# THE WALL PAINTINGS OF LITTLE WENHAM CHURCH, SUFFOLK

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## INTRODUCTION

THE WALL PAINTINGS in the chancel of Little Wenham church (Fig. 65), near Ipswich, formerly dedicated to All Saints and now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust, are amongst the finest of their type and date of any English parish church.[1] Few publications convey any sense of their beauty and artistic flair. The church dates from the second half of the thirteenth century, the simple Y-shaped lateral, and geometric east windows being consistent with a date before *c*.1290. The east wall of the chancel (Fig. 66), our main concern, is decorated with a Virgin and Child and censing angels beneath an elaborate canopy to the

FIG. 65 – Little Wenham, Suffolk, parish church from south east (*photo: Paul Binski*).

FIG. 66 – Little Wenham, parish church interior looking east (*photo: Julian Sale*).

FIG. 67 – Little Wenham, parish church, St Christopher, nave north wall (*photo: Paul Binski*).

north of the high altar: to its south are three virgin saints, St Margaret of Antioch, St Catherine of Alexandria and St Mary Magdalen, posed within a no less elaborate, but rather different structure. The figures are all painted with great verve and rhythm. The north nave wall opposite the south porch retains the torso of a large image of St Christopher with the Christ Child (Fig. 67), and the north and west walls show traces of two consecration crosses. The decoration may originally have been more elaborate and it was certainly technically coherent. The St Christopher was executed by the same team as the chancel paintings. The chancel space is separated from the nave by an original stone screen, formerly with open trefoil-cusped arcading above: the retable-like rectangular moulded panels on the west faces of the screen which mark the position of nave altars retain, on the south, traces of the distinctive turquoise blue pigment also found on the chancel wall. This, at least, raises the possibility that the church was decorated in one go, by one team, not long after its completion.

The church is usually and rightly considered together with Little Wenham Hall to its south (Fig. 68), an important domestic structure raised at some point between the 1270s and 1290s, in the same period as the church itself.[2] This paper will also argue for the decisive role of the tenants of the hall in the church's decoration.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss more fully the imagery and style of the paintings in order to advance some theories as to when they were done, for whom, and by whom. Questions of this type are usually too demanding for medieval parish church wall paintings, but the evidence at Little Wenham is such as to justify a little more ambition. Here, it will be proposed that the paintings were executed after 1294–95, that they were made for the Holbroke residents of the hall, and that the artists were professionally associated with the court in Westminster. First, we begin with the content of the paintings.

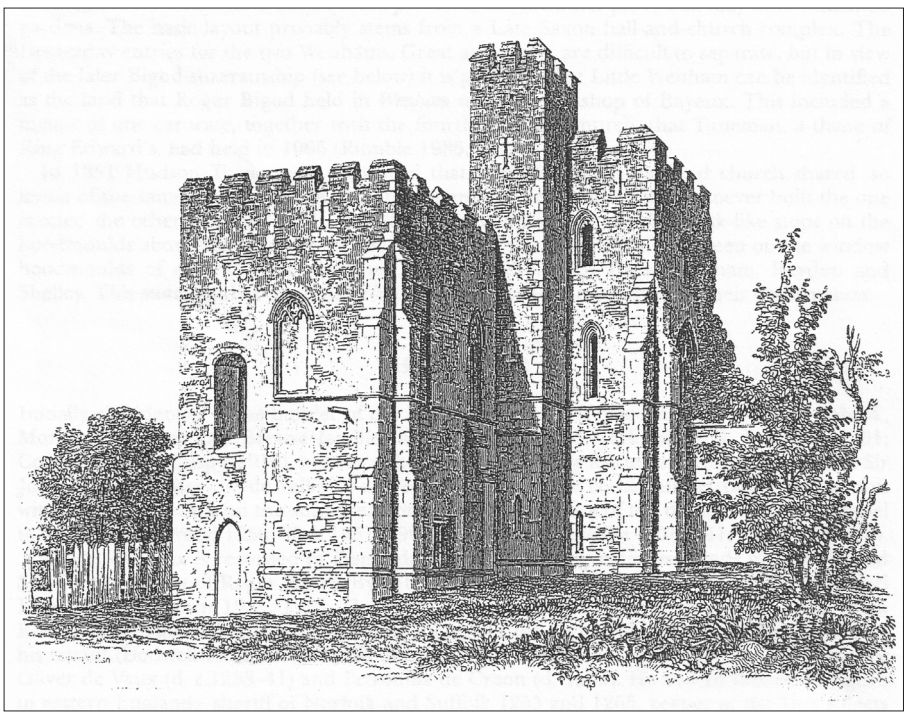

FIG. 68 – Little Wenham Hall, after Turner 1851.

## THE CHANCEL IMAGERY

The chancel measures 6.3m wide at the chancel steps, and 9.5m high to the crown of the roof. The images on the east wall are located above the east wall string course. The Virgin and Child and canopy (Fig. 69) measures 1.7m wide and 2.6m high, the virgin saints (Fig. 75) are 1.8m wide rising to a total height of about 3.5m. To the south of the high altar were stone sedilia, now lost, and nothing is known about the glass in the windows. The technique of the murals is a standard secco technique on a lime plaster ground, using a striking synthetic copper turquoise blue with light tan browns. According to Helen Howard, this blue may not be the original colour so much as a result of later degradation of a darker blue copper ammonia lime compound, originally closer to costly ultramarine in effect.[3] Similar colours are found in the stylistically related chancel wall paintings at Brent Eleigh in Suffolk.[4] This blue was clearly important at Little Wenham because, unusually, it is used not just for garments, but also for haloes, architectural features and crockets, where we might have expected gold. Much the most distinctive pigment alteration at Little Wenham was that of the flesh tones, originally using white lead which has blackened to form lead dioxide.[5] This now has the effect of picking out, and in some ways enhancing, the carefully posed head and hands, but this was clearly not the intention. Originally, as with Gothic painting and illumination since the mid-thirteenth century, the aim was to present flesh tones in a bright clear lead white, especially for female figures (Fig. 74). The white flesh tones would have been warmed by the richly convoluted light brown hair. Models for this type of hair in England lie in works made for the court at the end of the reign of Henry III (d.1272), such as the Westminster Retable and the Douce Apocalypse.[6] Thus, the construction of the curls on the censing angel to the Virgin's right is essentially similar to that of the Apostle holding the loaves in the Feeding of the Five Thousand medallion on the Westminster Retable. Analogies to the convolutions and light brown hue of the hair may also be found in north-eastern French or Netherlandish illumination of the last three decades of the century, such as the so-called prayer book of Madame Marie.[7]

