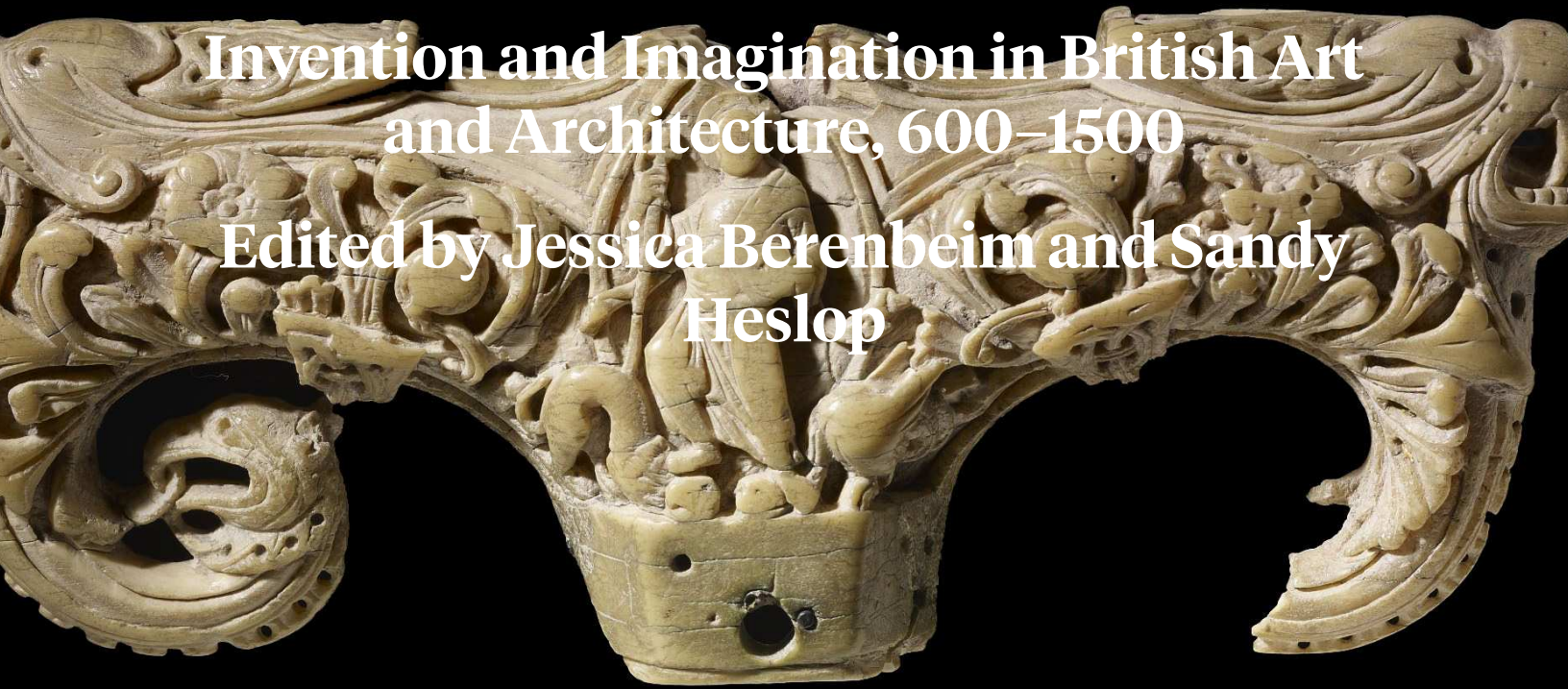


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**Invention and Imagination in British Art
and Architecture, 600–1500**

**Edited by Jessica Berenbeim and Sandy
Heslop**



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Cover image: Unknown maker, Ivory Staff Terminal from Alcester, 11th Century, ivory, 14 x 5 cm. Collection of the British Museum (1903,0323.1).. Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum

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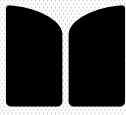
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Inventio Porticus—Imagining Solomon’s Porches in Late Medieval England

Helen Lunnon

Abstract

This paper presents a study of the iconographic relationship between medieval church porches and the porches of King Solomon. In so doing it develops Richard Krautheimer’s work to elucidate the inventive capacity of medieval designers when a prototype is known only through written sources not structural actuality. The paper begins by introducing instances where established architectural modes were adopted for the design of a church porch, for example the cloistral attributes of the porch at Great Massingham (Norfolk). It is then argued that, based on formal study of entrance buildings including porch-towers, gatehouses, and ultimately the remarkable double-depth north porch at St Mary Redcliffe, biblical descriptions of Solomon’s forebuildings presented designers with malleable models which afforded inventive architectural interpretation.

Authors

Dr Helen Lunnon trained as a historian and art historian and holds academic qualifications from the University of Reading (BA Hons, History, 1998), University College London (MA, Museum Studies, 1999) and UEA (MA, Medieval History, 2008, and PhD, Art History, 2012). Helen's research is concerned with the making and reception of art and architecture in medieval England. She is particularly interested in the late medieval understanding of decorum and appropriateness and how such notions influenced the art and architecture made in the period. Helen is Senior Research Associate on the Leverhulme Trust funded project “The Medieval Churches of Norwich: City, Community and Architecture” and a lecturer in the School of Art, Media and American Studies at the University of East Anglia.

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Richard Krautheimer's 1942 article "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture'" remains the defining work on how architectural iconographies were transmitted in the medieval period. By his own admission, Krautheimer's remarks "were not intended to be complete" but "merely to form contributions towards a future iconography of medieval architecture".¹ Responses to Krautheimer's article include papers by Richard Gem and Paul Crossley.² Gem distilled Krautheimer's approach into the identification of two kinds of image—"representations of specific buildings or modes of buildings, and representations of specific geometrical, mathematical or other forms". He extended the application of Krautheimer's method to Anglo-Saxon buildings, whilst maintaining focus on the transfer of selective elements drawn from known prototypes into new settings. This paper continues the conversation begun by Krautheimer, by exploring how those who designed buildings imagined them in the absence of an actual prototype or model. It is concerned with the intellectual malleability of material in the built environment, specifically with the re-cognition of the familiar in a revised or manipulated form. In doing so, it extends Krautheimer's discussion of medieval notions of copying to encompass architectural iconography that was developed using the imagination.

As a case study, this article tests the suggestion that textual references to Solomonic porches inspired architectural invention. My investigation is therefore focused on one type of building—the church porch. Owing to their generally diminutive size and threshold location, outside the main envelope of the building, and not having a distinct function to underpin a single formal remit, porches provided architectural practitioners with opportunities for experimentation and the practical exploration of invention.

