

The Significance of Doorway Positions in English Medieval Parochial Churches and Chapels



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Geoffrey Sedlezky

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Cover: Iffley north doorway

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The Significance of Doorway Positions in English Medieval Parochial Churches and Chapels

This book analyses the positions of external church doorways of English medieval parochial churches and chapels in an attempt to show the significance that positioning had for the function and design of these buildings.

From the seventh to tenth centuries, churches tended to have a single external nave doorway at the west end of the building. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the design changed. New buildings tended to have two nave doorways, on the north and south sides of the nave in a laterally opposite position. From the thirteenth century to the end of the Middle Ages new churches continued the two-doorway trend but often had western towers and doorways as well. The book also examines chapels, which were different from churches as they had a different function and status. Non-parochial chapels tended to have a single southern doorway while parochial chapels were often built with two nave doorways.

This book examines the reasons for these changes. The author argues that there are liturgical reasons for the changes both at the turn of the eleventh century and again in the later thirteenth. Gender and clerical segregation are considered in relation to the provision of a second nave doorway in churches and parochial chapels. It is also shown that the widespread idea of the 'Devil's Door' was only developed in the nineteenth century though it had roots in late medieval liturgy.

The author concludes that there is a link between the design and function of parochial churches and chapels with the number and attributes of their doorways.

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Finally, I would like to thank my partner Laura for inspiring me to follow my passion for history and without whose love and encouragement this effort would never have been possible.

I would like to dedicate this book to my parents, Dr Benjamin and Mrs Selma Sedlezky who supported me throughout my studies and who have always set an example for a pursuit of learning, regardless of age.

Abbreviations

AC	Archaeologia Cantiana
AJ	Archaeological Journal
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
<i>BofE</i>	<i>Buildings of England</i> , Pevsner, et al + County (London, New Haven: Penguin, Yale University Press, 1954-2019)
CASSS	The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture
CUP	Cambridge University Press
CRSBI	The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland
DB	Domesday Book
<i>HE</i>	Bede, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum</i> , eds. Bertram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979)
JBAA	Journal of the British Archaeological Society
KAS	Kent Archaeological Society
MUP	Manchester University Press
OUP	Oxford University Press
PASE	Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England
PUBS	Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society
<i>Taxatio</i>	<i>Taxatio Database</i> , eds., Jeff Denton et al., (Sheffield: The Digital Humanities Institute, 2014)
TPBHRS	The Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society
<i>TTB Survey</i>	Tim Tatton-Brown's Historical and Archaeological Survey, Canterbury and Rochester Dioceses, Kent Archaeological Society, website, Kent Archaeological Society, kentarchaeology.org.uk
VCH	Victoria County History
YUP	Yale University Press

Introduction

The Path to the Present Research

At the start of my research into English medieval churches, I recall driving along a remote country lane about ten kilometres north of Dover. I was en route to view the church of St Nicholas at Barfrestone (Kent). Arriving from the southeast my first glimpse was of a rather large, circular, mullioned window (Figure I.1). This form of ornamentation for an east-end chancel window was quite unusual from what I expected to find in a remote twelfth-century church.

I approached the church on foot from the south, which faces the street below (Figure I.2). Just as its circular east window was atypical so too were its two southern doorways. The larger, highly ornate one, is surrounded by an elaborate arch and carving (Figure I.3). From what was then visible, it appeared to be the primary entrance into the nave. The other, much narrower, less adorned one, was for the chancel. The upper level of the church is also uncommon as it has a full-length blind arcade within which are narrow single-light windows: two for the nave,

two in the chancel. My initial questions were why this southern doorway is so ornate while the other is plainer, and why the chancel doorway is blocked. Was this just a continuation of blind arcading on the ground level? Walking around the church I also saw another doorway, this time on the north side of the nave, and it was also blocked (Figure I.4).

This raised the question of what this doorway's purpose was, on the other side of the church and not as easily accessible as the southern entrance. Moreover, why was this second nave doorway similarly sealed, and when and by whom?