Some diocesan regulations of the period stipulated the presence of an image of the Virgin Mary in every church.[8] As at Brent Eleigh, where she was represented by a now lost carved image censed by two painted angels, the Virgin is to the north, the altar's right (Fig. 69).[9] Nothing is known about the high altar retable at Little Wenham, but the likelihood is that it, or the middle bay of the three-light east window, contained a Crucifixion, as at Brent Eleigh. The Virgin Mary is seated on a throne holding a sprouting *virga* in her right hand, while sustaining the Christ Child with her left; he is chucking her chin and stroking her breast. As can be seen from an enhanced and digitally modified image, the Virgin's lips curve into a sweet smile (Figs 70 and 71), as do those of Mary Magdalen opposite.[10] They sit beneath the wider central bay of a gabled and cusped canopy with large vine-leaf crockets, used throughout this composition and an allusion to the wine of the Mass. To either side, beneath the outer side gables, stand two large censing angels (Fig. 72). Though the thuribles are not visible, the composition resembles that in the psalter now BL, MS Add. 28681 (fol. 190v) and probably originating in the London area around 1260 (Fig. 73).[11] In MS Add. 28681 the figures are also surmounted by a fine gilded cinquefoil arch with townscape above. Censing and candle-bearing angels occur in the most magnificently illuminated image of the Virgin and Child in this period, that on fol. 131v of the Psalter of Robert de Lisle (Fig. 74), which also shows the Virgin holding a *virga* in her right hand, seated beneath a gabled cinquefoiled and subcusped arch sustained by outer image-buttresses.[12] Like Little Wenham, its gable has large, in this case doubled, vine-leaf crockets with grapes, also with eucharistic reference: censing angels float down from the top while angelic acolytes fill the upper compartments of the buttresses while

FIG. 69 – Little Wenham, Virgin and Child with censing angels (*photo: Julian Sale*).

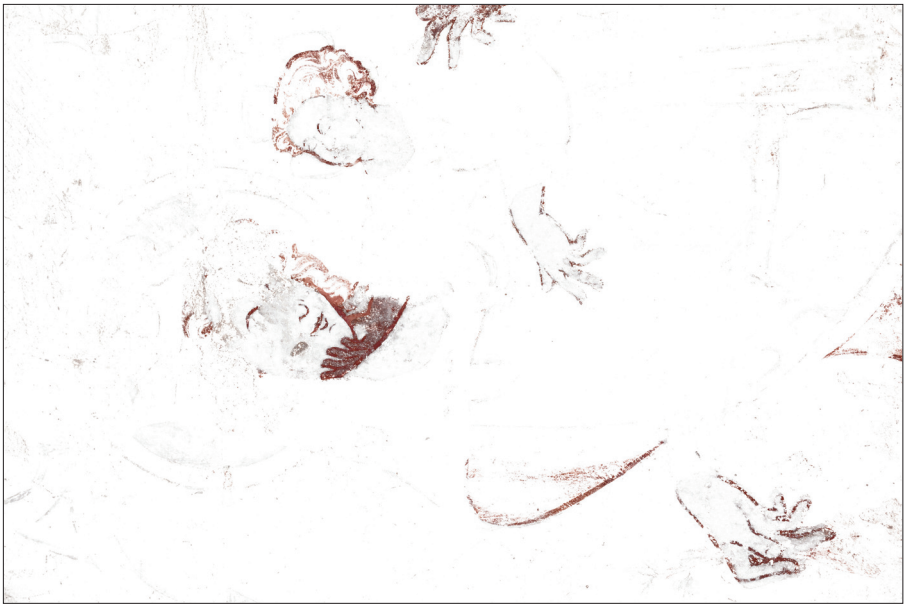

FIG. 71 – Detail of FIG. 69 modified using red/brown index in Adobe Photoshop (*image: Julian Sale*).

FIG. 70 – Detail of FIG. 69 (*photo: Julian Sale*).

St Catherine and St Margaret occupy the lower ones to either side. As in MS Add. 28681 fol. 190v, in allusion to Psalm 91, Mary tramples symbols of evil, in this case both a dragon and a lion. This motif does not appear at Little Wenham. The De Lisle Psalter, executed *c.*1300 or a little later, was made in full knowledge of the latest styles at Westminster, but belongs to the same very general body of London work as MS 28681 and the fine canopied drawings of *c.*1246–64 in the Black Book of the Exchequer, for example fol. 10.[13]

The Virgin and Child at Little Wenham are accompanied to the south of the high altar by an even grander architectural composition with three canopies containing saints, specifically

FIG. 72 – Detail of FIG. 69, censing angel (*photo: Julian Sale*).

FIG. 73 – Psalter, BL, Add. MS 28681, Virgin and Child, fol. 190v
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Margaret crowned with her dragon, Catherine crowned with her wheel, and Mary Magdalen with her vessel of fragrant oil, all standard attributes (Fig. 75). This feminine emphasis is very notable. We will return to this trio presently. As in the Virgin and Child composition, the figures are disposed in graceful if somewhat mannered attitudes, the relatively large hands lending energy to the composition (Fig. 76). The entire east wall can legitimately be read as a single composition showing the Virgin and Child with, before her beyond the altar, a saintly chorus or court of virgin saints. The fundamental idea of showing Mary with a chorus of virgin saints is very ancient, for we encounter it on fol. 1v of the tenth-century Benedictional of St Aethelwold.[14] The term 'court' is not unfitting, but to understand why, we need next to consider in much greater detail the very informative architecture above the Virgin Mary and her 'chorus'.

