibility of the clerestory to puritan ‘cleaners’. Two townspeople refer to windows in their wills: ‘to the making of the new window in the said church 6s 8d’ from John Smyth in 1501, and ‘I wish my ex[ecut]ors to have made a glass window in the chapel of the Blessed Lady in Melford’ in the will of John Brooke, 16 August 1502.³

WILLS

Testamentary evidence is surprisingly unrewarding. Two wills from 1467 and 1468/9 refer to the 'new fabric of the church', the earlier adding helpfully 'now begun', but there then follows a silence until one reference is made to the 'new fabric' in 1480.⁴ The south aisle gets two mentions in 1487 and a further one as late as 1500, by which time it must have been finished. The Lady chapel attracted considerable bequests, though commonly of the 'emendation' variety which does not necessarily imply rebuilding. Most refer to the chapel as 'in the churchyard' or 'standing in the churchyard', implying that at this stage, *c.* 1460–80, it was indeed a free-standing structure, possibly on the site of the present building. In 1495 a single reference to the new building is found: 'to the chapel of Our Lady to the building thereof £6 13s 4d'.⁵ Only in 1496 does will evidence tie up with the mural inscriptions when John Clopton leaves '100 marks to be spent on garnishing of Our Lady Chapel or of the cloister thereabout that I have made new in Melford churchyard'.⁶ The reference to 'cloister' relates most clearly to the present structure.

Two other parts of the building receive scant bequests spread over a long period, one at least referring to a period of work unrelated to the present structure. The rector Theodore de Colonia (Colchester) bequeathed a quarter of the fruits owing 'to making of the chancel', but this is in 1371.⁷ Nothing of this date appears to survive. A reference in the same will to one quarter of the 'fruits' to the 'use of making the tower' is more revealing, as bequests to that most significant structure are few and far between.⁸ None occur (or survive) until 1459, with a further single bequest in 1462 and another in 1463.⁹ None amount to much and all are simply 'to the tower'. One further reference to the 'Newe vestry that I did make' occurs in the will of Geoffrey Foote in 1507.¹⁰ The vestry links the Martin chapel east wall with the west end of the Lady chapel.

When the work began on the present church is not entirely clear. William Clopton (d. 1446) is often credited with commencing the work but, other than having a tomb in the new church, his role remains uncertain. The tomb could predate the rebuilding or indeed have been provided later by his heir.¹¹ The inscriptions make it clear that 1481 was a crucial year for the new work, with both aisles under way. The Lady chapel carries the date 1496 while the adjoining Clopton (second) chantry is 1497. The glazing of the whole church is likely to have continued well into the sixteenth century.

The wills are mostly silent when it comes to the rebuilding, yet many are long and rich. The implication is that the project 'committee' targeted the living rather than waiting for the vagaries of death.

FABRIC

Stylistically, the church is not very forthcoming. The windows and most of the moulding profiles are commonplace save for those of the Martin and Lady chapels. The profiles here are more refined and distinctive and may be traced to a group of buildings of similar date in the area. The tracery of the Martin chapel is quite unlike that of any of the other surviving windows and again relates to a distinct group and indeed a single hand. It has long been proposed that the architect involved here was John Melford of Sudbury, who had trained under the significant royal master, Reginald Ely.¹² This would explain his use of the 'flowing' tracery of the Martin chapel, which resembles closely the side closet chapels of King's Cambridge, begun in 1449. Other related works from Melford's hand probably include the nave of Cavendish, the chancel aisles of Glemsford and Lavenham, and the north aisle of Boxford. The distinctive pier, base and capital mouldings common to this group provide

another stylistic link. John Melford died in 1506 leaving a bequest to Long Melford church. Neither the moulding profiles nor the tracery of the remaining work suggests the same hand, but then each part of the scheme may have been subject to separate contracts and competing bids.