When I compared the two nave doorways it was clear that the builders of the church chose to decorate the southern nave entrance in a grander style than the laterally opposite northern doorway. The church was, after all, constructed in a single building phase and so the variation is even more apparent. Not only does the southern nave one have two orders of carved columns, compared to one on the north, but it also has a series of fourteen carved scenes in its surrounding archway's



Figure I.1, St Nicholas Barfrestone (Kent), from the east, Google Earth



Figure I.2, St Nicholas Barfreestone, from the south



Figure I.3, Barfreestone, south doorway



Figure I.4, Barfreestone, north doorway



Figure I.5, Barfreestone, chancel doorway

outer order instead of the zigzag motif. The southern one has a very detailed carved tympanum yet the northern one is plain; was it a modern insertion? The two doorways are also different in size; the southern one is taller than the northern one by 18 cm and is also 13 wider. When I further compared the southern one with the chancel doorway, (Figure I.5)

I saw that the difference in size is even greater, the southern doorway is 43 cm wider and 41 cm taller.

I was intrigued by this deliberate variation in the scale and elaboration of the church's doorways. There had to be a reason for these differences. Was one of the doorways more important than the other? If so, then why? Who used them and how, for what purpose? Asking these questions was what connected me to this research. I was compelled to find answers.

Aims and Objectives

Originally, my research was focused on identifying and explaining the blocking of doorways at English parochial churches and chapels. There surely had to be a reason for this very common phenomenon. I could find no academic writing on this subject and the literature only referred to the fact that a particular doorway had been sealed. It was rare to find a date for this in any

literature, let alone reasons as to why. Initially I focused upon the diocese of Canterbury as it was a close drive from my London residence and Tim Tatton-Brown had conducted and published online a large survey of churches in the 1990s. At two British Archaeological Association conferences I discussed my research objectives with two types of participants, members of the academic community and non-academic church architecture enthusiasts. The reaction of the first group was politely dismissive. Among the second group, the phenomenon of blocked north doorway was certainly obvious to some, for they told me that they were the 'Devil's Door'. The feedback from both groups encouraged me to consider a much broader scope about church doorways, beyond just their blocking. I believed it should therefore also be about their variation in appearance and positioning.

As I cast my search wider to include the whole of England I discovered that the variation in doorways involved much more than just their differences in magnitude and appearance. Some churches had two nave doorways, one on the north and south sides, whilst others did not. Many were built with a western doorway alone. Others had doorways at the west and south, or west and north.

Quite a few had only one doorway, usually on the south side. Others had a blocked doorway on the north or south side. Many had chancel doorways, some did not. I could find no answers in academic literature for these great differences. As such I was struck by not only the differences of their physical attributes but also by their positions. Why did some churches have different numbers of doorways?

Was there a relationship between the doorways and the landscape in any way? Could there be a link to the local manor, the location of the community, to topographical features or to the churchyard? Could the differences be linked chronologically or geographically? Critically, if so, what might explain these changes over time, or from place to place?

The evidence I had assembled directed me to pose several fundamental research questions: (i) Did the position for doorways in newly built churches change throughout the Middle Ages? (ii) If so, when were doorway positions changed? (iii) Why did their builders place them where they did? (iv) Why were the doorways at a single church given different sizes and appearance? (v) Why were church doorways and their location important to the medieval community? (vi) What can we learn about medieval society from their church doorways and how they designed these buildings? Finally, (vii) What is significant about their positions and their changes over time?

This work investigates these questions and seeks answers as to whether there are patterns in the location of doorways and whether this changed over time. It also seeks to ascertain, if such patterns can indeed be determined, when and why such changes occurred. Studying this aspect of medieval church architecture will add to our understanding of the planning and building of parochial churches and chapels in the Middle Ages. It will also seek to understand how doorways were used and perceived by medieval communities as they approached, entered and exited the church, and as they worshipped inside. It will further address widely held popular belief about the negative associations between north doorways and the Devil.

The Significance of the Doorways of Medieval Churches

Doorways were a very important architectural feature of medieval churches. At church doorways priests celebrated a multitude of church rituals.¹ Just beyond the doorway, outside the church, people were exorcised prior to baptism. It is where they were married and the place where many chose to be buried. Doorways were also spiritually important for the members of the medieval community as they were the focal point for religious processions and other celebrations like the church dedication.