FIG. 74 – Psalter of Robert de Lisle, BL, Arundel MS 83 (II), Virgin and Child, fol. 131v (*reproduced by kind permission of the British Library © British Library Board*).

## THE TABERNACLES: ARCHITECTURE AS IMAGE

The furnishing of the chancel's east wall with closely observed, but variegated painted tabernacles is an instance of the emergence in Gothic art in this period of painted or sculpted architecture, often consisting of so-called 'microarchitecture', to frame images of all types. One example emerging in exactly this period is the canopied altar reredos, typically found at this date in larger churches.[15] Grandiose painted displays of architecture to frame and dignify standing images were of course known earlier in this region, as in the (repainted) twelfth-century apse decorations of the church at Copford, near Colchester in Essex.[16] English Gothic art laid great stress on architectural variety and at Little Wenham the variations we see act as a subtle signalling system referring to the sometimes hazy boundary between the sacred and the secular. In this period English Gothic architecture was evolving in remarkable, but also

FIG. 75 – Little Wenham, parish church, SS Margaret, Catherine and Mary Magdalen (*photo: Julian Sale*).

FIG. 76 – Detail of FIG. 75.

datable, steps. By examining closely this painted architecture, we are able not only to understand the murals' message, but also to date them with some accuracy.

We turn first to the canopy work over the Virgin and Child and angels (Figs 69 and 77). The structure is in two tiers. The lowest is of three arched and gabled bays sustained by slim shafts with outer square-section buttresses, and prominent vine-leaf crockets. The central bay over the enthroned Virgin is broader with elaborate open cusping, and the outer bays are surmounted by short, crenellated towers. This triple canopy is of a type derived ultimately from mid-thirteenth-century French Gothic portal compositions, such as those on the transepts of Notre-Dame in Paris, via English intermediaries of the 1290s such as the tomb of Edmund, earl of Lancaster (d.1296), in Westminster Abbey.[17] The related, but slightly earlier tomb of Archbishop John Pecham (d.1292) in Canterbury Cathedral has a single canopy, but is flanked by two inhabited buttresses with crenellated tops in the fashion of the outer bays at Little Wenham.[18] Similar inhabited buttress towers, with detailing very close to the Crouchback tomb at Westminster, flank the Virgin and Child in the De Lisle Psalter noted earlier (Fig. 74).[19] That the artist at Little Wenham was familiar with court or 'Kentish' designs of the last decade or two of the century is shown by the pierced trefoil cusping of the central canopy which is of a type associated with works such as the tomb of Bishop John Bradfield (d.1283) in Rochester Cathedral.[20]

There is a super-canopy above, now faint. Close examination of the upper part of the composition is assisted by an observable series of parallel incision marks in its plaster ground, setting out five cusps beneath a broad single gable, also with vine-leaf crockets. Cinquefoil cusping of this type appears in BL, MS 28681 and well into the fourteenth century, as in the Peterborough Psalter in Brussels and the De Lisle Hours.[21] However, the presence of small rings (probably pendant corbels) at the tip of the lowest cusps shows that this super-canopy

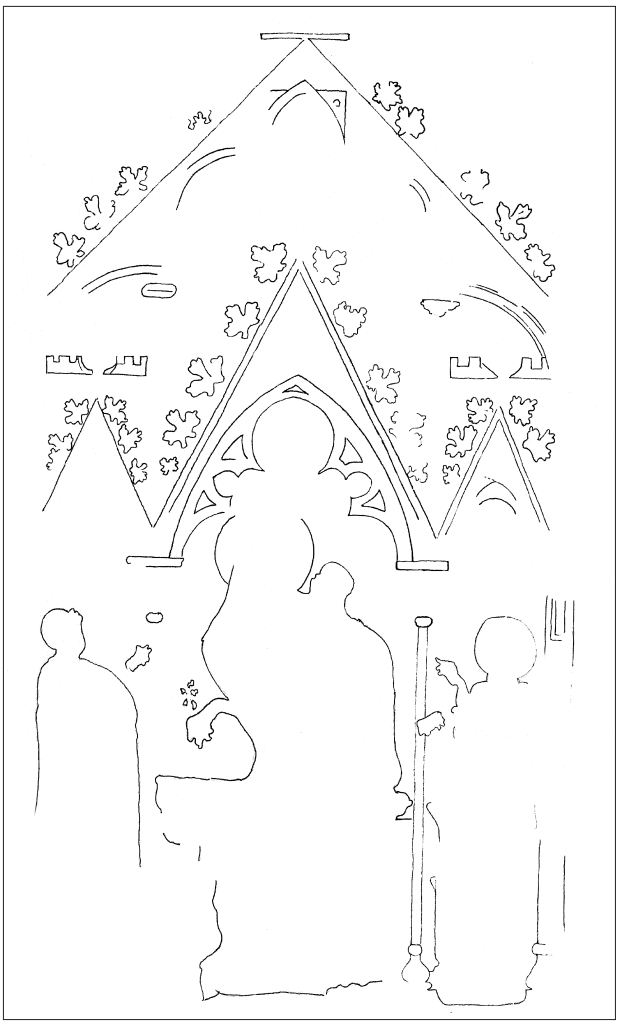

FIG. 77 – Schematic drawing of Virgin and Child (*drawing: Paul Binski*).

was to be envisaged as if it were a forward-canted structure of two lateral half-arches sustaining a projecting trefoil arch, of the sort developed early in the thirteenth century on the west facade of Wells Cathedral. In the light of the south-eastern English and courtly dimension of this detailing, it is striking that a version of such a forward-canted trefoil canopy with gable and foliage pendants is found over the prior's throne in the chapter house of Canterbury Cathedral, certainly complete by 1304 and possibly underway a decade or more earlier (Fig. 78).[22] The only elements missing from this bold and ornate double canopy are ogee arches, known in actual architecture in the 1290s, but common in depicted architecture only from 1300–10. This absence is of some interest and is true of all the paintings.

