Late medieval sub-division of space within a parish church: Holy Trinity, Goodramgate, York

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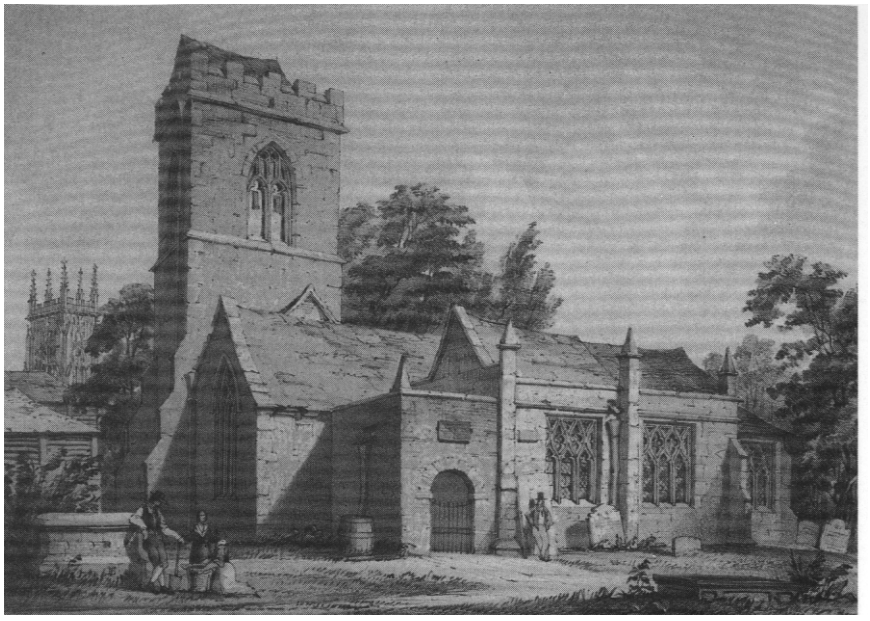


One of the most elusive aspects of medieval religious life is how people actually worshipped, that is, how they *used* the spaces demarcated for religious activity. Evidence of segregation within parish churches is often sought in an attempt to establish the dynamics of medieval parish life - did parishioners have a perception of some form of hierarchy of worship within their church? This essay will analyse the material evidence of one particular parish church - Holy Trinity in Goodramgate, York -
in order to suggest the existence of screens as a physical and psychological barrier/delimiter of space in several parts of the building. Firstly, a brief outline of the history of the main fabric of the church will be given. Secondly, the material evidence for the suggested screens will be presented. Finally, a brief discussion of the potential social implications of the segregation by screens will suggest avenues for future, interdisciplinary research.

There is brief documentary evidence of a church on the current site of Holy Trinity in the late-eleventh century, but the earliest physical evidence within the fabric of the present building dates from the twelfth century. As with many civic parish churches, Holy Trinity's development was an organic process, with modifications being made over time (fig. 1). The east wall of the chancel and the north wall date to the late twelfth century. The south-east chapel was added in the thirteenth century, and the south and north arcades are of the mid-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries respectively. The chapel of St. James, off the south aisle, accessed via a four-centred arch, was built with a bequest from Robert de Howme, merchant and erstwhile mayor of York, who was buried before the altar in 1396. The tower was added in the early-fifteenth century, at which point the south aisle was extended westwards to incorporate the tower. The box pews are of seventeenth/eighteenth origin and the extant pulpit was added in 1695 and remodelled in 1785. It appears that the south-east chapel is the only area to currently have its original floor level, while the levels elsewhere were raised in 1633. The ceiling was also raised, probably in the late fifteenth century.

(Benson, n.d.: 13-4; Gee, 1980: 3; R.C.H.M.E., 1981: 6-9; Pevsner, 1995: 160-1; Pearson, 1998: 4; Wilson and Mee, 1998: 39).

One of Holy Trinity's many attractions for the purposes of archaeological analysis is the fact that it has been relatively unscathed by post-medieval alteration, in that it largely escaped the attentions of Victorian "restorers", and has not had electricity or heating installed. The existing box pews give a clear indication of the deliberate positioning of Holy Trinity's early modern parishioners at worship. The pews are so striking that it is rather difficult to imagine the interior of the church without them (fig. 3). Nonetheless, close observation reveals that there is also much evidence of spatial subdivision within the church pre-dating the box pews. Undoubtedly both the pews and the panelling around the piers conceal evidence of earlier material activity. This essay, however, will concentrate specifically on the evidence found on the currently visible surfaces of the piers and arches, in order to posit the existence of screens.

Two points should be made at the outset. Firstly, this essay is but a preliminary investigation. As will be shown, the evidence warrants further study of the church, with sufficient time and resources to undertake detailed recording and drawn reconstruction. This essay, therefore, will only discuss evidence which can be clearly interpreted through a visual analysis alone. As will be seen on the photographic illustrations, there is a wealth of further evidence which hints at more than can be discussed here, and it is fully expected that subsequent research will confirm the existence of further subdivision of the church's space. Secondly, screens were constructed with varying designs and with correspondingly varying degrees of subsequent material evidence. As Woodcock warns, 'some screens may only have left very ephemeral reminders of their position on the piers themselves, for just as the modern chancel screen in some instances finishes in the floor or the end of another screen and only butts up against a column rather than going straight into it, it is just as legitimate to suppose that this may have

been the case in the past' (Woodcock, 1996: 55). Not all evidence treated, therefore, will have obviously corresponding features in opposing walls and piers. Encouragingly, however, many of the correlations are surprisingly neat, most notably in the case of the first two proposed screen positions.

The evidence for earlier subdivisions

For the purposes of the following discussion, the numbering of the piers is shown in fig. 2. The east face of pier 1, in the south arcade, has apparently had its panelling removed at some point, as there is a marked difference in colour below the height of the extant north-face panelling (fig. 4). The fill and wooden peg below this line are possibly of later date, and will therefore not be taken into account (not least because any potential counterparts are beneath extant panelling on the corresponding west face of pier 2). Two patches of fill are positioned, slightly to the right of the centre of the pier, at 1.2m and 1.6m from present floor level respectively (fig. 5). To the left of these, a vertical scar runs down across three stones, and the remains of a wooden peg lies slightly above the top of this scar.

