

Ecclesiastical joinery of the first half of the seventeenth century in south Wiltshire and beyond: the influence of economic and social developments

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Have you the lion's part? Pray you, if it be, give it to me, for I am slow of study.

Midsummer Night's Dream: Act 1, Scene 2, line 234

'SLOW OF STUDY', says Snug the Joiner of himself, yet Peter Quince, his bookish carpenter colleague, is enthusiastically caught up in the smallest detail of their script. What does this tell us about the relative standing of Shakespeare's rude mechanicals at the start of the seventeenth century? And what do the church furnishings commissioned during the early seventeenth century and made by Snug tell us about the economic and social and Church infrastructure mobilized to support its implementation? There certainly appears to be a correlation between the programme of reordering of churches and the stimulation of the trade economy.



An invitation by the PCC of St John the Baptist, Tisbury, Wiltshire to come up with a reordering scheme to make the church more accessible for the twenty-first century, made it clear that a detailed examination of the woodwork was overdue. This involved a careful archeological inspection of seating and the church as a whole, and some outstanding research into archival material by Laurence Keen.¹ Comparison with other ecclesiastical joinery in the area has led to the conclusion that the pews at this church are of relatively inferior quality, and made more so by having been re-fashioned at least five times since installation in the 1630s. Nevertheless they have charm and patina, and their future has been given careful thought.

This specific case has encouraged a consideration of joinery of the period in other churches both in the Salisbury area of Wiltshire and elsewhere in the country. It has prompted reflections on the speed of the changes to church furnishings (principally within the single decade 1630–40) and their consistency across the country, and the secular infrastructure of materials and craftsmen. It has also raised the question of why the high standards of craftsmanship on display in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean buildings seem to fall away in the mid seventeenth century.

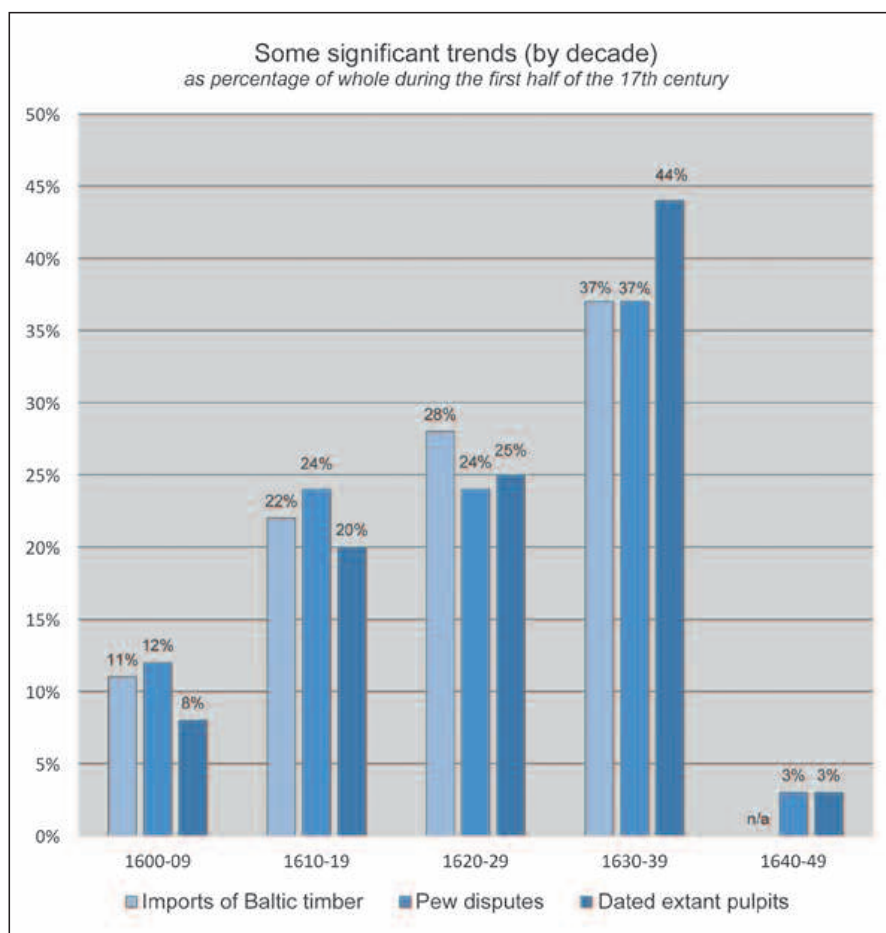
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Speed of change and consistency of work in parish churches

The speed of change across the country in churches of all types in the first decades of the seventeenth century was formidable. This is ground which has been well-covered by Fincham and Tyacke, Yates, Parry and others: suffice to say that by the 1640s, there had been a transformation in furnishings in almost every cathedral, including the introduction of coloured glass, silverware, wood-carving, and embroidered coverings to communion tables. In most parish churches the period saw less dramatic change, but many, perhaps most, parishes renewed their pulpit, reading desk and holy table, and introduced galleries, and sometimes carried out complete repewing. Under the changes espoused by Archbishops Laud and Neile and some like-minded bishops from the mid 1630s, parishes introduced altar rails and often tidied up their seating, and in some places there was pressure to introduce screens. Given the approximately eight thousand parish churches involved such change would be impressive if achieved today, even with the speed of modern communications.

Later re-orderings make it difficult to measure the relative rate of change in each decade after 1600. Nevertheless, Trevor Cooper

The chart compares three measures of activity in the first five decades of the seventeenth century: (a) English imports of Baltic timber (70% from Gdansk, the rest from Ducal Prussia, Latvia, Riga etc.); (b) recorded pew disputes in four English dioceses and the Star Chamber; (c) dated extant pulpits by decade of construction. For sources, see text.



has prepared an analysis of the known, dateable pulpits that are mentioned in Pevsner's collected *Buildings of England* series.² The statistics appear to demonstrate an acceleration from the early 1600s, with the highest level of activity in the decade of 1630–40. In fact, during each decade of the first half of the seventeenth century, there is a striking correlation between Cooper's analysis of dateable pulpits, the rise in the number of pew disputes,³ and imports of Baltic wainscot (discussed later)⁴ (see chart).

Some of this re-furnishing was a result of the increased formality in church worship encouraged by a number of key individuals, such as Laud and Neile. At each appointment these people could influence the liturgy, and the furnishings required to support it, in their cathedrals and university colleges and Royal Peculiars. They could also influence the choice and even the detail of style; and it is surely no coincidence that the detailing at, say, Laud's library at St John's or the paneling in the libraries, chapels and dining halls of Lincoln, Merton or Wadham Colleges (all completed before 1620) appear later to be echoed in the reordering of parish churches in the 1630s and 40s (Table 1).