The analogies to the Virgin's canopy date to the late thirteenth century and come from the south-east of England. The second canopy, over the three virgin saints, is richer still (Figs 75, 79 and 80). Both are triple-gabled compositions, and both have elaborate but dissimilar superstructures, with different design sources. This second canopy is better preserved. It consists of a trio of arched, gabled and buttressed niches with a show of pinnacles, the gables being lavishly crocketed with sprays of foliage in their tympana. These niches front and overlap a two-storied basilican superstructure consisting of a lower roofed aisle with lancet windows, and an upper vessel, viewed transversely. The upper stage has a series of five, originally probably six, two-light gabled and crocketed dormer windows with hood moulds, and is topped with metal cresting. Rising through the centre of this structure above the middle canopy is a narrow crenellated tower supporting a tall slim crocketed spire with two lateral pinnacles with spirelets and ball finials. The ultimate sources are the same as those for the Virgin and Child canopy, namely French Gothic portal compositions such as the transepts of Notre-Dame or the recorded west front of Saint-Nicaise in Reims, in which arched and gabled portal structures jab upwards and slide in front of the horizontal articulations of loftier rear structures. By 1260–70 these compositions were informing illuminated page layouts, such as

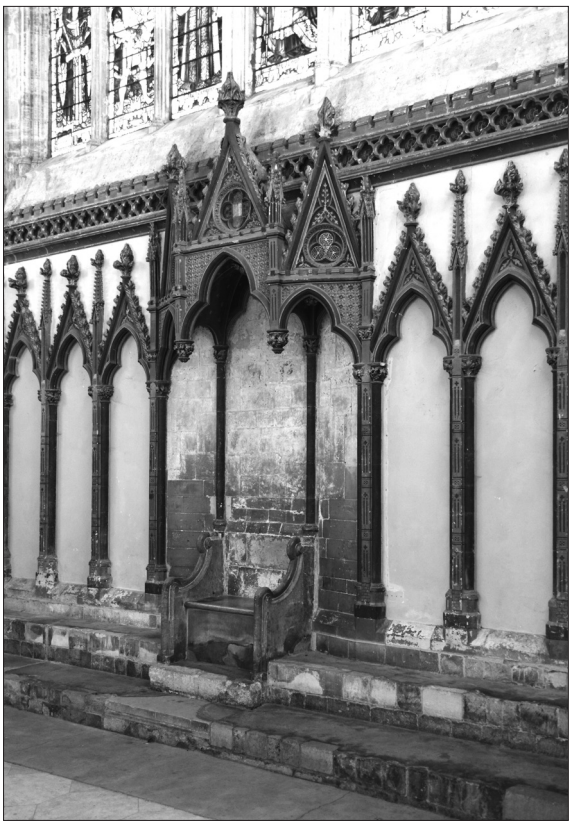

FIG. 78 – Canterbury Cathedral Chapter House, Prior's throne and arcading (*photo: Paul Binski*).

those in the St Louis Psalter, and also metalwork microarchitecture, such as the Sainte-Chapelle reliquary of three saints.[23] In churches of the period 1260–1300, including Saint-Urbain in Troyes, Amiens Cathedral, Cologne Cathedral and York Minster, gables are used over clearstory or aisle windows in accordance with this taste. The format is one recognizable on many of the finest later thirteenth- and fourteenth-century tombs in France and England. Bearing in mind that Little Wenham was within a diocese whose cathedral, Norwich, possessed a spire of some form at this date, and near a neighbouring diocese, London, whose cathedral had a spectacular spire, the choice of a spire is not surprising. It resembles the drawing of St Paul's spire in the *Annales Paulini* for the year 1314, with the same zigzag finish and lateral pinnacles.[24]

However, it is by no means clear that the referents of this very elaborate structure were solely sacred. The dormers of the top stage are not those of a conventional Gothic great church clerestory, but are more appropriate to a secular building. Gabled windows occurred on thirteenth-century English great halls, such as those at Canterbury and Winchester.[25] The late thirteenth-century hall at Stokesay Castle has gabled windows and French domestic instances with crocketed gables existed at Beauvais.[26] The hood moulds are of a similar type to those of Little Wenham Hall itself (Fig. 68). The form of this building, obviously in part a product of the painters' inventive imagination, is not one known literally in England at this date, but its generic likeness to the civic and mercantile halls burgeoning in this period in the Low Countries, such as Floris V's *aula* in The Hague by 1295, and the Ypres Cloth Hall of the period 1260–1304, is notable.[27] This *aula* type was adopted by the mendicant orders in the Low Countries. Whether or not it was a type also found in London or other commercial towns in England at this date is unknown, but the fact that such structures were often brick built may be of relevance, given Little Wenham Hall's main claim to fame as one of the earliest brick domestic structures in England. It has been suggested that this arose because of the Suffolk coast's proximity to the Low Countries, the Ipswich trading community developing links which Roger de Holbroke, a candidate for the construction of the hall, may well have cultivated.[28] The 'imaginary' of this building, with its cresting and excrescences, is thus complex because as a generalized image it connotes simultaneously not only a non-English building type, but also an *aula*, *mansio* or *palatium* — terms whose semantic range covered both the secular and the sacred — rather than a sacral *tabernaculum* of the sort over the Virgin and Child of a type only appropriate to a church.[29] A contemporary

FIG. 79 – Detail of FIG. 75 showing canopies (*photo: Julian Sale*).

English vernacular term for these housings would be *wones* [abodes]. Exactly the same use of forms, both sacred and secular, is made in the great St Louis Psalter itself, in which the stories of the Old Testament are acted out over many folios beneath a standardized hybrid structure, part church, part hall.[30] The Little Wenham building is arguably a palace or court appropriate to the chorus of saints accompanying the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven. The portal-like trio of gables might further justify a reading of this structure as an entire city, following the New Jerusalem with three gates on each side in Revelation 21. This would be the spiritual sense of this structure; the many mansions (*mansiones multae*) of God's house (*domus*) (John 14:2).