On the corresponding west face of pier 2, there is a deeply gouged hole of roughly circular shape, at 1.2m above present floor level, and the remains of a wooden peg at 1.6m, that is, aligning with the two patches of fill (fig. 6). Additionally, there is a square patch of fill at 1.27m, and the stub of an iron peg at 1.1m, both aligned vertically with the features mentioned earlier. It does appear, therefore, that a screen was positioned between piers 1 and 2. This is corroborated by the two pin holes at the top of the arch (similar to those in fig. 7, which is the top of the arch between piers 2 and 3), which may be evidence of a supporting chain at the centre of the screen, similar to those in fig. 8.

The division of the south aisle from the nave is continued between piers 2 and 3 (figs. 9 and 10). The arch of the east face of pier 2 contains a large square patch of fill, with a horizontal row of iron pegs below, at 2.62m and 2.1m from present floor level respectively (fig. 11). Below this, aligned vertically with the square of fill, is a deep gouge, underneath which is some horizontal fill at 1.6m (fig. 9).

The west face of pier 3 has an even more marked square infill, level with its counterpart on pier 2, and a horizontal line of fill aligned with the three pegs (fig. 12). The remains of an iron peg are at 1.48m from the present floor level, aligned vertically with the square and horizontal infills. Below this is a horizontal row of the remains of three iron pegs, the deepest of which – the central one – is vertically aligned with the afore-mentioned features, as is a patch of square infill slightly below the pegs (fig. 10). Clearly there was also a screen between these two piers, perhaps taller than that between piers 1 and 2, and also supported by a chain (fig. 7).

Although there is evidence of material alterations between piers 3 and 4, it does not appear to suggest a screen at this stage. Unfortunately it is not possible to find a counterpart for the large, deep, square hole on the west face of pier 4, as the corresponding part of pier 3 is panelled. Two long patches of infill at the bases of each arch may be evidence of decorative features, such as statues, or of medieval lighting fixtures. Similarly, it has not been possible at this stage to identify convincing evidence for screening between piers 4 and 5, although the south face of 4 shows some features which may justify further investigation, as their potential counterparts may be behind a nineteenth century memorial on the wall of the south-east chapel.

There is tantalizing evidence of material activity on pier 7. The east and south faces have several cuts and patches of infill, many holes and remains of pegs (figs. 13 and 14). Unfortunately, it has not been possible to convincingly match these with the west face of pier 6 or the full north face of pier 4. A correspondence can, however, be made at the base of the arch of the south face of pier 7. A deep hole with a vertical slot running up from it is at the top of the capital, 1.83m above present floor level (fig. 15). This approximately corresponds with a patch of infill and filled hole on pier 4, and is highly suggestive of a decorative feature. Given its position in the chancel, it is possible that this provides evidence of a rood-beam. Alternatively, there could simply have been corresponding, but not physically connected, decorative features.

The north face of pier 7 might bear possible evidence of a structure crossing the north aisle, in the form of the remains of two wooden pegs above the capital and a deep gouge 1m from present floor level, all vertically aligned (fig. 16). Regrettably, the removal of the vestry to its present location in 1792, and nineteenth-century rebuilding of the north wall, have rendered it impossible at this stage to confidently suggest a screen. This possibility is, however, perhaps borne out by the discovery in 1998 of an L-shaped alignment of bricks and limestone blocks at the foot of the present vestry steps (feature 4006 on fig. 17). The archaeological report describes, but, unfortunately, does not accurately label, a small rectangular cut on the inner face of this L-shape, which, it is suggested, may be ‘evidence for a timber upright adjacent to the north wall’ (Pearson, 1998: 14-15). It is tempting, but admittedly, at this stage, highly speculative, to posit the existence of some sort of dividing fixture between pier 7 and whatever was on top of Pearson’s L-shaped alignment. Further research is necessary in this area to be certain either way. At this stage, however, it is reasonable to at least tentatively suggest such a fixture.

The west face of pier 7 bears little convincing evidence of a screen crossing to pier 8. Two long patches of infill at the bases of each arch, however, similar to those noted above between piers 3 and 4, may suggest the existence of decorative features or medieval lighting fixtures. This is particularly tempting in the light of their posited existence on the south side of the chancel.

The north face of pier 8 may bear evidence of a screen crossing the north aisle, in the form of a large patch of vertical infill, with horizontal infill to the left at its top, and right across the north face about one-third of the way down the vertical infill (fig. 18). It is possible that this is merely a scar from the removal of the chancel arch (R.C.H.M.E., 1981: 6), which may also be evidenced on the south face of pier 8 and the projecting chamfered springer on pier 3. Removal of the chancel arch does not, however, account for the wooden peg remains below the capital. The series of gouges and vertical slot towards the base of the currently visible pier could conceivably have been made when the extant panels were constructed. At this stage, therefore, one can only conclude that there may or may not be evidence of a screen from the north face, and further investigation is necessary to reach a final decision.

There is slight evidence for a rood-screen between piers 3 and 8 (figs. 19 and 20). Unfortunately, the respective heights of the various holes, fills, and cuts do not quite match those of their potential counterparts. On the other hand, the removal of the chancel arch does not account for *all* of the scars. Addleshaw's suggestion that the timber under the seat in the pew on the north side of the nave opposite the pulpit is the base of a rood screen may indeed be reasonable, although further dating analysis of the timber would be necessary before this could be entirely convincing (Addleshaw, 1964: 2). Given that the extant pulpit obscures a great deal of the north face pier 3, it is possible at this stage only to very tentatively suggest that there may have been a screen here.

The evidence for a screen from the west face of pier 8, however, is far stronger (fig. 21). A large patch of infill at 2m from present floor level spreads onto the north-west face, where it stops just below the remains of an iron peg. A cut is just above the capital at 1.7m, and horizontal fill runs across the north-west, west, and south-west faces at 1.41m. A row of three wooden peg remains runs across the three faces at 1.2m, and a horizontal patch of fill is on the north-west and part of the west faces. There are further cuts and holes below the level of the current pew and panelling, which may therefore be later.