Recognizing how and what buildings mean starts with the transfer of an established mode into a new context. Retention of significant content could be achieved by the selective transfer of a few defining architectural motifs, as illustrated in a number of church porches which were designed to convey monumental import.³ The remarkable porch at Temple Church, London, built around 1160, is unique and plausibly owes its specific form to a penitential burial, that of Geoffrey de Mandeville ([fig. 1](#)). Having died excommunicate in 1144, Mandeville's body remained unburied until 1163, when he was posthumously absolved and interred at Temple Church.⁴ The west porch is in effect a suspended canopy before a door, juxtaposing the honorific vault with the humility of burial outside the door. Both references were pertinent to the biography of the founder of Temple Church, a point which has been convincingly argued by David Park.⁵ In this instance the design is drawn from a palette of transferable motifs rather than relying purely on architectural iconographies.



Figure 1.

West porch, Temple Church, *London*. Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.

Fundamental to the success of the architectural metaphor at Temple Church are the three large access points which result in an absence of walling. The structure is suspended over an outside burial space and maintains the significance of the threshold. No architectural model for the Temple porch is known in England, and no English porch can offer a meaningful formal antecedent—it is thus an inventive amalgam. However, the cultural pertinence of burial in western porches can be traced back to Anglo-Saxon behaviours, notably Benedict Biscop at Monkwearmouth, and ultimately to the western entrance of Old St Peter's in Rome, where successive popes were buried in the sixth and seventh centuries.⁶ In such instances, buildings were imbued with modes of reference extracted from known structures in other contexts. The step beyond this is quite a leap further, entailing the replication of a building which could not be known in actuality and had to be imagined from disparate clues.

The most renowned porches in Christian cultural consciousness—and therefore in the Latin West—were those built by King Solomon, as testified in the Old Testament first book of Kings and Ezekiel's vision. These buildings were known to have been destroyed and rebuilt multiple times. Theoderich,

writing in the thirteenth century, encouraged his reader to “consider how many times and by whom the Temple has been built or destroyed.” He also confirmed that the form had altered, saying “King Solomon first built the Temple by divine command at great expense—not in the round as it is today, but oblong.”⁷ Solomon’s porches had the potential to provide models to be imitated, blueprints to be copied. But, in the absence of the original buildings themselves, when looking to incorporate this powerful referent medieval designers had to go beyond the “disintegration of the prototype into its single elements, the selective transfer of these parts, and their reshuffling in the copy”.⁸ This article explores the form and image of a number of porches and related buildings, which suggest that Solomon’s porches provided a melody on which creative minds and capable artists could riff.

As discussed by Krautheimer and others, a well-documented and widely understood medieval architectural design method was the adoption and reapplication of defining components from existing buildings or building types. A case in point is the south porch at St Mary’s, Great Massingham (Norfolk), built around 1280 (fig. 2). The east and west walls, comprising two sets of three openings constructed of shafts resting on a plinth or stylobate, are open, arcade-like screens (fig. 3). This impression of “open-architecture” repeats the magnitude of the entrance arch, the scale of which in relation to the size of the porch facade reduces the amount of solid masonry to its absolute minimum. This design was not a commonplace response to the challenge of building a church porch at that date. The architecture of the Great Massingham porch, with its balance between voids and solids, and the fall of light across different shapes, forms, and surfaces, has sensory fluidity and dynamism. The distinction between within and without is ambiguous. In its conception and the experience it creates this open-arcaded entrance building is arguably more akin to a cloister walk than to other church porches of similar date.



Figure 2.
South porch, St Mary's Church, *Great Massingham*,
Norfolk. Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.



Figure 3.

Eastern elevation, south porch, St Mary's Church, *Great Massingham, Norfolk*. Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.

In plan it measures approximately 4.8 by 4 metres (15ft 10in by 13ft 5in), the entrance arch is 4.8 by 2.2 metres (15ft 10in by 7ft 2in), the internal doorway 2.8 by 1.3 metres (9ft 6in by 4ft 6in), and the sill height of the side openings is 1.2 metres (4ft) from the current internal ground level. So, the height of the arch is equal to the depth of the plan; the width of the plan divided by the square-root of two gives the internal door height; an orderly, systematized scheme is evident in both plan and elevation.⁹ Whilst it is stylistically consistent with the comprehensive building campaign undertaken at the church in the late thirteenth century, Massingham's designer departed from the established template for church entrance buildings. The porch at St Mary's, West Walton (Norfolk), built around 1240 and twenty-five miles south-west of Great Massingham, reinforces how very different thirteenth-century porch architecture in the region could be ([fig. 4](#)). Like the antecedent porches at Barnack, Southwell, Tewkesbury, and Malmesbury, West Walton does not have side openings of any kind. Importantly, however, these examples all have internal wall articulation analogous with blind arcading. Their similarity with West Walton is apparent, so too the distinctiveness of Great Massingham. At Massingham the external environment remains viscerally and visually present within the building, whilst at West Walton (as elsewhere) the porch interior is an enveloped, cocooned space. The only opening is the entrance arch, so large that it renders the facade no more than a framed aperture.



Figure 4.

South porch, St Mary's Church, *West Walton, Norfolk*.
Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.

The building's context might provide a partial explanation. The small house of Augustinian canons at Massingham Priory—founded before 1260 and now lost except for small remains in a residential dwelling—might have encouraged a particular design for the parish porch. The new Gothic cloister designed and built at Norwich Cathedral priory from 1297, following the fire of 1272 has bases of turned shafts emphatically resting on a stylobate and connected above capital height by elongated cusped cinque-foil heads—an arrangement not dissimilar to that in the porch at Massingham.¹⁰ Such stylistic forms are not unusual, nor regionally specific; however, their application as open arcading in the context of a parish church porch is remarkable. The rib-vaulted cloister at Salisbury, built around 1260, is also a pertinent comparator.¹¹ The panelling of the open arcade is replicated (slightly modified) on the opposing wall in blind form. Elsewhere, as at Norwich, the wall has blind arcading but it is not decorated with traceried panelling in the upper sections—the two sides thus differ from each other.

The example of Salisbury introduces a sense of consistency between the two sides of the cloister walk; progress along each walk is visually regularized and modulated. Massingham porch has a similar approach to spatial characterization. The close spacing of the shafts establishes a rhythm for movement and visually extends the sense of journeying to the church door. This is not to suggest that Salisbury directly informed Massingham, but rather that designs circulating amongst masons working at the great churches were being explored for their potential to resolve other architectural challenges.

It seems that designing Massingham porch involved conceiving of an open-sided structure in which the arcading common to porches (for example, at Southwell and Malmesbury) was retained but the blank walling in-fill removed, producing an open arcade along each flank. The interplay between decorative (or blind) and structural (or open) arcading which can be experienced in the round challenges the delineation between the internal and external surface treatments, or doing away with wall planes altogether. At Massingham the framing of the openings corresponds internally and externally; an architectural iconography more often associated with the inner court of a cloister. The porch itself implies how Massingham's designer repurposed an architectural mode with previously cloistral associations. In doing so he challenged accepted norms for this building type, redefining the structure and expanding the architectural and phenomenological parameters within which it could reside. The joy and subtlety of such invention appears to be the reconfiguration of the familiar, the alteration of something well known to present a new object.