## THE TABERNACLES: ARCHITECTURE AS EVIDENCE OF DATE

The canopy over SS Margaret, Catherine and Mary Magdalen is the most complex and richly referential of any of its date in English wall painting, matching in elegance if not similarity of detail the tall, probably stained-glass derived canopy over the kneeling figure of Richard Dod in the former chapel of St Thomas at the north-east end of the parish church at Faversham in Kent.[31] Its triple niche format is, as we have noticed, common on tombs and other portal-derived structures, though it is not of the lean-to type with a central niche and two smaller outer ones of the sort found in the murals formerly in the Painted Chamber at Westminster, Prior Crauden's chapel (*c.*1325) and the Octagon base at Ely (1322–8), and the façade of Butley Priory.[32] Instead, its origin lies, much more specifically, in a group of works implicated in the emergence of the canopied reredos format: the Eleanor Crosses of the 1290s, notably those executed under John of Battle (Hardingstone, Stony Stratford, Woburn, Dunstable and St Albans) of which only one, at Hardingstone (i.e. Northampton), remains.[33]

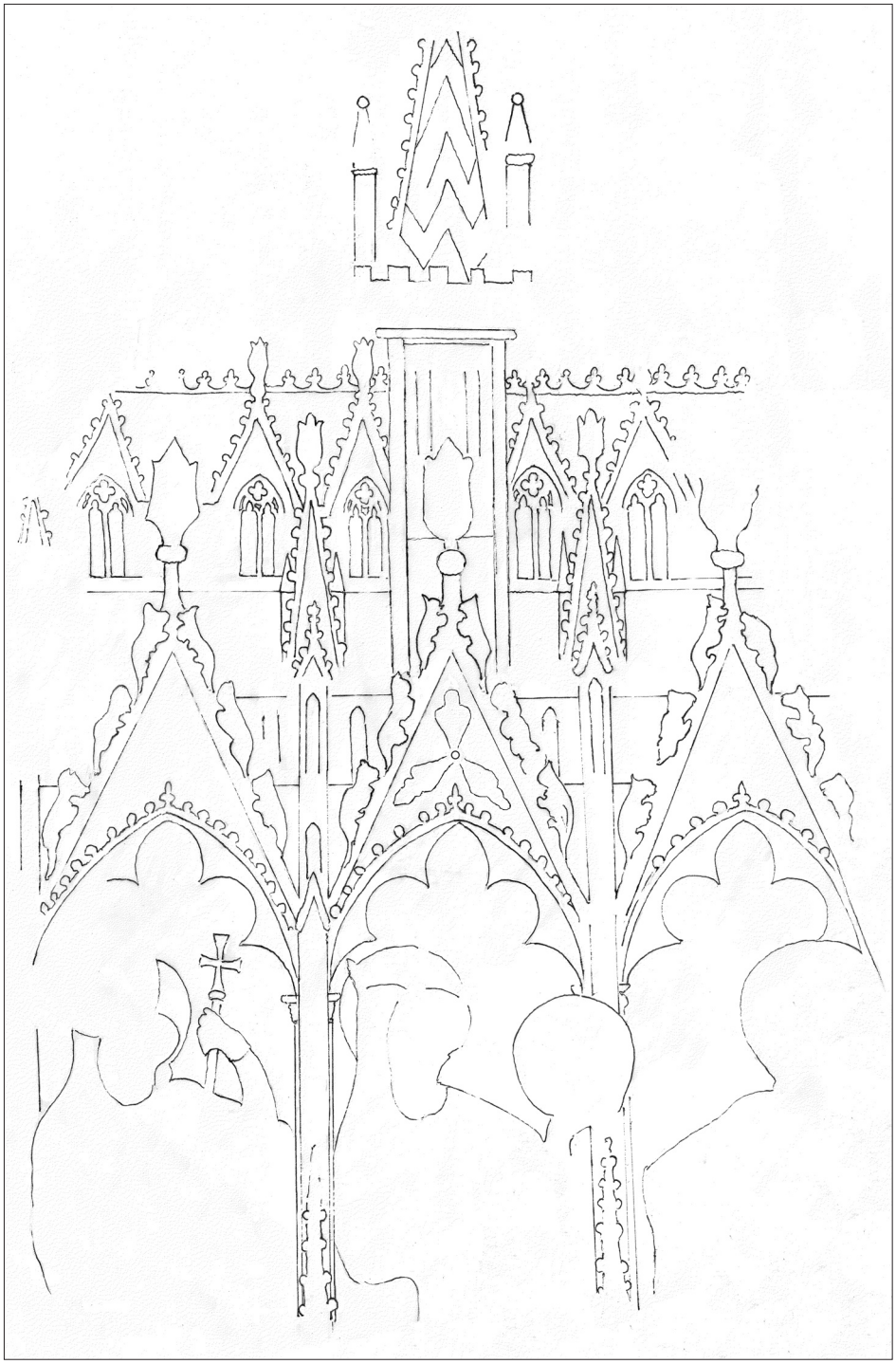

FIG. 80 – Schematic drawing of top part of FIG. 75 (*drawing: Paul Binski*).

FIG. 81 – Hardingstone Eleanor Cross, top stages (*photo: Paul Binski*).