The east face of pier 9 has 2 patches of fill at a height of 2m, and the remains of an iron peg on the north-east face, corresponding with the features on pier 8 (fig. 22). There are cuts, filled cuts, and patches of fill at 1.93 – 2.1m just above and on the corbel on the north-east, north, and south-east faces. A large horizontal patch of fill at 1.2m, with the remains of a wooden peg at the centre of the east face corresponds with the row of pegs on pier 8. Just below this patch is a deep cut at the corner of the east and south-east faces, and a filled hole at 1m on the east face, vertically aligned with the pinhole. Finally, a row of the remains of three iron pegs cross the three faces at 0.96m height, which, unfortunately, is below the panelling on pier 8. The features on the west and east faces of piers 8 and 9 correspond very closely, and the evidence is strong for a screen between the two.

There is little evidence of screens from pier 10. There is, however, convincing evidence of a screen in the arch to the chapel of St. James. A large iron peg is on the east face of the respond at 1.47m from present floor level, and has its counterpart at exactly the same height on the west respond (figs. 23 and 24). Pin holes at the top of the arch corroborate the idea of a screen (fig. 25).

We have seen, then, that there is evidence for considerable subdivision of space within late medieval Holy Trinity. There is strong evidence for screens between piers 1 and 2, 2 and 3, 8 and 9, and at the entrance to the chapel of St. James. There is tentative evidence for a screen between chancel and nave, between piers 3 and 8, and possibly of a rood-beam between piers 4 and 7. Decorative or lighting fixtures - possibly paired - were attached to the springers of piers 3 and 4, and 7 and 8. Finally, and perhaps most tentatively, there may have been a screen cutting across the north aisle from pier 7 and/or from pier 8 (fig. 26). It is possible that further investigation will suggest further subdivisions. Even the screens thus far mooted must have had a major effect on how people used Holy Trinity as a place of worship and social interaction. It is now generally acknowledged within archaeological theory that use of space both reflects and further consolidates social values (Giles, 1999: 88). The remainder of this essay will very briefly consider the historical context and social implications of this proposed subdivision of the church.

Firstly, it should be pointed out that extensive use of screens was not unusual in parish churches. Studies of All Saints' Church, in North Street, York and St. Helen's Church in Skipwith have suggested even more extensive screening (Woodcock, 1996; Peats, 1998). Scholars have suggested various reasons for segregation within a parish church. Is it possible to apply their theories to the evidence proposed here for Holy Trinity?

Gilchrist and Aston have focused on gendered segregation. Using material evidence, Gilchrist suggests that the northern parts of a church were strongly associated with women (1994: especially 128-43, which concentrates on nunnery churches, but also deals with churches in general; also 1995: 190). She has also expanded her hypothesis of gendered segregations into other types of building (Gilchrist, 1999). Essentially, her proposed

segregation is based on iconographic dualistic associations, where ‘north/moon/female/Old Testament’ is contrasted with ‘south/sun/male/New Testament’ (1994: 133-4).

Aston also suggests a (not invariable) gendered east/west segregation, on the grounds that women were not to tarnish the purity of the sacred rites taking place in the east end (Aston, 1990). She also subscribes to a gendered north/south association, with women associated particularly with the north and care of the area associated with Virgin Mary, who is usually depicted as at the right hand of Christ, and points to the still-current tradition of a bride standing on the north and her groom on the south (see also Gilchrist, 1994: 139-41).

Are such gendered models applicable to the segregation we have discovered for Holy Trinity? Sadly, at this stage, it seems not. Admittedly, the Chantry of Our Lady, founded in 1315, is traditionally assumed to have been in the north aisle (as was indeed common) (Gee, 1980: 16; Cook, 1906: 8). This chantry was, however, founded by a man, one William de Langtoft (Cook, 1906: 6). Marian devotion was, of course, far from restricted to women. Indeed, it has been suggested that men may have been more enthusiastic adherents to her cult (Bynum, 1982:141).

Little evidence of *in situ* iconography remains within Holy Trinity to mark specific spaces as female. The east window, however, suggests a perhaps surprising lack of gendered segregation. Female saints are heavily represented in the extant lights (Sheppard Routh, 1986: 109). The lower part of the original window - visible on the outside of the east wall - was hidden by the wooden reredos installed in 1721 (*ibid*.: 115). A seventeenth-century sketch of the original window suggests that the row of lights below the extant window depicted five images of the Virgin Mary. Even more interestingly, for the purposes of this essay, the bottom row of lights apparently consisted of five donor panels. Whilst the main

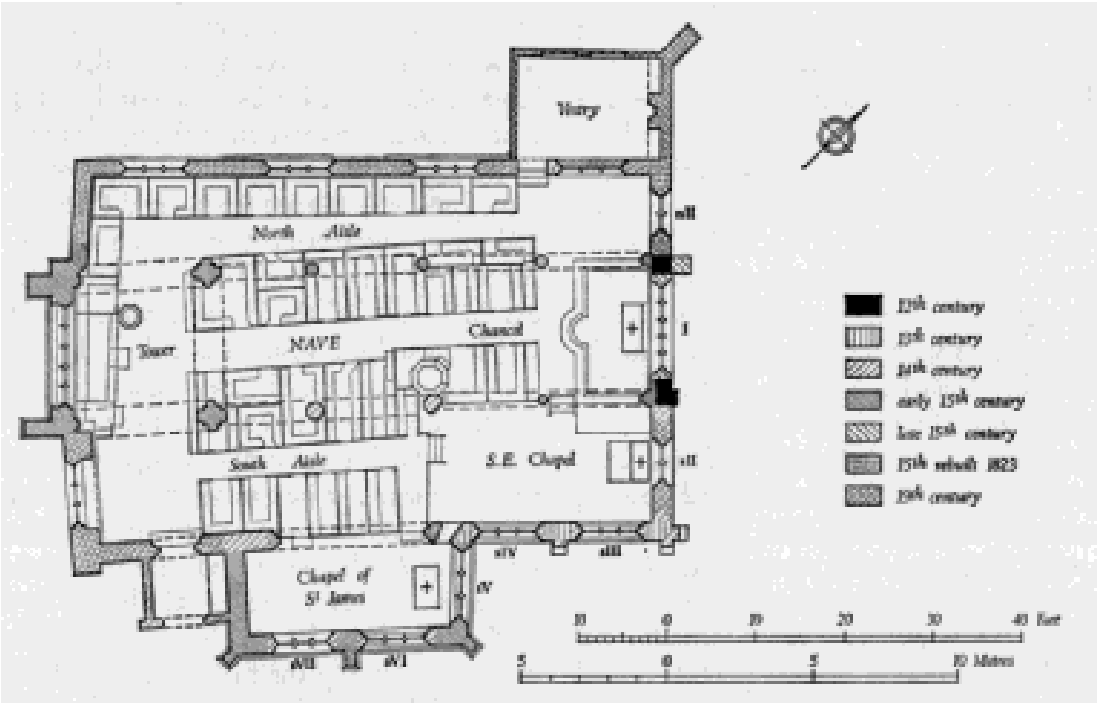
part of the window was paid for by John Walker, rector of Holy Trinity c.1471, clearly some parishioners were providing these lower lights. In four out of the five, the donors appear to have been male *and* female, presumably husband and wife. In the fifth, the seventeenth century sketch is only partial (*ibid*.: 117-119). It seems fair to conclude that far from being banished to one part of the church, women were very much an integral part of the parish community here. If, then, our screens are not evidence of gendered segregation, what other boundaries might they have reflected and reinforced?