The sociological importance of doorways themselves was an aspect of Arnold van Gennep's 1909 seminal work, *Les rites de passage*. He proposed that a society's rituals may be classed according to three basic categories: preliminal, liminal and post-liminal. He discussed some rites of transition which specifically identified doorways as a linking feature. He stated,

Precisely: the door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world.²

Latin Christian practice associates a church doorway with salvation, as we read the Gospel according to John. Christ says,

Ego sum ostium: per me si quis introierit salvabitur et ingredietur et egredietur et pascua inveniet.

I am the door: through me one will enter and leave and find pasture. John 10:9

¹ Helen Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 258-59.

² Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge, 1960), 20-21.

The Vulgate uses *ostium* and not other synonyms such as *porta*, *ianua*, or *foris*, whose primary definitions carry implications of 'door' or 'gate', as opposed to 'entrance.' In Classical Latin, the word *ostium* specifically translates as a 'door including the frame' and not just the physical object that is opened or closed.³ Christ is therefore the doorway to salvation.

The doorway has a further allegorical function in the Middle Ages. This has been very well explored in recent literature. For example, Jane Geddes says that in church dedication ceremonies, the doorway has "four attributes: it is the gate of heaven ...; it is Christ Himself; it is a barrier to evil; and it has the protective power of the patron saint."⁴ In addition, Calvin Kendall states, the doorway is "Christ welcoming, forgiving, or judging those who come to Him."⁵ Moreover, it was the physical mechanism for transcendence. He further writes that "Passing through it, the Christian could be spiritually exalted."⁶

For these reasons, functioning as the gateway to Christ and salvation, doorways are especially important. It is thus fundamental to know what occurred at church doorways, when and why? Moreover, in the case of multiple doorways, we might question how each was used, whether they had different functions, and if one was more important than the others at any particular time. Finally, a recurring question is why there appears to be variation among doorways at any single church that was built in a single phase.

Methodology and Research Limitations

My research began seeking Kent churches whose doorways remained in their original positions since the Middle Ages. Locating such buildings is difficult as there are only a few sources to consult. I decided to employ strict selection criteria for my choice of buildings in order to assure the accuracy of my observations, analysis and later conclusions. In order for inclusion a church needed ideally (i) to be reasonably intact, with doorways that were not overly restored and whose positions had not been altered since the Middle Ages, (ii) to have a reliable well-dated ground plan, and (iii) to have been the subject of an archaeological survey or historical study. Most of the buildings I include in this book meet two or three of these tests. I decided to exclude many churches as some appeared to have fabric or construction restorations so new that I doubted the

³ P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 2:1405.

⁴ Jane Geddes, *Medieval Decorative Ironwork in England* (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1999), 59, cited in Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture and Sacred Places*, 231.

⁵ Calvin B. Kendall, *The Allegory of the Church, Romanesque Portals and their Verse Transcriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 68.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

authenticity of their medieval doorways or of their positions. Some of the early churches are ruins, yet they left their physical imprint and so archaeologists have been able to study the remains and present viable ground plans. Other plans were produced by architectural surveys of surviving intact buildings.

I chose a date range from the year 600 to 1534. I selected the start of the seventh century as a starting point as from that date we have evidence of stone-built churches in Kent from that time. I chose 1534 as the final date as that is the year of Henry VIII's *Act of Supremacy*, one of the important dates for the beginning of the English Reformation. I chose this lengthy time span to help identify changes more clearly. It is true that the time frame is arbitrary, especially as key changes were happening in the central Middle Ages. It seemed crucial to get a good understanding of the pre-Conquest period as much as possible to identify the changes that occurred from that time and afterward.

Within these guidelines in mind, I started with Harold and Joan Taylor's three volume *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*. It was the first survey I consulted and was essential to identifying viable churches for analysis. Further initial sources I used to locate extant medieval churches included Eric Fernie's *The Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons* and *The Architecture of Norman England*. These then directed me to other architectural scholars and archaeological surveys. Tim Tatton-Brown's Kent archaeological survey from 1990-92 was very helpful in building an initial corpus of local Kent churches.⁷ *The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland* was an excellent resource for identifying eleventh and twelfth-century churches with intact nave doorways.⁸

I recognised that my study needed to expand beyond Kent if I were to accumulate a sufficient number of churches that met my selection criteria. It was then that I changed my focus to explore a comparison of two dioceses: Canterbury and a diocese from the north. I consulted the Southwell and Nottingham Church History Project for those dioceses.⁹ It was somewhat helpful to identify possible churches for inclusion. For this reason, I expanded my search to the whole of England.