The Little Wenham canopy is in fact a compositional and motivic derivation of the Hardingstone Cross and the French sources which informed it. Like the other crosses, Hardingstone has a polygonal base and an eye-catching middle tier of ornate canopies inhabited by statues of Queen Eleanor of Castile (d.November 1290), with a polygonal cross-shaft rising from it via a third stage with traceried and gabled surfaces (Fig. 81). The key elements for comparison are the top two tiers which, despite restoration, retain sufficient original detailing to offer a yardstick of comparison. The niches of the second tier are arranged on a cross plan in order to house four figures of Eleanor, three of which may be seen at any one time, the central one from the front, the side ones laterally. The housings consist of cinquefoil-cusped and gabled arches, the arches as well as the gables having crockets in keeping with the wall arcading of the Lady Chapel of Saint Germain des Près and the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris.[34] Following the example of the buttressing at the Sainte-Chapelle and its relatives, we note that the Hardingstone buttresses do not taper in stages, but instead have regularly placed weatherings.[35] The Little Wenham buttresses, though divided by single set-offs and crocketed gablets, also do not taper. Their three inhabited niches are essentially an unfolded version of the cruciform plan of the middle tier and third tier of the Hardingstone Cross. Accordingly, just as each image of the queen is posed deliberately with reference to its constraints, so too are the Little Wenham figures. The painting picks up one absolutely distinctive motif at Hardingstone, namely the radiating triple blades of foliage in the central gable. Also, the finials over the three gables and on the intervening buttress pinnacles are not unfurled, but are bunched up to create the same enclosed profile as those on the gables and rear spires of Hardingstone's ornate second stage. Little Wenham omits Hardingstone's thick-set crocketed spires above and behind the niche gables, but the gable finials pass up in front of the window zone of the upper stage in the same way that at Hardingstone the spires overlap the blind traceried third zone. Cresting appears at the base and over the top of this third tier of the cross. Finally, the two minor lateral pinnacles with finials to either side of the spire base at Little Wenham correspond to the minor pinnacles capping the outer buttresses of the third stage of the cross.

These specific coincidences suggest strongly that whoever designed the paintings was familiar directly or indirectly with the Hardingstone Cross or a structure very like it, and that they recognized in the Eleanor Crosses a series of practical stimuli for the innovative and stylish presentation of quasi-statuary in painted form. The indications are that this artist was familiar with the latest south-eastern English and Kentish fashions, not least at Westminster where ultimately Parisian motifs continued to be displayed in the latest commissions, as in the king's chamber of Edward I in the Palace of Westminster, decorated between 1292 and 1297 with a similar repertory of Rayonnant microarchitectural detailing.[36]

The connection to the Hardingstone Cross has firm date implications. The Hardingstone Cross seems to have acted as a node midway between the eight crosses commissioned to the south and east towards and in London, and the four crosses to the north leading to Lincoln. Organizationally, it allowed signals to pass to it from London and thence to Lincoln, and vice versa, acting as a communication exchange. The cross was erected between Michaelmas 1291 and Lent 1294.[37] Any derivative of it would thus reasonably be placed after 1294. This therefore yields a *terminus post quem* of 1294–95 for the start of the chancel murals given that the absolute chronology of the building of the church is unknown. Together, the two canopies in the chancel report very fairly on microarchitecture in and around the court in the mid-1290s, and given that their figure style is not inconsistent with a date around 1300 and that the structures lack conspicuous ogees — only discreet ones are apparent on the Hardingstone Cross — there is no *prima facie* need to date them much later.

In sum, the significance of the chancel wall images is, first, that they use very finely executed

architecture to create an early version of the canopied reredos, the purpose of which in this case was to enliven the idea of the Virgin and Child as an iconic sacral and regal presence accompanied by a fashionable 'court' of saints, a chorus of virgins housed in a quasi-palatial building perhaps understandable as the Heavenly Jerusalem. The underlying idea was very old: that its expression should by 1300 have become architectural is a measure of the importance of architecture to signal sacrality, secularity and status. This architecture, secondly, helps us to identify the underlying experiences of the artist(s) involved, and sets a firm date for their work throughout the church of not earlier than 1295 or so. Does this tally with the circumstances of patronage at Little Wenham at this time?

## AGENCY: PATRONS AND PAINTERS

Though no sculpture was involved in the commission, as at Brent Eleigh, fashionable excellence was clearly a factor in the art of the privileged space of Little Wenham's chancel. This points to the nearest likely origin of their patronage, the residents of the recently constructed Little Wenham Hall. Lay involvement in the provision of such 'ornaments' would be consistent with the intention of much diocesan legislation concerning church patronage at this time.[38]

According to Edward Martin, Little Wenham Hall was more probably built by one of its resident tenants rather than the non-resident overlords. In the relevant period, the final three decades of so of the thirteenth century, the most likely of these was Roger de Holbroke, who acquired Wenham in 1270–71, and who is frequently styled 'Magister', suggesting a degree holder, churchman or higher civil servant.[39] He may have been the brother of Sir Richard de Holbroke, king's steward in several eastern counties before 1292. In 1294–95, according to Martin, Roger de Holbroke settled Wenham on a relative, Sir John de Holbroke, whose wife was called Petronilla; at the same time John also obtained the advowson of the church.[40] This may in fact have been a resettlement by John and Petronilla on themselves via the trustees Robert de Reymes and Matthew de Holbroke.[41] John and Petronilla in turn alienated Wenham to Robert de Reymes in 1307–8, and John appears to have died in 1309.[42]

The period of Holbroke ascendancy at Little Wenham, 1270–71 to about 1309, comfortably embraces the likely construction periods both of the hall and the church with its decorations.[43] The possibility that more than one owner of the hall, or their family, had royal connections is clearly relevant to our enquiry, especially so given that the settlement or resettlement period of John de Holbroke, starting in 1294–95, coincides with the 1294–95 *terminus post quem* for the chancel murals established earlier.

This raises the possibility that the murals were commissioned by John and Petronilla de Holbroke after 1294–95, but before about 1309, the year of John's death. These patrons may well have found a newly built consecrated, but undecorated, church and addressed this by having the building painted throughout by a single team of artists. The choice of entirely female saints for the chancel murals — setting aside the issue of the content of the east window's glazing — might indicate the devotional preferences of a female patron such as Petronilla, herself named after an Early Christian virgin martyr.[44] Though she was still lady of the manor of Little Wenham in 1316, and may have been dead only by the early 1320s, the likelihood practically and stylistically is that the paintings were done earlier in her tenure, with John before his death in 1309.[45] The painting would fall into a more widely observable pattern in which court innovations, especially at Westminster in the 1290s, were circulating rapidly amongst the provincial aristocracy within no more than a decade.