Graves has suggested that there was conflict between clergy and laity, with the latter steadily encroaching upon what was traditionally seen as clerical and sacred space (Graves, 1989). With the laity crowding into the chancel, in order to get a better view of the mass, and the clergy attempting to regain "their" space, she sees 'Church and secular power exist[ing] in a continual dialectic of mutually beneficial and conflicting interest' (*ibid*.: 302). She dates a climax of material alterations to parish churches to the fifteenth century, as merchants began to emulate gentry encroachments on traditionally clerical space, interpreting this as 'the challenge of an emergent political power through the practice of established discourse' (*ibid*.: 312-13). This lay encroachment and clerical reaction may well be reflected in the posited fixtures between piers 3 and 8, and 4 and 7. Woodcock has suggested such a lay encroachment into chancel/clerical reaffirmation of authority for All Saints, North Street (Woodcock, 1996: 55-6). Peats, however, suggests a more co-operative relationship between clergy and laity, pointing out that the laity were often responsible for financing the erection of the rood (Peats, 1998: 52). He highlights the cruciality of an air of mystery surrounding the mass, which would have been enhanced by the partial obscuration a screen would provide (*ibid*.: 5-6; this point has been corroborated by K. Giles, pers.comm.). Given the lack of wholly convincing evidence for the existence of screens in these positions, however, it is perhaps wiser to dwell more on the screens which have been more confidently suggested.

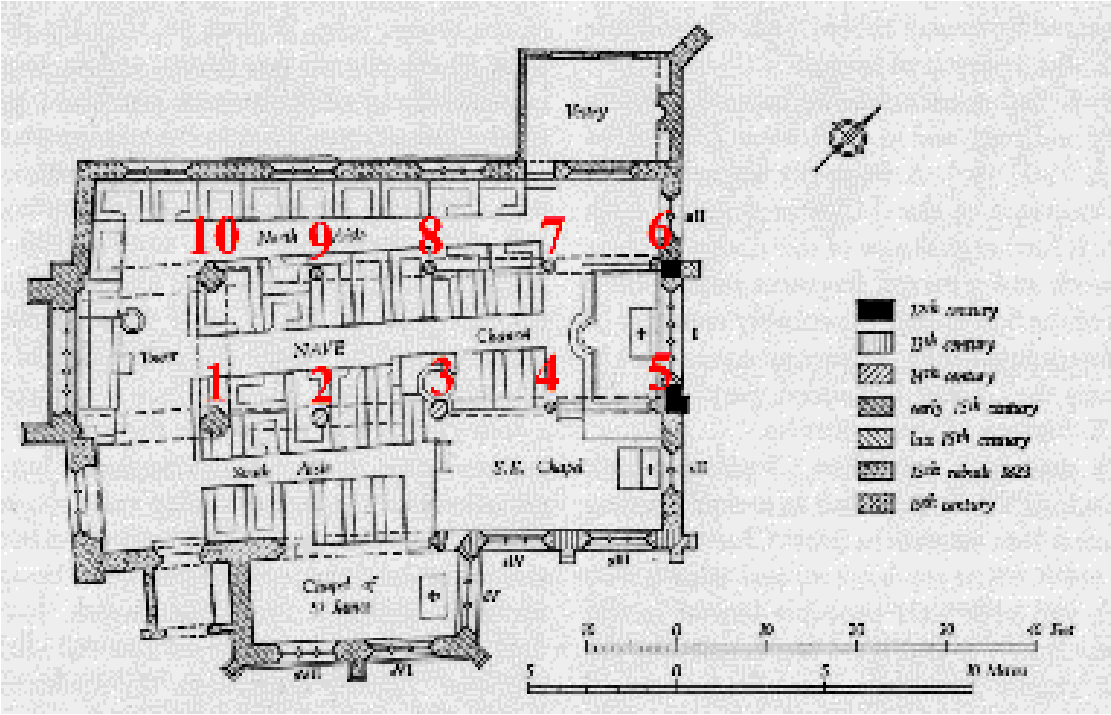
In the light of the fact that one of the proposed screens partitioned what is known to be a chantry, it seems reasonable to consider the implications of screening chantries in parish churches. Chantries were a form of 'elaborate *post mortem* security' (Swanson, 1995:229), by which the founder provided for the celebration of masses specifically to mitigate their sins and limit their time in purgatory. They might also be celebrated for the souls of the founder's friends, kin, or for the dead in general.