With this new geographical range I consulted David Stocker and Paul Everson's *Summoning St Michael* which likewise helped locate possible Lincolnshire churches. I found these sources useful as they are archaeologically minded corpuses that helped me to

locate possible churches with intact nave doorways in their original positions. Still, as my geographic range was all of England, I looked at as many publications as I could which identified and analysed medieval English churches. Within all of these sources were buildings that had been altered in the thousand years since they were built. In order to detect patterns my research required buildings that were mostly unaltered since their original construction. Only those whose doorways were positioned in the Middle Ages, and mostly unaltered, would be of any value to my research. These sources helped me to identify buildings with doorways modified after the English Reformation, especially during the great restoration campaign of the nineteenth century. Even though the church at Barfrestone was very restored in the nineteenth century, the location and dimensions of its doorways have not changed. I understand the potential problems such a church causes for my research. Despite its restoration it still remains valuable for my study as without the alterations the church at Barfrestone might not have survived to this day. Few, if any, remain in their original form since the Middle Ages. Restoration is a feature of their present existence and is a reality that architectural historians are required to accept.

As the body of possible churches grew, I searched through the online Archaeology Data Service website as well as the *Victoria County Histories* series of books and the *British History Online* website. Pevsner's *Buildings of England* series and the *British Listed Buildings* online database were especially helpful to obtain further possible buildings for study. Numerous other secondary sources on county churches also expanded my research as I assembled the buildings for analysis. Google Earth and YouTube were also extremely helpful and saved me a great deal of time on site visits as these applications allowed me, as much as possible, to see the evidence for myself before planning my many journeys throughout England.

The corpus of churches I assembled in my research is not at all exhaustive but amounts to a sufficiently large quantity of possible buildings for each period in my study to determine if doorway patterns are evident. Still, it is a sizable collection of 177 churches and chapels that date from the seventh to sixteenth century all of which have a number of characteristics that make them suitable for analysis. They are located throughout England so as to reduce any chance of geographical bias.

As I am interested in finding variation among the individual doorways at each particular church, I took their measurements. These dimensions are an especially important aspect of the present research, separate from their appearance. I believe that their relative sizes

⁷ Tim Tatton-Brown, *Canterbury Diocese, Historical and Archaeological Survey 1991*, <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/00.htm>.

⁸ *The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland*, www.crsbi.ac.uk.

⁹ *Southwell and Nottingham Church History Project*, https://southwellchurches.nottingham.ac.uk/_main/hindex.php.



Figure I.6, Method for Doorway Measurements

and other attributes provide important signs of their importance at the church. I measured doorways with a laser device to assure accuracy especially when some are very tall and thus using a tape measure would pose a problem to accuracy. At all doorways I measured the widths between the jambs and then from the centre of the threshold to the base of the centre of the lintel or to the arch as close to the wooden plank door as possible (Figure I.6).

Finally, I assembled the research and divided this book into two basic sections. Chapters 1 to 4 are the architectural chapters which focus on the buildings themselves. Chapters 5 to 7 seek to analyse and explain the patterns identified in the first half. Chapter 5 addresses medieval liturgy, Chapter 6 looks at gender and segregation and Chapter 7 examines the 'Devil's Door'. Finally, in the Conclusion, I reconsider my initial questions, and address the findings of my research. I further include an Appendix which lists the 177 buildings and gives the sources I used to arrive at their dates and other features. I also suggest possible further areas for future research opportunities.

