

Elaboration: Artisans and Ideas in the Devon Parish

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‘ROODSCREENS AND ROODLOFTS’

In the second volume of their monumental 1909 work on late medieval English rood screens and lofts, Francis Bligh Bond and Dom Bede Camm characterized Devon as ‘a county notable for old ecclesiastical wood-carvings, and *par excellence* for screenwork’. The authors went on to describe some rood screens as composites, in which foreign and native and new and old design elements were combined. Differing forms of ornament, they wrote, ‘appear side by side, each preserving its own individuality, but blended into an artistic whole by their careful subordination and the unity of scale of projection which is preserved’.¹ This precocious analysis of design ran against the grain of contemporaneous readings of English ecclesiastical fixed woodwork of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, which at the time were typically presented as the insular products of self-contained communities.² Bond and Camm’s nuanced reading, however, is in line with interpretations of late-medieval English parish life put forth by present-day socio-cultural historians who only in the last decade and a half stripped the term ‘parochial’ of its connotations of cultural stagnation.³ Not unlike the screens of which Bond and Camm wrote, parish communities are now described as dynamic, socially and ideologically heterogeneous, and linked to wider informational networks.⁴ Engagement with Rood screens effectively led two nineteenth-century antiquarians towards a conclusion that prefigures major historiographic trends of nearly a century later. This suggests the potential of the fixed, ornamented woodwork of late medieval parish churches — hereafter referred to as *elaborated woodwork* — as an important point of entry to wider historical inquiry.

The rich body of material relating to elaborated woodwork yields important insights into not only the design and fabrication of objects used in and by late medieval English parish communities but a range of other social practices as well. The woodworkers that operated in Devon during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were highly skilled, mobile, and intersected with parishioners at multiple levels. They fulfilled many roles and maintained interlocking associations with one another and in disparate communities and regions. In the surviving archival sources relating to English parishes, woodworkers are the artisans who feature most prominently, both in their trade-capacities and as individuals. They were a primary vector for the movement of information into and out of parishes. Interactions with elaborated woodwork were among the principal means by which parishioners, on both an individual and collective basis,

¹ Bond and Camm (1909), II, pp. 275, 280.

² Bond (1908), pp. 68, 87.

³ Hindle and Kümin (2009).

⁴ Withington and Shepard (2000); Jones and Woolf (2007), pp. 1–18; Wrightson (2007), p. 20; Kümin (1996), p. 100; French (2001), p. 21.



1 Map of Devon showing location of churches that retain surviving pre-1550 churchwardens' accounts and/or elaborated woodwork

engaged with new concepts and sources of information within their own communities. Pulpits, lecterns and desks, fixed benches, figurative images, tabernacles, rood screens and lofts can therefore be interpreted as embodying the many external forces and forms of information circulating in and around parish communities. Such objects simultaneously represent the distinctly internal priorities and perceptions through which that information was received and understood.

Approximately thirty parishes, positioned in a crescent around the eastern and north-eastern rim of Dartmoor (Figure 1), retain a remarkable amount of elaborated woodwork constructed before 1550. During the approximately two centuries leading up to the 1530s, these and other Devon communities witnessed previously unparalleled expansion of lay-prosperity, particularly among rural, non-elite households.⁵ Equipped with extensive sheep pasture, upland streams ideally suited to power fulling-mills, and active seaports (Topham, Plymouth, Barnstaple, and Dartmouth) situated on two non-continuous coasts, the communities around the major urban, mercantile centre, Exeter, grew wealthy by the early-sixteenth century, supplying moderately priced woollens to the rising population of the 'middling sort' on the Continent. This wealth was poured

⁵ Carus-Wilson (1963), pp. 7–9; Kowaleski (1995), pp. 16–18; Schofield (1974).

into the region's churches, often in the form of elaborated woodwork.⁶ After the precipitous collapse of the market for English woollens on the Continent in the 1560s, many of the once thriving Devon parishes descended into centuries of relative economic stagnation.⁷ Well-travelled roads veered away, leaving many parishes isolated. Their churches and non-movable contents remained undisturbed, preserved by impoverishment and benign neglect. Parish churches in Devon house the single largest body of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century elaborated woodwork extant. A substantial quantity of this material survives in excellent condition, having avoided much of the murderous wear induced by daily use, the predations of thieves and vandals, and renovations inflicted by well-meaning parishioners that beset elaborated woodwork in more prosperous and populous regions.

For perhaps the same reasons that the elaborated woodwork of many Devon churches endures, the Diocese of Exeter holds thirteen percent of all known parish accounts composed before 1570.⁸ This format of document was intended as an official record of annual parish expenditures and revenues, and of the nature and disposition of resources. From the perspective of the historian, parish accounts constitute the richest source of archival material relating to late medieval English parishes. The accounts of Devon, like the county's churches, are dominated by the presence of woodworkers. Examples of accounts that predate 1570 are rare. Most of these documents were originally kept in the form of loose sheets of vellum or parchment, bundled into quires (Figure 2), and stored in a locked chest within the church. Parishes with greater resources often transitioned to the use of bound volumes by 1500. Moisture, insects, and carelessness exacted a substantial toll. The majority of surviving accounts have been cut and bound, and are sometimes fragmentary at best. Many accounts, particularly those dating from the mid-fifteenth through early sixteenth centuries, are principally in scribal-language — a composite of Latin and English nouns, Latin verbs, and Norman French direct articles that was frequently employed in ecclesiastical and other formal documents. Particularly in small, less affluent communities, the writer's Latin was often insufficient to accurately record data.⁹ The scribes hired to compose the final documents often lapsed into English, and word selection could be allegorical or inferential. Any reading of parish accounts exposes the historian to the flaws inherent in this type of document. They are fundamentally records of achievement. Struggle, failure, and conflict are often omitted. The voices of those most able to contribute to the success of parish endeavours are always privileged. However, if approached objectively and supplemented with other sources, the accounts allow the reconstruction of links between the surviving material culture of late medieval English parishes and its cultural context.¹⁰

⁶ Schofield, (1974); Greeves (1992), pp. 39, 43; Hoskins (1955), pp. 233–41; Kowaleski (1995), pp. 15–16, 26–28, 37; Munro (2003); Van der Wee (2003).

⁷ Van der Wee (2003).

⁸ French (2001), p. 47; Whiting (1989), p. 17.

⁹ Duffy (2006), 'The end of it all', p. 6; (Foster (1997); Kümin, (1996), pp. 86, 92. In 1534 Ashburton transitioned from loose folios to a bound volume when a 'a nue booke for the wardens' was purchased [DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fol. 115v].

¹⁰ Drew (1940); Duffy (2001), pp. 19–20; Foster (1997); French (2001), pp. 18–19, 44–47; Kümin (1996), p. 10.

THE ECONOMY OF INFORMATION IN THE ENGLISH PARISH

Devon parish churches of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were positioned at the convergence of a unique set of social, political, and economic factors. Between approximately 1430 and 1530 churches underwent a sustained campaign of liturgical, structural, administrative, and decorative elaboration. This process was brought about by four interrelated developments within the parish communities: [i] crystallization of the insitutional musculature of parish organization and administration coincided with [ii] increasing general parochial prosperity, much of it derived from the woollens trade with the Continent. Trends in lay spirituality popularized [iii] a more vibrant form of collective religious life which prioritized the synthetic and material dimensions of devotion. [iv] The growing presence of purgatory in lay spiritual consciousness (the 'penitential *mentalité*') fostered a perception that benefactions and commemorative strategies were most effective when targeted at one's local church. These factors, combined with the broadly defined and generally corporate nature of parish worship, and the pragmatic need for widespread local lay-involvement,¹¹ propelled the ornaments, furnishings, and architectural features of parish churches to a heightened position of cultural centrality. The advent of printing in the late fifteenth century and a concurrent expansion of non-elite lay-literacy also facilitated widespread engagement with devotional literature saturated with woodcut images that were either imported, based upon French or Flemish originals, or otherwise exotic in character (Figures 3 and 4).¹² Elaboration channelled a continuous stream of information, from increasingly diverse sources, through each parish. New knowledge, new devotions, new priorities and modes of expression, and the continual push and pull of the episcopacy transformed churches into hubs within an information network that extended to other regions and even other lands.¹³ Parishioners responded through the acquisition, construction, and donation of objects.¹⁴ Artisans functioned as the principal mediators of this process. Their unique sets of resources and capabilities, and their limitations, intersected with the equally distinctive expectations and interests of the laity.¹⁵

The needs of the laity and the distribution of their resources depended upon the decisions made by wardens. Within each community, these officials were appointed on a largely voluntary basis to manage the day-to-day affairs of both the parish and each of its 'stores'. These latter were funds maintained by specific individuals within a parish which often blossomed into sub-parochial affiliations of limited, voluntary membership that acted semi-autonomously within the larger parish.¹⁶ Wardens served only a brief period (usually one year), which seldom led to succeeding terms. The constantly

¹¹ Burgess (2006); Kamerick (2002), pp. 170–80; Kümin (2006); Hoskins (1955), pp. 233–41; Kowaleski (1995), pp. 16, 26, 36–37; Munro (2003); Van der Wee (2003); Burgess (1988); Rubin (1991), pp. 64, 112, 114, 150; Duffy (1992), p. 131; Marks (2004), pp. 30, 36; Richmond (1994), p. 185.

¹² Erler (1999); Hellinga (1999); Kamerick (2002), pp. 7, 156, 158.

¹³ Burgess (2006); Duffy (1992), pp. 42–45, 131, 132; Erler (1999), pp. 500–03; French (2001), pp. 28–29, 145; Hutton (1997); Kamerick (2002), pp. 73–74, 77; Kümin (2006); Whiting (1989), pp. 86–87; Williamson (2006), pp. 177, 178.

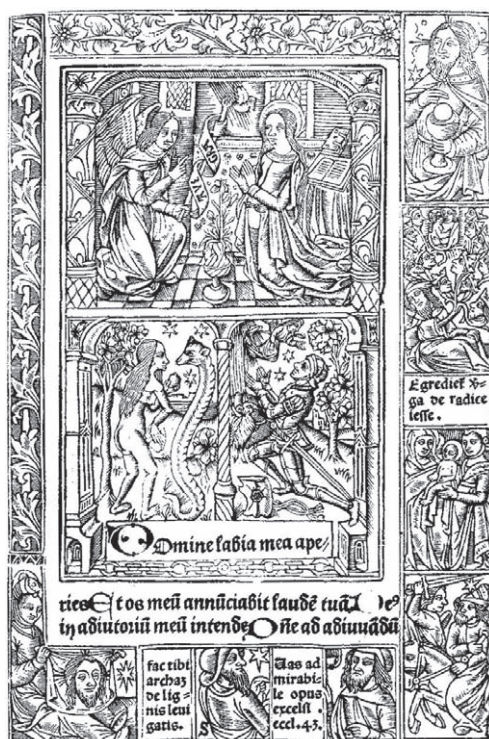
¹⁴ Duffy (1992), pp. 42–45, 55; French (2001), pp. 28–29, 183–85; Hellinga (1999); Kümin (2006); Kamerick (2002), pp. 7, 82–84, 103, 156; Marks (2004), pp. 90–91, 98, 109, 113–14; Rubin (1991), pp. 43, 54, 57–58, 88.

¹⁵ Burgess (2006); Duffy (1992), p. 132; French (2001), p. 144; Hutton (1997); Kamerick (2002), pp. 8–9.

¹⁶ Powicke and Cheney (1964); French (2001), pp. 29, 51; Amos (2004).