As Woodcock points out, 'in a public building the separation of space suggests a higher regard being afforded to that particular area' (Woodcock, 1996: 36). It is logical, therefore, that a founder who went to the considerable expense of building an additional chapel onto an existing building and resetting the windows of the original, replaced aisle into the new chapel (Pearson, 1998: 4), would be more than willing to erect a screen to afford a degree of privacy to the new area while simultaneously drawing attention to it. Here, perhaps, we have touched on a crucial motivating factor in the erection of screens: conspicuous consumption. Whilst not wishing to completely negate the spiritual motivations behind actions and endowments within the church, chantries did indeed provide 'for a much more high-profile presence within the … church' (Burgess, 1991:72), and bore witness to the testator's wealth and status (Duffy, 1992:328). Some chantries were effectively independent of the main altar of the church, celebrating the mass at different times (as suggested for St. Helen's, Skipwith by Peats, 1998: 50). The squint in the chapel of St. James at Holy Trinity, however, suggests that celebrations here were concurrent. The size of the chapel further suggests that members of the founder's family may have worshipped within it, that is away from the main body of parishioners. A screen would have highlighted this separation as well as the sanctity of the chantry altar.

It is tempting to suggest that the possible evidence of a screen from the north face of pier 7 to the site of the present vestry could be similarly screening a chantry, perhaps that dedicated to Our Lady, particularly in the light of the L-shaped structure discovered in 1998 (Pearson, 1998: 14-15). This theory is even more seductive given that decorated floor tiles were also found in this area (*ibid*.). Pearson felt that his evidence could suggest that this area was used as a chantry (*ibid*. :18). This essay's suggestions that there may have been a screen between pier 7 and the north wall, or a parallel screen from pier 8 do rather lend weight to this theory, particularly in a building where a screen seems to have partitioned another chantry from the main body of the church. Perhaps it is even possible that both suggested screens crossing the north aisle existed, in which case they may suggest the location of another chantry. It is recorded that a chantry of Ss. Nicholas and Katherine existed in the fourteenth century, and that in 1441 there were five altars in addition to the main one (Gee, 1980: 16). A pattern of multiple chantries established in the aisles, especially clustered around the chancel, does indeed concur with Cook's general model of the location of chantries within parish churches (Cook, 1954: 113-16). Here, however, we are becoming highly speculative. Further archaeological investigation may yield more definitive answers.



It is not possible at this stage to confidently suggest the usage or symbolic and social meaning of the remaining screens. In passing, however, it is interesting to note that three approximately align with the entrance to the chapel of St. James (namely those between piers 2 and 3, 7 and 8, and, of course, the entrance itself).



No definitive conclusions as to the motivating factors behind the erection of the screens and their consequent effect on the parishioners have, then, been reached. This essay has, however, demonstrated that there is clear evidence of deliberate subdivision of space within Holy Trinity in the late medieval period. The church is clearly ripe for further research, in order to fully appreciate the complex dynamics which can only have been touched upon within this project. It seems that the best future approach would be interdisciplinary, considering not only the archaeological evidence, but also iconographic interpretations (especially of the east window), the theological and social historical contexts, and the records of the parishioners - both individually in the form of wills and foundations, and collectively in the context of their guilds.

Fig. 3: View from west respond of chapel of St. James, showing south and north arcades

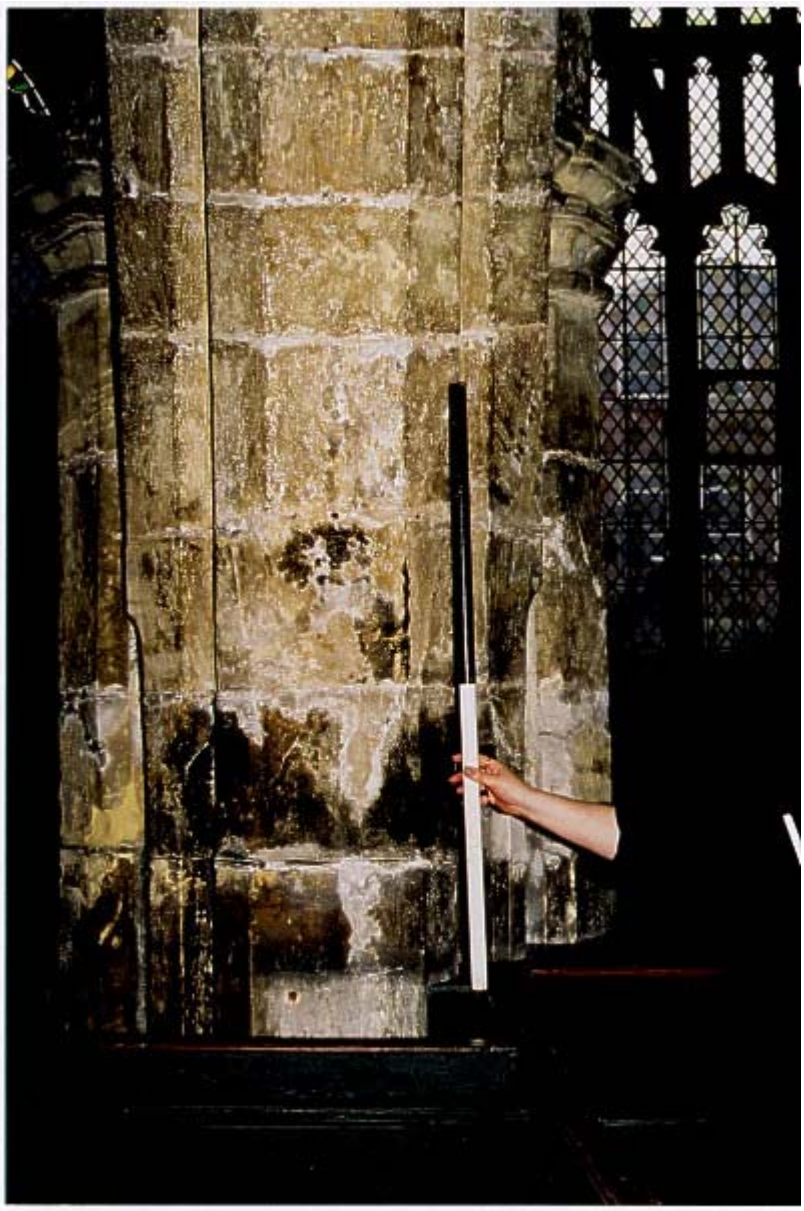


Fig. 4: Pier 1, east face

Fig. 5: Pier 1, detail of east face

Fig. 6: Pier 2, detail of west face

Fig. 7:

Fig. 8: Screen supported by chain, at Brushford

Fig. 9: Pier 2, east face

Fig. 10: Pier 3, west face

Fig. 11: Pier 2, detail of east face

Fig. 12: Pier 3, detail of west face

Fig. 13: Pier 7, east face

Fig. 14: Pier 7, south face

Fig. 15: Pier 7, detail of south face

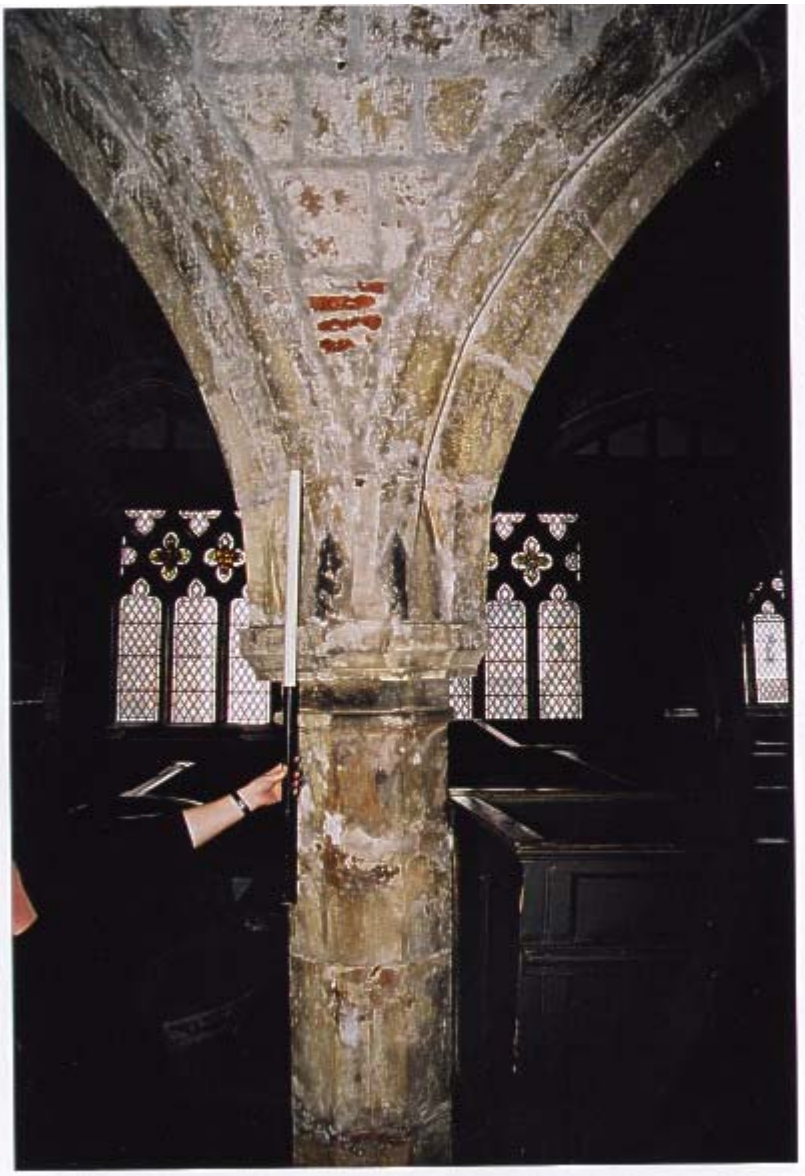


Fig. 16: Pier 7, north face

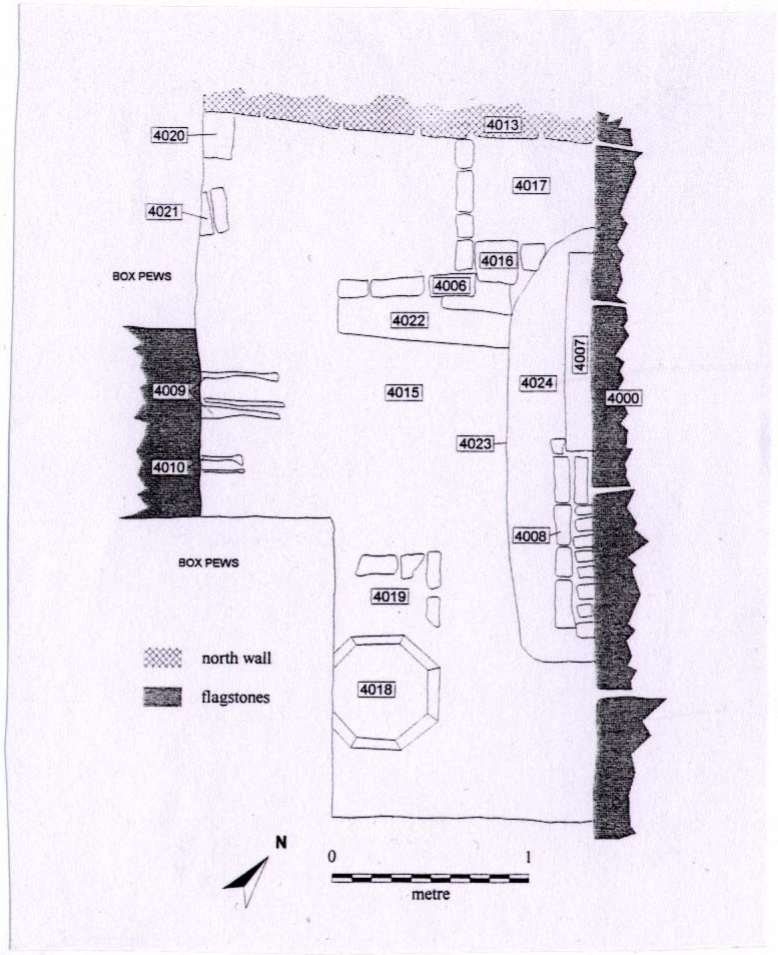


Fig. 17: Plan from excavation report of north-east area,
(Pearson, 1988: 16)

