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Carved and Spoken Words: the Angelic Salutation, The Mary Play and South Walsham Church, Norfolk

Peter Meredith

As things stand at the moment, it is not possible to 'place' the N.town plays with any greater precision than 'East Anglia, most probably Norfolk'.¹ The work of *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*² has placed the scribe in the south of the county in the Thetford area, more precisely somewhere near East Harling.³ Despite the fact that *LALME* aims not to place a text but the scribe who wrote it, it is inevitable that the placing of the scribe will rub off on the text he has written. There is a general feeling, therefore, that the N.town plays are probably from somewhere in the East Harling/Thetford area. As far as records are concerned, there is no clear evidence from there that would specifically point to the kinds of play represented by the N.town manuscript, but, as with many other small country places, the records are by no means extensive. The now-missing East Harling church-wardens' accounts refer to 'an Interlude at the Cherch gate' in 1452 and to the 'Games' from Lopham and Garboldisham in 1457, and from Kenninghall in 1463 and 1467.⁴ Judging from the use of the word in records from small villages elsewhere in Norfolk, 'games' are as likely (if not more likely) to be sports and general entertainments, or even processions, as any kind of formal drama. The 'Interlude' could, I suppose, refer to the *Mary Play*, the *Purification* or the *Assumption* but probably not to anything on a larger scale.⁵ Thetford is at first sight a much more promising place. It was already an ancient town by the fifteenth century. There was a castle (demolished in 1173); there had been an Anglo-Saxon cathedral, and, by the fifteenth century, there were twenty parish churches, and dominating the town was a large and wealthy Cluniac Priory. Fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century evidence for entertainment survives, but unfortunately only from the Priory. There are relevant records from 1496 until 1540, though again there is nothing that looks obviously like any of the N.town plays. But what would the N.town plays look like in a series of priory accounts?

There are *jucelararis*, 'Menstrelles' and 'pleyeres', *Mimis* and *lusoribus*, commanding fees of between xij^d (1499/1500) and ix^s (1496/7); there are more 'games', a 'gild', a 'procession' and, most promisingly at first sight, a 'ludus' – but worth only xij^d, and probably never at Thetford anyway.⁶ As at East Harling, local places appear, but there are others, especially (but not only) the waits, from quite a distance.

But even if the scribe of the N.town manuscript was originally from that area, scribes move about, especially when there is a commercial or social reason for doing so, as *LALME* readily admits; and, besides, they are not the only kind of evidence. The EDAM series of volumes on the surviving and recorded art of individual cities and counties partly stems from the idea that local connections may exist between the media of art and drama, and that possibilities of this kind are worth investigating.⁷ The idea of the 'discourse community' seems to me to be useful here. I am not using it simply to refer to a language community but to a community created by shared attitudes (whether in opposition, agreement or indifference) and by shared experience, by familiarity with a local landscape (the built environment as well as the natural and agricultural) and with local social conditions. 'Discourse' is the right word because it implies communication and reception; that what is spoken, written, carved or painted will be presented and understood in a particular local way.⁸ A 'discourse community' is, however, a difficult thing to establish, especially from the distant viewpoint of the twenty-first century. How do you define its borders? Or what is part of the 'discourse'? What one person saw at the time, may be what another was blind to; what was of obvious importance to one, was insignificant to another. And how do we interpret the evidence? Is the plague inscription in Acle church in Norfolk⁹ an expression of the deeply-felt grief of a community, or is it a sign of the ingenuity and Latinity of the parish priest, or just the opportunity for some moralising? Would the 'community' even have been aware of it, placed as it is on the north wall of the chancel? What we can know is that it existed in Acle in the fifteenth century and that in that same century Acle was in what one scholar believes to have been a region of endemic disease and at times a 'crisis-mortality zone'.¹⁰ Despite the difficulties, it is one such possible discourse community that I want to start piecing together here. It involves the N.town *Mary Play*, the village of South Walsham, and the nearby small town of Acle.

South Walsham (TG 365131)¹¹ might appear at present a little non-descript. It has no obvious centre; it lies along what is now a minor road from Norwich to Great Yarmouth, and suffers a bit from it. Almost five kilometres to

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the south-east is Acle (TG 401102) which suffers more, being drawn and quartered by roads, though the main Norwich-to-Yarmouth road now by-passes the centre. If you went to Norfolk in search of great churches or of Arthur Ransome or simply of peace and quiet, you would probably not stop at either. Also, both lie just outside the tourist orbit of the Broads, even though South Walsham possesses a broad of its own. About two kilometres to the north of Walsham is Ranworth, which in site and broad and church fittings and tourist provision easily outdoes both Acle and South Walsham. Not that either of them is lacking in interest. Acle has a large church, St Edmund's, a very elaborate fifteenth-century font, a 'tall and exceptionally good' screen (as Pevsner says), the already-mentioned and remarkable Latin plague inscription painted on the north wall of the chancel, and a fifteenth-century porch with donors carved in the left-hand spandrel of the arch.¹² Walsham has a pretty painted screen (not Pevsner this time) with an inscription, a fifteenth-century porch with an Annunciation in the spandrels of the arch and a Coronation of the Virgin in a niche above, and a series of fifteenth-century bench-ends with carved poppyheads. Walsham is also unusual though not unique in possessing two churches in one churchyard, St Mary and the larger St Lawrence. The latter was, however, burnt out in 1927, and only an extended chancel now survives. The nave is a herb garden and the tower a pile of rubble.¹³