3 Woodcut, from *Dives and Pauper*, a heavily circulated orthodox didactic text, published by Wynken de Worde, 1496.
British Library



4 Woodcut, from *Horae: ad usum Romanum*, published by Philippe Pigouchet for Simon Vostre, Paris, 1497.
British Library

rotating roster of men and, on a few occasions, women, together with the social heterogeneity of these individuals, resulted in a format of administrative leadership that left a highly varied and dynamic imprint upon the parish.¹⁷ Each group (typically more than two at any one time and as many as six) brought a unique set of personalities and preferences to the office. 'Stores' were supervised by their own semi-autonomous wardens who managed projects during the year. With each successive year, new wardens repeated established patterns while simultaneously instituting subtle variations that, with time, developed into major alterations of parish priorities. The oversight of auditors (small groups of typically six or eight respected and experienced parishioners, often former wardens themselves, responsible for yearly supervision of churchwardens' activities, setting rates, and the management of exceptional outlays and major, one-time initiatives) added yet further layers to parish government and decision making.¹⁸

The principal duty of wardens was the management of parish assets. Parishes generated income through five types of funding: gifts, collections, rent of property, provision of entertainment, and sale of donated objects, food, and ale. The vast

¹⁷ Burgess (2006); Kümin (1996); French (2006).

¹⁸ Drew (1940); Duffy (2001), p. 23; Kümin (1996), p. 30, 34, 38–40.

majority of this was locally derived, substantially from the parishioners themselves who contributed and/or participated according to age, gender, and social and economic position. The accounts of Morebath, maintained by one man from 1528 to 1572 (Vicar Sir Christopher Trychay), provide the most detailed documentation of parish initiatives for construction of elaborated woodwork.¹⁹ Men and their sons volunteered time to perform non-skilled labour like carrying timber, wives prepared food and drink for visiting artisans, and families opened their homes as rent-free lodging. Stores and the parish as a whole accelerated the standard machinery of fund-raising to funnel a continuous stream of revenue towards a project. Morebath sold raw wool from the various stocks of parish sheep, while Ashburton rented out its parish-owned tenements. Virtually all parishes and their stores engaged in the primary means of generating income: brewing ale and its sale in churchyards and church-houses.²⁰ Sums ranging from a few groats to several pounds and valuable personal items intended for resale were donated and willed by individuals, living and dead, to cover expenses relating to construction and maintenance. Parishioners influenced decisions in accordance with their level of participation. Those who wielded greater economic resources, as did John Ford, an attorney and Burgess who donated £10 towards payment of artisans' wages during the construction of a Rood screen and loft at St Andrew, Ashburton from 1521 to 1523, made contributions that reflected their social power.²¹ Local circumstances usually failed to align sufficiently to allow for all potential revenue sources to be utilized simultaneously. Instead, funds typically accumulated in a piecemeal fashion that seldom kept pace with the rate of need. In the time required, parish priorities, and the men and women who carried them out, invariably changed.

Wardens were also among the most mobile members of a parish. Visitations, litigations, and transactions with artisans all required extended travel. Diocesan visitations were usually held on-site at Exeter Cathedral. Even the yearly visitations conducted by deacons and rural deans were more often held at an impromptu court established for the purpose at a centrally located parish. Wardens, like the four who rode from Ashburton 'to Tottoni [Totnes] at Visitation' in 1547–48 accompanied by eight other men, attended to represent their parish, often accompanied by a retinue of fellow parishioners. Visitations of this form gave churchwardens and other parish officials a chance to meet their counterparts and compare their parishes with those in other areas. Such encounters also provided wardens a glimpse of the material results of the decisions of other wardens and the fund-raising efforts of their people. Experiences in Exeter with its thirteenth- and fourteenth-century cathedral and the equally vibrant architecture of the surrounding city would have left a more lasting visual imprint.²²

After 1400 a far greater range of issues and needs began to demand the attentions and energies of wardens, filling the pages of their accounts, and consuming the resources for which they were responsible. Every diocese introduced calendrical, liturgical, and didactic material devised or revised to appeal to the 'symples' and unlearned sensibilities of the laity and their local clergy. These innovations emphasized

¹⁹ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 175–76, 179–80, 332–33, 335, 354–55, 358, 200, 205.

²⁰ French (2001), p. 31.

²¹ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 77v, 79; Hanham (1970), pp. vii–viii.

²² DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fol. 43; French (2001), pp. 179–80.

Here begynneþ the legende named in latyn legenda aurea / that is to say in englysh
 the golden legende: For lyke as passeth golde in valewe al oþer metallys / soo
 ys legende excelleth all oþer bokes:



5 Woodcut, from the *The legenda aurea*, the most widely hagiographic text produced for late-medieval lay audiences, published by William Caxton, 1493 or 1494. *British Library*

devotional practices intended to provoke states of sensory excitation, and most were configured around engagement with objects.²³ In the form of feasts, festivals, ceremonies, processions, plays, prayers, primers, exempla, a constellation of saints and angels, and through image, text, and performance, the laity were coached to construct a 'horizon of images' (Figure 5). This method of visually accessing holiness was one of the principal ways in which average laymen and -women experienced their faiths.²⁴ The material consequences of liturgical innovation in late medieval England are most vibrantly represented in the steadily intensifying strain of Eucharistic piety.²⁵ The Mass, the high-point of lay-experience of the Eucharist, was universally 'augmented and decorated' to heighten its sensory impact.²⁶ The resultant perception of the Host (a

²³ Mirk (1974); Jones (2002); Duffy (1992), p. 55; French (2001), pp. 183–85.

²⁴ Rubin (1991), pp. 52, 64, 105, 150; Kameron (2002), p. 52.

²⁵ Duffy (1992), pp. 92, 110.

²⁶ Rubin (1991), pp. 93.



6 Figurative image of St Andrew, oak, late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.
Private collection

sign that became that which it signified) became the model for lay response to other objects constructed for use in ecclesiastical contexts.²⁷ If the Host, an object composed from mundane materials, could be transformed into the materialization of divine presence, why would a figurative image of a saint carved from oak by an artisan (Figure 6) be expected to behave any differently?

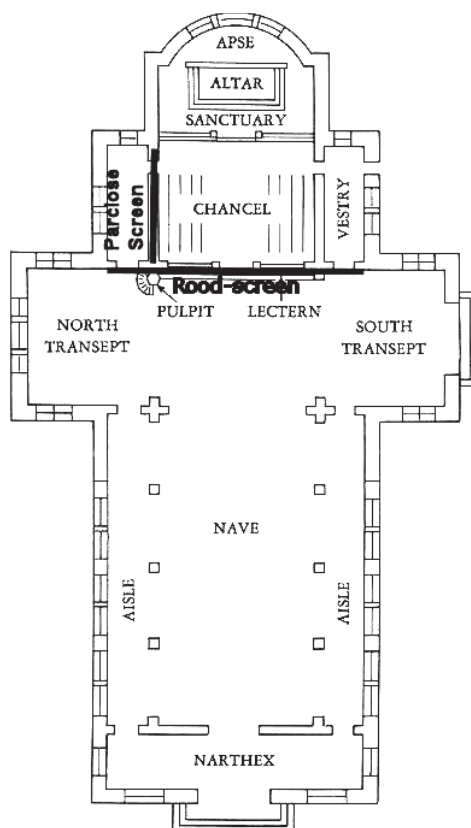
The most dramatic development associated with the elaboration of the Mass was the proliferation of Rood screens (Figure 7). These structures functioned as non-load-bearing partitions that separated the chancel and within it the sanctuary (the sacred space that housed the high altar and where the liturgies were enacted) from the people in the nave (Figure 8). Situated atop the bressummer beam surmounting the screen was a large enclosure bearing an ornamented facing called a 'loft' (Figure 9). Above, a tie-beam that spanned the central section of the screen supported the rood — a carved image of Christ on the Cross, flanked by figures of Mary and John the Evangelist

²⁷ Kamerick (2002), p. 52.



7 (above) Rood screen showing layout of surviving and lost components of, early sixteenth century, oak, St Paul, Bovey Tracy, Newton Abbot, Devon

8 (right) Floor-Plan of typical late medieval English parish church showing position of Rood screen





9 Rood screen and loft, oak, early sixteenth century, St Mary, Atherington, Umberleigh, Devon

(Figure 10). On the dado, the enclosed lower section of the screen, was often painted an array of holy personages, including the primary personifications of the church's catechetical teachings (the Twelve Apostles and the four Latin Doctors) as well as a host of authenticated and local saints (Figure 11).²⁸ As the connective tissue surrounding the primary rituals and central images of lay devotion, Rood screens and attendant lofts received tremendous attention in the process of church elaboration. Devon screens are particularly notable for their massive scale, intensity of ornament, and complex parabolic vaulting.²⁹ Designs and techniques, that appear to have been introduced on these costly symbolically important objects, were carried over to all other examples of elaborated woodwork constructed for parish church settings.

²⁸ Duffy (1992) pp. 65, 157–58.

²⁹ Tracy (2007).



10 Rood beam with restored Rood (High Cross and figurative images of Mary and John the Evangelist), oak, late fifteenth or early sixteenth century and later, St James the Apostle, Swimbridge, Barnstaple, Devon



11 Rood screen with dado painted with pictorial images of saints, early sixteenth century, St John the Baptist, Plymtree, Cullompton, Devon

Elaborated woodwork, to a greater extent than any other medium of material religion, manifests the many strands of information passing through late medieval English parishes at a given moment. Joinery was a remarkably versatile and accessible form of construction. Innovations in woodworking practice during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries allowed for structures that were light, strong, of ambitious geometry, and most importantly for rural parishes, far less expensive and labour intensive than stone structures.³⁰ Oak horizontal and vertical framing members were assembled with mortise and tenon joints and enclosed with thin, free-floating panels captured in shallow grooves. Motifs and patterns were executed with sequences of curved gouges, straight chisels, and v-shaped parting tools. Further embellishment, often applied on the surfaces of framing members, was worked with planes with angled blades or simple scratch-stocks that produced compound moulding profiles. Stonework, the other major form of church embellishment, was substantially the preserve of the elite. Even comparatively minor pieces of stonework relied upon costly materials and required the engagement of highly trained masons — the artisans who consistently rated the highest wages in Devon parish accounts of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Most Devon parishes simply could not mobilize sufficient resources to initiate and sustain more than a scattering of projects. As a result stonework never accumulated in Devon parish churches at the same rate as elaborated woodwork. Many stonework projects, particularly those in cathedral settings, were so costly and executed at such a massive scale that they played out over a period of decades rather than months.³¹ Considering the cost and time involved, embellished stonework in Devon parish churches more often reflects the slow crystallization of the priorities of a few elites. Comparatively cheap and quickly constructed elaborated woodwork captures, in real-time, the collective and individual preferences and perceptions of the laity. The unique circumstances of each object's design and fabrication indicate the means by which information was understood within a specific community. Form, dimensions, materials, structural and ornamental properties, integration with surrounding architecture and objects, the particular artisans and labourers responsible for executing and incorporating these elements, and the sequence of decision-making and social action that gave the project form reflect the relationship between a piece of elaborated woodwork and its site.

THE MOVEMENT OF ARTISANS AND INFORMATION

Elaborated woodwork manifested a nexus of artisans and ideas within a parish church. Major elaboration projects simultaneously engaged woodworkers ranging from mobile, and sometimes foreign, specialists to a spectrum of local generalists, carpenters, and semi-skilled labourers. Masons, gilders and painters, and textile workers were also enlisted in the process. No artisans contributed more to this than the woodworkers identified in parish accounts as 'carvers'. These specialists were enlisted to execute the most demanding elements of elaborated woodwork. Their duties extended well beyond

³⁰ Eames (1977), app. ix, pp. 274–76; Cragoe (2005); Tracy (1987) and (2007).