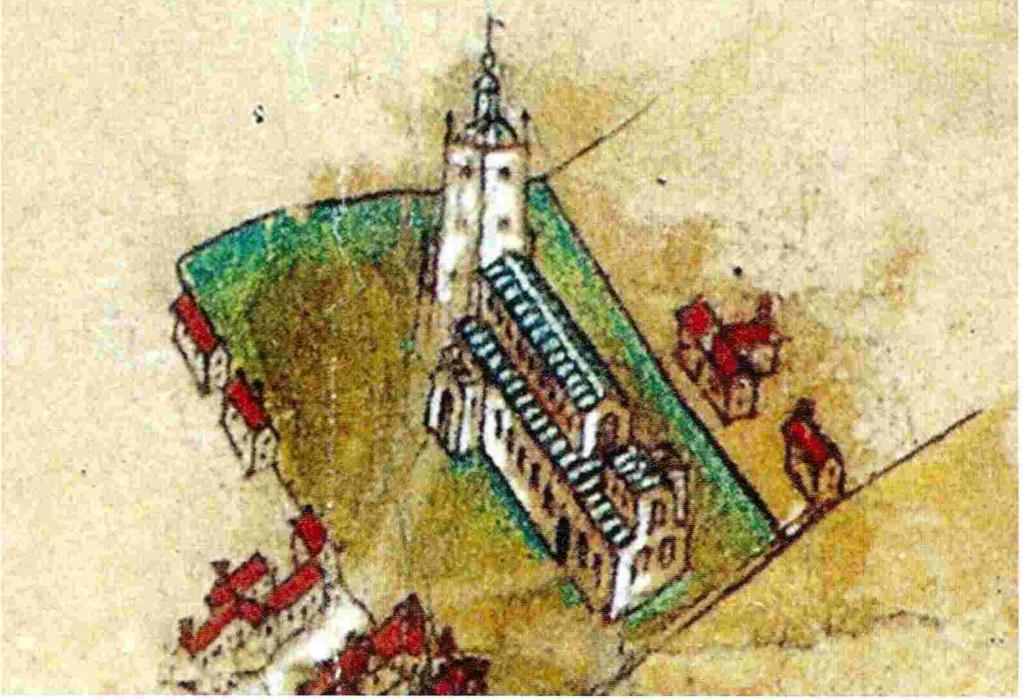


FIG. 50 – Detail from the map of the Manor of Melford, 1613, by Samuel Piersie
(by courtesy of Sir Richard Hyde Parker).

It has been argued for decades by this author that the chapel surely had a clerestory raised over the central oblong nave, the present sawn-off appearance above the elegant niches looking far from satisfactory.¹³ A bird's-eye view of the church of 1613 (Fig. 50) makes clear that this was indeed the case, and though the artist extends the raised section to the east wall, which clearly did not happen, his intention is obvious. The present roof over the central section matches the surrounding aisle roofs and is undoubtedly the original, lowered to its present level after 1613. There is clear evidence that the principals once had curved arch-braces, each cut off and replaced with newer timbers to make the overall roof-line flat. The upper window arrangement may be surmised from the panelling that would have linked arcade to clerestory. The bays are divided by tall, finely carved niches, all currently labouring under a heavy coat of plaster. Between are units of five square-headed panels, suggesting a single five-light window above. The western interior wall has eleven panels, suggesting twin five-light windows. The east wall is more problematic. The dividing niches are missing from the corners and the wall surfaces are just blank. A large blind arch is set into the east wall, which must always have been solid as the adjoining aisle flat roof continues behind. While the arch is suspiciously tall so as to look modern, the jamb moulding that rises unbroken around it matches the similar feature throughout the chapel aisles. It might be that a major (?timber) altarpiece once filled this area. How tall the lost clerestory was is difficult to tell. The 1613 drawing shows it as a notable feature and to an extent it must have been so in order to clear

the gabled rooflines so obvious today. The 1613 drawing shows flat roofs throughout and that would have matched the rest of the church. It does not show the dominant flushwork gables though there can be no doubting their originality. Were they just for show?