This is nevertheless an assumption, but it can be justified by one other neglected datum which supports the idea of Holbroke patronage at Little Wenham church, the selection of SS

FIG. 82 – Psalter, BL, Egerton MS 1066, fol. 10v (*reproduced by kind permission of the British Library © British Library Board*).

Margaret, Catherine and Mary Magdalen opposite the Virgin Mary. While this trio is occasionally found in English art of the period, as in the east window of Exeter Cathedral, it is also found in BL, Egerton MS 1066, an illuminated psalter dated by Nigel Morgan to 1270–90 for use in the diocese of Norwich. At the start of the psalter, Egerton MS 1066 has an image at fol. 10v of SS Catherine, Mary Magdalen and Margaret lined up under trefoil canopies with townscapes, together with the stoning of St Stephen below (Fig. 82). This is of interest in the light of the psalter's calendar which contains fourteenth-century obits for John de Holbroke, 1309 (13 Feb., fol. 3v), John, son of John de Holbroke senior (fol. 5), and Petronilla de Holbroke (7 July, fol. 6).[46] Opposite the saints on fol. 10v is the opening of Psalm 1 with King David and the Annunciation (following Luke 1:32). Strikingly, an offset image on the present fol. 9v of Egerton MS 1066 shows that the original intervening folio prior to fol. 10, now lost, depicted on its recto an enthroned Virgin and Child beneath a trefoil canopy, with a kneeling female donor.[47] This lost image of the Virgin and Child with donor therefore prefaced the depiction of SS Catherine, Mary Magdalen and Margaret, so standing in the same relationship as the images on the chancel wall of Little Wenham. It may follow that the Holbrokes in question were indeed the John and Petronilla of Little Wenham. At the very least, the use of this book by the Holbrokes certainly points to a devotional interest on the part of this family in this sequence of saints. Were the Holbrokes shown as donors in the chancel's east window?

This proposal provides some context, finally, for considering who might have done the murals, if executed in the period 1294–95 to *c.*1309. Normally, such questions are unanswerable in regard to parish church wall painting. As we have seen, however, the data provided by the chancel murals points to an artist of exceptional ability, closely familiar with a range of models of London or court origin. Such an artist might have been recruited directly from this sector via Holbroke court contacts. It is also worth noting that documentation of painting in the Palace of Westminster in exactly these years suggests another alternative, namely that there were suitably talented painters, associated both with this region and the court, who might have been involved.

The 1292–96 exchequer accounts for work on the murals in the king's chamber and other

rooms in the Palace of Westminster offer one possibility.[48] The accounts, which document a protracted campaign of work in the years 1292–97 on what was to become known as the Painted Chamber as well as other palace rooms, name over sixty painters from many regions of England, specifying their wages. This campaign ended abruptly in 1297 with the onset of war, and probably led to a diaspora of the artists involved from Westminster. One painter in the accounts is of interest to us. A rotulet for April 1295 records that Ricardo de Remdon' was paid 3s 4d for five days' work: this artist is probably the same as the Ricardo de Reyndon' noted in an account for January 1296 as being paid 15s 6d for twenty-six days' work, about 6d per day, or half the 1s a day rate for the master painter, Walter of Durham.[49] The names Remdon and Reyndon designate three likely alternatives: Reydon or Raydon in Suffolk, or Roydon further to the west in Essex near Harlow [all Latin: *Reinduna*]. There are also two Roydons in Norfolk, near Diss and King's Lynn. But the options are narrowed significantly by the occurrence in the rolls of a painter called Ricardo de Essex also working in the period 1294–95, whose wage rates correspond closely with those of Ricardo de Remdon/Reyndon, with the proviso that on weeks where he certainly worked for the whole week (*per septimanam*) he was paid 7s, or 1s a day, the same rate as the master.[50] He was thus one of the highest-paid painters at work in the palace. To have one painter in the same period called Richard with toponymics that point to the same region, consistently paid high rates, and not occurring side by side with his nominal alternatives, suggests that this was in fact one man, and that he was connected not with Norfolk, but with the Essex-Suffolk region, perhaps either Roydon in Essex, or the Raydon immediately to the west of Little Wenham itself, not far from the Essex border.

From this we can be reasonably certain that in the period in question there were painters of the necessary training and quality connected with this region, and perhaps known to the local aristocracy. It may also be worth noting that earlier, in 1292, this workshop had included a Roger de Ybernia [*Hibernia*: Ireland] who may have been related to the sculptor William of Ireland noted in the accounts for the Lincoln and Hardingstone Eleanor Crosses between 1292 and 1294.[51] Though Roger's period of service at Westminster seems not to have overlapped with Richard of Essex, workshop associations are the sort of thing that could account for the connections we have noted between the chancel paintings and the Hardingstone Cross in particular. This is not to say that the Little Wenham murals were provably executed by Richard of Essex; the issue is assessing what type of painter might have brought such fine art to such a modest church, and with whom he in turn might have been linked.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has in part been to highlight the extraordinary quality and thoughtfulness of the murals in Little Wenham church as well as their connectedness to the wider culture of English medieval art. In pursuing in detail questions of meaning, detailing and agency, I have attempted to introduce a rather finer granularity into discussion of parish church wall painting than is normally possible, while questioning the idea that parish church art is necessarily of a second-order creative status. The main points of this paper have been, firstly, that the chancel paintings indicate a high level of discrimination about the meaning and handling of architecture as an artistic signalling system capable of enriching the spiritual significance of the *wone* or habitation; secondly, that the artist(s) involved had an equally high level of communication with south-eastern English and courtly artistic activity during the last two decades of the reign of Edward I, and specifically with the project of Eleanor Crosses, the murals being possibly the first provincial reception of the Hardingstone Cross in particular; and, thirdly, that if so, this indicates a date after 1294–95 for the murals, under the tutelage

at Little Wenham of John and Petronilla de Holbroke, and the possible involvement of painters actually employed by the court. Together, the hall and parish church set out structurally the same relation of sacred zone and court as that apparent in the murals to either side of the church's east window.