³¹ The project for construction of a stone rood screen in Yatton (Somerset) which commenced in 1446 required fourteen years to complete [SARS, Yatton Parish Accounts, fols. 11, 23, 43, 74].



12 Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Credition, Devon

post-fabrication embellishment. Carvers active within Devon parishes of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries managed every element of a project's design and construction; the conceptual aspects of its complex geometry, selection of timber for use in specific components, supervision of structural work, planning, layout and application of ornament, and final assembly. Carvers make appearances in Devon primarily as itinerants. Most are documented at work in communities and regions other than their own. Their peregrinations propelled them across social, economic, regional, and, sometimes, large-scale geographic boundaries. Itinerant carvers lived and worked in a host community for periods of weeks or even months, engaging with locals in intimate settings outside of the dynamics of work, sometimes for sequential periods. Work was carried out substantially or wholly *in situ*. Such sustained interactions with local communities and worksites allowed carvers to adapt their practices to the distinctive character of parish churches and their members.

Itinerants, like the two 'Kervers' who constructed an ambitious Rood screen and loft at St Andrew, Ashburton between 1521 and 1523, typically operated in tandem or sometimes in small teams.³² Local artisans and labourers worked under the carvers' direct supervision to conduct the heavy and semi-skilled labour that did not require a carver's specialist skills and tool sets. A Rood screen (Figure 12) that extends the full width of the transept at St Matthew, Coldridge (a sheep raising community on the

³² DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 78, 79, 79v, 81v.



13 Rood screen, oak, c. 1540, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon

north-eastern rim of Dartmoor) was constructed under such circumstances. The screen may date as late as 1540 on the basis of a closely related screen (Figure 13) at St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford (five miles away from Coldridge). The carvers responsible for the design and fabrication of the Coldridge and Lapford Rood screens were active throughout mid and east Devon during the second quarter of the sixteenth century. Related works (a further four Rood screens, a Rood loft, and a pulpit) remain in situ at four other parish churches extending from St James the Apostle at Swimbridge near Barnstaple in the north-west, to St Michael and all Angels, Dunchideock and St John the Baptist, Plymtree (south and north of Exeter respectively) and St Bartholomew, Brushford, on the Devon and Somerset border (Figures 11, 14–16). The carving on all six screens was executed with a consistent set of tools (gouges of the same sweep, chisels of identical width, and v-tools of equal depth), an attribute that would have

14 Rood screen, oak,
early sixteenth century,
St James the Apostle,
Swimbridge, Barnstaple,
Devon



15 Rood screen, oak,
early sixteenth century,
St Michael and all
Angels, Dunchideock,
Exeter, Devon



16 Rood screen, oak,
early sixteenth century,
St Bartholomew,
Brushford, Dulverton,
Somerset





17 (above left) Detail of footing, from Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Credition, Devon

18 (above) Detail of footing, from Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St James the Apostle, Swimbridge, Barnstaple, Devon

19 (left) Detail of footing, from Rood screen, oak, c. 1540, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Credition, Devon

been particular to each artisan or collaborating group of artisans. Another recurrent feature is the use of distinctive footings (the sockets that extend above the horizontal sills to receive the primary vertical framing members) with their projecting, collared toes (Figures 17–19). Most striking is the continual high-density variation of ornament seen in this group of carvers' work. Every component of the Coldridge screen and its cognates aside from their primary structural members includes minute carved details and appliqués. There are few repetitions of motifs; each panel of the parabolic vaulting, applied boss, section of foliage worked on the edges of the framing members, passage of wrought ropework and convex openwork that form the cresting fixed over the upper structural beam, and the tracery attached to the panels of the dado varies from one component to the next (Figures 20–25). Although it does not reach the same level of intricacy, constant variation of ornament extends to the reverse of the screens. The volume and variety of motifs and patterns expressed on the Coleridge and cognate



20 (above) Arch, from Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Credition, Devon



21 (above right) Detail of vaulting, from Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Credition, Devon



22 (right) Detail of vaulting, from Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Credition, Devon



23 Detail of cresting, from Rood- screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Credition, Devon



24 Detail of dado panels, from Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Credition, Devon



25 Detail of vaulting, from reverse of Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Credition, Devon

26 Detail of reverse of dado panel
showing high-quality timber,
from Rood screen, oak, *c.* 1540,
St Thomas of Canterbury,
Lapford, Crediton, Devon



screens demonstrate the prodigious amount of design information mobilized for a single project by itinerant carvers.

The fabrication of elaborated woodwork centred on working the fine radius curves of relief and openwork carving and creating delicate structural joints. Ideally these operations were performed using clear-grained, high ring-density oak, free of knots, sapwood, and wane. This material could only be harvested from the trunks of old-growth trees that were felled whole. Some parishes sourced timber in their immediate area. Small parishes benefited from their rural/agrarian setting as the laity were often able to provide the needed materials either at reduced rates or in the form of donations. When new fixed benches were installed in the nave of St George, Morebath, the vicar and several prominent parishioners donated seven ‘wokis’ to the project.³³ Town parishes with little unimproved land were forced to go farther afield. St Andrew, Ashburton paid 6*d.* for transportation of timber approximately twenty-five miles from ‘Holleperke’ to the church during a major project for the construction of fixed benches in the nave between 1511 and 1514. Local availability of timber in Ashburton had not improved by 1536–37 when 6*d.* was paid ‘ffor lokyn of the stoke to make’ a figurative image of St Christopher, a project that involved a substantial amount of carving and required quality oak.³⁴

³³ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 203, 205.

³⁴ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 123, 128v.



27 Rood screen, early sixteenth century, St Bartholomew, Bow, Crediton, Devon

Local oaks, while sufficient for the relative coarse joinery of fixed benches, were unlikely to yield enough high-grade timber for a project of larger scale and greater complexity. Scarcity of large, clear-grained standards was compensated by importation of Continental (typically Baltic) timber. Wainscot, as it was identified in Devon parish accounts, was the material most frequently documented in the construction of Rood screens and attendant lofts.³⁵ Successful execution of the intricate carving and advanced joinery involved in the parabolic vaulting on Rood screens (the *c.* 1540 screen at St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford for example) demanded oak that could be worked to the tightest tolerances. Ashburton outlaid over 67s. for the acquisition of ‘Wynscote Tymber’ and its transport (likely from the nearest port of Dartmouth) during the construction of its new screen and loft in 1521–23.³⁶ The thin, elongated medullary rays evident on the reverse of the dado panels at Lapford (Figure 26) reveal that parish, too, utilized imported timber, probably Baltic in origin. Parishes that lacked the financial wherewithal to acquire either high-grade local stock or wainscot could substitute distorted, damaged, diseased, or immature trees. Timber employed in the Rood screen and parclose screen in the comparatively tiny St Bartholomew, Bow (no more than five miles from Lapford) is shockingly poor — rife with knots, twisted grain,

³⁵ Munby (1991).

³⁶ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 79–79v, 81.



28 Parclose screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Bartholomew, Bow, Crediton, Devon



29 Detail of framing of dado showing poor quality timber, from reverse of Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Bartholomew, Bow, Crediton, Devon



30 (above) Detail of muntin showing burlled timber, from parclose screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Bartholomew, Bow, Crediton, Devon



31 (right) Dado panel showing partially finished surface with visible saw-kerfs, from Rood screen, early sixteenth century, St Bartholomew, Bow, Crediton, Devon

sapwood, and pre-existing insect damage (Figures 27–29). One of the muntins framing an arch of the parclose screen is worked directly through a large section of burl and has distorted wildly as a result (Figure 30). Artisans exercised their skills only to the extent that they were paid, and the level of workmanship evident in the Bow screens reflects an economization of labour consistent with the parsimonious timber selection. Most secondary and even some primary surfaces were left rough, with tear-outs and prominent saw kerfs. The faces of the dado, typically painted with images of saints, were here given only perfunctory attention with smoothing planes; their uneven surfaces would have bedevilled even the most adept painter (Figure 31).

Itinerant carvers were contracted by a parish when that community lacked direct access to individuals capable of carrying out work to the standards imposed by decision-makers. Morebath, a sheep raising parish situated on the isolated rim of Exmoor and inhabited by no more than 150 adults and children, relied heavily on itinerant carvers.³⁷ Despite its small size and lack of economic power, Morebath's tiny church of St George underwent a sustained campaign of refurnishing with elaborated woodwork between 1526 and 1538. In 1526–27 the wardens dispatched one of the parishioners across the Somerset border to Taunton to enlist two 'kervrs'. An existing Rood screen was replaced by Harry Day, who received a full payment of 27s. 6d. for the project within a single year of record-keeping.³⁸ Resolution of William Poppell's

³⁷ Duffy (2001), pp. 4–5.

³⁸ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 268, 167, 175–76, 77–78, 205, 219–20.



32 Fixed benches, oak, early sixteenth century, St John the Baptist, Ashton, Newton Abbot, Devon

project for a 'paneled celure' lingered until full funding was available between 1533 and 1535.³⁹ Reliance upon itinerants was not a phenomenon unique to small communities. Even large town parishes like Tavistock enlisted itinerant carvers, sending a man approximately twenty miles in 1556 'unto buckeland to feche' Robert Collin 'the Carvr' to rebuild their Rood-screen and loft.⁴⁰ The documented presence of itinerant carvers in parishes great and small is supported by the object record. Elaborated woodwork that represents a second group of itinerants survives in at least nine churches widely dispersed throughout mid and east Devon. Closely related Rood and parclose screens and fixed benches can be found in the parish churches of St John the Baptist, Ashton; St Thomas Becket, Bridford; and St Andrew, Ipplepen. Cognate benches remain at churches in the town parishes of St Martin and St Mary, Chudleigh; St Mary, Dartington; and at the grand collegiate church of Ottery St Mary (Figures 32–37).

Carvers also came to Devon parishes from more distant points. Foreign-trained artisans were active in Devon in the early sixteenth century. Two 'carvers' enlisted to dismantle the Rood and Rood loft in the lay-chapel at St Nicholas priory, Exeter, during the suppression of the minor monasteries in 1535 were described as 'Breton carvers' during an inquiry following an incident in which the artisans were violently accosted by a group of local women.⁴¹ Four early sixteenth-century screens (one Rood screen, three parclose screens, and one chapel-screen) standing at Coldridge, St Andrew,

³⁹ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 77–78, 205, 219–20, 84.

⁴⁰ DRO, Tavistock Parish Accounts, PW21.

⁴¹ Boggis (1922), pp. 356–57; Youings (1971), p. 165fn.



33 Fragments of fixed benches (some bench fronts and backs concocted into chair), early sixteenth century, St Thomas Becket, Bridford, Newton Abbot, Devon



34 Arch, from Rood screen, early sixteenth century with later additions, St Andrew, Ipplepen, Newton Abbot, Devon



35 Fixed benches, oak, early sixteenth century, St Martin and St Mary, Chudleigh, Newton Abbot, Devon

36 (right) Arch , from Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Mary, Dartington, Newton Abbot, Devon

37 (below) Fixed benches, oak, early sixteenth century, collegiate church of St Mary, Ottery, Exeter, Devon





38 Parclose screen constructed by Franco-Flemish artisans, oak, c. 1538, St Matthew, Coldridge, Crediton, Devon

Colebrooke and St Mary, Brushford (all adjacent to Crediton) are of substantially northern French design and are the work of the same artisans (Figures 38–40). These French, possibly Breton, itinerant carvers executed elongated panels worked with reversing curves (Figure 41) to simulate the appearance of folded drapery and wrought delicate cusps, foils, and arches contorted into intricate, flamboyant tracery (Figure 42). Both were common sights in the late medieval churches of northern France (Figure 43). Elaborated woodwork constructed by local artisans and English-born itinerants survives side by side in Coldridge with such Anglo-French screenwork. These juxtapositions demonstrate possibility of direct interactions between native and foreign carvers.