The rapid career path of some of these key individuals (Table 2) gives some indication of how these views were promulgated across the country. Although they had little direct control of the style of furnishing in parish churches, we can assume they set the tone, commissioning work they deemed exemplary.

But it is notable that despite this speed of change and lack of top-down control, there was considerable consistency in both technique and surface decoration of church furniture. Chinnery has written about some of the contemporary joinery techniques used, noting the consistency of jointing, panel size, composition, proportion, dimensions, mouldings, carved motifs and arrangement of decorative panels,⁵ but he does not explain the reasons for the remarkable similarities that appear in work spread not only across England – from Devon to Durham, York to Yarmouth, Salisbury to Shrewsbury – but even more widely, from Copenhagen to Connecticut. Museums in Boston, Chicago and New York display examples of local, mid seventeenth century oak furniture that could easily be mistaken for an English or even a Salisbury equivalent.

What was happening that could account for both the similarity of work and the sudden decline in the standard of joinery (it occurred principally in the single decade 1630–40), this curious consistency over such a geographical spread? One clue to

Table 1: Some significant joinery projects

King's College Chapel (screen)	1533
Trinity College, Cambridge (chapel)	1564
Gonville and Caius, Cambridge	1565
Royal Exchange, London	1566
Middle Temple (dining hall)	1570
Longleat	1579
Emmanuel College, Cambridge	1584
Trinity Hall, Cambridge (chapel)	1584
Woollaton Hall	1588
Gray's Inn (Dining Hall screen)	1590
Montacute House	1596
Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge	1596
St John's College, Oxford (Old Library)	1596
Hardwick Hall	1597
St John's College, Cambridge (2nd Court and library)	1598
<i>Accession of James</i>	1603
Wadham College, Oxford	1610
Merton College, Oxford (Tower of the Orders)	1610
Cantmarle, Dorset	1612
Oxford University Schools, (Tower of the Orders)	1613
Lincoln's Inn (dining hall)	1618
Lincoln College, Oxford	1618
Banqueting House, Whitehall	1622
Peterhouse, Cambridge (chapel)	1623
Exeter College, Oxford	1623
<i>Accession of Charles</i>	1625
Brancepeth	1626
Laud's appointment to Canterbury	1628
St John's, Leeds	1631
Inigo Jones's repairs and new portico to St Paul's	1631
St John's College, Oxford (Canterbury Quad)	1632
Lambeth Palace (stalls and screen)	1633
Laud's archiepiscopal visitation to Salisbury	1634
Balliol College Chapel (screen)	1636
Oriel College, Oxford	1637
Probable date for Tisbury pewing (see text)	1637

Table 2: Appointments of some key ‘ceremonialist’ clerics

		<i>start</i>	<i>end</i>
Lancelot Andrewes	Dean of Westminster Abbey	1601	1605
	Bishop of Chichester	1605	1609
	Bishop of Ely	1609	1619
	Dean of Chapel Royal	1617	1626
	Bishop of Winchester	1618	1626
Richard Neile	Bishop of Rochester	1608	1610
	Bishop of Lichfield	1610	1614
	Bishop of Lincoln	1614	1617
	Bishop of Durham	1617	1628
	Bishop of Winchester	1628	1631
	Archbishop of York	1631	1640
William Laud	Chaplain to Richard Neile, Bishop of Rochester	1608	1610
	President of St John's College, Oxford	1611	1621
	Dean of Gloucester	1616	1621
	Bishop of St David's	1621	1626
	Bishop of Bath and Wells	1626	1628
	Bishop of London	1628	1633
	Chancellor of Oxford University	1630	1641
	Archbishop of Canterbury	1633	1645
Richard Montagu	Dean of Hereford	1616	1617
	Archdeacon of Hereford	1617	1620
	Bishop of Chichester	1628	1638
	Bishop of Norwich	1638	1641
Matthew Wren	Dean of Windsor	1628	1635
	Bishop of Hereford	1634	1635
	Bishop of Ely	1638	1667
	Bishop of Norwich	1635	1638
	Prebendary of Westminster Abbey	1635	1638
John Cosin	Archdeacon of East Riding of Yorkshire	1625	1660
	Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge	1635	1643
	Dean of Peterborough	1640	1660
	Bishop of Durham	1660	1672



Fig. 1: Wainscot in the screens passage, Wadham College, Oxford. This well-executed work probably dates from 1610. The construction is standard, with a top horizontal panel with low-relief carving, dry mounted within rails and stiles.



Fig. 2: St John's, Tisbury, Wiltshire, detail of former pew door with traces of nailed dovetail hinges and green paint (of unknown date). The pews at this church date from the 1630s, but have since had a complex history of change and adaptation. A shell-head above a rail carved with rope-work guilloche is common in Wiltshire and the South-West. Note the 'dancing sea-horses' or, more probably, dolphins.



Fig. 3: St Peter's, Fugglestone, Wiltshire, a pew door almost certainly from the 1630s, now mounted as wainscot wall-panelling. The marks from the door-hinges are still visible on the right of the picture. Compare these repeating 'shell' decorations with those at Boscombe (Fig 5).

the American material may be found in the itinerant Puritan craftsmen who settled on the East coast of the America: sister villages to Tisbury and Chilmark (three miles apart in Wiltshire) lie within a few miles of each other on Martha's Vineyard and there is even a town called Salisbury in Connecticut. Artisans were the type to be attracted to the Utopian promise of the New World, taking their pattern books and skills with them and at the same time denuding the skill-pool of those that remained.⁶

But what were the factors at work on Snug, 'slow of study', still back in England, which enabled him to execute an apparent orthodoxy of design from Yorkshire to West Wiltshire, most particularly in the carved panels usually mounted in the uppermost frames (Figs 1–9)? There seem to be four factors: the power of the guilds, the organisation of workshops, the use of materials prepared on an industrial scale in the Baltic, and a shared source of visual inspiration in pattern books.

Fig. 4: St Peter's Alstonfield, Derbyshire, a box pew (now painted green) with deeper relief carving. The decorative elements are recognisably the same as found elsewhere – guilloche (interlinked circles) to enrich the linear elements, with serpentine sea-creatures, most probably based on Renaissance pattern-book versions of dolphins, used as decorative fillers, here combined with a thistle and rose.