Historiography

The earliest modern scholarly writing on church doorways is from the nineteenth century notably by Thomas Rickman and Matthew Bloxam. They, like the

architectural historians of the early twentieth century, such as G. Baldwin Brown, Charles Peers and Alfred Clapham, discuss doorways in their writing but only give brief statements about their locations.¹⁰ They do not address the doorways in context. For early Anglo-Saxon churches, Brown said,

Western entrances through western towers are the principal entry point for these churches,

and for later Anglo-Saxon churches,

It is characteristically Saxon to place these, north and south, often just opposite each other, at the western end of the nave. One of them generally the north is now very commonly blocked.¹¹

Francis Bond repeats this observation but adds a possible reason. He writes that,

One of these may have been intended for the parochial Sunday procession; usually it is the northern of the two.¹²

Still, the writing is mostly art historical with much description of carving style and appearance. Numerous other academic writers follow these general ideas about doorway positions like George A. T. Middleton, A. Hamilton Thompson, and Frank E. Howard.¹³

From about 1920, after the work of A. Hamilton Thompson, academic writing appeared to follow two branches in the study of medieval churches. One group proceeded along an art historical mode mostly focusing upon the physical appearance of the buildings, and the development of architectural style over time. The other, from the 1960s, focused somewhat less upon appearance of the buildings but more upon their form and function.

George Zarnecki, one of the leading art historical scholars of the century analysed medieval sculpture, including the carving at church doorways. His work

¹⁰ Thomas Rickman, *An attempt to discriminate the styles of architecture in England from the Conquest to the Reformation* (London: Longman Hurst, Rees, Orme, 1825); Matthew H. Bloxam, *The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture*, 10th ed. (London: W. Kent and Co., 1859) 21; G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England, Ecclesiastical Architecture in England from the Conversion of the Saxons to the Norman Conquest* (London: John Murray, 1903), 94-97; Charles R. Peers, "On Saxon Churches of the St. Pancras Type," *AJ* 58 (1901): 402-34; Alfred W. Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture Before the Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 95.

¹¹ Baldwin Brown, 94-97.

¹² Francis Bond, *An Introduction to English Church Architecture From the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Century* (London: OUP, 1913), 1:706.

¹³ George A. T. Middleton, *English Church Architecture: From the Earliest Times to the Reformation* (London: F. Griffiths, 1909), 15; A. Hamilton Thompson, *The Ground Plan of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge: CUP, 1911), 36-45; Frank E. Howard, *The Medieval Styles of the English Parish Church* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1936), 83.

on Romanesque sculpture was transformative and established it as a subject in its own right, distinct from Anglo-Saxon history or Anglo-Norman architecture.¹⁴ His work has been important for the dating of many of the churches in this work but it is mostly silent on the function of the doorways or their positioning. George H. Cook in *The English Medieval Parish Church*, focused upon the parish church's architectural features, analysing their attributes and classing them according to distinct categories such as Anglo-Saxon, Norman or Perpendicular. Cook builds upon the earlier work of Thompson and uses the style of the masonry, tooling, stone carving, design of arches, and windows to date the buildings and to remark upon the development of church architecture through the Middle Ages.¹⁵ He provides very little on church doorways or their function. For example, of Norman churches he says,

The main entrance to the Norman parish church was a doorway at the south-west of the nave, and where there was a western tower it was used solely as a belfry

and,

the south door of the nave, usually the chief entrance, was framed in a thick projection of walling which gave the masons opportunity for elaborating the arch orders and their supports.¹⁶

Of the later medieval doorways he writes,

Characteristic of Perpendicular doorways is the framing of the arch within a rectangular hood mould, the spandrels being filled with tracery, foliage or heraldic devices carved in relief.¹⁷

From the 1960s onward, archaeologically driven research approached doorways from a different perspective. Harold and Joan Taylor's *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* was a significant contribution to the field which is extensively used in this book.¹⁸ Their work focused on form and plan but also analysed church doorways, their positions and function.

Also in and after the 1960s further scholars including Martin Biddle at Winchester (Hampshire), Warwick Rodwell at Barton-upon Humber (Lincolnshire), Rosemary Cramp at Monkwearmouth and Jarrow

(Durham, historically) and David Parsons at Brixworth (Northamptonshire) led the some of the most significant English archaeological projects in the second half of the twentieth century. Their work focused on the plans of many buildings including medieval churches, which located doorways, their possible positions and the function of the buildings.