Most itinerant carvers appear not to have returned to their homes while engaged in a project and were therefore dependent upon their host community to provide basic necessities. Towns in the south-west generated income through the rent of parish-owned tenements. These communities frequently had access to unoccupied residential space.⁴² Ashburton accounted for 2s. in rent from the house formerly belonging to William Dolbeare for '*its occupation by le kervers*' of a major Rood screen and loft project between 1521 and 1523.⁴³ Particularly in small communities that did not own

⁴² French (2001), pp. 76–77.

⁴³ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fol. 79v.



39 Chapel screen constructed by Franco-Flemish artisans, oak, c. 1535, St Andrew, Colebrooke, Crediton, Devon



40 Rood screen constructed by Franco-Flemish artisans, oak, c. 1535, St Mary, Brushford, Crediton, Devon



41 (above left) Detail of linenfold dado panel, from parcloze screen constructed by Franco-Flemish artisans, oak, c. 1535, St Andrew, Colebrooke, Crediton, Devon

42 (above) Detail of openwork tracery with crocketed head, from chapel screen constructed by Franco-Flemish artisans, oak, c. 1535, St Andrew, Colebrooke, Crediton, Devon

43 (left) Chapel screen, oak, early sixteenth century, Laon cathedral, Picard, France. (Laurence Fligney, *Le Mobilier en Picardie*, 1200–1700, fig. 23, p. 50)

properties, parish officials were reliant upon the generosity or, more likely, the pecuniary interest of parishioners to accommodate itinerants. Morebath paid 5s. 2d. to John Morse for Harry Day's 'bord' during the duration of the 1526–27 screen project.⁴⁴ The intensely physical nature of joinery meant that liberal quantities of food and ale were required to keep an itinerant's muscles, joints, and spirits well lubricated. Parish accounts detailing the construction of elaborated woodwork, as in the 'kervyng' of the Rood for St Andrew, South Tawton, were attended by payments for 'meat & drynk'.⁴⁵ Carvers rarely arrived in a host community without aid of assistants. Journey-men, apprentices, and servants were all provided for in the same manner as the artisans themselves.⁴⁶ Yet itinerants lacked direct access to the infrastructure they and their predecessors had developed over years, or even decades, to support their practices. Familiar equipment, working spaces, and sources of material were, for the most part, out of reach. Wardens and clergy were also unwilling to completely surrender the interiors of the churches to the clutter and chaos of a work-site. Itinerants, for their part, did not have the ability to withdraw to their shops to work on specific components of a project. Some itinerants, like the 'Joynr' contracted to 'sett upp' the fixed benches at St Brannock, Branton who relocated the construction phase back to his shop in the 'Bay' [Barnstaple], lived close enough to make the journey without upending the timetable of a project.⁴⁷ But most parishes paid to secure adjacent, off-site work-space. In Ashburton, for example, wardens outlaid 6s. 3d. for '*rent of the house formerly of henry Est þ making it in*' during the construction of a parclose screen in 1525–26.⁴⁸

Itinerant carvers consistently rated the highest payments of wages of any woodworkers. The need to provide physical support to non-local artisans to work in a local context also entailed many parasitic costs. The scale and complexity of most projects for which itinerant carvers were engaged ensured that these expenses remained in effect for an extended period of time, sometimes accumulating to crippling sums. The £9 that Morebath paid over a two-year period beginning in 1547–48 to woodworker Thomas Glasse for the construction of a screen consumed all but '1d lefth' of parish funds.⁴⁹ The carvers responsible for the major screen and loft at Ashburton, Geoffrey Dupayne and William Summer, worked steadily through two years of parish record-keeping. Their wages commenced in 1521–22 when the itinerants took up residence in the parish-owned tenement, and carried over into at least one season of colder weather, necessitating the purchase of 'foule þ le carvers de le Rodeloft'. The screen and loft project held Summer and Dupayne in Ashburton for slightly over a year. The amount of labour involved can be adduced from the cost of the completed object (£26 10s. 7d.). For the design and construction of the Rood-screen and loft, Dupayne and Summer were paid £20. The amount was disbursed over the duration of the work. After an initial payment of over £7, the rest followed as parish resources permitted.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fol. 268.

⁴⁵ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, South Tawton Parish Accounts, fol. 98v.

⁴⁶ DRO, Branton Parish Accounts, fol. 49.

⁴⁷ DRO, Branton Parish Accounts, fol. 49.

⁴⁸ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fol. 90.

⁴⁹ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 302, 363, 367, 369–71.

⁵⁰ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 78–79v, 81v.

It was standard practice to pay carvers' wages over a long period, sometimes at regular intervals but sometimes episodically. This arrangement allowed for a piecemeal dispersal of funds that kept pace with the often uneven streams of parish revenue. The 'kervr' responsible for construction of a Rood loft at the church of All Saints, Winkleigh — the single most costly elaborated woodwork project documented in a sixteenth-century Devon parish accounts — was paid his £64 12s. in ten separate payments over three years as the funds gradually became available.⁵¹ Parishes that generated income through production of commodities often exchanged their goods for artisans' labour, bypassing the process of marketing these goods and thereby expediting payment. Morebath frequently paid the artisans in the form of wool from the various stocks of parish sheep.⁵² When neither sufficient nor acceptable commodities were available, parishes attempted to resolve their debts with their most abundant resource — the fabric of the church. Disused or damaged pieces of elaborated woodwork were often sold by their parish owners for the value of their materials. In the 1530–32 contract with Morebath, Thomas Glasse agreed to accept the old St George from a larger figural group that included a dragon as partial payment for replacing the carved figures of the saint and his horse. Glasse likely took the old St George not for its value as an object, but because it represented a source of high-quality timber that could be harvested for use in future projects. Glasse's work to extract old components, match and then integrate the new, and his receipt of the 'iorge' created a situation in which he interacted with the work of another artisan at a particularly intimate level.⁵³ Even repairs that did not entail woodworking artisans taking physical possession of pre-existing elaborated woodwork would have opened up similar opportunities for learning.

Itinerant carvers lived and worked in a host community for periods of weeks or even months. They engaged with locals in intimate settings outside of the dynamics of work, sometimes for sequential periods. Such interactions may have softened parishioners to the unfamiliar if not foreign ideas, even if only at a regional level, expressed in the work of itinerant artisans. Interactions of this type also facilitated construction of a more productive working dynamic between artisans and their parish clients. As mentioned above, William Summer and Geoffery Dupayne settled temporarily in a tenement in Ashburton for the duration of the 1521–23 project. At the end of two years and with the project completed, Summer and his colleague were bestowed a 'reward' of 76s., in addition to their £20 of agreed upon wages. The outcome could have been quite different. There was a considerable sum (£37) involved, as well as the high technical demands and equally high expectations (one benefactor contributed £10 towards payment of the carvers' wages).⁵⁴ Both men, as is the case with most itinerant carvers, vanished from subsequent record after nearly two years living among the parishioners of Ashburton, with one minor exception. A year after the project's completion, receipt of 4d. from 'Willi Somr' is documented among the gifts to the parish.⁵⁵ Summer's act

⁵¹ DRO, Winkleigh Parish Accounts, PW3, fols. 1–3, 9.

⁵² DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 182, 194, 332.

⁵³ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fol. 354.

⁵⁴ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 77v, 79–79v, 81v.

⁵⁵ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fol. 83.

may represent both an attempt to curry favour for a future contact and/or an expression of genuine affection for the community that was his erstwhile employer. Some carvers established a long-term presence in a particular parish community, returning to fulfil multiple contracts. Following the celure project initiated in 1526–27, William Poppell emerged as an almost permanent fixture for over two decades within the pages of the Morebath accounts. His eight subsequent major projects include a new high cross and figurative images of Mary and John (1532–35), celures over two side altars (1532–33 and 1535–36), fixed benches (1533–34), a joined canopy suspended above the high altar (1534–35), a tabernacle for the church's patron St George (1535–35), and a new high altar (1536–37).⁵⁶

Encounters between itinerant carvers and their local and itinerant counterparts that occurred within parish churches appear to have been frequent. The parishioner dispatched from Morebath to Tiverton was sent to enlist two artisans for both 'ye enter-closse & ye sylyng'. Initial phases of William Poppell's celure project ran concurrently with fabrication of the screen overseen by Harry Day.⁵⁷ The carvers occupied overlapping workspaces. Technical observation of each other's progress and processes, even if at an unconscious level, was an inevitable outcome. Both Popell and Day collaborated with local woodworkers and/or workmen who conducted much of the heavy carpentry and semi-skilled labour. William Wyatt framed the substructure of the celure while William Hurley processed, prepared, and transported timber for the joinery and substrate 'posts & refters'. Work on the screen followed this same general configuration. Materials were managed by one local labourer and another, a carpenter identified as 'quycke', attended to the heavy structural work of bedding the stiles of the screen into footings.⁵⁸ Such division of labour prevented parishes from paying carver's wages for carpenter's work. The Coldridge and Lapford screens and three other cognate Rood screens scattered across mid, east, and north Devon and west Somerset support the conclusion that highly paid itinerants were tasked with the carving and fine joinery while locals handled the carpentry. Large-scale mortise and tenon joints, and the mortise chisel which was virtually unique to each artisan, vary in each screen (Figures 44 and 45) meaning that local woodworkers, not the itinerant carvers, conducted the semi-skilled, preparatory, and heavy structural work.

The locals responsible for the heavy structural aspects of elaborated woodwork cannot be simplistically classified as 'carpenters'. Hard and fast trade distinctions did not, for the most part, exist outside of Exeter in late medieval Devon. Urban regulatory statutes that imposed and enforced divisions among woodworkers, if they existed at all outside of London, held little sway in rural parishes.⁵⁹ Parish accounts are filled with the activities of generalist woodworkers; John Mayne and William Westbrook in Ashburton, John Courtney in Braunton, Thomas Comb in Chagford, John Lake in Coldridge, James Michell in Dartington, Thomas Jordan in Morebath, William Austin

⁵⁶ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 77–78, 74, 202–03, 205, 219, 222, 224, 85–86, 88, 117–18.

⁵⁷ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 268, 167.

⁵⁸ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 268, 167, 175–76.

⁵⁹ Marks and Williamson (2003), p. 86; MacCaffrey (1958), p. 87.



44 Detail of exposed tenon, from door framing of Rood screen, oak, c. 1540, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon



45 Detail of exposed tenon, from door framing of Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Crediton, Devon

and John Conybear in South Tawton, and John Palmer in Tavistock.⁶⁰ Accounts with these artisans detail heavy carpentry such as laying the timberwork beneath the slates of church roofs and continuous repair of non-elaborated woodwork (doors, window frames, gutter supports, gates and fencing, etc). In addition to their work under the supervision of carvers, generalists were the artisans most often enlisted to perform routine maintenance on existing elaborated woodwork. The sequence of daily devotions inflicted serious injuries upon fragile and complicated pieces of elaborated woodwork. Infestation and the damp cold radiated by structures composed substantially of stone and sheathed in lead and slate contributed equally. The regularity of repairs made enlistment of a carver for such work cost-prohibitive. Local generalists were contracted even when the work required was extensive and involved the most sophisticated objects, such as the repairs William Austin was paid 2s. to perform upon the Rood loft at

⁶⁰ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 29v, 30v, 41–42, 46v–48, 48–49, 50–51v, 54v–55v, 57, 58, 62v, 70v, 113v, 139v–140v, 142, 144, 150, 151v, 158v–159, 161, 163v–164; Braunton Parish Accounts, fols. 7, 51; Chagford Parish Accounts, fols. 96, 99; Coldridge Parish Accounts, fols. 12, 15, 16, 37; Dartington Parish Accounts, fols. 6–7, 12–14, 20–22, 27, 32, 34, 37, 39–41, 45, 53, 62, 64–65, 67–68, 70–72, 75, 78–79, 82; Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 269, 29, 34–35, 39, 42, 54, 56, 402, 100, 102; South Tawton Parish Accounts, fols. 89v, 108, 112, 24; Tavistock Parish Accounts, PW20–21.