Originally, the central interior of the Lady chapel was a brilliant and glittering jewel-box raised above the arcades, flooding the altar area in a theatrical manner. Perhaps it was inspired by the spectacular new roof of Needham Market. In effect, both buildings are oblong versions of the Ely octagon.

The placing of the Lady chapel is also something of a puzzle. It is not axially aligned with the body of the church, rather it is shifted southwards so that the north exterior wall forms a continuation of the north wall of the chancel. In this way, the southern exterior wall is aligned visually with the south aisle of the nave. One consequence would have been that the raised clerestory did not block the light from the chancel east window, which stood mostly to the north. Thus Pevsner's quip that the existing roof-line of the Lady chapel interferes with the view of the main east window is irrelevant – there never was a view.¹⁴ Why the Lady chapel is so placed is open to debate. Was it to increase the visual impact from the important vista from the town approach, or does it relate to the position of a former, completely free-standing, Lady chapel 'in the churchyard'? We shall never know.

The Lady chapel is now integrated with the chancel and its associated chapels, but this connection was originally more tenuous. The space between the Lady chapel and chancel is filled with a pair of vestries, north and south. They have a complicated history. The north or priest's vestry seems to have been built first, probably as part of the chancel reconstruction. This vestry has an original door leading from the high altar area, one leading east into the Lady chapel and another, originally leading outside to the south but now trapped within the southern or choir vestry. Externally, the priest's vestry is very roughly built with almost rubble surfaces forming part of the eastern buttresses of the chancel. Further, the choir vestry interior is interrupted by the lower section of the south-east buttress of the chancel that now penetrates down to ground level through the choir vestry roof.

The choir vestry is currently entered *via* a door midway along the east wall of the Martin chapel. This would have made the placing of an altar inconvenient. The east window of the Martin chapel over this door has been blocked in its lowest section, the jambs and mouldings clearly once proceeding further down. The wall below has been crudely cut back to take the modern door into the choir vestry. The choir vestry roof viewed through the east window is at a higher level than even the present raised level of the east window cill, while just within the door the timber ceiling of the choir vestry goes through considerable contortions to avoid the adjoining glazed area.

On the outside, where the choir vestry butts up against the east wall of the Martin chapel, both levels of the vestry plinths are lower than those on the nearby south-eastern diagonal buttress of the Martin chapel. The vestry plinth has decorated panels while the adjoining section of the Martin chapel east wall does not. At the south-eastern angle of the vestry, the wall butts up against the south-west diagonal buttress of the Lady chapel.

On the exterior north side the vestry information is less forthcoming. It looks as though the north-eastern angle of the Clopton aisle chapel had a pair of right-angle buttresses, not one diagonal. The lower section of the original eastern buttress is now caught up in the connecting passage of the two Clopton chantries. Certainly the chancel was rebuilt prior to the easternmost Clopton chapel, for the tomb of John (d. 1496) taking the form of an Easter Sepulchre has been inset rather crudely into an existing design.

The overall conclusion from the vestries is that the rebuilt Lady chapel was almost free-standing in 1496, connected only by the narrower priest's vestry to the high altar end of the chancel. Later, from will evidence before 1509, the choir vestry was added, possibly only

entered through the original south exterior door of the priest's vestry.

In the church proper, a close internal examination of the fabric reveals that the nave and chancel arcades have significant differences beyond the odd moulding profile. Existing and recorded inscriptions, plus a single will reference, suggest that the chancel was complete, or substantially so, in 1479, the Martin aisle and arcade by at least 1484. The chancel has one free-standing bay, now variously occupied by tombs. That on the north is John Clopton (d. 1496), the Sepulchre crudely inserted into pre-existing work. This was presumably the site of the lost inscription recording the extent of John Clopton's work on the north side. The south side of the chancel is overburdened with the tomb of Sir William Cordell (d. 1580) but both tombs show clear evidence that the blind panelling descending from the clerestory also decorated this last bay, that on the south surely incorporating a sedilia and piscina.