A colonnaded walkway set before a parish church door is one way to read the advanced architectural re-cognition devised by the designer of Massingham porch. In this light, the porch would mirror formal qualities prevalent amongst coeval works of high-status, designing masons elsewhere in England. A difficulty with this interpretation, however, is that such modern notions of formal resemblance are anachronistic. As Krautheimer explained, "inexactness in reproducing the particular shape of a definite architectural form, in plan as well as elevation, seems to be one of the outstanding elements in the relation of the copy and original in medieval architecture."¹² Yet, the importance of content resolves this apparent anachronistic difficulty. Wayne Dynes, in a paper exploring the intellectual comparison of the monastic cloister and the Portico of Solomon by medieval witnesses, including Honorius of Autun and William Durandus, commented that "The comparison provides a dignified pedigree for an invention which developed gradually by a natural process in early medieval times in response to functional needs."¹³ Similarly, I suggest, the cloistral mode translated into the vocabulary of church fore-buildings is not an example of copying or imitation, but rather the use of significant content (dignified pedigree) as a

means to think, design, and build. As already mentioned, Solomon's porches were likely to have been key reference points for a medieval designer seeking to compose an entrance structure with intellectual and architectural consequence. That late medieval church porches, whether enclosed or open-sided, echo cloistral forms is perhaps less surprising when contextualized in this way. However, Massingham porch is a challengingly notable structure, suggesting that the person who designed it was rather more than a jobbing mason. Whilst up-to-date, high-end architectural forms and motifs were already within his repertoire, it is possible that the porches built by King Solomon might also have some bearing on what was made at Massingham.

If attention is trained on what this church porch is made of—rather than what it lacks—one element comes to the fore: the shafts or pillars that effectively support the roof and create a screen-like barrier, fence, or railing. They transform the elegantly rhythmic cloistral arcade into an array of stakes thrust into the ground to protect the church's entrance. In Solomonic terms, the key design motif at Massingham might cast the building as *porticum columnarum* ("a porch of pillars": 1 Kings 7:6). I suggest that Great Massingham porch owes its success to the designer's ability to combine and manage architectural characteristics taken from an alternative building type, the adoption of fashionable stylistic elements, and an inflection towards the Old Testament prototype of a celebrated porch.

Around the same date that St Mary's Great Massingham was designed, planned, and built, towers with open-fronted ground-floor stages serving as porches were starting to be constructed over the lateral doors of parish churches. In a manner similar to the "cloistral" or "honorific canopy" mode adopted by porch designers, porch-towers raise questions about how building forms are classified. Perhaps inevitably, given their hybridity, these buildings have to date received little attention or exploration.¹⁴ Combining towers and porches may have come about as a straightforward and pragmatic solution to a particular problem. Locating a tower laterally, rather than axially, allowed for large glazed windows to be set into the west end of the nave, maximizing the amount of direct light coming into the church at the end of the day, and providing opportunities for painted glazing schemes on the axis of the central aisle, chancel arch, and high altar. Known examples of porch-towers coinciding with sizable west windows are at All Saints', Stanhoe, and St Andrew's, Little Cressingham, both in Norfolk, but in many cases the arrangement at the west end of the church has been altered or lost and solid conclusions are difficult to draw.

The compositional elements of porch-towers do not exhibit much consistency, as demonstrated by two late Norfolk examples, St Mary's, Holme-next-the-Sea (built around 1405) and St Andrew's, Wicklewood (built around 1412) (figs 5 and 6).¹⁵ Although constructed within a few years of

each other, the design of these porch-towers is different in manner as well as mode. The powerful, half-drum jambs surmounted by shallow capitals of the Wicklewood porch contrast with the more delicate multi-ordered responds of the entrance at Holme. However, it is not simply that the porch-tower at Holme is the more ambitious, less utilitarian piece of architecture.

Wicklewood's diagonal buttresses are faced with a combination of regularly cut black flint and ashlar set with exquisite precision, an attention to detail that continues with the string course that circumscribes the whole church, including the porch-tower. It is delicately treated at the point where it rises to form the hood-mould of the entrance archway, resulting in a voided label stop. The walling which surrounds the hood-mould is also detailed and well executed—narrow red bricks alternate with black flints cut and set to the same width and length. The treatment of the same element at Holme also accentuates the entrance arch, but it is achieved in a different manner.

Spandrels are formed from the vertical continuation of the outermost shaft and a string course running from the apex of the outer order of the arch. The deep carving of the spandrels is a regular geometric pattern, with the main element being an encircled quatrefoil at the centre of which is a blank shield. In displaying notably different forms and details, these two buildings, constructed within a few years of each other, emphasize that architectural variety—achieved through the use of contrasting materials, articulation for decorative effect, and the relationship of solids and voids—continued to be appropriate for church porches in the fifteenth century.



Figure 5.
Porch-tower, St Mary's Church, *Holme-next-the-Sea*,
Norfolk. Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.



Figure 6.

Porch-tower, St Andrew's Church, *Wiklewood, Norfolk*.
Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.

Porch-towers sit between two other phases of tower building—antecedent western towers which only communicated with the church interior, and later grand “processional” entrances where substantial west doors are surmounted by an impressive traceried window. It is therefore worth enquiring about the impetus for moving towers to the established location for porches. That the new arrangement facilitated west windows in the nave is irrefutable, but another factor perhaps drove the innovation. Regardless of its location, a tower designed to also serve as a porch echoes the biblical description of that built for King Solomon at the Temple in Jerusalem. According to 1 Kings 6:3 and 2 Chronicles 3:4, this *porticus* was a fore-building—termed as both *ante templum* (“before the temple”) and *ante frontem* (“before the front”). Old Testament narratives also provide a basic mathematical template, including repeatable design elements sufficient for later builders to weave signifiers into the fabric of their own structures. Solomon’s Temple Porch was built 20 cubits long, 10 cubits wide, and 120

cubits high (1 Kings 6:3; 2 Chronicles 3:4). A standard “cubit” equates to the length of a man’s forearm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, thus approximating to 45.7 centimetres (18in). On this basis, the Temple Porch would have measured 9 metres long by 4.6 metres wide, and was 24.3 metres high (in English feet: 30ft long by 15ft wide, and 180ft high). Consequently, the structure was a tower, erected on a 2:1 rectangular plan. The possibility that awareness of, and desire to interpret King Solomon’s architectural works informed a new type of late medieval church porch is supported by the detail of other multi-storied fore-buildings, notably gatehouses.