Fig. 18: Pier 8, north face

Fig. 19: Pier 3, north face

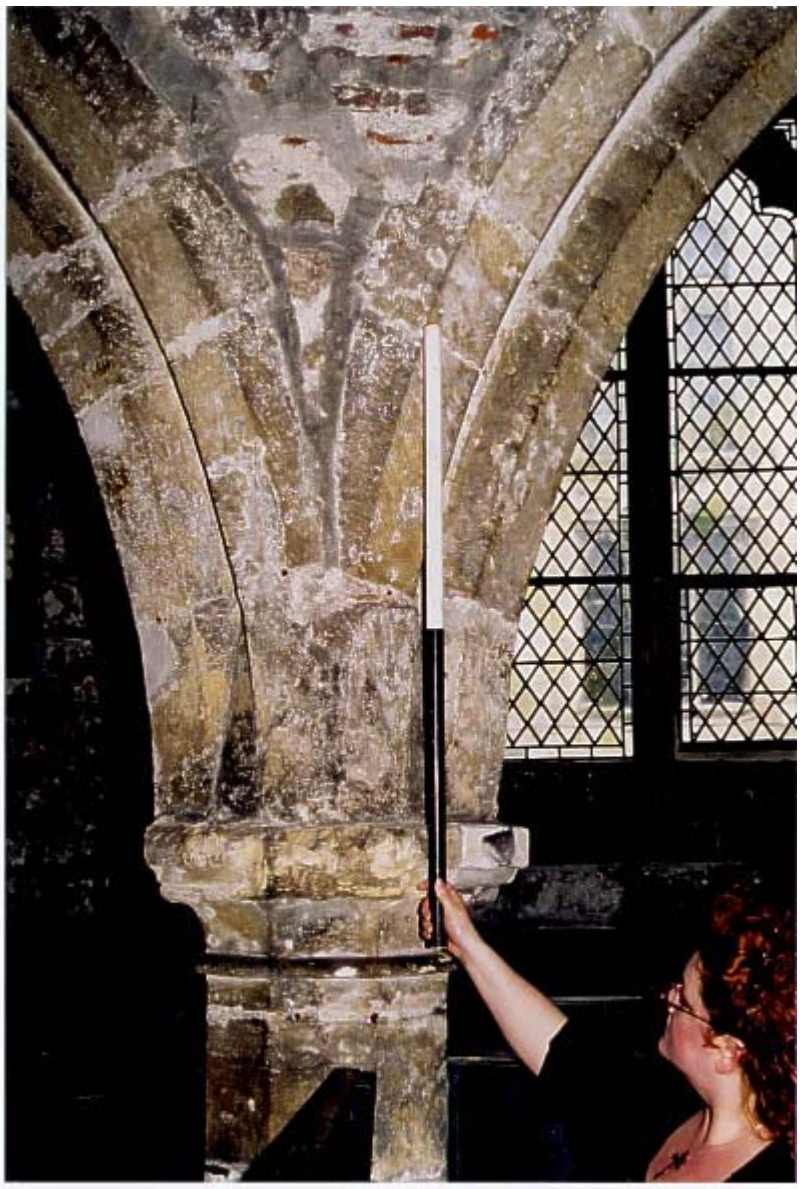


Fig. 20: Pier 8, south face

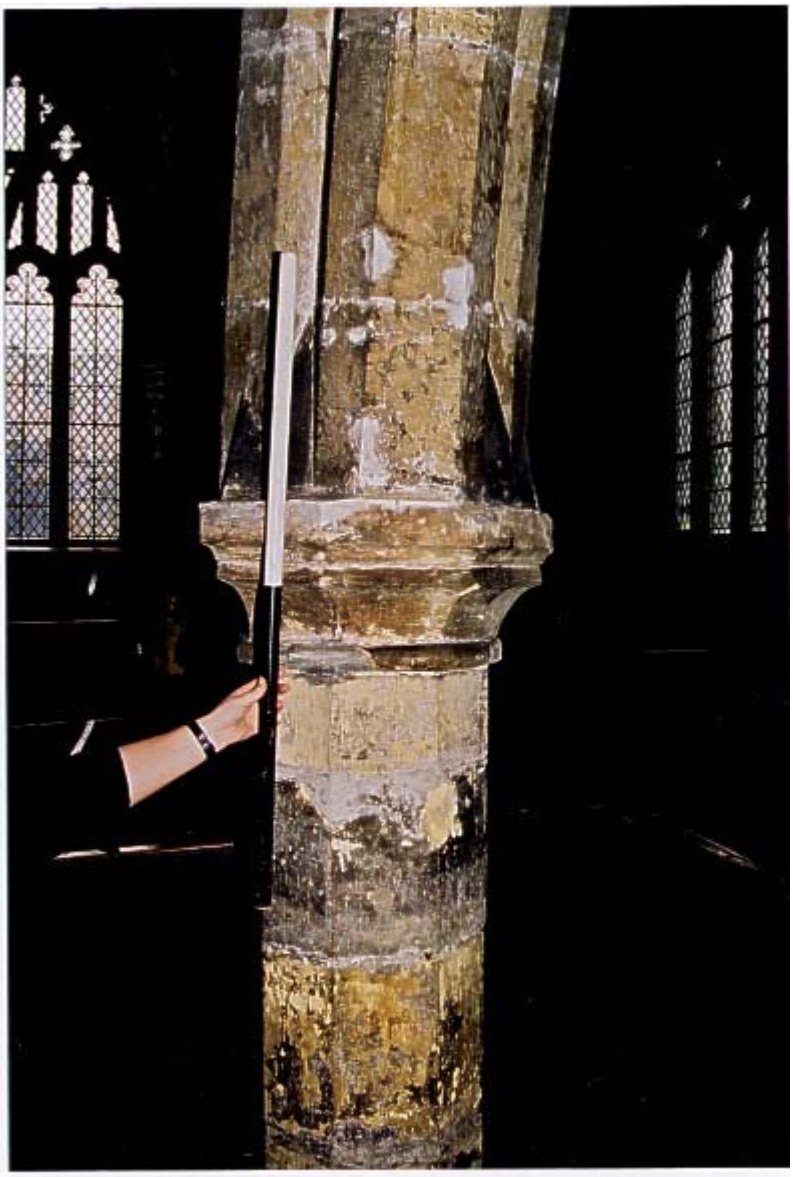


Fig. 22: Pier 9, east face

Fig. 23: Chantry, east respond