Visitors to Little Wenham church may recall that many years ago a small information sheet in the church cited the opinion of Francis Wormald, a major expert on English medieval art, to the effect that the murals were products of the English court school.[52] Whatever we make of the term 'court school', Wormald, I suggest, was basically right.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTES

1 The paintings were found shortly before 1878, Lermit 1878, 183–4, also noting that fragments of the sedilia in the south wall still survived. For further references, see Keyser 1883, 268; Tristram 1955, 262; Alexander and Binski 1987, 128 and fig. 97 (by David Park); Park 1996, 399; Binski 2014, 157–9, of which the present paper is an expansion.
2 Martin 1998; Goodall 2011, 232, pl. 173, suggests building dates of *c.*1279–1294/5.
3 Howard 2003, 53–6, figs 73–5.
4 Howard 2003, 56, 168.
5 Howard 2003, 184.
6 Westminster Retable: see Binski and Massing 2009; Klein 1983; Douce Apocalypse: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 180.
7 Stones 1997; Prayer book of Madame Marie: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 16251.
8 The earliest instance is the Exeter statutes of 1287, discussed Binski 2004, 157.
9 Binski 1995b, 54 and pl. 44.
10 Fig. 71 was taken by Julian Sale with a Canon 5dsr and 24mm f1.4L at f10, 1/8th sec, ISO 200. Raw conversion to JPG was performed using DXO Photolab 4. The JPG was transferred to Adobe Photoshop and the outline of the Virgin and Child isolated using the 'Select color range' eyedropper with 'Fuzziness' set to 85, indexing on the red/brown of the Virgin's hair to the right side of the face.
11 Morgan 1988, no. 114 and fig. 86.
12 Sandler 1983; Psalter of Robert de Lisle: BL, MS Arundel 83 (ii).
13 Morgan 1982, no. 83 and fig. 278; Black Book of the Exchequer: TNA, MS (E36) 266.
14 Wormald 1959, pl. 1; Benedictional of St Aethelwold: BL, MS Add. 49598.
15 The best introduction is Wilson 1980.
16 Demus 1978, 508.
17 Binski 1995, 115–19, fig. 157.
18 Wilson 1995, 459–64, pl. 92.
19 Binski 1995, 173–4, figs 226, 229.
20 Bony 1979, pl. 152. The bulbous flask-shaped bases of the colonettes are perhaps variants of the bell base which entered England from France in the thirteenth century.
21 Sandler 1974, figs 17, 18; Sandler 196, no. 77, fig. 194.
22 Woodman 1981, 142–5.
23 Park and Howard 1996, 399; for the St Louis Psalter, Stahl 2008; for the Sainte-Chapelle reliquary of saints, Taburet-Delahaye 1989 no. 25; also Binski 2014, 155–7.
24 For the Norwich spire dated by Woodman to 1291–97, see Woodman 1996, 192; the St Paul's chronicle is discussed in Keene, Burns and Saint 2004, 135–6, 154, fig. 84.
25 Tatton-Brown 1982, fig. 2; Colvin 1963, vol. 2, 859 and fig. 66.

26 Goodall 2011, 233, pl. 174; for Beauvais, Wood 1981, pl. 1A opposite 192.
27 Coopmans 2007, 187–8, 189, figs 2, 3.
28 Martin 1998, 159, 160.
29 These terms are discussed more fully in Binski 2014, 155–9.
30 Stahl 2008, 83–9.
31 Willement 1858, 150, 152.
32 Whittingham 1980, 286.
33 Colvin 1963, vol. 1, 479–85.
34 Branner 1965, figs 69, 73.
35 Branner 1965, fig. 64.
36 Binski 1986 and 2021.
37 The relevant accounts are published in Turner 1841, between 100 (1291) and 138 (1294).
38 Binski 2004, 174–7.
39 Martin 1998, 159; Rye 1900, 72.
40 Kirk 1928, 51 for John de Holbroke and 'Parnell' his wife in 1285–86; Rye 1900, 99 for 1294–95.
41 Here I follow with gratitude a suggestion by an anonymous reader of this paper following TNA, CP 25/1/216/49.
42 Rye 1900, 114, and see note 46 below.
43 Martin 1998, 160.
44 Martin 1998, 154.
45 Maskelyne 1908, 37; Sharp 1910, 275 no. 461 (1324).
46 Morgan 1988, no. 182: fol. 3v *Obitus domini Johannis de Holebrok militis Anno domini Millesimo trecentesimo nono* (not 1400 as stated by Morgan); *Obitus Johannis filii Johannis de Holebrok senioris* (fol. 5); *Obitus dominae Petronillae de Holbrock* (fol. 6). The obit of Sir John de Holbroke was added in red in a formal early fourteenth-century bookhand, those of John junior and Petronilla in a different but only slightly later fourteenth-century bookhand. The Psalter's calendar originally includes some saints of East Anglian type (e.g. Felix, 8 March with 9 lections); Winwaloe (3 March) (for Wereham Priory), Withburga (16 March) and the dedication of Norwich Cathedral (24 September) were all added subsequently.
47 Noted by Morgan; the offset on 9v resulted from the lost Virgin and Child on the next folio, only the stub of which remains with the inscription 'cut out when bought F.M.' presumably written by Frank Madden. The verso of this missing folio was probably blank, preceding the blank recto of fol. 10 on the verso of which are the saints. They were therefore probably preceded by a blank opening.
48 The accounts are now published fully with commentary in Binski 2021.
49 Binski 2021, 60–1, rots 142 and 162.
50 Binski 2021, 30 and 51–60, rots 90–3, 106–7, 110–15, 117–18, 141. The 1s per day rate is noted at rots 110, 113–14.
51 For Roger of Ireland, see Binski 2021, 40–2, rots 25, 27, 28, 29; for William at Hardingstone, see Turner 1841, 114, 120,124, 129, 131, 137; Colvin 1963, vol. 1, 484.
52 For his work on Westminster, see Wormald 1949.

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*Abbreviations*

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|---|---|
| BL | British Library |
| TNA | The National Archives |