Fig. 5: St Mary's Boscombe, Wiltshire. Below is a detail of a pew door and two side panels, collectively showing three different styles of surface decoration. The left hand panel is now made up into a reading desk below the pulpit. Compare the shell decoration on the frieze with that at Fugglestone (Fig. 3) and St Lawrence Stratford-sub-Castle (Fig. 19).





Fig. 6: St John's, Leeds, Yorkshire. The church was completed in 1634. The furnishings have been moved around since that time, but retain much of their original form. The pattern of carved top panel set as a frieze within joinery in the form of a 'kit of parts' is common across the country and will be found in many of the illustrations shown here.



Fig. 7: St Cuthbert's, Crayke, Yorkshire. The pulpit is dated 1637. The essential form, framing, decorative elements, panel sizes and construction details are common across the country.

Nature of the guilds, nationally and locally

During our period the Guilds, both merchant and craft, became more prominent than previously. After the abolition of private chapels and chantries in the Reformation, the Guilds had seemed to lose focus and ended with their original charters revoked.⁷ In response, they reformed themselves and obtained new secular charters, especially under James I who was alert to the revenue opportunities;⁸ substantial fees were charged for new charters for the emboldened towns as well as for the Guilds which both he and his successor, Charles I, saw as easy targets for forced loans and taxation, not least to finance wars.

Communal advantages of the Guilds included the bulk purchase of raw materials (especially from overseas), the shared use of tools (especially the larger ones, e.g. saw-pits and those that were capital-intensive), labour and training. Typically, they elected committees of overseers, regulating standards of workmanship, protection of trade interests and regulation of trading conditions. They appointed 'Viewers and Searchers' who had the power to visit workshops to inspect raw materials, finished articles and methods of production. When it came to training, the 'Great Statute of Artificers' in 1563 stipulated the terms of the apprenticeship system (seven years) after which it allowed admission as a 'journeyman' to the Freedom of the Company; it maintained a rigid social order between master, journeyman, apprentice. The Guilds both limited wages (an unpopular role when there was rampant inflation) and maintained the going rates for both labour and finished work. They were particularly protectionist against other trades, cut-price competitors, and 'strangers and foreigners' (a reflection, perhaps, of the resentment caused by the massive influx of Huguenot refugee craftsmen after

Figs. 8 (below left and right): St Michael's, Mere, Wiltshire, carved top rail to the backrest and a bench end. This work is reputedly by William Walter of nearby Maiden Bradley (see Fig. 21), c.1640. As elsewhere, the tops of the bench ends are crowned with shell-heads (integrated into the top rails and not merely planted on), and rope-work guilloche is used as a linear element. Along the back rail, sinuous shapes in low-relief fill the space, in basic shape not unlike the 'dolphins' at Tisbury or the serpentine figures at Alstonfield (Fig. 4).



the 1560s).⁹ In London the demarcation between carpenters, turners, carvers, inlayers and joiners was zealously maintained.

Salisbury incorporated in 1612 after a 'long campaign of the merchant class for freedom from the Bishop's domination',¹⁰ and had a particularly flourishing wool export trade before 1650 (largely via Antwerp) as well as an active local woodwork industry. One of the first acts of the corporation under the new charter was to order all trades and crafts to form themselves into companies and submit their constitutions to be officially confirmed and sealed by the mayor. Although there had been a local Carpenters Guild since at least 1440, the new 'Joyners Guild' was formerly re-constituted in April 1617 with greater powers of enforcement and breadth of activities.¹¹ In the new charter, the Salisbury joiners



Fig. 9: St Michael and All Angels, Winterbourne Earls, Wiltshire, the pulpit. Notice on the upper rail the repeated shell-head decoration quite common in Wiltshire, and the horizontal paired 'hearts' in the upper panel, seen at Leeds and Crayke, Yorkshire (Figs 6 and 7) and even in a chest to be found in Guilford, New Haven County, USA (illustrated on page 445 of Victor Chinnery, Oak Furniture, for which see reading list at the end of this article).



Fig. 10a (top left): Cleaving quartered oak with a froe to produce quartered shingles and, with larger sections of timber, wainscot panels. Notice how the wainscot is wedge-shaped at this stage in the process – thicker at one side than the other. Because the oak is quartered (split across the rings) the expansion and contraction with changes in humidity are reduced and it will be much less prone to warp as it dries out.

Fig. 10b (top right): Quartering oak logs with wedges.

Fig. 10c (left): A froe, a typical splitting tool.

Fig. 10d (above): A froe being used for splitting longer boards. The wood is held in a frame, and the froe is being used as a lever to separate the boards.

Images from Peter Follansbee's website, pfollansbee.wordpress.com

Fig. 11a: A reconstruction of the medieval water-driven hammer at Abbaye de Fontenay, France, showing the use of water power for splitting logs. The water-wheel can be seen through the open doorway. The mill wheel drive-shaft is operating a heavy repetition hammer, by means of the 'cogs' on the axle. These cogs alternately push the end of the beam down, then release it suddenly; at the other end of the beam, off the frame to the left of the picture (and shown in Fig. 11b), is a heavy hammer which drops when the end of the beam is released.



Fig. 11b: The hammer at the end of the beam. Here it is set with a splitting tool, for industrial-scale riving of wood. Millions of square feet of wainscot are estimated to have been imported to England each year, a trade that nearly trebled between 1600 and 1630, with 70% originating from timber conversion yards in Gdansk.

were granted a concession unthinkable in London, permitting them to carry out ‘joyning, carving, inlaying and such turning as joyners do use’, thus trampling over the traditional demarcation lines. This may have contributed to a loss of focus, a dilution of skill and, later, falling standards.

From local archives pertaining to Salisbury, we now know of some individuals and their workshops, such as William Arnold’s craftsmen who moved from Montacute to work at Wadham College.¹² We know of Edward Batten, a joiner working at Chantmarle (Dorset),¹³ of the Beckham family (Reynold, John, William, Benjamin and Humphrey), of the painter-carver Rosgrave,¹⁴ and of Thomas Caper, a Flem described as ‘a resident of Salisbury’, who made the pulpit in 1631 for Newport, Isle of Wight.¹⁵

Workshops, local joiners and carvers

According to Dick Reid, an experienced master carver based at York,¹⁶ carvers, then as now, seldom design, create or develop ornament but tend to copy modify, adapt and stretch from templates and pattern books. Results depend on the templates and tools available. Simpler patterns were devised that were capable of being replicated by less experienced hands; much can be achieved with four to six standard chisels and a set of punches (to give background texture).