Two further major archaeological projects that had great impact on my research are those at Wharram Percy (Yorkshire) and Raunds Furnells (Northamptonshire).¹⁹ Simon Mays, Charlotte Harding and Carolyn Heighway led excavations at Wharram Percy and produced an extensive understanding of many buildings at the deserted village, its churchyard and a plan for the medieval church along with its doorways. However valuable such research was for this book, especially with regard to the churchyard, those authors did not indicate how the doorways might have functioned in relation to the other domestic structures or to the wider community.

Andy Boddington's archaeological work at Raunds, along with contributions from Michel Audouy, Andy Chapman and David Parsons, traced the history of the site and the churches at that location. He also found the position of its doorway, while David Parsons further suggested how the western space of the church might have been used; a factor that relates to the position of the doorway.²⁰ Also very important was the work of Warwick Rodwell who argued for the change in doorway positions associated with the use of western space in the nave for some liturgical rites.²¹

Within a church building context, a general focus among these church archaeology and history scholars has been to identify the form and plan of the medieval church. They include art historical analysis for aspects of their evidence but this is secondary to their search for the form and phases of building construction.

Eric Fernie traces the history of Anglo-Saxon and Norman churches from both art historical and archaeological perspectives.²² Other architectural historians at the end of the century and into the new millennium expanded on the importance of church doorways. Carol Davidson Cragoe analysed a narrow

¹⁴ Eric Fernie, "Zarnecki, George (Jerzy)," *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), accessed September 22, 2021, <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2102/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T2217296>.

¹⁵ George H. Cook, *The English Medieval Parish Church* (London: Phoenix House, 1954).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 86, 211.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁸ Harold M. Taylor and Joan Taylor, *Anglo Saxon Architecture*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: CUP, 1965- 1980).

¹⁹ Simon Mays, Charlotte Harding and Carolyn Heighway, *The Churchyard, Wharram A Study of Settlement on the Yorkshire Wolds*, XI (York: York University Press, 2007), 216-32.

²⁰ Andy Boddington, *Raunds Furnells: the Anglo-Saxon Church and Churchyard* (London: English Heritage, 1996); Michel Audouy and Andy Chapman, *Raunds The origin and growth of a midland village AD 450-1500 Excavations in north Raunds, Northamptonshire 1977-87* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009), 64-66, 84-88.

²¹ Warwick Rodwell, *St Peter's, Barton-upon-Humber: a Parish Church and its Community* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2007-2011), 299-302, 352-53.

²² Eric Fernie, *The Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons* (London: Batsford, 1983); Eric Fernie, *The Architecture of Norman England* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

period of English church architecture 1125-1250. She repeated the general conclusion of earlier writers about two opposing north and south nave doorways, but she, following Rodwell, also suggested liturgical reasons for their positioning. She writes,

However, from the later eleventh century, most local churches, whether or not they had towers, were built from the outset without west doors. Instead, entrance to the church was, as at Kellington, through north and south nave doors. ... It is possible, therefore, that the elimination of western doors in minor churches also indicates that the west ends of these churches too had begun to be used as liturgical spaces.²³

Warwick Rodwell also argued that the western space at the west end of St Peter's church at Barton-upon-Humber may have been used as a baptistery.²⁴ If true, then the absence of a western doorway at that church in favour of laterally opposing north and south tower-nave doorways might have preserved the western cell from external disturbances.

Helen Gittos writes of the function of doorways within a liturgical context and their possible impact on Anglo-Saxon church architecture design,

Where new buildings were constructed, many were designed to use the west end of the nave for a liturgical function rather than as the main door.²⁵

Gittos goes further though in this context. She also suggests that the west end use of space for rites might date from the mid to later eleventh century. At that time the primary entrance into the church changed from the west end to north and south nave doorways. She also argues that the two-doorway form may have been based on gender.²⁶ This last possibility influenced my research into this theme.

David Stocker and Paul Everson see possible links between tower doorways and churchyards.²⁷ However, their recent work on Lincolnshire towers was limited to one county and to two centuries. Recently, Margrete S. Andås also wrote on the importance of church doorways.²⁸ She linked the religious transformative

rituals that had been expounded by van Gennep and other anthropologists with medieval church doorways, specifically those at the thirteenth-century cathedral at Trondheim, Norway. She argues that the doorway "becomes a symbol for the encounter with Christ."²⁹ It is ultimately the physical border between the sacred and profane in the medieval church; being, van Gennep's liminal and transitional threshold. The doorway is the physical mechanism that facilitates the transition. It is the church doorway that establishes the physical and spiritual link to Christ.³⁰ But Andås's research is focused on the cathedral and she does not discuss where rites were celebrated in parish churches.