Porches and gates are cognate architectural forms. As both occupy points of spatial transition, marking and occupying thresholds, a degree of formal overlap might be expected. This is true despite their differences: practical function demanded that gatehouses be mechanisms of control, whilst porches are usually more intimately human in scale and engagement, and are never closed. The architectural openness of porches reflects their role in facilitating human access to the Divine, as described by William Durandus (1230–1296): “The atrium of the church signifies Christ, through whom the entrance to the celestial Jerusalem is opened, which is called a porch [*porticus*], and is thus named from the word gate [*porta*] that it might be opened wide [*aperta*].”¹⁶ Durandus’s words typify the medieval propensity to apply the nomenclature of gates (*porta*) and porches (*porticus*) interchangeably, an authorial technique to effect positive connections and associations rather than evidence of linguistic imprecision.¹⁷

In a similar way to the honorific canopy or cloistral mode adopted by some porch designers, the architectural slippage between the formal nature of porches and gatehouses exemplifies design that manipulates a recognized form just enough for the outcome to be recognizably novel. The parish church porch at Barton Turf (Norfolk) and the south-west porch at Canterbury Cathedral have bastion-like qualities, but no porch is actually a gatehouse; in all instances porches are attached to larger buildings and connect open-air space to interior space, whereas gatehouses have open space before and after them. From the late fourteenth century, architectural references to city-gates, fictive and actual, occur so frequently in porch design that there can be little doubt that the allusion was intentional, recognized, and appropriate.¹⁸ Yet the contribution of porch-towers to this conversation has not previously been set out. The formal language shared between gatehouses and porches supports my proposition that parochial porch-towers were, in some senses, comments on the Solomonic model. Two East Anglian buildings are notable examples—the Ethelbert Gate in Norwich, and the Court Gate at Bury St Edmunds.¹⁹

The Ethelbert Gate and the Bury Court Gate were both rebuilt after aggressive civil unrest directed against the monastery. Damage to the Ethelbert Gate was associated with rioting in August 1272 but, according to the cathedral's accounts, structural renewal was not carried out until around 1316, a generation later.²⁰ At Bury the "Great Riot" of 1327 caused similar architectural injury, and the Court Gate was sufficiently damaged to warrant its rebuilding, which was realized more than two decades after the riot. Just as King Solomon was cast as the chosen Temple builder, and not the warrior King David, at Norwich and Bury it was succeeding generations and not those who had been involved in the period of violent strife who carried out the work. The hiatus between riot and rebuilding is unlikely to have been contrived to permit this biblical allusion; financial or other matters probably delayed the gate's reconstruction. However, the integration of design elements alluding to Solomon's porches at the new court entrance would have conjured a powerful *post hoc* interpretation and elision between architectural ambition, wisdom, judgement, and firm rule.

At Norwich, the low-relief sculptural imagery of the gate's facade makes reference to Isaiah's prophecies of the fall of Babylon and recalls the local disputes which necessitated the gate's remodelling.²¹ Pre-restoration depictions show additional key elements. According to John Adey Repton's visual record, a seated figure of Christ displaying his wounds occupied the central niche directly above the apex of the west portal (fig. 7). A subtle alternating arrangement of canopied niches and narrow windows places the figure of Christ at the centre of four other alcoves. Lower in the facade, two further niches flank the iconographic spandrels. Christ, shown seated in judgement, was likely surrounded by tetramorphic figures of the four evangelists, in which case this part of the facade's composition referenced the Apocalypse and the ultimate victory. The imagery can also be interpreted as a typological allusion to Solomon as judge: "He made also the porch of the throne wherein is the seat of judgment; and covered it with cedar wood from the floor to the top" (1 Kings 7:7). Repton also showed a flushwork hexagram or sexfoil in the gable immediately above the central figure; a significant component lost during restoration. As discussed in more detail below, this motif was associated with the seal of Solomon. The suggestion that a Solomonic model was consciously adopted by the gate's designer is little more than speculation, but one bolstered by the building's measurements. To achieve the "correct" Solomonic proportion, the Romanesque gate (renewed rather than replaced) was extended eastwards to result in a double square (each 4.87 metres [16ft] in length and width) and achieve a plan ratio of 2:1.

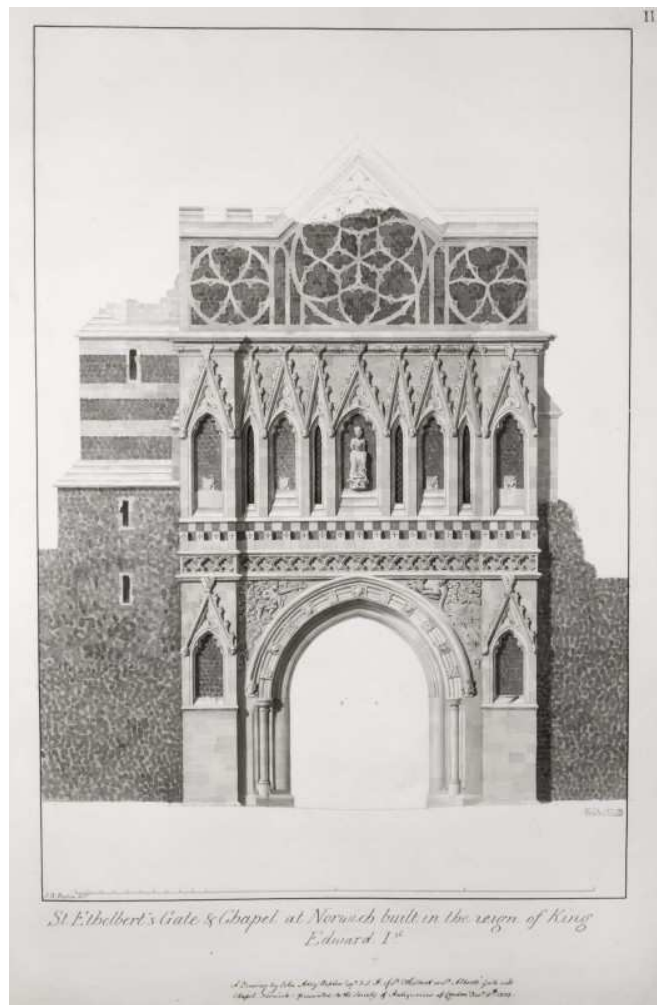


Figure 7.
John Adey Repton, Drawing of the Ethelbert Gate
(West Elevation), Norwich, 1803. Collection of The
Society of Antiquaries of London. Digital image
courtesy of The Society of Antiquaries of London.



Figure 8.

The Court Gate, *Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk*. Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.

The Court Gate at Bury St Edmunds includes a pair of cusped hexagrams set into roundels carved into the frieze of the facade's upper storey—a motif imbued with notions of defence and power to subdue errant forces (fig. 8). The Court Gate shares a number of formal elements with the “Solomonic” buildings discussed above, for example the measurements of the ground plan. Internally the building measures 7.9 metres (25ft 10in) in width and 15.7 metres (51ft 8in) in length. As a single structure the Court Gate was laid out on a ratio of 2:1. However, whilst externally the structure reads as a single unit, internally the space is divided, with an outer compartment (approximately 3.65 by 5.7 metres [12ft by 18ft 10in]) and an inner compartment (10.7 by 8.6 metres [35ft 4in by 25ft 10in]). If construed as a “porch before a porch”, the Court Gate echoes with allusions to King Solomon’s court, where the greater porch (*maioris porticus*) was preceded by a porch of pillars (*porticum columnarum*) (1 Kings 7:6).