From the earliest times, even up to 1980s, there was a ‘union’ rate, and an ‘ability’ rate, which was tiered between mere surface-relief carvers to those who could carve ‘in the round’ (i.e. three-dimensionally). A competent three-dimensional carver could thus earn almost double the rate of pattern-carvers engaged on simple surface decoration. There is little doubt in Dick Reid’s mind that



Fig. 12: An example of medullary rays from quartered oak. Medullary rays extend vertically through the tree across and perpendicular to the growth rings and allow the radial transmission of sap. When wood is quarter sawn (cut with the rings perpendicular to the face of the board) the medullary rays can produce beautiful patterns. Panels would often be selected merely because of the visual quality of their medullary rays. This would suggest that such panels were never intended to be painted.



Fig. 13: A typical layout of a seventeenth-century joiner's workshop, at Den Gamle By, Aarhus, Denmark.

the issue of the 1617 Salisbury Joiners' Guild charter, breaking up the traditional, local demarcation lines between the joiners, carvers, inlayers and turners, will have contributed to a lowering of standards in each discipline.

For example, the guilloche on rails of the pew panels at Tisbury (Fig. 2) is a much-simplified interpretation of the more elaborate detail found in contemporary furniture and joinery across Europe and North America. It is swiftly executed with a straight, hollow gouge with two sharp blows with a mallet, first at a slanting angle on the diagonal and then vertically – quaint and effective but hardly evidence of a master-carver at work.

Little detailed analysis has been done on the manning, layouts and sizes of workshops in our period, and there is ample opportunity for further research through wills and local records. Nevertheless it is the author's and Dick Reid's contention that not much has changed over the centuries. In Den Gamly By (in Aarhus, Denmark), a typical seventeenth century early joiner's workshop is presented which very closely resembles the author's from the 1970s and 80s, and those he remembers of joiners and cabinet-makers in the Salisbury area during the 1960s.

This would suggest that, typically, Snug's workshop might have had between four and ten bench-bound, workshop-based employees who prepared the components for any framed paneling, then disassembled them into manageable sections for transportation to site, where they were dry-jointed and pegged before fixing. Wainscot panels that required surface decoration



Fig. 14: Cabinet in the chateau, Azay le Rideau, Loire, France. The decorative devices used by joiners in the sixteenth and seventeenth century (compare this Figure and Fig. 15 with the other illustrations) are remarkably consistent across Europe and were clearly derived from pattern books and widely disseminated through prints.



Figs. 15 (above and opposite): Early seventeenth-century cupboard and wainscot in the Mayor's House, Den Gamle By, Aarhus, Denmark; all the familiar decorative devices are present in the woodwork and are even painted onto the walls.

could either be sent off to a nearby carvers' workshop and returned prior to assembly, or carved in the joiner's workshop by an itinerant journeyman, who would most probably be available to other local workshops as well – again, then as now. Later, noticeably after the 1630s with the softening of the demarcation between the trades, joiners were taught the setting out and some of the simpler techniques for decoration.

Baltic timber trade, Poland and the production of wainscot

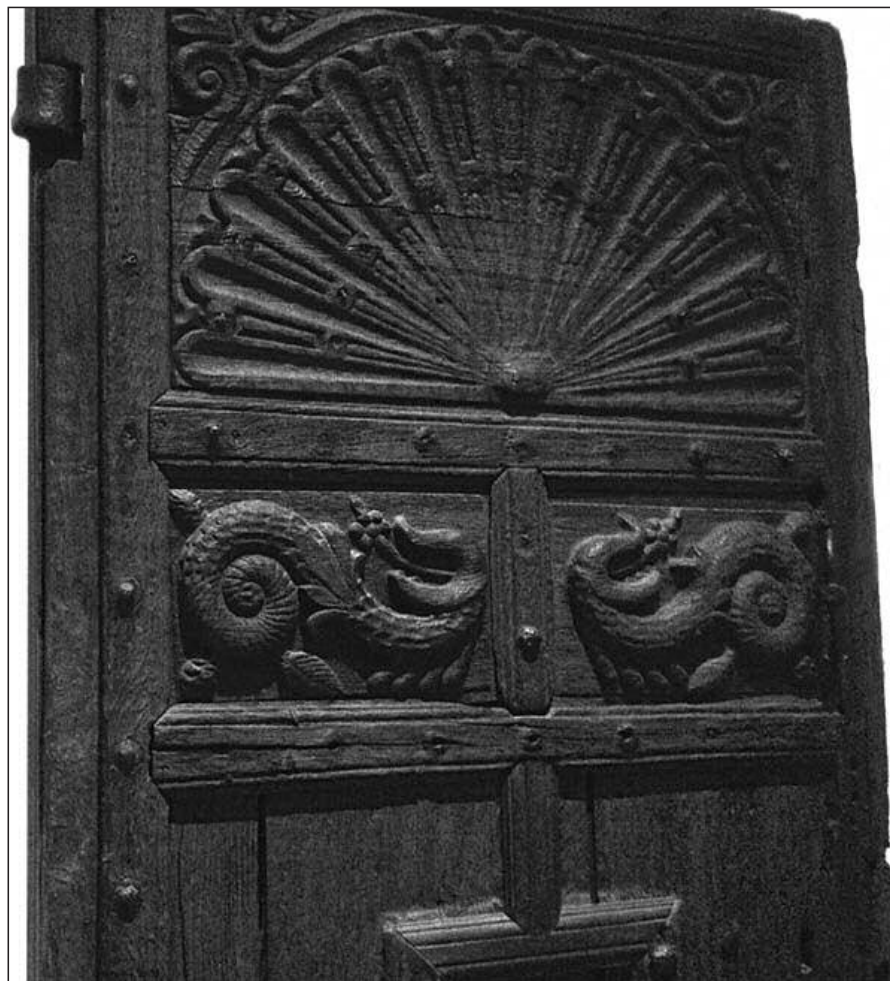
During the Middles Ages, Belgium and Netherlands were almost totally deforested and even in England, forest cover was



never as great as folklore would have us believe. Rackham's analysis of Domesday Book seems to indicate 12% forest cover in 1086 and a slight increase to 15% by the early seventeenth century. As early as the ninth century, large volumes of timber came from the surrounding northern European regions; by the early seventeenth century, by which time the Hanseatic League had formed into a disciplined commercial network, 80–90% of English exports were wool and textiles and the principal balancing import had become timber.¹⁷

Timber exports were much aided by Renaissance advances in navigation and ship design. For example, the cargo capacity of a Hanseatic cog (a type of ship) before the fourteenth century

Fig. 16: Detail of joinery, Rowallan Castle, Ayrshire, Scotland (c.1600). Note the same serpentine, dolphin-like monster that can be found in decorative panels all over Europe, as well as the shell-head decoration in the upper panel.



was 90–100 tonnes; in the fifteenth century a hold could carry 300 tonnes. By contrast, the caravels (another type of ship) of the late sixteenth century could carry up to 1000 tonnes.¹⁸ This increased capacity meant deeper submersion and required deeper, better organized (and fewer) harbours, which made the trade easier to monitor for political and revenue control.