46 Benchend, oak, late fifteenth or early
sixteenth century, St Matthew,
Coldridge, Credition, Devon



St Andrew, South Tawton in 1531–32. To complete their tasks, local generalists dissected, scrutinized, and reverse-engineered the techniques employed by itinerant carvers. Scattered documentation records local generalists engaging in wholly new construction of elaborated woodwork. These projects are, in all instances, for forms of lesser technical complexity. Fixed benches (the form most often documented as constructed by generalist woodworkers) were comparatively simple; they required little more than basic joinery and few carving tools. Only a single mortise chisel and a plough-plane were needed to fit the backs and seats to the bench-ends and then secure the bench-ends to the sills (Figure 46). Bench-ends also provided smaller fields for carved ornament which was typically simpler and more repetitive in nature than the work on screens (Figure 47).

The complex networks of woodworking artisans active in and around parishes were physically mapped upon each community's church. The sequences of design, funding, and fabrication of elaborated woodwork carried out in every Devon parish for which records survive were defined by uneven patterns of leadership, varied sources and episodic streams of revenue, diverse and continually fluctuating sources of information and influence, and a cacophony of voices involved in decision-making. So many forms of input, coming from various sources and at unpredictable times, meant that no two projects, even those within the same church, followed the same design and cost parameters, engaged the same artisans, utilized the same resources, adhered to the same timetable, or fulfilled the same role once complete. In the time required for a parish to launch and complete multiple projects, or even bring a single project to



47 Bench-front, oak late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon

fruition, parish priorities and the men and women who carried them out invariably changed. Over time individual objects accumulated in complex patterns. Works involving different hands, constructed at various times, and making use of diverse concepts and approaches shared space inside each church. These juxtapositions reflect the complex nature of parish communities and the multivalent networks of artisans at work in and around them.

In addition to the dozen oak figurative images, carved reredos behind the high altar and a canopy above, an Easter Sepulchre, four oak tabernacles, choir stalls in the chancel, two canopies, and a desk all constructed by various hands, the major projects of five very different woodworking artisans are documented at Ashburton by 1540.⁶¹ These works include fixed benches carved and constructed by itinerant John Hopper (1509–10); a tabernacle (1511–12) and more benches in the nave (1511–13) and aisles of St Katherine (1513–15) and Mary (1526–27) by local generalist John Mayne; reredos behind a side altar made and painted by local gilder Walter Anthony (1514–15); the Rood-screen and loft overseen by specialized itinerants William Summer and Geoffrey Dupayne (1521–23); and a tabernacle (1523–24), parclose screen and loft, and benches in the aisle of St Thomas (1525–26), and figure of St Christopher (1527–38) by local ‘kerver’ Peter Rowling.⁶² Mayne, Anthony, and Rowling also directly engaged, at a technical level, with the products of other artisans in the course of their extensive repair and maintenance work.⁶³ Much of the elaborated woodwork at Ashburton also received layers of gilding and polychromy by both local and itinerant ‘painters’.⁶⁴

⁶¹ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 3, 4v, 6, 21, 32, 51v, 52v, 62v, 81v, 84v, 90, 119, 123, 128v.

⁶² DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 46v, 48, 51v, 55, 57, 59v, 60, 71v, 77v, 78v–79, 81v, 84v, 90, 93, 128v.

⁶³ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 57, 60, 62v, 93, 98, 100v, 122.

⁶⁴ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 55, 65, 81v, 90–90v, 113v, 119, 122, 128v.

- 48 (right) Benchend, oak, late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon
- 49 (below) Wagon-vault ceiling over nave, oak, fifteenth century, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon
- 50 (opposite page, top) Celure, oak, late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon
- 51 (opposite page, bottom) View of chancel showing intersection between Rood and parclose screens designed by different artisans, oak, first half sixteenth century, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon



Similar juxtapositions survive in the parish churches of mid-Devon, such as at Lapford which retains late fifteenth-century fixed benches in the nave (Figure 48) a wagon-vault ceiling (Figure 49), a celure over the High Cross (Figure 50), a parclose screen (Figure 51), a *c.* 1540 Rood screen carved by itinerants with ‘Antique’ motifs (Figure 52), and a small figurative image of an Apostle (probably St John the Evangelist) (Figure 53), all apparently executed by different hands at various times. Parish churches provided local and itinerant artisans access to continuously renewable sources of visual and technical information. The objects parishioners encountered in these structures — many of which were of a cost and scale that vastly exceeded the resources of most



individuals — may have prefigured what they desired to see in their own homes. Participation in planning, funding, and fabrication of pieces of elaborated woodwork undoubtedly had an impact upon parishioners, sparking new desires or coaxing men and women into a state receptive to previously unfamiliar approaches to design.

Substantial material evidence survives in the parish churches of Devon for the introduction of foreign designs by itinerant carvers. The Rood screen at St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, a rather standard structural form constructed by predominantly native artisans, is saturated with Antique ornament of the type that propagated from Italy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Figure 52). Each panel set within

the parabolic vaulting of the screen is loaded up with an array of meticulously modelled scroll-work, entwined foliage and abstract flower-heads, stylized urns and vases, fantastical zoomorphic forms, and profile-portrait roundels. This approach almost entirely supplants the conventional, English-style tracery that appears on the vaulting of five screens (Coldridge, Swimbridge, Dunchideock, Plymtree, and Brushford, Somerset) constructed by the same group of itinerant carvers (Figure 54). The lower portion of the Lapford screen (the sills, footings, dados, doors, and arches) is of an entirely conventional format that deviates little from the other screens (Figure 55). No trace of Antique ornament is evident on any of the cognate screens. This raises questions. The six related screens originally occupied generally equivalent social and geographic contexts and are of approximately the same date. What circumstances, acting upon the artisans and/or their clients, unleashed such a torrent of foreign designs in Lapford? St Thomas of Canterbury is the most substantial church in the largest of the six parishes; Lapford was undoubtedly equipped with an equally substantial fundraising apparatus. The screen, a more complex and costly object than its cognates, reflects this. It represents an extension of the constant variation of pattern and motif evident at the four other churches. All possible options within a basic framework that the artisans were capable of executing and were within the means of the parish, were exercised. No two components, even the smallest panels or applied bosses, are identical. Each exhibits a density of ornament that exceeds even the most prominent components of the other screens. Use of Antique ornament may have been motivated partially by the obvious effort on the part of the artisans to maximize the visual variety present on the screen. The inherent asymmetry of Antique ornament allows for an almost infinite manipulation of individual motifs into differing configurations. Tracery of the type that substantially comprises the ornament of the cognate screens is composed in bilateral symmetry, offering much less latitude for improvisation.

The Antique ornament at Lapford and not Coldridge, Swimbridge, Dunchideock, Plymtree, and Brushford can be explained with three possible scenarios. It was either a latent ability possessed by the artisans that was not utilized on other surviving works because of the limitations or priorities of parish clients; an innovation of some sort that was wholly absent when the cognate screens were constructed; or a combination of both. For experienced carvers, as the artisans responsible for the five screens demonstrably were, the assimilation of new visuals into an established technical framework would not have proved difficult. It is possible that an immigrant, or an artisan trained by immigrants, joined the pre-existing group of itinerants at a later point in their career as a collective. This artisan could have managed the generation of motifs and patterns while overseeing the others at work. The working relationship between the artisans responsible for the 1521 to 1523 Rood screen and loft project at Ashburton, William Summer and Geoffrey Dupayne — the latter possibly a foreigner from France or the Channel Islands — may represent an example of this type of collaboration. It is also possible that an entirely indigenous group of artisans engineered the Antique ornament independent of sporadic encounters with immigrant woodworks and their products. Another, richer body of source material may have provided the basic concept. Print was portable and readily available in endless variety. Antique ornament can be found in much of the printed devotional literature marketed to lay audiences. Woodcut borders convulsing with precisely the sort of motifs and patterns that appear at Lapford



52 Detail of vaulting with Continentalized Antique motifs, from Rood screen, oak, c. 1540, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon



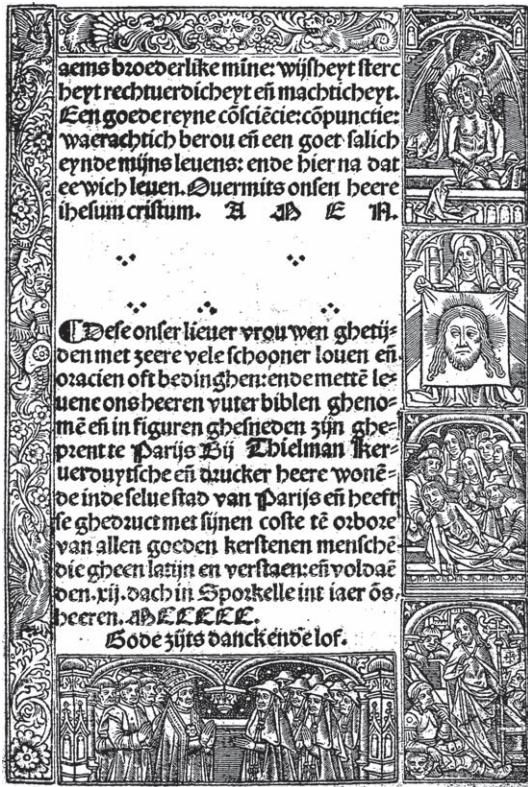
53 Figurative image of apostle (possibly St John the Evangelist), oak, late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon



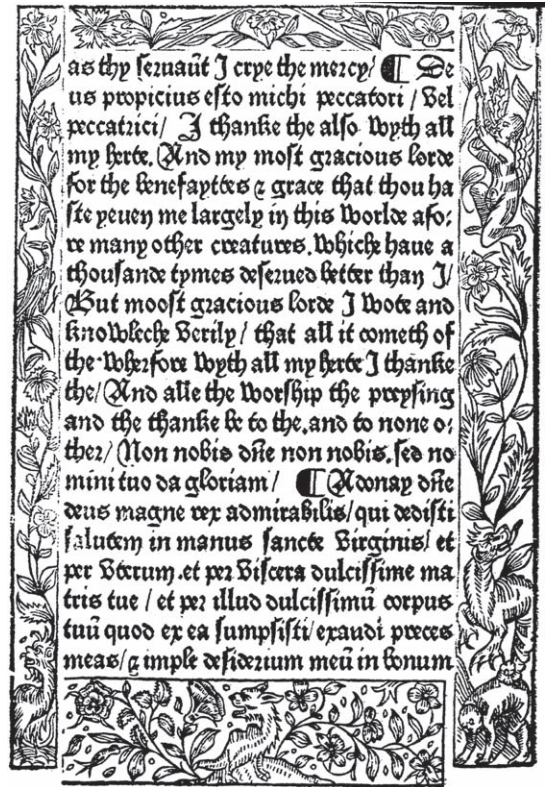
54 Detail of vaulting, from Rood screen, oak, early sixteenth century, St Bartholomew, Brushford, Dulverton, Somerset



55 Detail of dado panel and adjacent framing, from Rood screen, oak, c. 1540, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon



56 Leaf with woodcut border, from *Horae: ad usum Romanum*, published by Etienne Jehannot for Antoine Verard, Paris, 1499.
British Library



57 Leaf with woodcut border, from *Orationes [The Fifteen Oes]*, published by William Caxton, c. 1491.
British Library

are omnipresent on the pages of Continental books of hours as well as domestic productions of foreign inspiration (Figures 56 and 57).