Recognizing an Old Testament archetype as the basis for Norwich's Ethelbert Gate and the Court Gate at Bury St Edmunds stresses the centrality of content to medieval architectural iconographies, and how modern attitudes to copying or mimicking are anachronistic. As Krautheimer stated, "the modern copy with all its exactness in reproducing the whole building and with its striving towards absolute faithfulness, definitely omits the elements which were important to the Middle Ages: the content and the significance of the building."²² Much of Krautheimer's concern was with the imitation of actual buildings. However, for designers of porches the archetype was conveyed through words rather than structures. In such circumstances, inventiveness was not only desirable on the part of the designer but essential. Significant motifs (for example, pillars) and mathematical proportions (that is, 1:2 and 3:5) could be extracted from the biblical narrative but provided the designer with little more than a starting point. It would be necessary to combine, meld, and revise architectural content to form the rest of the building, ensuring its suitability to the site and everyday function, and allowing for considerations of architectural decorum, style, and patronal preferences. The success of this admixture relied on the unity of imagination and applied invention, skilfully blended to produce specific architectural mnemonics which could "vibrate" with significances in the minds of informed beholders.²³

An exceptional evocation of this mode is the hexagonal outer north porch of St Mary Redcliffe in Bristol (fig. 9). It is one of only three such buildings known in England and by far the most significant.²⁴ The extent of the designer's inventive capacity is remarkable, perhaps unsurpassed; the building is an extreme case which challenges its audience to comprehend it. In the absence of an antecedent hexagonal porch it is apparent that the designer used other structures or architectural iconographies as inspirational source material. Christopher Wilson offered two earlier hexagonal structures that epitomized the "Decorated emphasis on the curious and unexpected"—the canopy over the shrine of Saint-Sernin at Toulouse (1258; destroyed) and the Eleanor Cross of Waltham.²⁵ These architectural references are, broadly speaking, canopied shrines. What they provided to St Mary Redcliffe's designer might have been the appropriateness of their type as much as their stylistic or formal composition. The Redcliffe porch also continues the already discussed familiarity between porches and gatehouses. As Christopher Wilson observed, "the arrangement of niches as a band which spreads onto the buttresses [at Redcliffe] is very reminiscent of the gatehouse of St Augustine's, Canterbury."²⁶ Implicitly, St Mary Redcliffe's architectural allusions were also appropriate for gatehouses. This planar articulation is augmented by decorative details largely derived from the Lady Chapels at Ely and Glastonbury (the latter built 150 years previously).²⁶ Whilst observation of imitative details works for a modern

sense of copying, repetition of carved details in the design of different buildings may not reveal the significant iconographic, rather than stylistic, models for an overall conception. In its form and decoration, Redcliffe's porch was conceived to invoke the Solomonic *porticus* and typologically conflate Solomon's Throne of Judgement with the Mother of God as the vessel of Christian beginnings.

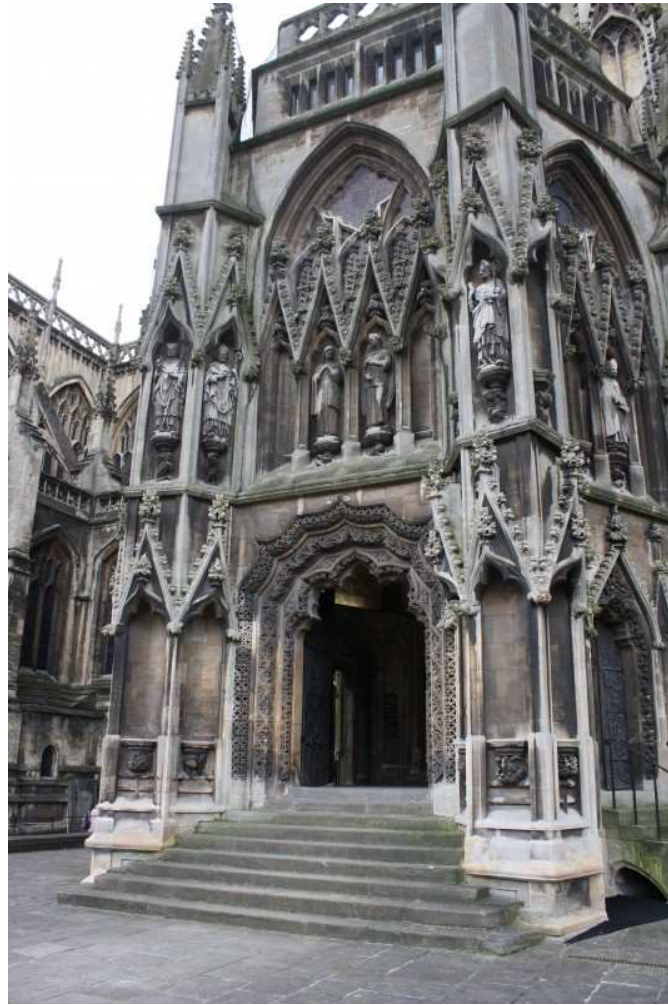


Figure 9.

North porch, St Mary Redcliffe Church, *Bristol*. Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.

The hexagonal outer porch was built around 1320 as an addition to a pre-existing rectangular north porch of around 1200. Regardless of the new building's plan type, the decision taken not to demolish the existing porch is critical. The dissimilarity between the forms of the two structures is such that they cannot be read as a double-depth porch—the independent identity of each building is retained. As a result, the north elevation of St Mary Redcliffe effectively has two porches, one built before (in front of) the other; a patent fourteenth-century realization of the passage "*et alteram porticum in facie*

maioris porticus” (“and another porch before the greater porch”; 1 Kings 7:6) The arrangement at Redcliffe suggests a particular reading of this biblical passage. It encourages *maioris* to be understood in the sense of bestowing honour and esteem, specifying not that the porch is of great size but rather of great distinction and venerability. As the container of a cult statue of the Mother of God, the inner porch was an august, respected place and served the designer well in his architectural translation of the text. The porch of around 1200 was preserved in order to serve the new architectural composition.

Playing with the concept of two porches gave the designer at St Mary Redcliffe an opportunity to construct a series of allusions to the Old Testament precedent, most immediately apparent in the hexagonal plan. The hexagon was used as an architectural adaptation of the hexagram, the six-pointed star sometimes known as the “Shield of David”. The hexagram was widely used under the designation the “Seal of Solomon”.²⁷ The association of the hexagram with the Seal of Solomon is made apparent in works such as *The Testament of Solomon*, a Greek magical text, known in England by the fourteenth century, in which the Seal acts as the weapon with which Solomon wielded power over demonic forces.²⁸ Placing a protective hexagon at the church entrance was therefore a powerful apotropaic signification.