The area now known as Poland (where the forest cover was and remains typically about 35–40%), was a principal source for oak and for good reason; the oak was far superior, principally because the forestry management in the region produced taller, straighter, slower-grown trees which provided for boards that were knot-free, low in tannin, light in weight, dimensionally stable and easy to work. Native English oak was and is faster grown, more likely to have come from open fields and deer parks, so tending to be gnarled and crooked – ideal for ships keels, beams and braces but less consistent or suited for fine decorative work. Moreover, the preparation and seasoning of boards, especially of English oak, required heavy hauling and splitting equipment not available to the ordinary joiner. It would have been easier and cheaper for Snug to buy pre-prepared components.



Fig. 17a: Cabinet in Chicago Fine Art Museum.



Fig. 17b: Detail of chair in New Haven Museum, Connecticut.



Fig. 17c: Cabinets in Metropolitan Museum, NYC.

Figs. 18 (right and opposite): St Andrew's, Great Durnford, Wiltshire, pulpit (dated 1619), possibly by Humphrey Beckham, with early pulpit hanging (1657). The rope-work guilloche is common in the area, as is the arch, here carved into the panel in shallow relief.



Trees from forests along the river Vistula, some as far as 300km upstream, were floated down to Gdansk, mostly in two periods, (March to May and September to December). It took about three weeks to arrive from the upper reaches. At Gdansk it was cut into shorter, manageable lengths in well-organised timber-conversion yards. From there, the components were packaged in bundles, and shipped to the major ports such as London, Amsterdam and above all, Antwerp – the supreme international and cultural exchange city of Europe. A further long sea voyage would show up any tendency to warp or split so what came to market was already well seasoned. A time of six to twelve months was achievable from tree-felling to arrival as planks in London, Antwerp or Amsterdam.¹⁹

Until the Industrial Revolution, sawing timber along its length in saw-pits was an expensive process. By contrast, split and riven boards were relatively easy to produce, especially if, as with the Elizabethan and Jacobean joinery, the panels were small and splitting was mechanically assisted with water-driven hammers (Figs 10–13). Straight-grained oak splits (or is ‘riven’) cleanly and easily at 90 degrees to the growth rings; a few subsequent strokes with a smoothing plane produce fine surfaces decorated with medullary rays (a particularly attractive characteristic of oak when



converted with tree-rings perpendicular to the face). Timber that is 'quartered' in this way is dimensionally stable and not prone to warp.

Wainscot is the term originally applied to these high-quality riven panels. Framing member such as rails, stiles and muntins (the horizontal, main vertical and intermediate vertical components) were exported from Poland, sometimes with special profiles complete with tongues, grooves and mouldings and even joints prepared prior to shipping.²⁰ Provincial English joiners could thus order from their local market town a package of mass-produced components and simply cut them to length. At a time when transport costs could be as much as three or four times that of the raw material,²¹ it helped if the city or market town was close to a navigable river.

Opinions vary about the quantities produced but at a conservative estimate, there were millions of square feet of wainscot imported to England each year,²² a trade that nearly



Figs. 19 (above and opposite top): St Lawrence, Stratford-sub-Castle, near Salisbury, Wiltshire. The arch on the central panel of the pulpit is not carved out of the wood, but added afterwards, held on by nails. The guilloche ornament on the middle rail and the geometric strapwork in the frieze are rather crudely carved in low relief, as are the familiar shell decoration on the cornice, canopy and bottom rail.



trebled between 1600 and 1630, with 70% originating from Gdansk.²³ This goes a long way to explain so much consistency – the raw material supply of components from the Baltic was the same for Leith, Yarmouth, London, Salisbury or Exeter.

Sources for decorative carving

It is now well established that the sources for the decorative motifs, including those used in carving, came through Renaissance prints that were widely disseminated throughout Europe.²⁴ There were four principal printed sources.

The first was Sebastiano Serlio's (1475–1554) *I sette libri dell'architettura* (*Seven Books of Architecture*), published in 1537 and widely circulated in Europe. Although the first English translation was not published until 1611, prints were available a full half-century earlier in England. The second was Jacques Androuet du Cerceau's (1510–84) *Plus Excellents Bastiments de France* (1579) including fanciful engravings of decorative architectural elements and ornament, especially influential for designers and craftsmen of Antwerp (in a style known as Northern Mannerism). The third was from Hans Vredeman de Vries (1527–1607) a Dutch Renaissance architect, painter and engineer, known for books on

Fig. 20 (below): Side panel in St Mary's, Winterbourne Gunner, Wiltshire, originally from St Giles's, Imber, on the Salisbury Plain. This pew panel has similar shell head and rope-work motifs to those found elsewhere in the area, but poorly executed. The decorated panel below has the fretwork incised into the decorative panel rather than being left in relief, as at Tisbury (Fig. 2). Compare also the upper pulpit panel at St Lawrence, Stratford-sub-Castle (Fig. 19). This is a curious piece.





Figs. 21 (above and opposite): The pews and pulpit at All Saints, Maiden Bradley, Wiltshire. The lower part of the pulpit has been altered or added. Compare the rope-work guilloche, design of the shells and geometric fretwork with that at Mere (Fig. 8). All the timber sections are substantial, and well-selected; all the mouldings are crisp and confidently executed.

garden designs (1583,) ornaments (1565) and perspective (1604), who fled Antwerp in 1585 because of Spanish occupation, and moved to Frankfurt. The fourth source was Wendel Dietterlin (1550–1599), a German mannerist painter, printmaker and architectural theoretician, best known for his treatise on architectural ornament *Architectura: von Ausstheilung, Symmetria und Proportion der Fünff Seulen*, published in its final edition in Nuremberg 1598.