A woodcut did inspire at least one motif carved on the Lapford Rood screen. Looming from a panel of the vaulting directly above a portal designed for the administration of the Sacrament is the portrait of an imposing man bearing a crown and displaying a full beard (Figure 58). This portrait, surrounded by a company of 'worthies', is that of Henry VIII. The image appears as if directly transplanted from the shoulders of the king depicted on the frontispiece of the woodcut after Hans Holbein the Younger that appears in the 'Great Bible' of 1538–39 (Figure 59). It was this volume that was the first ordered to be 'set up in sum convenient place wythin' every parish church.⁶⁵ This image situates the Lapford screen in the early 1540s, a period that witnessed the rejection of the Roman mother Church, redistribution of monastic wealth, a drastic

⁶⁵ Herbert (1968), p. 25.



58 (above) Detail of vaulting panel carved with portrait roundel (probably Henry VIII), from Rood screen, oak, c. 1540, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon



59 (right) Frontispiece after Holbein, from folio edition of *The Byble in Englyshe, that is to say the content of all the holy scripture, bothe of ye olde and newe testament ...* [the 'Great Bible'], printed Richard Grafton and Edward Whitchurch, 1539.
British Library

diminution of the ritual calendar, and the refashioning of material religion.⁶⁶ Royal proclamations, episcopal injunctions, and scriptural books formed the leading edge of theological change at the parish level. Print at this particular moment achieved a new level of primacy in the lives of laymen and women. The 'seeing of parishioners' of this period, according to Margaret Aston, 'was above all to be the seeing and reading of texts and books'.⁶⁷ Lapford's decision to locate the particular image of the King above the most symbolic element of a potent object can be seen as recognition of the powerfully spiritual dimension acquired by the Monarchy with the passage of the Royal Supremacy. The Antique ornament, then, reflects the reaction of the parish to the ideological instability of their time, expressed through itinerant carvers.

PARISH PATRONAGE

Parishioners made very deliberate decisions about the types of images and architectural forms installed in their churches. Late medieval laymen and women were not passive recipients of decorative schemes imposed upon them by the clerical hierarchy,

⁶⁶ Aston, (1988), pp. 224, 227, 239–42; Duffy (1992), pp. 393–95; Hughes & Larkin (1967), pp. 229–32, 278–81, 296–97.

⁶⁷ Aston, (2003).

aristocrats, other elite benefactors, or even the artisans responsible for construction. The choices of parishioners reflect an awareness of sophisticated design information and theological concepts that originated well outside of the physical and social boundaries of their communities.⁶⁸ Although the ways in which parishioners weighed in on matters of design are not directly visible, the choices made by their social leaders, their clergy, and their elite benefactors are.

The parish leaders most often tasked to administer an elaboration project were the two to six 'trustworthy' men and women who comprised the principal wardens elected annually to oversee the general operations of a parish.⁶⁹ Thomas Layhe, Thomas Whatstonn, Marke Dedatott and John Blakemore of Winkleigh set their names to a contract with carver John Kellogg for construction of a Rood loft in 1515–16. The 'hye Wardyns of y^e of y^e goodds & y^e cattyll' of Morebath', Thomas Borrage & Williy Leddon, engaged William Poppell to construct a High Cross and paneled cellure in 1534–35.⁷⁰ The wardens in charge of sub-parochial 'stores' also weighed in on projects, according to their group's level of contribution. Wardens became involved with elaboration projects at multiple levels. Some contributed financial or material resources, like John Morse of Morebath who donated an oak tree in 1534–35 to supply timber for the new fixed benches constructed in the nave of St George under his wardenship.⁷¹ Others like Robert Pollisand, the South Tawton warden who recorded 'myn owne labour in helpin Lawrenc munquies about the chancel dore' during a project in 1585–86, invested their own time and labour.⁷² The office also conveyed important social benefits. Service was a pious act. Successful projects and initiatives, and the accounts that documented a warden's contribution towards completion, were a concrete record of benefaction no less than a name inscribed on a bede roll or an object bestowed by an elite donor.

For their contribution to elaboration projects, wardens determined the precise type of object to be made and its scale, dimensions, extent of ornamentation, and allowable costs. They enlisted the artisans and labourers involved, deliberated and drew-up contracts, set the timetable and sequence of work, acquired materials and orchestrated their transportation, secured supporting infrastructure, located and developed funding sources, marshalled the enthusiasm of parishioners and mobilized their participation, and anticipated and contended with the succession of obstacles that might punctuate the progress of a major project. The results of these considerations, from which all subsequent workmanship and community involvement proceeded, were conveyed to the artisans hired to manage the project in the form of a contract. A document of this type, often termed in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century parish accounts as a 'patent,' 'Indntr', or a 'bargyn', outlined the basic parameters under which the artisan was required to operate and specified those obligations the parish consented to perform in exchange.⁷³ The language of surviving contracts, rife with references to 'bargains'

⁶⁸ Cragoe (2005).

⁶⁹ French (2001), pp. 45–46.

⁷⁰ DRO, Winkleigh Parish Accounts, PW3, fol. 2; Morebath Parish Accounts, fol. 218.

⁷¹ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 200, 203.

⁷² DRO, South Tawton Parish Accounts, fols. 41–42.

⁷³ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 219, 332; Winkleigh Parish Accounts, PW3, fol. 2.

and ‘promises,’ reflects healthy mistrust on all sides and heated negotiation. This was particularly likely in the case of itinerants who may have had little or no previous direct connections with the communities for which they worked. The wording of the 1515–16 contract between the wardens of Winkleigh and itinerant carver John Kellogg for construction of a Rood loft in the church of All Saints gives insight into the potential consequences of a violation. With £64 12s. and three years of work on the line, the parties consented to fulfill their respective obligations ‘a pon a payne off Indenturys,’ and probably in front of an attorney or another local official.⁷⁴ Negotiations appear to have concluded with payment of a symbolic 1d. to the artisans involved to formalize the agreement — the ‘jd’ warden Richard Webber ‘delyvryd at ye bargyn for makyn of ye sets’ in the Morebath nave in 1533–24.⁷⁵ Contracts formed through this sort of intense ‘*bargaining*’ for which warden William Hall was paid an additional 12d. by Chagford during negotiations with itinerant woodworker John Hall, represent the first stage of the interactions between late medieval parish communities and the artisans.⁷⁶

Contracts were originally recorded in stand-alone documents, usually referred to as an ‘indenture’, which was witnessed by some external party (typically a local authority figure) and signed by the artisans and representatives of the parish involved. Originals, such as the 1531 example made by the parish of Stratton in Cornwall and the itinerant carvers John Dawe and John Pares for construction of a rood loft, screen, benches, two side altars, and a celure in the church of St Andrew,⁷⁷ rarely survive.⁷⁸ However, the salient details were often summarized in brief within parish accounts. The contractual information recorded in Devon parish accounts usually followed a standardized formula, as in the 1534–35 ‘patent’ drawn up between the ‘hye Wardyns’ of Morebath and William Poppell for construction of a Rood and panelled celure above the crossing of the Church of St George (Figure 60). This contract first identifies the objective of the project — ‘ye makyn of ye crucifix & mary & John wt all ye sylyng’. Also specified is the extent of work to be performed by the artisans themselves, as opposed to those tasks for which locals were hired. In this case, Poppell also consented to construct the supporting structural members (everything pertaining ‘to ye same’ including the loft beam to support the rood and the wall plates of the celure and ‘sett hyt upp’). Sources of timber are usually specified as well as the means by which this material was acquired, transported, and processed, and to whom these responsibilities fell. The contract with Poppell appears structured to benefit the parish in this respect. Morebath required the carver to ‘fynd all manner of stuffe [timber]’ himself, acquire what was necessary, and prepare it for use at ‘hys costs & charge’, incurring no additional expenses for the parish. Morebath’s wardens did, however, consent to provide ‘ye tymber for ye byme & ye wall plate’. Any accidental shortfalls in, or losses of, materials were Poppell’s responsibility to resolve. This arrangement was unusual and likely reflected the small size of Morebath and its church, the limited scale and conservative nature of the project, and a use of local timber that would not have been feasible in a more ambitious project.

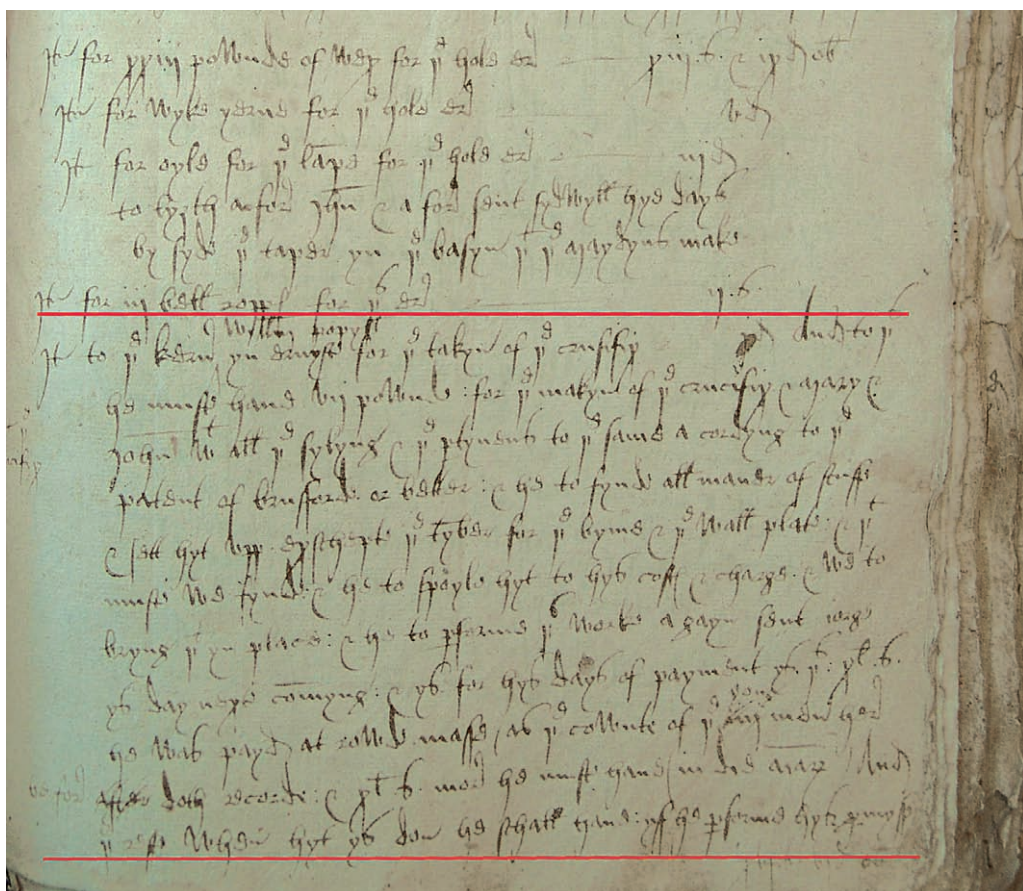
⁷⁴ DRO, Winkleigh Parish Accounts, PW3, fols. 2–3, 9; Woodward (1995), pp. 188–89.

⁷⁵ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fol. 74.

⁷⁶ DRO, Chagford Parish Accounts, v. 4, fol. 6.

⁷⁷ CRO, Stratton Indenture.

⁷⁸ French (2001), p. 158; Marks & Williamson (2003), p. 400; Middleton-Stewart (2006).