It was pointed out long ago that the five bays of the western end of the nave stand on piers reused from the previous building.¹⁵ This includes the westernmost half respond pier against the west wall. Thus the previous church was as long to the west as now, certainly by the Decorated period, to which the piers belong. What can only be seen in certain light is that the innermost order of the arches is also older, the outer mouldings and the upper panelled clerestory wall being grafted on with considerable skill, not to mention some risk. This is unexpectedly penny-pinching in a scheme of such ambition but doubtless appealed to the churchwardens and parishioners.

The story of the nave arcades is actually more complicated than at first sight. There are two clearly distinct stone types in the nave. A honey coloured rough textured limestone, presumably Barnack, and a crisper white, which appears to be Clipsham. The latter is only employed in the fifteenth-century work. To make this discussion easier the nave piers will be numbered from 1 to 8, the first being the combined easternmost pier at the junction of the nave and chancel, while number 8 is the westernmost half pier by the tower.

On both sides, piers 4 to 8 date from the fourteenth century and have characteristic half shafts on the cardinal faces and small shafts in the angles. All, that is, except the two westernmost piers (7), where the angle shafts are omitted, and pier 3 south (see below). The inner order of the arcade arches is also reused from the fourteenth-century work, including the two arches spanning between piers 3 and 4, where, at least on the north side, pier 3 is entirely fifteenth-century and was the last pier west claimed by John Clopton's inscription. This arch has either been held up while the supporting pier was replaced (difficult but not without precedent) or the blocks have simply been dismantled and put back up. Piers 3, 2 and 1 on the north side represent completely new work from the floor up, mostly made of white stone. The moulded plinth of pier 2 is higher than that of 3.

Again, the fourteenth-century sections of the southern arcade are made from the honey coloured Barnack that is quite obviously different from the whiter fifteenth-century stonework. However, the final two eastern free-standing piers on the south side (3 and 2) also appear to be of Barnack, the western (3) up to and including the capital, the last (2) to below capital level. Further, the fourteenth-century base type continues in Barnack stone to beneath pier 3, which in every other way looks fifteenth-century in style, though is all made of Barnack. The only difference between the base of pier 3 south and its neighbours further west is that it rises slightly higher. Was pier 3 south made from Barnack recovered from demolition work? Pier 3 south looks to be fourteenth-century work right up to the capital block where the present fifteenth-century mouldings are distinctly crude. If the pier is indeed fourteenth-century then it also has no angle shafts like the pair at 7. Those piers seem to have acted as a transition between the others in the nave and the distinctly different mouldings of the half-pier 8. Were the piers 3 north and south similarly designed to prepare for half-piers where pier 2 now stands? Certainly, the fifteenth-century capitals on either side, north and south, do not

match, those on the north being considerably finer.

The nave bays have one final piece of information to yield – the bay lengths. The fourteenth-century bays are relatively uniform, being between 405 and 410cm from shaft face to face. That is all except bay 2 from the east. Here the distance is 365cm both north and south. The final bay 1 from the east restores the distance to approximately 400cm. This means that the even bay lengths of the fourteenth-century work could not have proceeded evenly to the existing nave/chancel division. This evidence, combined with the taller fourteenth-century moulded base of pier 2 south and the absence of angle shafts, might suggest that the former nave bay sequence was interrupted by another feature no longer present.

Though the arcade evidence is complicated, some things become obvious. Whatever the material on the south side, the last two free-standing eastern piers, 2 and pier 3 on the north side represent new work of the fifteenth century from floor level up, something that does not occur further to the west. On the south side, pier 2 is entirely new while pier 3 reuses at least the base if not the whole of the fourteenth-century work. This all occurs at the point where the fourteenth-century bays' lengths are seriously disrupted.