Throughout all of the scholarly literature, I could find no substantial writing that answered my research questions. This compelled me to proceed with this present research. Architectural historians have explained where the primary doorway may have been in Anglo-Saxon churches but with only limited exploration of the reasons why there may have been a change in the eleventh century. The writing appears to suggest that from the eleventh century, churches had north and south nave doorways. Scholarship is also mostly silent on the position of church doorways built in the later medieval centuries, and I could find no solid writing that linked doorways with any liturgical rubrics. Gender was suggested as a reason for doorway positioning but without convincing evidence in support. Furthermore, although I found two recent articles on the 'Devil's Door' neither adequately addressed its origin or the reasons for its persistence of the idea.³¹ One of my primary objectives in this research has been to find answers to these unresolved questions.

Definitions, Research Problems and Other Limitations

(i) *Issues of Terminology*

The churches I have studied were built throughout almost one thousand years of medieval English history. It is not possible to compare a building like the seventh-century church of St Augustine's Abbey at Canterbury (Kent) with the fourteenth-century church of St Mary at Stocklinch (Somerset). The Abbey church had a greatly different function as it served a community of clerics, the greater lay community, it had royal patronage, was a very complex building enveloped by porticus and was in its early period, the burial place for the archbishops of Canterbury. The church at Stocklinch, in contrast, was a much simpler building constructed to serve as a parish church for its local

²³ Carol Foote Davidson, "Written in Stone Architecture, Liturgy and the Laity in English Parish Churches c. 1125 - c. 1250," (PhD thesis, University of London, 1998), 208-16.

²⁴ Rodwell, *St Peter's, Barton-upon-Humber*, 299-302, 352-53.

²⁵ Helen Gittos, "Sacred space in Anglo-Saxon England: Liturgy, Architecture and Place," (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2001); Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture and Sacred Places*, 177-79.

²⁶ Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture and Sacred Places*, 177-79, 201-02.

²⁷ David Stocker and Paul Everson, *Summoning St Michael: Early Romanesque Towers in Lincolnshire* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2006), 86.

²⁸ Margrete Syrstad Andås, "Art and Ritual in the Liminal Zone," in *The Medieval Cathedral of Trondheim: Architectural and Ritual Constructions in their European Context*, eds., Margrete S. Andås, Øystein Ekroll,

Andreas Haug and Nils H. Petersen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 56.

²⁹ Andås, "Art and Ritual in the Liminal Zone," 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

³¹ See Chapter 8, note 12, above for articles by Nicholas Groves, and Robert J. Silvester.

community. Besides their clear multi-faceted physical, functional and other differences, they were also from greatly different time periods. Stocklinch was a parish church or perhaps what one might call a 'local' church. St Augustine's Abbey was built several hundred years before the creation of the parish system and it was not 'local' but a major place of worship and at the centre of Kent's religious leadership.

So, with such variation, why should we study both forms? The answer is that if we are to understand the later medieval period one must comprehend the buildings that preceded them. By so doing, we can better see whether the churches of the eleventh and later centuries trace any doorway design features and positions from the first three centuries of stone built church architecture of Anglo-Saxon England. As my research includes these early buildings I am not seeking to compare them with the later period churches. Instead, I am seeking to detect if there is a pattern for the churches of the seventh to tenth century and, if there is one, what is it and why did it take the form that it did? Consequently, this work divides the evidence into logical categories to compare like with like. As a result, the title I use was derived after numerous iterations in order to address these issues. As most of the 177 buildings I assemble are from the twelfth century onwards, one could classify them as parochial churches or chapels. Some were not originally built as parish churches but in time acquired this function. Therefore, the greater number of buildings I analyse are parochial. Many of the earlier churches served this function in that they served the pastoral needs of their communities, if in a rather different way to later parish churches. It is for these reasons that in the end I settled for the term 'parochial' rather than, say 'local'.