The plan at St Mary Redcliffe is also significant in its dimensions (fig. 10). Each interior side of the hexagon measures approximately 2 metres (7ft 2in), which is noteworthy for how this length was derived. The width of the inner, greater porch is 2.5 metres (8ft 3in; or half a perch) and its length is 4.1 metres (13ft 7in)—thus a 3:5 ratio. A source for this relationship is the porch of pillars cited in 1 Kings 7:6 (“And he made a porch of pillars of fifty cubits in length, and thirty cubits in breadth: and another porch before the greater porch: and pillars, and chapiters upon the pillars”). Each side of the outer porch’s underlying hexagram is 6.7 metres (22ft; one third of a chain), approximating to the sum of the inner porch’s width and length. A sexfoil of this dimension provides the outer porch with an internal width of 4.4 metres (14ft 6in), and the double-porch complex has a depth of 8.8 metres (29ft)—thus a ratio of 2:1.

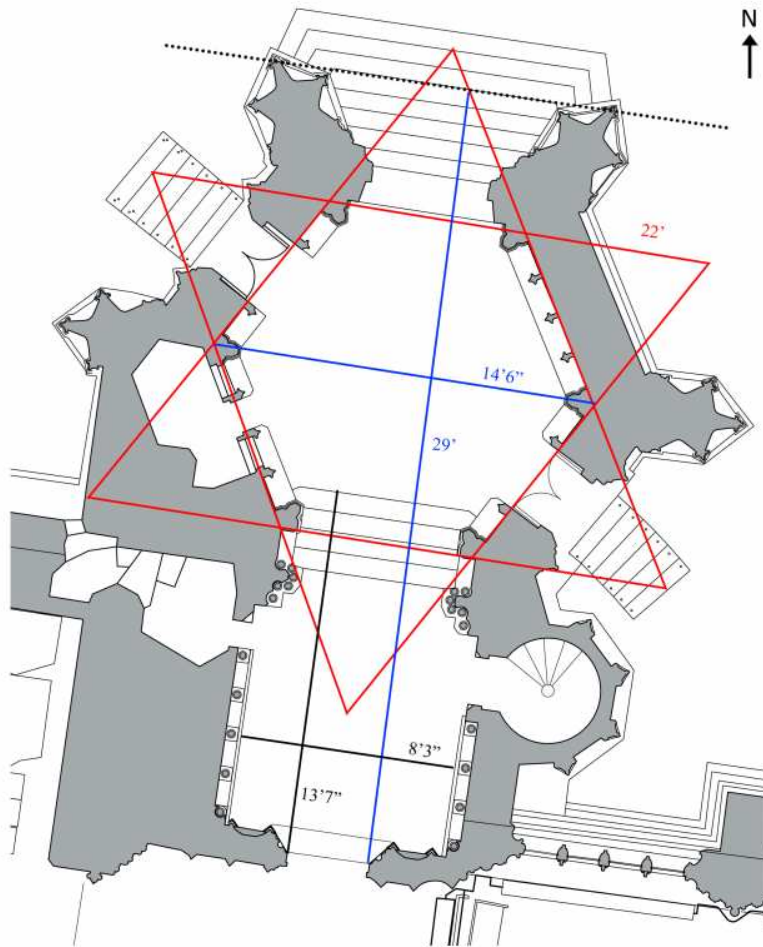


Figure 10.

Plan of the north porch, St Mary Redcliffe Church, Bristol, with author's measurements overlaid. Digital image courtesy of St Mary Redcliffe Church Council / Benjamin and Beauchamp Architects Limited.

In its details the Redcliffe porch stands as a panoply of architectural allusions to the Temple. The extant corbel sculpture, though no longer *in situ*, presents a host of indigent characters including a lame man with a crutch and a starved figure with ribs clearly delineated (fig. 11). The figures are corporally twisted, their agonies physically expressed. These sculptures populated the porch exterior as the sick and infirm had come before the Beautiful Gate, the location of the miraculous healing of a lame man (*"ad portam templi quae dicitur Speciosa"*, Acts 3:2). Other medieval portals specifically associated with sheltering beggars seeking to receive alms, include the "Penniless Porch" at Wells, the "Porta Speciosa" at Salisbury, and the porch at St Étienne, Bourges, where a vivid fifteenth-century poem inscribed on its walls ends:

Give, you who pass this place
Alms for sinners
To free them from Purgatory
By means of the good and alms
That each man does and gives to them
They will receive the glory of Heaven.²⁹

The design of the porch at St Mary Redcliffe implies the same function in architectural rather than textual terms. By populating the building with representations of the sick and infirm the designer not only provided shelter for beggars but fashioned a place which confounds time and space: by this means Redcliffe's beggars could mnemonically reside in the company of those who sought succour at the Beautiful Gate.



Figure 11.

Corbel figure, ex situ, from the north porch, *St Mary Redcliffe Church, Bristol*. Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.

Peter Fergusson and Stephen Murray have both discussed the important role of mnemonics in shaping medieval architecture.³⁰ Murray's investigation of the Sainte-Chapelle identifies its apparent points of reference, clearly demonstrating the medieval interest in combining forms and principles taken from contemporary and historical buildings, what Murray terms "the synchronic power of architecture".³¹ He argues that the employment of biblical prototypes should not be seen as out-dated, out-moded, or negatively retrospective. As Murray concludes, "We must be open to the possibility of mixed messages or even contradictions in the language of

forms. The envelope of a medieval building should never be treated as a passive receptacle."³² The currency of ancient architectural prototypes was highly valued in medieval western architecture, but as a fillip to creativity, not at its expense. The hexagonal north porch at St Mary Redcliffe, a synthesis of biblical porches and gates, supports this statement.

In planning the outer porch at Redcliffe the chosen architectural strategist faced the challenge of structurally and conceptually preceding a porch-chapel which contained a miracle-working statue of the Virgin.³³ His building had to provide a circuit of access and egress for pilgrims in an ante-chamber that was of sufficient architectural reverence to act as a prelude to the esteemed inner porch and its sacred focus, the precious image of Mary. The jewel-box-like effect of the rib-vaulted hexagonal space is to this day remarkably affecting (fig. 12). The geometric shape plays with a circular, centrally planned form, but rather than being a standard polygon based on the multiplication or division of eight sides (conveying Christo-sepulchral associations), the porch's designer audaciously mutates the familiarity of centrally planned buildings into a hexagram and so infuses the structure with Solomonic content. Meanwhile, retention of the circular form enhances one's sense of the building as a place as well as a route to elsewhere. When serving as a porch, facilitating the congregation's access to the main vessel of the church, the hexagonal form in no way impedes progress; as a pilgrim's destination and the ante-room to the cult statue, the six-sided plan contains greater significance.