This international set of decorative elements influenced the often quite humble world of English parish church furnishings. For example, some of the pews at Tisbury are decorated by what initially appeared to be simplified, two-dimensional sea-horses. Further enquiry would suggest they are actually panel fillers representing dolphins, a common motif in paneled joinery of the period. The dolphin was abundantly celebrated from Etruscan times, and from the Renaissance onwards it was an extremely popular decorative motif, especially in Italy and all over France (where it was *de rigueur* in the decorative arts of French Crown, even though there is no real knowledge why the heir to the

throne was known by that name), appearing on coins, sculpture, door-knockers, prints, and tapestries. In seventeenth-century joinery across Europe, dolphins appear as decoration in both secular and ecclesiastical wood and stonework. It has been claimed that the dolphin was also a symbol for sacramental fish, with wine and a basket of bread, to represent the Eucharist and the Last Supper in Christian art,²⁵ but this does not appear to have much



Fig. 22: St Mary's Wylye, the pulpit, originally from the church at Wilton. This particularly exuberant pulpit is dated 1628 (not visible in the photograph) and shows work of turners, inlayers, joiners and carvers – the four principal woodworking disciplines traditionally represented by separate Guilds; conventional demarcation lines were, in 1617, relaxed in favour of the Joyners Guild in Salisbury permitting members to carry out 'joyning, carving, inlaying and such turning as joyners do use'.



pre-occupied Snug or his contemporaries. Unlike the representation of cherubs or angels, more tell-tale signs of high church sentiment, there appears to be no particular significance to their deployment in church furnishings.

Comparing the output of contemporary Salisbury craftsmen against those, say, in Suffolk, York or Somerset, it seems they favoured the Flemish-inspired ornament and to have followed de Vries more than the others. They were not isolated in this – similar decoration can be found in a small cabinet in the Loire at Chateau Azay le Rideau (Fig. 14), in houses and churches in Denmark (Fig. 15), in Scotland (Fig. 16), in Flanders²⁶ and in New England (Fig. 17).

All the decorative elements appear to be derived from the same prints and pattern books that were reinterpreted by the master craftsmen and set out using 'pricked' chalking templates in card or leather;²⁷ these could be rolled up in a tool-box (and even transported to across the Atlantic to New England by a dissenting artisan). Our joiner, Snug, was no Grinling Gibbons and although

he might not have owned his own versions of the actual Flemish prints, he probably had access to his Master's copies. The chosen decoration was adapted to swift, deft execution using a few well-practiced strokes of a carving chisel.

Seventeenth century work in the Salisbury area

We can see the fruits of the Salisbury craftsmen's labours in churches local to Salisbury, including what remains of their work in Fugglestone (Fig. 3), Mere (Fig. 8), Winterbourne Earls (Fig. 9), Great Durnford (Fig. 18), Stratford-sub-Castle (Fig. 19), Middle Woodford, Winterbourne Gunner (Fig. 20), Maiden Bradley (Fig. 21), Bruton, Wylke (Fig. 22), Sherrington (Fig. 23a), and in Salisbury (St Thomas's), as well as slightly further afield at Puddletown and Folke (Fig. 23b) in Dorset.

The applied decoration, in particular of carved scrolled guilloche detail, the shellheads, the decorated top panels, were done by immediately recognisable 'techniques'. These were either by those of a few itinerant carvers who moved between these local workshops or (less likely) by individuals who were attached to particular employers. Dick Reid cautions against the detection of 'recognisable hands' in surface decoration (as opposed to relief carving) since identical patterns tended to be used in individual workshops over many years and were often part-prepared by the less-skilled.²⁸

In Salisbury diocese the typical quality of the work falls away as the seventeenth century progressed, and this was probably a widespread phenomenon. By the time of the late 1630s, the timber sections are thinner, the mouldings and mitres are less crisp and the decoration is more two-dimensional; examples can be seen at Tisbury (Fig. 2), Fugglestone (Fig. 3). Winterbourne Earls (Fig. 9), and Winterbourne Gunner (Fig. 20). The whole effect is

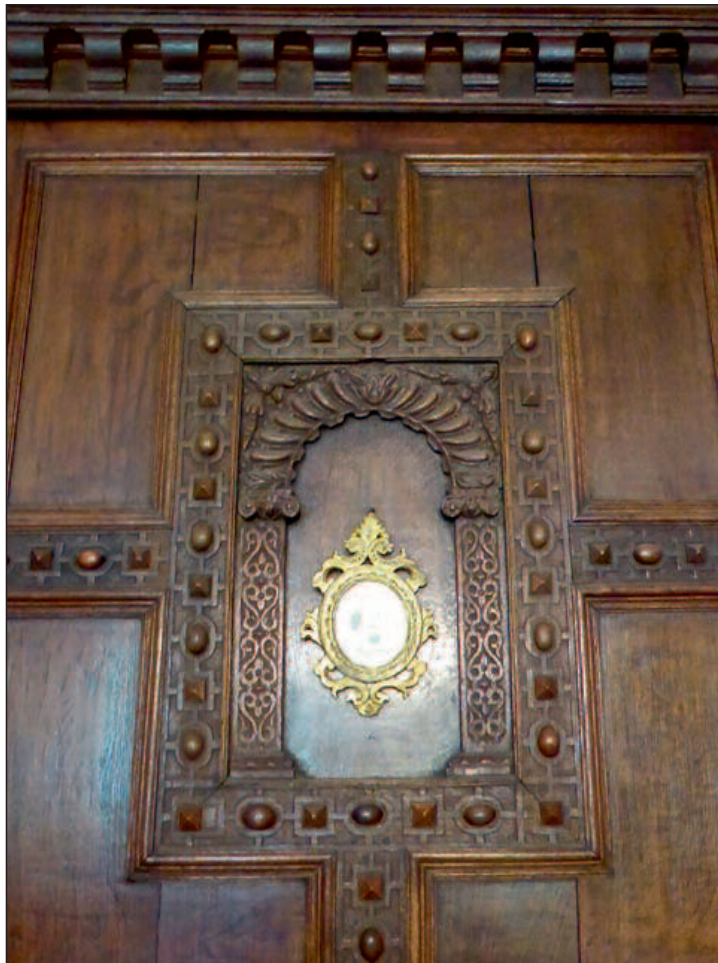
Figs. 23: Pew details from Folke, Dorset and Sherrington, Wiltshire. The Folke example almost certainly dates from the rebuilding of 1628. The basic shell pattern is familiar from other illustrations shown here. Whereas at Mere (Fig. 8) and Tisbury (Fig. 2) and Maiden Bradley (Fig. 21) the shell is carved from a block separately attached to a framed bench end, at these two churches the entire bench end is a single plank, not panelled within a frame – an old-fashioned approach.



Fig. 24 (top right): Detail of joinery, dining hall, Wadham College. Within the smaller square of the pattern is a decorated arch, a common detail in Renaissance paintings and pattern books; a more elaborate version of this detail can be found at Lincoln College (following image).