One further design feature is the variation of the aisle window tracery. The Martin chapel has flowing tracery in two of its windows but this occurs nowhere else at Melford. Everything about the chapel speaks of a different hand. On the north side, the four easternmost windows have an elevated transom motif not found elsewhere in the church. Whilst two of these are within the earlier Clopton chapel and may be 'excused' for the same reason as on the south, the third and fourth form the windows of the last two bays at the east end of the nave aisle. What makes this more puzzling is that the distinctive jamb mouldings with shafts and tiny bases found throughout the other aisle windows, but not on the two windows of the Clopton chapel, are found on the third 'Clopton' type within the nave, though here with the addition of tiny capitals. So in these two bays the tracery matches the windows further to the east while the setting, the jambs, picks up the design to the west. Is this just a transition from one to the other or is it the earliest development of what will become the 'Melford look'? Did all work start at the east end of the north aisle?

The overall conclusion is that the eastern bays of the nave are clearly different from those further west, with those on the north side at least representing a fully integrated new build. Even if the rebuilt chancel projects further to the east than its predecessor there is still evidence of a substantial reconstruction and infill at the eastern end of the parish nave. This is not an uncommon story in the locality, or even in the region.

One great problem for ambitious parishioners such as those of Long Melford was the limit to the extent of 'their' church. Expanding westwards was often ruled out by the presence of a substantial west tower, while making the nave wider, a common solution, would be at the expense of the burial yard. Some buildings offered a tempting solution – those with existing central towers and transeptal chapels. Remove the tower and expand the nave eastwards to the chancel. Of course the loss of the tower would have to be compensated for elsewhere, but a new tower could be built against the west wall or free-standing, a solution found quite often in East Anglia. The advantages to the parish of removing a central tower were many: their space could be expanded at no real cost to the churchyard while a better, more integrated, spatial arrangement would be created between nave and chancel. A number of such rebuilds happened or can be argued in the region. The most obvious is Saffron Walden, where evidence exists beneath the floor that a crossing between nave and chancel was swept away for the current building.¹⁶ The first move was the commencement of an entirely new west tower in 1444, followed by the rebuilding of a northern transeptal chapel, apparently for a guild. This chapel not only set the style for the reconstruction of the nave aisle, it also set the new width such that the aisles – north in the 1460s and south from 1489 – occupied the full width of the

older transept. Not only would the nave expand eastwards through the space of the lost crossing but it would also expand laterally, the extra aisle width offering the opportunity for guild or chantry altars abutting the wall whilst leaving a good processional width on the arcade side. It also had the advantage that the work could proceed without disrupting the existing nave. The work at Walden took decades, the final campaign on the new arcades and clerestory being commenced only in 1497, but there can be little doubt that it became planned a scheme at an early stage.

A similar history may be posited for St Peter Mancroft in Norwich.¹⁷ Here a new west tower was begun late in the fourteenth century, projecting to the limit of the churchyard and requiring a through-passage at its base to preserve the processional route. Again, the building of a new north-eastern chapel set the pattern for the total reconstruction and, though more piecemeal than Walden, it is clear that by the 1450s a single scheme was being put into place.

Ashbourne, Derbyshire, offers the most striking example of an unfulfilled project 'caught in the act'. Several new schemes were begun, some colliding with the old tower, while the new north nave wall completely ignores its presence, bypassing it in an almost comical fashion. Great St Mary's, Cambridge has a similar story though this time completed.¹⁸ A new west tower, here straddling part of the road, was added to the west end, while the original intention was just to make good the gap left by the removal of the old central tower by expanding the old nave eastwards. A sudden influx of money and major patrons changed their minds and a wholly new nave was constructed.

The remains of St Michael's, Coventry, suggest the same story – beginning with the building of a new west tower – and a similar pattern of removal and eastward expansion may well have happened nationwide, but so complete was the reconstruction of major parish churches after 1400 that few have left any evidence of their previous form.