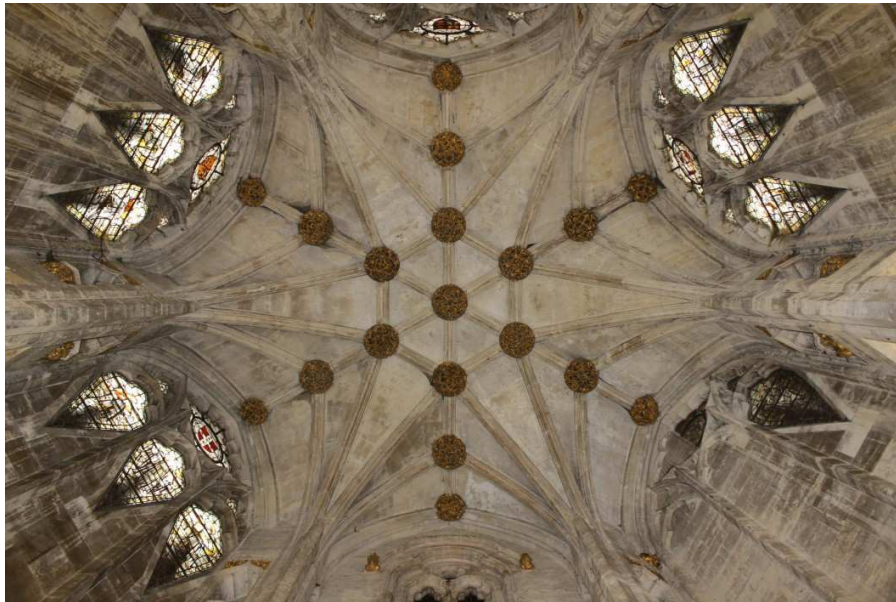


Figure 12.

Rib vault, north porch, *St Mary Redcliffe Church, Bristol*. Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.

The relationship between the Annunciation, the Virgin's womb, the marriage of bridegroom and bride, and the prefiguration of these events in the person of Solomon was set out in a commentary on "The Annunciation of Saint Mary" in the tenth-century "Old English Homilies". The text presents the circumstances and significance of the chain of events which leads through the Annunciation, Nativity, Crucifixion, and implicitly the union of Christ and his bride in heaven. The entirety is condensed into a single statement: "Wherefore the Heavenly King shall prepare thy womb as a bridal chamber for his son", which is later reaffirmed: "Let us rejoice then in the union of God and men, and in the union of the bridegroom and the bride, that is Christ and the holy church."³⁴ The prefiguration of these events is also commented on:

In her [i.e. Mary] was fulfilled what was sung in the Song of Songs, thus saying: 'Solomon's bed was surrounded by guards, that is by sixty men, the strongest that were in Israel, and each of them had a sword girt to his hip (side), on account of the terror of the night. Now then what was Solomon's bed else but the womb of the ever pure Virgin? The peace-loving king, our lord Jesus Christ, chose and sought that womb.'³⁵

More commonly Solomon is presented as a type for Christ as judge and his throne for the Virgin, as, for example, in Nicholas of Clairvaux's *Sermon on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*: "Our Solomon is not only wise but wisdom itself; not only our peacemaker but our peace. He has made himself a throne, even the womb of a pure Virgin where that Majesty sits whose nod shakes the earth."³⁶

The suggestion of these two earlier commentaries—that porches are analogous to the Virgin's womb, the tabernacle which held the ultimate judge—is supported by evidence in the buildings themselves. Annunciation imagery is often found in exterior spandrels framing a porch entrance, and the relevance of the open door and the placement of such imagery is evidence of symbiosis between the vessel of Incarnation and the vehicle for passage through the door of paradise.³⁷ Less commonly, but also significantly, vaulted porches include roof bosses showing Joys of the Virgin. The early fifteenth-century south porch at St Margaret's, Cley-next-the-Sea (Norfolk) is one such instance: it is a space covered by a vault displaying the Joys, under which seven shallow, well-spaced steps lead to a door flanked by lions (fig. 13). Given the cult focus at the entrance to St Mary Redcliffe, the designer's adoption of motifs used in chapels built to honour the Virgin was certainly intelligent; in the context of a porch, it was an imaginative leap and an inventive act. The wider narrative of porches as architectural vessels containing the aura of the Virgin as receiver and conceiver of Christianity is

an observable tradition which developed in England during the fourteenth century and continued up to the Reformation. As church porches were settings for aspects of medieval marriage ceremonies, their architectural iconographies could also conjure with contemporary experience and give didactic resonance to these interwoven references. The designer of Redcliffe's outer porch appears to have been at the forefront of this development, perhaps even leading the charge.



Figure 13.

South porch, St Margaret's Church, *Cley-next-the-Sea*, Norfolk. Digital image courtesy of Helen Lunnon.

In relation to each of the examples presented here, and others besides, one might argue that designing masons were acting on instruction, and that the introduction of Solomonic, cloistral, gatehouse, and sepulchral references into the vocabulary of church porches was dictated by the commissioning patron or the bill payer, as opposed to an inventive craftsman. Collaboration and partnership were, without doubt, central to the end product, but attributing the patron with the kind of architectural invention discussed here

would rather miss my point. It would also ignore the recent dilution of binary constructions of patron and craftsman contributions by art historians interested in assigning authorship and ownership.³⁸ The buildings presented in this essay demonstrate that the level of understanding and appropriate handling of materials and content, and the application of underlying principles in a creative way, implies that the designing intellect was that of a practitioner. Each would have required a designer who could invoke textual references and strike a delicate balance between accepted modes used in porches as a building type and the introduction of innovative elements—ancient antecedents inventively reapplied.

This article has sought to expand on Krautheimer's approach to architectural iconography based on copying from extant structures by exploring an instance which necessitates imagination because there are no direct visual models, only written descriptions. Consideration of *inventio porticus* demonstrates that designing masons borrowed and integrated architectural content familiar in other building types and manipulated and repurposed them into new, recognizable, and effective architectural iconography. In many instances designing porches presented uniquely experimental opportunities, and in doing so we have before us some of the most significant buildings in terms of expanding architectural possibility. They also elucidate the inventive capacity of medieval designers when a prototype is known dimly through written sources rather than structural actuality. The copying or "selective imitation" so well explored by Krautheimer was not always enough – what was needed was imagination and its application as invention. Where experimentation and invention differ, I suggest, is that the latter is ultimately successful, more than a practice run, test case, or novelty. It amalgamates well-known ingredients in a novel mental conception. When that process is translated into an architectural product, the result is a building which operates on multiple levels and stands as testament to imaginative realization.

Footnotes

- ¹ Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Medieval Architecture'", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5, no. 2 (1942): 1-33.
- ² Paul Crossley, "Medieval Architecture and Meaning: The Limits of Iconography", *The Burlington Magazine* 130, no. 1019 (1988): 116-21; Richard Gem, "Towards an Iconography of Anglo-Saxon Architecture", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983): 1-18.
- ³ Helen E. Lunnon, "'I will have one porch of stone . . . over my grave': Medieval Parish Church Porches and their Function as Tomb Canopies", *Church Monuments* 27 (2012): 53-65.
- ⁴ C. Warren Hollister, "Mandeville, Geoffrey de, first earl of Essex", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed 26 January 2017.
- ⁵ David Park, "Medieval Burials and Monuments", in *The Temple Church in London: History, Architecture, Art*, ed. Robin Griffith-Jones and David Park (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 67-92.
- ⁶ Helen E. Lunnon, "Making an Entrance: Studies of Medieval Church Porches in Norfolk" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2012), 19-20.
- ⁷ Theoderich, *Guide to the Holy Land*, trans. Aubrey Stewart, ed. Ronald G. Musto, 2nd edn (New York: Italica Press, 1986), 28.