Fig. 25 (bottom right): Detail of over-mantel panelling, Lincoln College, Oxford c.1618. The carved relief detail is noticeably deeper, richer, crisper and more elaborate than tends to be found in the 1630s.



reduced. Nails, rather than joints, are more evident for attaching the deeper mouldings and decorative elements. It is almost as if either the local journeymen had stopped trying, or the hybrid vigour that had emerged in the late sixteenth century through the combined talents of dedicated architects and Huguenot émigrés

had just petered out. Perhaps our joiner, Snug, was under such pressure to churn out the work on mass-produced scale than he could not keep up. Perhaps the downward pressure on prices removed the passion for excellence; perhaps the zeal of the Guild's 'Viewers and Searchers' was waning; perhaps the effect of the Salisbury Joiners' new charter of 1617 was to spread skills too thinly; perhaps the pressures of the tendering process followed the usual trajectory, squeezing out talent and favouring the mundane.

The standards of the joinery in, for example, Tisbury can scarcely bear comparison with the high-quality work apparent in the university colleges like Wadham (Fig. 24), St John's, Lincoln (Fig. 25), Peterhouse or the late Elizabethan and Jacobean 'prodigy' houses in the Wiltshire area like Montacute (Fig. 26), Longford Castle or Longleat. These houses were created under the control of architects such as William Arnold, Robert Smythson and John Thorpe and the woodwork carries energetic, fluent carving and mouldings in deep relief. Similarly, the better surviving pulpits of this period such as Abbotsbury (Fig. 27), Maiden Bradley (Fig. 21) and Wilton (now in Wylye) (Fig. 22), display robust, high-quality three-dimensional turning, carving and inlaying in the blind arches, fluted columns and shell details.



Fig. 26: Detail of joinery in Montacute, Somerset. This is very high quality workmanship, requiring a range of different trades to build up the decorative elements. The square within a larger square is a motif commonly found (as at Wadham and Lincoln College, the previous two Figures).

These were clearly intended to impress and display something of their costs. It is probably no coincidence that the Abbotsbury pulpit bears a partly-legible family coat of arms, indicating it may have been a personal gift, perhaps connected with the Strangways' estate,²⁹ while Wilton and Maiden Bradley churches adjoined respectively the homes of the Earl of Pembroke (James I was a regular visitor to Wilton House) and the Duke of Somerset, who might well have contributed handsomely. This would explain the high quality of the furniture compared with places where churchwardens were obliged to fund their interiors from parishioners, by means of church rates, pew rents or similar.

Conclusions

It seems clear that the principle reason for the consistency of technique over such a wide geographical area, not just in Britain but also northern Europe and New England was owing to the semi-industrial provision of similar dimensioned timber stock – supplied as a kit of parts. The movement of itinerant craftsmen and the re-use of print and pattern books would tend towards the repetition of decorative elements.

The role of the re-established Guilds was instrumental in training, thus maintaining the standards and orthodoxy of technique, although standards were certainly slipping towards the end of the reign of Charles I. In addition to the possible causes already listed this may also have been because there was so much refurbishment of churches that the market became saturated, practitioners became less motivated and the resentment of some



Fig. 27: St Mary's, Abbotsbury, Dorset. The pulpit is of very high quality. The arches have been carved separately, then applied to the panels. Although the standard of workmanship is high, there is rather little by way of fresh invention, merely a skilful reworking of standard patterns.

church wardens in complying with new requirements led to them opting for the cheapest options. Only when a rich patron took a personal interest do we tend to find a return to earlier standards.

All this goes a long way to explain the standardised, rather inferior work at Tisbury, where the principal local noble family, the Arundells, were still paying substantial fines for continuing to practice as Catholics and were probably indifferent to the quality of workmanship in their parish church, and unwilling to sponsor anything at all special.

The recent techniques developed for dendro-provenancing (initially in relation to religious painted panels) has opened up a wealth of further research opportunities about the Baltic timber trade. Similarly, as Keen's research on Tisbury and Chantmarle has shown, there is a considerable unexplored material accessible in local town and county archives about individual craftsmen and their workshops. Other areas meriting further investigation include: the revenues recorded in the contemporary port books; the migration movements of individual craftsmen; the iconography of some of the decorative elements; the extent that Guilds were really responsible for the quality of their members work and how far their geographical influence extended. It is difficult to ignore the fact that the increasing tax revenues from trade via the ports wool export and timber imports must have greatly benefitted crown revenues, whether by accident or intent, without alienating the nobles on whom royal power depended; this also merits further investigation.

Finally, the collation of a definitive photo library of Jacobean joinery, with all the pattern recognition and sorting facilities of modern digitized image formats, would greatly add to our available knowledge.

Acknowledgements

I am particularly grateful to Trevor Cooper, Laurence Keen OBE, FSA, Prof. Peter McCullough, Prof. Robert Neild, and Dr Nicholas Riall FSA for advice and bringing specific publications (and, in some cases, unpublished material) to my attention. Special mention must also go to Dick Reid with whom I have, over many years, pooled our shared experience of how craftsmen actually work and think.

Further reading

This short bibliography lists some key works relating to seventeenth-century furniture, guilds (including those in the Salisbury area), and the Baltic timber trade, together with some general discussions of Reformation changes to English church interiors.

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- ‘Tisbury’, in D. A. Crowley (ed.), *Victoria History of the County of Wiltshire* (1987), XIII, 195ff.
- E. Easton, *Antiquitates Sarisburiensie* (1771).
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- E. Power and M. Postan, *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1933).
- RCHME, *Ancient and Historical Monuments in the City of Salisbury* (London, 1980).
- O. Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (London, 1986).
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- C. Tracy, *Continental Church Furniture in England: a Traffic in Piety* (Woodbridge, 2001).
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A. Wells-Cole, *The Art of Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: the Influence of Continental Prints, 1558–1625* (New Haven and London, 1997).

R. Whiting, *The Reformation of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge, 2010).

N. Yates, *Buildings, Faith and Worship – the Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600–1900* (Oxford, 2000).