60 Contract with William Poppell for construction of Rood and paneled ceiling, 1534–35,
Churchwardens' Accounts of Morebath, 1528–1596.
Devon Record Office, 2983 A/PW 2, fol. 219

In the Morebath rood and celure contract, the sequence of payment was linked to the projected work schedule and the overall timetable established for the project. Distribution of Poppell's £11 3s. 4d. in compensation was structured over five months and, as in contracts with other carvers, linked to major points in the local liturgical calendar — Rood Mass (late March), St George's Day (23 April), and the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin (25 August).⁷⁹ Projects of larger scale and greater cost often took years rather than months.⁸⁰ The piecemeal distribution of funds not only maximized resources by preventing parishes from paying for work yet to be done, but also provided a measure of security against artisans absconding before fulfilment of their contracts. If his project was completed as planned and on schedule Poppell was guaranteed an additional sum — a not insubstantial 16s. 6½d. — 'yf he pform hys

⁷⁹ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 78, 205, 218–20; Ashburton Parish Accounts, fol. 79.

⁸⁰ DRO, Winkleigh Parish Accounts, PW3, fols. 1–3, 9.

pmysse'. 'Rewards' such as that paid to Poppell or the 66s. 8½*d.* bestowed upon William Summer and Geoffrey Dupayne upon completion of the Ashburton Rood screen and loft in 1523–24 were standard parish practice. This further incentivized artisans to work swiftly and to high standards, and empowered parishes to withhold some resources in the event of an unsatisfactory outcome.

Some wardens, such as James Michel — a generalist carpenter living, working and occasionally serving as a warden in Dartington during the mid-sixteenth century — were themselves involved in some aspects of woodworking.⁸¹ Others acquired a working familiarity with the techniques and terminology of woodwork during their ongoing transactions with artisans, either independently or acting on behalf of their parish or one of its stores in some previous capacity. However, no carver identified in late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Devon parish accounts is known to have served as a warden. This fact combined with the complexity of elaborated woodwork implies that wardens were heavily reliant upon the judgement of the artisans under their employ when it came to making many of the technical decision involved in a project. For example, this hands-off approach is evident in the selection of materials for William Poppell's Rood and celure project and at Tavistock in 1537 when carver Robert Collin was paid for making five new benches in the chancel 'and ffyndyng tymber to the same'.⁸²

A few contracts with carvers hint at the ways in which parishioners decided upon and qualitatively evaluated elaborated woodwork, and protected their communities against the prospect of failure. The contract with William Poppell is one of these documents. Morebath's wardens specified that the Rood and panelled celure were to be completed 'a cordyng to y^e patent of brusforde or better' — i.e., meeting or exceeding the standards of workmanship and the decorative properties of objects of the same form apparently seen and admired by Morebath parishioners just over the Somerset border at St Bartholomew, Brushford, Dulverton.⁸³ By predicating the parameters of a project upon an existing object in an adjacent community, parishioners lacking technical knowledge of elaborated woodwork were able more effectively to communicate their desires to artisans. Because Poppell was an itinerant it is likely that he had seen the Brushford Rood and celure, and may even have constructed them himself. The emulative strategy can also be seen as providing the wardens with a measure of assurance that the outcome of the project would satisfy the parish. If the quality of the work was in doubt, comparison with Brushford would have revealed any failing or non-compliance by the artisan. The wording of the contract may also implicate Morebath's wardens, and probably a number of its parishioners, in an attempt to equal or surpass a nearby parish through the display of elaborated woodwork within their church. Although there is little evidence that local Devon clergy were explicitly involved in decision-making, they were none the less instrumental in the design of elaboration projects because of the influence they exerted on community life. Their approval or apathy/disapproval could ensure the success of some projects, condemn others to failure.⁸⁴

⁸¹ DRO, Winkleigh Parish Accounts, fols. 6–7, 12–14, 20–21, 32, 34, 37, 39–41, 45, 53, 62, 64–65, 67–68, 70–72, 79.

⁸² DRO, Tavistock Parish Accounts, PW25.

⁸³ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fol. 219.

⁸⁴ Duffy (1992), p. 160.

Elite benefactors who stood outside of the immediate social boundaries of a Devon parish were also known to insert their interests in extant projects or launch initiatives all their own. Diocesan officials and members of mendicant orders occasionally lent support to parish projects through the donation of resources.⁸⁵ Ashburton received 'iij pec of *good timber*' from the abbot of Buckfast Abbey in 1521–22 for use in the major project for a Rood screen and loft, and an oak tree was bestowed towards construction of a figurative image of St Thomas by 'Johus *archbishop of Exon*' in 1530–31.⁸⁶ Such gifts from revered figures were powerful endorsements of the social and theological priorities and decorative schemes expressed by a project. Aristocrats and wealthy merchants were the outside benefactors who appear most frequently in parish accounts of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and whose actions had the greatest impact upon the communities they patronized. The interventions of elite benefactors could be both beneficial and disruptive. Pre-existing parish priorities or plans were often ignored or swept aside, clearing space for benefactors to inscribe their presence upon the local fabric. Some outside benefactions did serve the needs of parishes, providing critical funds to compensate for revenue shortfalls or allowing a parish to boost a project beyond initial design and cost parameters. However, such gifts bound the recipient parish to certain obligations, as did the 6s. received by Braunton in 1534–35 from 'Willi Raw Senr *gent to making up le rudeloft*' in St Brannock and the £10 bestowed upon Ashburton by 'John fford in *part payment þ making le Rodeloft*' and an accompanying screen in 1521–22.⁸⁷ Documentation indicates that wardens also yielded a share of decision-making authority proportional to the magnitude of the gift. Some cases were extreme, as in the aisle and fan vault stone ceiling constructed in St Andrew, Cullompton beginning in 1526–27 and mostly financed by John Lane, a wealthy cloth merchant. Lane virtually seized control of the design and planning processes from the Cullompton wardens.⁸⁸ The involvement of John Ford, a relatively prosperous attorney and Burgess, was less invasive. Ford's gift, which amounted to one-third of the total cost of the project, was explicitly directed towards payment of carvers' wages. The fact that Ford was able to specify the use to which his gift was put indicates that he was entitled to a proportional say in the selection of the artisans contacted for the project and the parameters under which those artisans were required to work.

Pieces of elaborated woodwork motivated and funded completely (the Cullompton ceiling) or in large part (the Ashburton screen and loft) by outside benefactors were often branded with the identities of their patrons. Names, initials, coats of arms, and crests were integrated, often not so subtly, into the schemes of patterns and motifs present on elaborated woodwork. At St John the Baptist, Ashton, for example, donors' initials appear upon roundels conjoined in the open tracery of the chapel screen's arches (Figure 61). This practice of branding was most obviously expressed in the form of inscriptions. Detailed examples identified the date of benefaction, the name of the patron, and sometimes proclaimed his or her pious qualities, articulated personal devotional preferences, and exhorted viewers to intercessory prayer. The reading slope of

⁸⁵ French (2001), pp. 26, 145; Marks (2004), p. 105.

⁸⁶ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 79–79v, 131.

⁸⁷ DRO, Braunton Parish Accounts, fols. 196, 200; DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fol. 77v.

⁸⁸ Colvin (1999), p. 26; Whiting (1989), p. 89.



61 (left) Detail of donors' initials conjoined in tracery of chapel screen, early sixteenth century, church of St John the Baptist, Ashton, Newton Abbot, Devon

62 (below) Detail of donor's inscription on reading rest, from box pew constructed by Franco-Flemish artisans, oak, c. 1538, St Matthew, Coldridge, Crediton, Devon



the lead seat among the box pews in the chapel of St Matthew, Coldridge (Figure 62) proclaims in clerical Latin carved in black letter script that the pews were given to the parish by 'John Evans ... *to the work of Jesus ... in the thirtieth year of the reign of King Henry VIII*' (1538).

Many elite benefactors like John Lane and John Ford patronized multiple parish churches. This practice maximized the value to the donor by distributing intercessory and commemorative efforts made on his or her behalf, rather than concentrating these energies in a single place. Patronage was usually focused upon communities in which benefactors maintained some economic, social, or familial interests. Some parishes were targeted because their population size and ability to mobilize collective efforts on behalf of a benefactor allowed for optimization of the reflective benefits of the gift. The posthumous benefactions of John Ford mirror the strategies he and other elites pursued in life. His will, composed in 1542, specifies bequests of 20s. to Ashburton, Ilington, Chagford, Budleigh, 'And to Twenty other pyrshe churches in whiche I have

my lands and Trusts in Devon' for 'the mayntenance of gods sirves and ornamentes'.⁸⁹ Homologies so evident in surviving examples of elaborated woodwork throughout Devon can be attributed in part to elites making repetitive design choices in each parish they patronized. Some elite benefactors who engaged in dispersed benefaction appear to have employed the same principal artisans for each of their initiatives. This strategy further blurred the differences in design from parish to parish and object to object. It is possible that the Coldridge parclose screen standing next the 1538 box pews and obviously constructed by the same group of Anglo-French carvers was also initiated by John Evans. This offers a partial explanation as to why immigrant artisans were employed for these projects rather than the native-born itinerants responsible for the roughly contemporaneous rood screen and pulpit in the same church. Evans, local minor gentry and a '*park-keeper*', may also have pursued dispersed benefaction, patronizing the nearby churches of St Andrew, Coldridge and St Mary, Brushford in which screens constructed by the same Anglo-French carvers are also present.

Members of Devon parishes contributed to elaboration projects in four basic ways. First, laymen and women gave funds or goods that could be sold to realize the equivalent value. Second, they could donate or provide materials or services required to carry out the project. Third, they participated in community revenue generating activities. Finally, they volunteered physical labour or other skilled or semi-skilled activities involved in the processes of construction or related aspects of project infrastructure. Individuals or groups of parishioners often contributed in all these ways during the duration of the fund-raising and physical work. Each means of participation allowed the individuals or groups involved proportional influence over the direction of the overall project. In the same way that John Ford stipulated the explicit use of his benefaction of £10 by Ashburton during the 1521 to 1523 Rood screen and loft project (payment of artisans' wages), parishioners were able to direct the trajectories of their lesser gifts and donations.⁹⁰ These voluntary contributions, unlike compulsory collections, were not simply subsumed into a larger pool of parish resources to be used at the discretion of current wardens.⁹¹

Gifts and donations were often reactive to short-term parish needs. They occurred after a project had taken shape, while work was already underway, and were often made to compensate for shortfalls in funding, materials, or other resources required for construction to begin or proceed to its next phase. This was the scenario during the 1536–37 project for a panelled celure above the high altar in St George, Morebath. 5s. 4d. had been 'payd for y^e tyber worke to [William] popyll a redy'. William Timewell, a senior member of the parish, 'contendyd to pay for y^e sylyng of y^e hye auter & for y^e payntnyng of ye same also: what so ev^r hyt coste: as sone as hyt can be don'. This promised gift triggered other interventions. A second elder parishioner, a neighbour of William Timewell, donated 'iij bords' to be used in the project; Timeswell's wife, Johanna, donated valuable personal possessions ('her^e gowne & her^e gurdyll'), valued 'yn p^rsse of xiijs & iiijd'.⁹² Because of the compressed timetable involved, such reactive

⁸⁹ NA, PROB 11/29.

⁹⁰ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fols. 77v, 78v.

⁹¹ Cragoe (2005).

⁹² DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols. 100–01.

benefactions were limited to hard currency, materials, etc. that were immediately useful in a project, or the most valuable and fungible personal possessions such as textiles and jewellery.

