

# A Dendrochronological Study of Medieval Chests in East Kent

This report describes some research I was able to do on clamped medieval chests with bursary help from the Society and grants from the Marc Fitch Fund, Kent Archaeological Society, and Furniture History Society. (The [older] term 'clamped' is preferable to 'clamp-fronted' since all four walls are held by mortise and tenon joints between the four 'clamps' (or stiles).) It aimed to obtain dendrochronological dates for

- a) Some of a group of five capacious pin-hinged chests with gothic arcading in East Kent: All Saints, Graveney (illustrated in Chinnery), St John's Hospital, Canterbury (A and B), St Mary's, Norton and St Giles, Wormshill. This group whose incised decoration is unlike that on medieval chests elsewhere in England has not been previously recognised in the literature.
- b) A long, narrow, plain chest at St Peter and St Paul's, Yalding
- c) One of the so-called 'Kentish Gothic' chests at St John's Hospital, Canterbury (C) This is similar to chests at St Margaret's, Rainham and St Mary of Charity, Faversham (see my article in *Regional Furniture*, 21, 2007) and three chests in Norfolk (All Saints, Litcham, Gressenhall (ex-St Margaret's Norwich) and All Saints, Wighton.)

## Results

Martin Bridge and Dan Miles undertook the work and obtained the following probable felling date ranges:

- a) St John's Hospital A 1237–69, B 1250–82, Graveney 1258–90, and Norton 1302–34, b) Yalding c. 1300–20 (all of South Eastern oak), and c) St John's Hospital C 1400–24 (Baltic oak).

The arcaded gothic group of chests was shown to have been made over a period from the mid-13th to early 14th centuries. The three pre-1300 dates are extremely early. They mean that the St John's Hospital A and B chests are the earliest chests with decorated facades in England so far dated by dendrochronology. There are other pin-hinged clamped chests (some with chip-carved roundels) but none of them have yet been dendro-dated.

The St John's Hospital C chest had almost identical dates to the Faversham chest (1389–1421). This helps to date all six 'Kentish Gothic chests', which I argue are imported from the North Germany–North Poland area.

The Yalding chest was the first of its kind to be dated. The dendrochronology results matched closely those for the Graveney chest, suggesting that the timber was from the same source.

The dates have provided a) revised dates for chests previously dated stylistically, e.g. the Graveney chest (1258–90) was previously dated 1200–20 and mid-13th

century, b) the first evidence of pin or pivot hinges being used after 1300, c) dates for a type of lock with an internal sliding bolt and d) a base line of knowledge for the study of pin-hinged clamped chests elsewhere in England which I am currently engaged in.

I have written two articles: one on 15th-century tracery-carved chests in Kent and Norfolk (this will appear in *Archaeologia Cantiana* 2017) and one on the incised gothic group of chests (submitted for publication). Reports have been sent to the churches and to St John's Hospital.

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Fig. 1 The Graveney medieval chest



Fig. 2 St John's Hospital 'C' chest