

Towards an Art History of the Parish Church, 1200–1399 (London, 2–3 Jun 17)

London, The Courtauld Institute of Art, Jun 2–03, 2017

James Alexander Cameron

Paul Binski, in his 1999 *Studies in Iconography* article, “The English Parish Church and its Art in the Later Middle Ages,” asked “how, and in what ways, we might place the imagery of the parish church at the centre of the study of medieval visual culture rather than seeing it as some unfathomable, and perhaps embarrassing, epiphenomenon of something that was ‘really’ going on elsewhere.” Though some 8,000 parish churches in England can be said to consist largely of medieval fabric, no overarching study of English medieval church architecture is available. Instead, scholarship is generally limited to descriptions of single buildings and their furnishings, and the broader historical significance of this building type has largely gone unaddressed.

Towards an Art History of the Parish Church, 1200–1399, to be held on 2–3 June, 2017 at The Courtauld Institute of Art, will gather scholars to revisit the question of the parish church and its relationship to medieval visual culture. Participants will contribute to a vibrant discussion of the Gothic parish church, its utility as an object of study, and the insights offered on the subject by diverse methodologies. In particular, the conference will prioritise ways in which scholars might think about Gothic parish churches collectively, profiting from the rapidly expanding technologies of the digital age. We are pleased to announce that Professor Paul Binski has agreed to give the closing remarks for the conference, and reflect upon how scholarship has progressed since his *Studies in Iconography* article.

The conference draws its temporal focus from the most notable lacuna in scholarship, which concerns the introduction and flowering of Gothic architecture across the English parish church in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The thirteenth century saw a broadly Gothic style replace the Romanesque across England; although this has been studied with regard to great church architecture, the mechanics of what amounts to a major stylistic shift at parish level remain largely uninvestigated. Likewise, the quantity of fourteenth-century work in parish churches further shaped the manifestation of the Gothic style, particularly in features such as sedilia which were originally developed in outside of cathedrals and great monasteries. Given the impact of the English Decorated Style on Late Gothic architectural developments across Europe, the parish church promises to illuminate art historical questions beyond the borders of England. These lacunae are in stark contrast to the smaller corpus of the Romanesque period, which has had a large amount of attention via resources such as CRSBI; and the late medieval church after 1400, which draws on greater availability of documentary evidence.

Tickets £26 / £16 students and over-60s

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PROGRAMME

FRIDAY 2 JUNE

12.30-1.15 Registration

1.15-1.30 Welcome and opening remarks

Dr James Alexander Cameron

1.30-3.00 Session 1: Breaking ground

John McNeill (Oxford University Continuing Education), The State of the Parish Church at 1200

Prof. Duncan Givans (Massachusetts College of Art), Advowson, lordship & ecclesiastical patronage

Meg Bernstein (University of California, Los Angeles/The Courtauld Institute of Art), Parochial decorum

3.00-3.30 TEA BREAK (all delegates)

3.30-5.00 Session 2: Questions of style

Jon Cannon (University of Bristol), Boring Decorated: a parish church 'mode' for the Dec style?

Dr Alex Buchanan (University of Liverpool), St Mary's Nantwich: New methods of architectural analysis

Dr Zach Stewart (Fordham University), Models, Copies, and Mendicants: A Reassessment of A. W. Clapham's Etiology of the Late Medieval English Parish Church

5.00-6.30 Session 3: Big Data

Martin Renshaw and Victoria Harding (soundsmedieval.org), 'Lucus non lucendum?' Windows in chancels to 1399.

Dr Gabriel Byng (Cambridge), Big data, small churches: the construction of parish churches across England c. 1200-1350

Andrew Budge (Birkbeck, University of London), Big(ish) Data: the benefits and challenges of applying the concept to the medieval architecture of parish churches

Close of first day (all will be invited for drinks at a local hostelry, followed by dinner for speakers and chairs)

SATURDAY 3 JUNE

9.30-11.00 Session 4: Architecture in context

Dr Julian Luxford (University of St Andrews), The parish church as an object and category of study

Dr Helen Lunnon (University of East Anglia), A phenomenological study of the English parish church porch, 1200-1399

Agata Eltman (Churches Conservation Trust), Gothic in a hamlet: a case study of artistic development at St John the Baptist, Inglesham

11.00-11.30 COFFEE BREAK (all delegates)

11.30-1.00 Session 5: Imagery in the parish

Dr Miriam Gill (Leicester University), An Incomplete Picture: models and parochial schemes of wall painting in fourteenth-century England?

Lloyd de Beer (British Museum), Sculpted images and the altar

D. Lyle Dechant (Yale University), The Case of Arbogast: Image and Identity in a Swiss Gothic Parish Church

1.00-2.30 LUNCH (provided for speakers and chairs)

2.30-4.00 Session 6: Church and town

Prof. Sandy Heslop (University of East Anglia), The Parish Churches of Norwich Before 1400

Catherine Hundley (University of Virginia), Shared Space: Templars, Hospitallers, and the English Parish Church

Prof. Tomasz Węclawowicz (Faculty of Architecture and Fine Arts of Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow), St Mary's Choir in Krakow and its iconography

4.00-4.30 TEA BREAK (all delegates)

4.30-6.00 Session 7: Sense and Experience in the Parish Church

Dr Emma Wells (University of York), Sensing the Art of Belief: Sacred Landscapes and Architectures of Devotion in the English Gothic Parish Church

Dr Tom Nickson (The Courtauld Institute of Art), Lighting the Parish Church

Nicola Lowe (Birkbeck, University of London) – Monumental marginalia? Reading the de Grey chapel frieze at St Mary's, Cogges, Oxfordshire.

6.00 Closing remarks

Paul Binski (University of Cambridge): closing remarks and reflections on the "parish church problem". Followed by wine reception for all delegates.

We are grateful to the Paul Mellon Centre for funding student and ECR travel places.

Organised by Meg Bernstein (University of California Los Angeles) and Dr James Alexander Cameron

Reference:

CONF: Towards an Art History of the Parish Church, 1200-1399 (London, 2-3 Jun 17). In: Arthist.net, Apr 8, 2017 (accessed Sep 19, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/15192>>.