Because reactive gifts and donations occurred well downstream of the initial design process, they afforded benefactors relatively little influence. Anticipatory gifts and donations, however, were made months or even years before critical sequences of decision-making, selection of artisans, and signing of contracts. This form of benefaction opened substantial opportunities to impact on the outcome of a project. In some instances, major anticipatory benefactions, such as the bequest made by Morebath widow Johanna Rumbelow in 1527–28, served to inspire a wholly new project. Elderly and in failing health, Johanna Rumbelow bequeathed all of her personal goods towards the construction of a new carved oak figurative image of the Virgin Mary. Members of the Morebath sub-parochial store specifically dedicated to the Virgin mobilized in support of the project. The accounts of the ‘wardyns of y^e store of ow^r lady’ record the widow’s testament of her ‘entent: y^t her goodds: y^t wer^e lefth when sche was brofthe yn yerthe: schuld be bestowyd a pon a new image of ow^r laydy’. Her death during the following year of record keeping and the subsequent realization of 21s. from the sale of her goods with the addition of 6d. of her ‘redy mony’ motivated other parishioners into a sequence of complementary gifts and donations of property and materials for the project. Most were affiliated with the store of Our Lady, like Richard at Wode who donated ‘iij bords of yn cow^rte wode’ for use in the project. A number of non-members also contributed, including principal warden Harry Hurly who gave 4s. in 1528–29. The store as a whole participated through the acceleration of its engines of fundraising — the sale of wool from its stock of sheep (‘ow^r laydy wolles’) and the brewing of ale and its sale in the churchyard by younger members of the store.

The Rumbelow bequest and the community response it generated are illustrative of the ways in which personal devotional tendencies prompted community aesthetic preferences which in turn affected the design of elaborated woodwork. Construction of ‘a new image of ow^r laydy’ and its accompanying tabernacle does not appear to have been propounded by any Morebath wardens prior to the widow’s bequest, and it is likely that her act catalyzed the entire project. The contract with carver Thomas Glass ‘for a nimage of y^e nativite of ow^r laydy w^t her p^rtenes’ was not drawn up until 1528–29 and fabrication, installation, and full payment of Glasse’s agreed upon £5 did not occur until 1531–32.⁹³ The most revealing aspect of the documentation surrounding Johanna Rumbelow’s bequest is that she specified a particular type of image — a figure of the Virgin represented laying in childbed — one of more than a dozen options, each with equally unique personalities, popularized during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁹⁴ Once completed, Morebath’s *Geysn* became the devotional focal point of one of the parish’s principal stores and the most important Marian image within the church of St George. The impact of the choices made by Johanna Rumbelow demonstrate the ability of individual parishioners not only to initiate and determine the course of a major elaboration project, but also to shape the long-term devotional priorities of a community and the material form in which they were expressed.

⁹³ DRO, Morebath Parish Accounts, fols 173–74, 180, 332, 345, 354–55, 358.

⁹⁴ Marks (2004), pp. 121–22, 144–45.



63 Mid-naive benchend, oak, early sixteenth century, St John the Baptist, Ashton, Newton Abbot, Devon

Juxtapositions of multiple objects, each reflecting slightly different circumstances as at St John the Baptist, Ashton (Figure 63), were symbolic of a parish community's social makeup.⁹⁵ Fixed benches set up in the naves of churches, for example, delineated the structure of local hierarchies. Most late medieval parishes sold the rights to use specific benches to parishioners, as did Ashburton which received payments for between 8*d.* and 6*s.* for each seat 'sold'. Benches situated in closest proximity to the screen afforded the least obstructed view of mass and other liturgies, and parishioners seated in them were the first to assemble for Easter house and the weekly stand-ins for communion, the 'kiss of the pax' and distribution of the 'holy loaf'. The more costly lead benches communicated prestige and conferred, to those who could afford them, greater sacral benefit. The spiritual and social advantage and cost of seating diminished progressively towards the rear of the nave. Community divisions were reinforced by kinship and social groups like stores which often clustered together, buying rights to adjacent benches. These distinctions were represented upon bench-end design. The intricacy and variety of carving executed on the slab-like ends of benches varied proportionally with their position relative to the screen, and were paid for during initial

⁹⁵ Jenkins (1999), pp. 107, 153.



64 Back-nave benches, oak, late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, St Matthew, Coldridge, Credition, Devon

construction by the parishioners who owned the rights to use them. Bench-ends positioned in the centre of the nave, like those at Ashton, were typically of simple and uniform configurations; examples at the back lacked any ornament aside from mouldings and chamfers (Figures 63 and 64). Lead benches were often ornamented in a way that signifies the fundamental difference between their occupiers and other parishioners seated further aft. Additional variant ornament appears to have been directly specified by the seat-holders. Coats of arms or other heraldic insignia as at Ashton (Figure 65), trade emblems, specific devotional iconography like the representations of the Five Wounds at St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford (Figure 66), or other individualized motifs articulated personal and familial identity, occupational and/or social affiliations, devotional tendencies, and aesthetic preferences.⁹⁶

Situated immediately before the front rows of benches in the Ashton nave is the Rood screen, an object that reflects a form of religion that operated at two complementary levels within a single community — the external Church, with its hierarchies, sacraments and liturgy, and local custom and tradition. The massive structure and dense carving of the Ashton screen forcefully communicated the power and permanence of the doctrine. The dado panels, as in most Devon churches, are painted with representations of a variety of sacred personages – saints both foreign and domestic as well as the four Latin Doctors (Figure 67). On one hand, saints did manifest Church priorities. On the other hand, the circumstances under which individual saints were selected and

⁹⁶ DRO, Ashburton Parish Accounts, fol. 15; Duffy (1992), p. 125; French (2001), pp. 144–45, pp. 162–63; Rubin (1991), p. 64.



65 (left) Lead benchend with coat of arms, oak, early sixteenth century, St John the Baptist, Ashton, Newton Abbot, Devon

66 (middle) Lead benchend with motif of Five Wounds of Christ, oak, late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, St Thomas of Canterbury, Lapford, Crediton, Devon

67 (right) Arch showing dado panels with pictorial images of saints, from Rood screen, early sixteenth century, St John the Baptist, Ashton, Newton Abbot, Devon

the ways in which parishioners and artisans chose to represent them were specific to each parish. Their iconographic programmes could be easily manipulated to reflect local priorities. Saints like Erasmus (Figure 68), beloved by those involved in the woollens trade and often represented holding a distaff rather than a windlass that features in his legend, allowed parishioners to carve out personal agendas within their religion.⁹⁷ Each of the twenty-eight images appearing on the nave-facing side of the Ashton screen corresponds to a particular cluster of motivations at work within the parish.

⁹⁷ Duffy (1997); Kamerick (2002), pp. 86, 88; Marks (2004), pp. 36, 103, 105, 109, 113.



68 Detail of dado panel with pictorial images of saints including Erasmus (extreme proper-right), from Rood screen, early sixteenth century, St John the Baptist, Ashton, Newton Abbot, Devon

CONCLUSION

Late medieval parish churches were composite sites. A community's church housed the immediate point of access to sacraments and liturgies of the external Church and also contained the artifacts that defined a community's memory.⁹⁸ The institutional identities of a parish church were further affected by the diverse uses to which the space within them was put and the continual penetration of external information. Churches were places of social and economic transaction, and foci for the display of local priorities, resources and, conversely, insufficiencies. They also served as the places in each community through which news, outsiders, and new objects were first received.⁹⁹ The complexity of parish churches was represented by woodworking artisans. Itinerant carvers, the principal artisans involved in the process of church elaboration, worked in communities positioned across the social and economic spectrum. They often operated

⁹⁸ Duffy, (1992) pp. 92–93; Whiting (1989), p. 17; Jenkins (1999), pp. 79, 107; Kamerick (2002), p. 94; Kümin (2006).

⁹⁹ Coster and Spicer (2005), pp. 7–8; Hindle and Kümin (2009), p. 5.

in other regions and even other lands. During each project, their practices adapted to local requirements and resources. Resultant innovations were then relocated to the next worksite, where they were subject to further alteration. Layers of local histories and traditions and continually fluctuating internal forces and resources meant that no piece of information swept up in this sequence of artisanal transmission was ever redeployed in exactly the same way. Furnishings and architectural elements that accumulated as a result mapped out the evolving ways in which each parish employed unique local understandings to engage with and negotiate the outside information introduced by artisans and other sources. Different forms and densities of objects and features manifested the shifting forces, relationships, and interests involved in this process over time.¹⁰⁰

Extensive examination of elaborated woodwork encourages rethinking of the place of parishes within the wider landscape of late medieval English design and patronage. Cities, cathedrals, and the Court are traditionally presented as the loci of innovation and production and aristocrats, major landowners, and elite clerics and high-level artisans as the primary instigators and agents of design.¹⁰¹ The basic principle of the primacy of sites such as London in this urban/elite-centric interpretation is not fundamentally flawed, and need not be wholly discarded. However, the interpretive balance of this model must be reweighted towards inclusion of parish communities as important contributors to design. Even relatively rural Devon parishes were capable of mobilizing resources, commissioning artisans, and concentrating creative energies in their churches at levels that equalled many elite patrons and their great houses or cathedrals. The quantity, variety, and regularity of construction carried out in parish churches combined with the need to enlist as many members of the local community as possible in the process. This meant that a wide cross-section of parishioners observed and even participated in surprisingly diverse design processes, perhaps to a greater extent than their more urban and prosperous counterparts. They raised funds, contracted with artisans, made aesthetic and technical judgments, and witnessed their plans move from concept to completion. Men and women — the young and old and the prosperous and poor — gained a level of experience in the practice of patronage that would never have been available to them on an individual basis.

Church elaboration also pulled a level of woodworking artisan into certain parishes that would not have worked in those communities or conducted business with their individual members. There the artisans encountered working environments that varied markedly from the more urban settings in which they would otherwise have operated. Such shifts forced these itinerants to respond and adapt in new and different ways, generating innovations. Local artisans benefited too. They were able to participate in, and gain skills from, costly and complex projects otherwise beyond their experience. Parish churches can also be thought of as resources for artisans. Upon entering, artisans gained access to a continually enlarging archive of design that equalled the richness and exceeded the diversity of any great house, gild hall, or cathedral of equivalent size. The material within was more accessible than at elite private and corporate sites, and

¹⁰⁰ Coster and Spicer (2005); French (2001), pp. 144–45.

¹⁰¹ Marks and Williamson (2003), pp. 88, 94.

could be readily assimilated by artisans and adapted for use in future projects or different applications.

Movable furniture was the most directly impacted by the wider effects of parish patronage. Technical and decorative information derived from elaborated woodwork could be applied, on a one-to-one basis, to wooden furniture, which was far less costly than textiles, masonry, metalware, and even fixed woodwork. While documentary evidence is scarce, there is little doubt that carvers at work in parishes for periods of months were enlisted to perform private work by some of the parishioners they encountered. Other artisans were likely contracted to produce movable furniture which recreated elements of the elaborated woodwork in their clients' churches. The blind tracery, wrought foliage, Antique references, and fabric motifs like linenfold, which survive on moveable furniture, as well as the technical infrastructure to support these types of ornament, probably made their first appearances in most communities on elaborated woodwork. Furniture styles, like other approaches to design, travelled in complex patterns. This information arrived initially in urban/elite contexts, from there migrating to parish churches, and then to domestic sites by multiple routes and modes of travel. Consequently, parish churches can be seen as relay stations in a network of circulation in which design information moved and was modified in various directions and dimensions. Far from being marginal outposts located on the periphery of late medieval English design, parish churches were centres in their own right.

This article is dedicated to Bridget Beedham and her family for their remarkable strength.

ABBREVIATIONS

CRO	Cornwall Record Office
DRO	Devon Record Office
NA	National Archives
NDRO	North Devon Record Office
PWDRO	Plymouth and West Devon Record Office
SARS	Somerset Archive and Record Service

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