- 8 Krautheimer, "Introduction", 14.
- 9 For a discussion of the geometry and proportional design grid for a fictional gothic portal and porch, see Linda Neagley, "A Late Gothic Architectural Drawing at The Cloisters", in *Reading Medieval Images: The Art Historian and the Object*, ed. Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 91–99.
- 10 Eric Fernie and A. B. Whittingham, *The Early Communar and Pittancer Rolls of Norwich Cathedral Priory: With an Account of the Building of the Cloister* (Norwich: Norfolk Record Society, 1972).
- 11 For discussion of gothic cloisters as foci for architectural experimentation, see Linda Monkton, "Experimental Architecture? Vaulting and West Country Cloisters in the Late Middle Ages", *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 159, no. 1 (2006): 249–83.
- 12 Krautheimer, "Introduction", 7.
- 13 Wayne Dynes, "The Medieval Cloister as Portico of Solomon", *Gesta* 12, no. 1/2 (1973): 68.
- 14 This form of entrance building is known in various parts of England. Norfolk has seventeen examples, there are at least twenty in Suffolk and others can be found across England, including the examples of the south towers at Sutton-under-Brailes in Warwickshire and Melbury Bubb in Dorset, All Saints Canterbury, Ringmore in Devon, Yeldham in Essex, Tutbury in Staffordshire, and Norbury in Derbyshire. In Somerset, there are at least twelve examples of porch-towers and in Wiltshire at least ten.
- 15 The chancel at Wicklewood was remodelled in 1412, and the material evidence suggests that the porch-tower was constructed in the same programme of works (NRO DCN 1/6/50-57); the porch-tower at Holme-next-the-Sea is mentioned in the inscription on the memorial brass of Henry Nottingham, dated 1405: "Henry Notyngnam and hys wyffe lye here Yat maden this chirche stepull and quere."
- 16 T. M. Thibodeau, trans., *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum of William Durand of Mende: A New Translation of the Prologue and Book One* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 17–18.
- 17 Julian Luxford, "Architecture and Environment: St Benet's Holm and the Fashioning of the English Monastic Gatehouse", *Architectural History* 57 (2014): 31–72 (59–60).
- 18 John Goodall, "The English Gatehouse", *Architectural History* 55 (2012): 1–23.
- 19 For recent discussion of these two gatehouses in their architectural and environmental context, see Luxford, "Architecture and Environment".
- 20 Fernie and Whittingham, *Early Communar and Pittancer Rolls*, 33, 90.
- 21 Veronica Sekules, "The Gothic Sculpture", in *Norwich Cathedral: Church, City and Diocese, 1096–1996*, ed. Ian Atherton, Eric Fernie, Christopher Harper-Bill, and Hassell Smith (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 199–202.
- 22 Krautheimer, "Introduction", 20.
- 23 Writing of the symbolic multiplicity of the number eight, Johannes Scotus Erigena uses sonorous metaphor to express how the different connotations sound together within him, a sensory experience which Krautheimer interpreted as vibration. See Krautheimer, "Introduction", 9–10, and taken up in Crossley "Medieval Architecture and Meaning", 121.
- 24 St Mary Redcliffe's north porch is one of only three hexagonally planned church porches in England. The other two, at Ludlow and Chipping Norton, display little of the fervent invention of the building on which they were presumably in some sense modelled. Nothing more than the hexagonal plan has been imitated and they stand as testament to the failure of subsequent architects or patrons to recognize or appreciate the imaginative complexities inherent in the great works of art they seek to emulate.
- 25 Christopher Wilson, "St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, Outer North Porch, North Side", in *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England, 1200–1400*, ed. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski (London: Royal Academy of Art, 1987), 413, cat. no. 490.
- 26 Wilson, "St Mary Redcliffe", 413.
- 27 Cyrus Adler, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Vol. 12 (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1905–12), 448.
- 28 "Now when I Solomon heard this, I entered the Temple of God, and prayed with all my soul, night and day, that the demon might be delivered into my hands, and that I might gain authority over him. And it came about through my prayer that grace was given to me from the Lord Sabaoth by Michael his archangel. [He brought me] a little ring, having a seal consisting of an engraved stone, and said to me: 'Take, O Solomon, king, son of David, the gift which the Lord God has sent thee, the highest Sabaoth. With it thou shalt lock up all the demons of the earth, male and female; and with their help thou shalt build up Jerusalem. [But] thou [must] wear this seal of God. And this engraving of the seal of the ring sent thee is a Pentalpha.'" F. C. Conybeare, trans., "The Testament of Solomon", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 11, no. 1 (1898): 16. That the hexagram and pentagram were interchangeable and the names *Seal of Solomon* and *Shield of David* were applied to both forms is noted in Adler, ed., *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12: 337.
- 29 Lunnon, "Making an Entrance", 32–34 and 67–68.
- 30 Peter Fergusson, "Modernization and Mnemonics at Christ Church, Canterbury: The Treasury Building", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 65, no. 1 (2006): 50–67; Stephen Murray, "The Architectural Envelope of the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris", in *Pierre, Lumière, Couleur: Etudes d'histoire de l'art du Moyen Âge en l'honneur d'Anne Prache: Cultures et Civilisations Médiévale* 20, ed. Fabienne Joubert and Dany Sandron (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999), 223–30.
- 31 Murray, "Architectural Envelope", 229.

- 32 Murray, "Architectural Envelope", 230.
- 33 Frances Neale, ed., *William Worcestre: The Topography of Medieval Bristol*, Bristol Records Society Publications 51 (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2000), 153 and 277.
- 34 Richard Morris, ed. and trans., *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Edited from MSS. in the British Museum, Lambeth and Bodleian Libraries* (London: Trübner & Co., 1874-76), 8-9.
- 35 Morris, ed. and trans., *Old English Homilies*, 10.
- 36 *Sermon on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary* ascribed to Nicholas of Clairvaux, twelfth century. The passage is cited in Francis Wormald, "The Throne of Solomon and St Edward's Chair", in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, Vol. 1, ed. Millard Meiss (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 534.
- 37 That the throne of Solomon is analogous with the door of paradise was convincingly set out in Isa Ragusa, "Terror Demonum and Terror Inimicorum: The Two Lions of the Throne of Solomon and the Open Door of Paradise", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 40, no. 2 (1977): 93-114. See also Paul Binski, *Gothic Wonder: Art, Artifice and the Decorated Style, 1290-1350* (New Haven, CT, and London, Yale University Press, 2014), 198.
- 38 Jill Caskey, "Whodunnit? Patronage, the Canon, and the Problematics of Agency in Romanesque and Gothic Art", in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic Art in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolf (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 193-212.

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