H. Zins, *England and the Baltic in the Elizabethan era*, (Manchester, 1972).

Notes

- 1 Keen concludes that the Tisbury joinery is made up of a mixture of pieces from seventeenth century box pews with fragments datable to 1637; that the sills and pews bases are not original and, importantly, the pew ends show evidence of being reused doors. None of the original pews survive in their original state. What now survives is a hotchpotch of seventeenth and 18th century woodwork, reordered in 1827, 1854 and 1871 and several times since. (L. Keen, *Architectural, Historical and Archeological Assessment of St John the Baptist, Tisbury* (Dorchester: prepared for Parochial Church Council, 2014). See also Luke Hughes, *St John the Baptist, Tisbury: Survey of seating joinery* (London: Luke Hughes and Company, 2013).
- 2 Trevor Cooper, 'The interior arrangement of the English parish church from Elizabeth I to 1640' (forthcoming) in P. S. Barnwell & Trevor Cooper (eds.), *Places of Worship in Britain and Ireland, 1550-1689*, Rewley House Studies in the Historic Environment (Donington: Shaun Tyas, forthcoming). I am very grateful to Trevor Cooper for permission to use in this paper his forthcoming results for the number of dated pulpits.
- 3 Catherine Wright, 'The spatial ordering of community in English church seating, c. 1550–1700' (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2002), p. 89ff. I am grateful to Dr N. Riall for drawing this reference to my attention. As Dr Wright points out, a similar (though not identical) profile is reported for a different group of jurisdictions by Kevin Dillow in 'The social and ecclesiastical significance of church seating arrangements and pew disputes, 1500–1740' (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1990), pp193–95.
- 4 H. Zins, *England and the Baltic in the Elizabethan era* (Manchester, 1972), Fig. 7.13.
- 5 V. Chinnery, *Oak Furniture: the British Tradition* (Woodbridge, 1979), 118 ff.
- 6 For the work carried out by a particular New England workshop in the seventeenth century, see Peter Follansbee and John D. Alexander, 'Seventeenth-century joinery from Braintree, Massachusetts: the Savell shop tradition', in Luke Beckerdite, *American Furniture* (1996), available online at www.chipstone.org/article.php/222/American-Furniture-1996/Seventeenth-Century-Joinery-from-Braintree,-Massachusetts-The-Savell-Shop-Tradition (accessed May 2015).
- 7 V. Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, 23ff.
- 8 For example, the London-based Carpenters Company received its new charter in 1607.
- 9 After the Spanish Wars of Religion in the 1560s, over 50,000 Huguenots are estimated to have fled from the Low Countries to England, putting great strain on individual cities; in Norwich, there number may have been as high as 30% of the population (see C. Tracy, *Continental Church Furniture in England: a Traffic in Piety* (Woodbridge, 2001), 33.
- 10 RCHME, *Ancient and Historical Monuments in the City of Salisbury* (London, 1980), I, xlvii.

- 11 'Trade Companies since 1612', in E. Crittal (ed.), *Victoria History of the County of Wiltshire* (1962), VI, 136–38; C. H. Haskins, *The Ancient Trade Guilds and Companies of Salisbury* (Salisbury, 1912), 340. Joiners' Hall survives in St Ann Street, Salisbury, though much of its interior has been lost.
- 12 M. Girouard, *Elizabethan Architecture: its Rise and Fall, 1540–1640* (New Haven and London, 2009).
- 13 Edward Batten of Salisbury made the ceilings, pulpit and pews: 'Againe to this Chappell Edward Batten of Salisbury did make and sett up sielings of wainscot viz. in the North part a pulpit, the Minister's pewe, & another pewe, and two lower pews behind that, likewise on the South part, two higher & two Lower pews, and also seates be round the Chappell, which was all finished 20th February 1617, and for this Batten had of me by Composition 11 li. 8s. 0d. (John Hutchins, *History of Dorset*, 2nd edition (1813), vol III, 299, quoted by L. Keen in 'Chantmarle, Cattistock. Sir John Strode's account of his building and the consecration of his oratory or chapel', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*, 133 (2012), 37–41).
- 14 V. Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, 449.
- 15 C. Tracy, *Continental Church Furniture*, 35, 197.
- 16 From private conversation with Dick Reid OBE, master carver based in York, now in his eighties and responsible *inter alia* for the restoration of carvings at Hampton Court and Windsor Castle after their respective fires. He is Training Coordinator and Court Assistant of the Worshipful Company of Masons, formerly a Trustee of the Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, Master of the Art Workers' Guild in London 2003–4 and a past President of the Master Carvers' Association. In 2002 Dick was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of York.
- 17 For this section, see the various relevant works listed in the bibliography. In general, written sources (mostly custom records) confirm the trade; dendrochronology reflects its scale and, most recently dendro-provenancing (matching tree-rings with particular geographical areas to establish the provenance of a piece of timber) increasingly confirms the source.
- 18 T. Wazny, 'The origins, assortments and transport of Baltic timber', in C Van de Velde et al (eds), *Constructing Wooden Images* (Brussels, 2005), 115–126, p. 115.
- 19 T. Wazny, *Origins*, 123–24.
- 20 O. Rackham, *Ancient Woodland: its history, vegetation and uses in England* (2003), 151 and 462.
- 21 See R. Neild, 'Nevile and his Court: the turbulent history of Nevile's Court, Trinity College, Cambridge', *Georgian Group Journal*, 22 (2014) and R. Neild, 'How Nevile built Trinity', *Construction History*, (30:1, 2015), 39–51.
- 22 Adam Bowett, *Woods in British Furniture Making 1400–1900* (Kew Publishing, 2012), xi–xiv, 242–50, 320; N. Riall, *Renaissance Stalls at the Hospital of St Cross*, The Hospital of St Cross and Almshouses of Noble Poverty, 2014.
- 23 See graph in text.
- 24 See Summerson and Girouard in outline, and Jervis and Wells-Cole in formidable detail: J. Summerson, *Architecture in Britain, 1530–1830* (1983); M. Girouard, *Elizabethan Architecture*. For Jervis and Wells-Cole, see the list of further reading.
- 25 C. Avery, *A School of Dolphins* (2009), 120–33.
- 26 See e.g. the illustration of paneling in St Catherine, Birtles, Cheshire, made up of remains of seventeenth-century Flemish choir stalls, in C. Tracy, *Continental Church Furniture*, 73.
- 27 A. Wells-Cole illustrates copies of pages from such pattern-books used by the Abbot family, plasterers and joiners in Exeter (*The Art of Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: the Influence of Continental Prints, 1558–1625* (New Haven and London, 1997), 160–61).
- 28 In New England, the Savell workshop in Braintree, Massachusetts produced a series of objects with more or less identical carving (Peter Follansbee and John D. Alexander, 'Seventeenth-century joinery', *passim*).
- 29 RCHME, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Dorset*, vol I (West), 1952, 3. The arms are described as 'Egioke (?) impaling Denham'.