Does this offer an answer to the question of the relatively new eastern nave bays of Long Melford? The north-eastern chapel of the nave became the chantry for William Clopton (d. 1446) who by tradition began the reconstruction work. This is the pattern of both Walden and Mancroft. The removal of a central tower and flanking transeptal chapels would certainly leave a gap needing an infill but the work, being new from the ground up, leaves no hint of what stood before.¹⁹

The medieval west tower is the one vital missing link in the story. We know roughly what it looked like and that it fell in 1710 to be replaced by a rather unlovely stump. This in turn was removed as a matter of taste when the present rather sober exercise was begun in 1897.

The bird's-eye drawing from the early seventeenth century (Fig. 50) shows a tall tower of many stages, in proportion not far short of the length of the nave.²⁰ It has diagonal buttresses, corner pinnacles and battlements. The whole was topped by a cupola-like spire as eccentric as Swaffham or Mancroft.

Towers fell for a variety of reasons, but foundation failure was most common. The collapse of Melford caused little obvious damage to the west end of the nave – the fourteenth-century responds remain in place – which suggests that it fell either straight down or westwards. The latter would be most commonly caused by the construction of a new tower later in the Middle Ages against or incorporating an existing west wall. The early work would act as a prop to the eastern face of the tower leaving the other faces to settle in the manner of all foundations. The result could be catastrophic and the fear of such a loss led many parishes in East Anglia to construct entirely free-standing bell towers.

The tower of Long Melford is quite literally a blank page in the architectural history of the church. The relative absence of testamentary evidence is puzzling but then, as we have seen, the wills of Long Melford are not exactly forthcoming. Doubtless the lost tower carried evidence of its patronage, evidence no one thought interesting before it fell in 1710. Quite

often, emblematic or heraldic devices offer the only evidence of patronage when it comes to new towers. At neighbouring Lavenham, the tower patronage is made clear by a flushwork star for de Vere, earl of Oxford, and the armorial bearings of Thomas Spring III that adorn the top. Such substantial patrons needed no help from others, indeed seeking further bequests might be seen as insulting. Many new towers carry only one patronal device – de la Pole at Cawston, Norfolk, or Morton at Wisbech; indeed John Morton undertook the sole patronage of the new central tower of Canterbury cathedral. Towers were not only seen as single, one-off projects, but suitably grand statements that could attract a rich individual patron. A new tower at Long Melford seems to have been under way as early as 1371, though further bequests are lacking before the mid fifteenth century when there are three in a row. Was there a single patron in between? Was it William Clopton?

The architectural history of Long Melford proposed here would see an already substantial church of roughly the present length, but with central tower, transeptal chapels, and a free-standing Lady chapel. This made way for an appropriately 'long' structure with a new west tower, projected if not begun in the late fourteenth century, a transformed nave expanded eastwards across the gap created by removing the tower, a potentially lengthened chancel and a discrete but integrated eastern Lady chapel. If William Clopton did indeed begin the work, then it was achieved within about sixty years, quicker than either Saffron Walden or St Peter Mancroft. Yet the single reference to the 'new tower' in 1371 raises the prospect that a complete rebuild had been in prospect a lot longer.

What we can see now is that the writing on the wall tells only part of the story. The evidence of wills and of the structure itself both amend and enhance the tale.