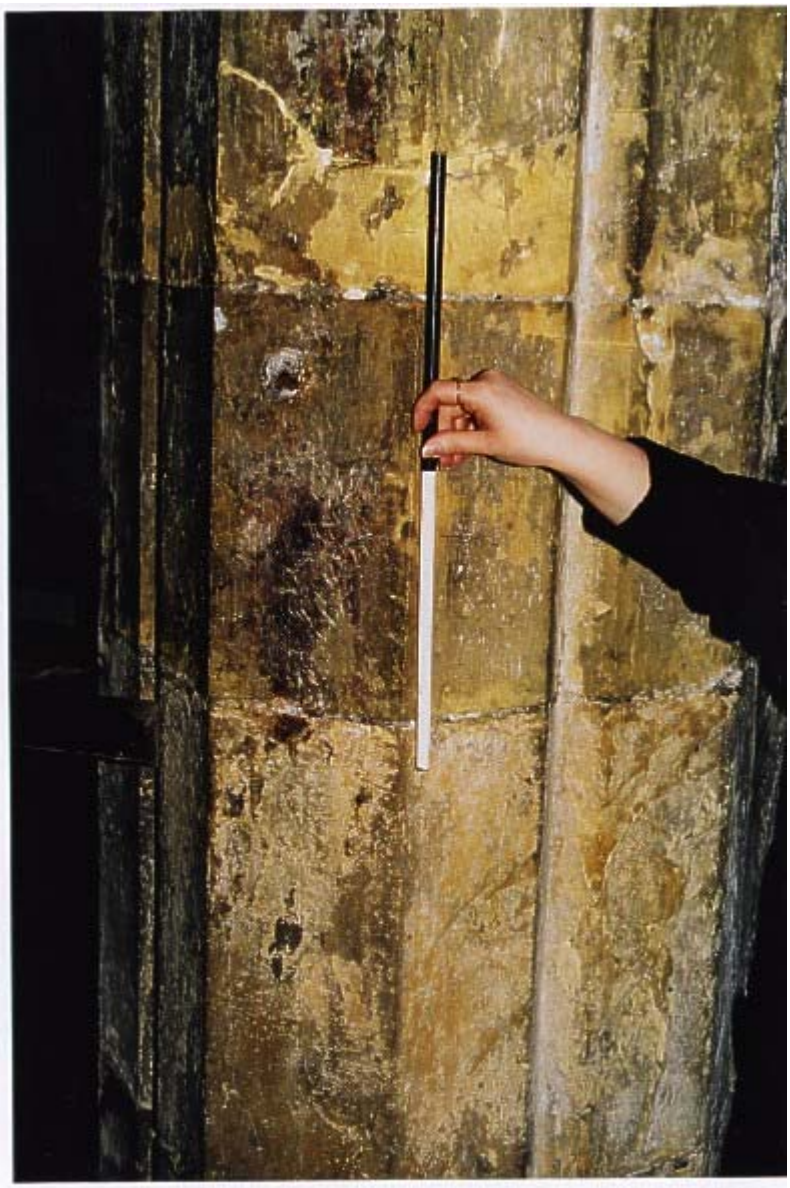
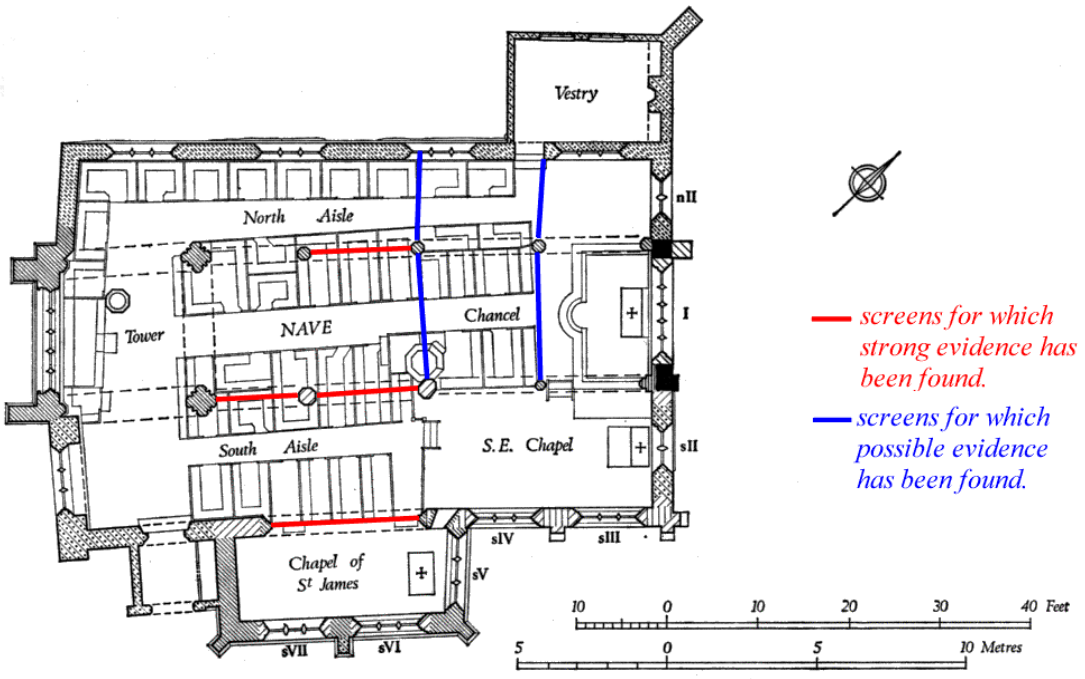


Fig. 24: Chantry, west respond

Fig. 25: Chantry, top of arch



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