Furthermore, I examine a small group of twelfth-century churches, five overall, which were originally minsters. They were neither 'local', like Stocklinch, nor parochial churches when first built, but they later became parish churches. For this reason they are included as a separate category within their chapter.

(i) Physical Measurement Issues

Overall, I did not encounter any difficulties with measuring church doorways. In some cases the fabric of the doorway threshold appeared to have been heavily restored in modern times which may have affected the accuracy of the dimensions of the medieval doorway. When this occurred, I made adjustments based on the surviving fabric at the jambs to align with what might have been the original base of the doorway. As I am not comparing doorway dimensions among churches but only the doorways at each church, these variations of

original with repaired or replaced thresholds has little impact on the results of the study as a whole.

I did encounter some difficulties in obtaining measurements at several churches due to numerous factors that include: a threshold was obscured by an accretion of soil, vegetation and other debris and modern additions such as chimneys and downspouts. Others were inaccessible as they were within enclosed vestries or other rooms. Locked but see-through steel gates prevented direct access to some, but in those two cases the Pythagorean function of the measuring device provided assistance in estimating heights. At some churches, their doorways were blocked by later period alterations which left only vestiges of them. Still, if it was clear where their original doorways were then I made best effort estimates.

Modern alterations did not automatically disqualify a doorway from this collection. For example, the sealed twelfth-century north doorway at Barfrestone has original intact jambs which can be measured. Although its tympanum is probably a mid-nineteenth-century replacement I estimated where its original bottom level lay. In this instance, the new tympanum probably is in line with the existing original impost as at the southern doorway. As such, I obtained a height for this doorway again estimating the original thresholds for this and for the southern doorway based on the probable positions of the original bases. In this case, I include that church even though it has a sealed doorway as that modern alteration did not affect the relative comparison between the two nave doorways.

(iii) Other Limitations

In addition, although England is geographically a relatively small country, compared with Canada, my nation of origin, I drove in excess of 6,000 kilometres for site visits ranging from Kent to Devon and as far north as Alnwick (Northumberland). I searched ideally for clusters of buildings for expediency and to limit travel time, and to control fuel and accommodation costs but in many instances my journeys took me to far flung locations to view one church. Many of these diversions were unfortunately unproductive but necessary. Other locations visited beyond London were the county archives at Maidstone (Kent) and Chippenham (Wiltshire). As items had to be ordered in advance not all items were delivered as requested, which frustrated my attempts to read desired church records, architectural plans and faculties. Again, due to financial consideration I did not retain archive staff to sift through volumes of materials as they would not necessarily know what to look for and such fees are substantial. I had planned to visit further archives but was not able to do so due to time and financial

considerations. Where possible, I asked churchwardens and vicars for assistance and this was often provided.

As much as further trips through rural England would have been productive, I had to cease additional site visits once I arrived at a viable quantum of buildings for my research purposes. By May 2021 I concluded my search for possible churches. I recognise that many other churches could have formed part of the corpus of this book. I accept that this group is, though sizeable, limited.

Assembling an exhaustive list was not an objective of my research. Rather, it was to survey enough relevant buildings built in the Middle Ages and to identify general trends. In this regard, I believe I accomplished this goal. I also acknowledge the problems of making arguments and drawing conclusions upon limited data, and understand that when compared to the complete number of medieval parish churches in England my sample size is relatively small. It is necessarily so, however, since it is in relatively few instances that we

can be certain of all of a church's original doorway positions, especially the further back in time one delves. Ultimately, I recognise that the patterns I present are, to an extent, tentative. With the limited sample, the conclusions I reach are the best I can achieve, but they are not definitive.

Potential Outcome of This Research

One of the objectives of this publication is to provide greater understanding of medieval church design. We know to a great extent how the buildings were constructed but at times we do not know why they took the various forms they did. By analysing their doorways this research will hopefully present viable possibilities for their positions and function through the Middle Ages. This book seeks to further link medieval church form with its liturgy, to add further evidence for the use of church architecture as a feature of medieval gender studies, and, finally, to dismiss the commonly held notion of the 'Devil's Door' as a medieval creation.