NOTES

- 1 For the lost inscriptions see Pevsner 1961, 344–45.
- 2 Goldyng was to be buried outside in the churchyard 'above John's altar on the south side' and his executors were to erect 'a chapel ... over me where that I shall lie in the said churchyard, to which £40 it to be made as soon as the money may be allowed', TNA, PCC, PROB 11, 13 Horne: John Goldyng, 1495. John Mondes was to be buried 'within the new chapel of Our Lady which I late builded', PROB 11, 16 Alenger: John Mondes, 1533.
- 3 'To the making of the new window in the said church 6s 8d', PROB 11, 30 Blamyr: John Smyth, 11 June 1501.
'I wish my ex[ecut]ors To have made a glass window in the chapel of the Blessed Lady in Melford', PROB 11, 17 Blamyr: John Brooke, 16 Aug. 1502.
The best guide to the glass in Long Melford is Steward n.d. There are two potential readings of the surviving glass: that most of it was the gift of John Clopton flaunting his aristocratic relations or that he 'touched' his family connections in a good cause.
- 4 'To the new fabric of the church, now begun 6s 8d', SROB, Baldwyne 420: John Brokhole, 25 Oct 1467.
'To the new fabric of the church £10' plus sale of land 'the money wholly expended at the discretion of my ex[ecut]ors On the fabric and reparation of Melford church', SROB, Baldwyne 576: Robert Sparow (late wife was Marion), 6 Mar 1468/9.
- 5 'To the chapel of Our Lady to the building thereof £6 13s 4d', PCC, PROB 11, 5 Horne: John Barker, 30 Nov. 1495.
- 6 '100 marks to be spent on garnishing of Our Lady Chapel or of the cloister thereabout, that I have made new in Melford churchyard', PCC, PROB 11, 17 Horne: John Clopton, 20 Feb 1496.
- 7 A quarter of 'fruits' 'to making of the chancel', NRO, NCC, 9 Heydon: Theodore de Colonia, rector, 3 May 1371.
- 8 'To the use of making the tower', NRO, NCC, 9 Heydon.
- 9 'To the tower of the church', SROB, Baldwyne 271: Richard Wareyn, 4 Mar. 1459/60.
'To the tower of the church 6s 8d', SROB, Baldwyne 322: John Brygth, 4 June 1462.
'To the tower of Melford church 40d', SROB, Baldwyne 319: Thomas Brokhole, 1 Dec. 1463.
- 10 Buried in the churchyard 'nere by the Newe vestry that I did make', PCC, PROB 11, 34 Fetiplace: Geoffrey Foote, 27 Nov 1507. I am grateful to Liz Wigmore for confirming this information.

- 11 The Clopton tomb looks horribly modern. It is thickly coated with plaster and all the detailing of poor quality. The main suggestion that it does represent something medieval is that holy water stoop on its western sloping angle, servicing the nearby exterior door. This would have been the quick entry into the church from the Cloptons' residence. The tomb fits snugly into the window jamb, the canted end tucking it out of the way of the entry to the second Clopton chapel. William Clopton's tomb was certainly made for its present position or one exactly like it. The eastern finial has no angle block for a splayed end, and no provision for cresting found on all other sides of the tomb. Further, the finial top is part of the same block that turns due east and is set into the wall. The only notable design detail of the tomb is the split-cusped quatrefoils in panels behind the figure that closely match those over the inner west door of the Lady chapel. They are of 1496. Is this also the date of the tomb?
- 12 For John Melford see Oswald 1984, 99, and Woodman 1986, 150–51.
- 13 Repeatedly in many public lectures and see n. 16 below.
- 14 See Pevsner 1961, 344.
- 15 See Pevsner 1961, 344.
- 16 For Saffron Walden see Woodman 1986, 134, and Woodman 1978(a), 52–62.
- 17 For St. Peter Mancroft see Woodman 1995.
- 18 For Great St Mary's see Woodman 1978(b); and Woodman, 1978(a), 170–80.
- 19 I see I am not alone in thinking that Long Melford once had at least a transept. Clive Paine made a similar suggestion in a paper of 2000. He noted that the bay lengths at the eastern end of the nave varied by 'about a foot' but went no further in his remarks. Here I am suggesting a previous full crossing with a tower intended to be removed from the late fourteenth century. See Paine 2000, 23–30. The will of Theodore of Colonia (d. 1371) (see n. 7) makes reference to 'to making of the chancel'. Was this already part of a late-fourteenth-century plan to remove the tower and rebuild the chancel? That after all would be his responsibility as rector.
- 20 I am grateful to Liz Wigmore for tracking down this drawing for me.

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Abbreviations

NCC	Norwich Consistory Court
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
PCC	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
SROB	Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds
TNA	The National Archives (Public Record Office)