In the fifteenth century, South Walsham and Acle were in the same arch-deaconry (Norwich), the same deanery (Blofield) and the same hundred (Walsham), but the parishes were not adjacent. Acle was the local market town.¹⁴ Both places had religious institutions associated with them: Acle, the Augustinian Priory of Weybridge, and South Walsham, the Benedictine Abbey of St Benet of Hulme. All the evidence suggests that St Benet's maintained a regular community of a little over twenty monks throughout its existence, but Weybridge Priory apparently never had more than four canons, and latterly only two.¹⁵ Weybridge Priory appears to have been just outside Acle, near the bridge over the river Bure on the road to Yarmouth, but as an Augustinian house, and a very small one, it was closely associated with the town. It possessed a guild of St Anne.¹⁶ St Benet's was about three kilometres to the north-east of Walsham, across the river Bure. It owned property in Walsham and held a manor court there, but as a flourishing Benedictine abbey it was largely self-contained, besides which its outside associations were to the north and east rather than to the west and south. Sir John Fastolf, who was a benefactor of the abbey, and his wife, Millicent Scrope, were buried there in the south aisle of the chancel, which he had built as a chapel,

probably intending it as the centre-piece of the college which it was his intention to found.¹⁷ There was possibly a ferry across the river at St Benet's, however, linking it with its possessions in Walsham, as there certainly was at a later date. South Walsham lies about fourteen kilometres east of Norwich; between is Mousehold heath, which in the fifteenth century was one of the largest areas of heathland in Norfolk and had a somewhat unsavoury reputation.

Acle, of course, was also the home of Robert Reynes. His so-called commonplace book contains the heterogeneous contents of a human life; fortunately a life which touched on literature and drama as well as on business and family affairs, so that not only did he ensure the survival of two excerpts from plays of which we should otherwise know nothing, but he also allows us a view of the activities and beliefs of one member of a fifteenth-century audience – or, if that is jumping too much to conclusions, at the very least to glimpse an individual with some known dramatic connections.¹⁸ Various attempts have been made to characterise Reynes. Cameron Louis in the introduction to his edition gives the fullest account. He sees Reynes as grammar- or business-school trained,¹⁹ a practiced scribe if not a fluent Latinist, acting perhaps as reeve for the lord of the manor, the Abbot of Tintern, as well as a church-warden. It is worth saying also that Reynes's legal documents are full of references to Norwich, and his book includes two routes to Tintern Abbey, via Oxford or via London (with the address of the Abbot of Tintern's inn in London, as well), perhaps implying that it would be wrong to see him as Acle-bound. Louis is less concerned with Reynes's devotional side. This is dealt with to some extent by Eamon Duffy, who uses Reynes as his sample lower-end-of-the-social-scale Christian.²⁰ For Duffy, he is 'as near as one is likely to get to the typical representative of the class of men who became churchwardens in the parishes of late fifteenth-century England', and 'he was clearly far less sophisticated and far less well educated than either Idley or the compilers of [Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38]' (p. 71). His demonstration of this consists largely in listing the contents of Reynes's book. But it is important to remember that it is not a commonplace book in the later understanding of the term²¹ or a book of instruction for others; it is a personal memorandum book – a repository of what he didn't want forgotten, either because it was interesting or important, or because it might or would come in useful in the future. It is easy to be critical of Reynes for not getting his Latin quite right²² or for jotting down charms instead of prayers,²³ but he was as far as we know doing it for his own benefit or as an *aide-mémoire* for his community. Though revealing, it is not perhaps remarkable that ordinary members of a small-town

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community in rural Norfolk should have access to such varied resources; officials of religious guilds might well have possessed literature appropriate to their chosen dedicatees, such as a full-scale life of St Anne; manorial men of affairs must have had the means of knowing assizes of bread and ale, the processes involved in swearing allegiance, or legal formularies for such matters as the transferring of land. What is remarkable is that it is one man's range, and that he had either intellectual curiosity enough to want to keep this material himself or social responsibility enough to want to keep it for his community, *and* the skill and diligence to make a record of it. But it isn't because of the simple existence of his book that he doesn't fit my idea of a typical church-warden. How many church-wardens possessed a Cisio-Janus (120),²⁴ or were interested in listing all the archbishoprics of the world (119)? How many made notes about the reredos of the altar of their local shrine (116c), or listed the nine orders of angels (115) or what Louis calls 'Major Events in the History of the World' (94)? And interestingly enough his book reflects, both in a general and in a detailed way, theological and devotional matters that also interested the writer and the scribe of the N.town plays (in particular the *Mary Play*): the lineage of Mary and Anne (46-48), puns on *Ave* (99), Our Lady's Psalter (90), the names of the knights who watched the sepulchre (78). The N.town plays are not, like many French plays, monuments of theological learning; they are repositories of history and legend, fun, knowledge of affairs, serious devotion. One might argue that there's not much fun in Reynes's book; that may be the nature of memorandum books. There is certainly a bit of everything else.

South Walsham can claim no-one to match Reynes, but it can offer something which parallels the kind of devotional world which appears in his book. St Mary's church contains a very full, possibly complete, set of fifteenth-century bench-ends (fig. 1), though they are not in the same decorative class as, for example, those at Wiggenhall St Mary, Salle or Fressingfield, over the border in Suffolk.²⁵ There are two beautifully carved arm-rest figures surviving of the four which once existed (though both are rather damaged), but the main interest of the bench-ends lies in their subject matter not in the beauty of their carving. A number of the poppyheads carry the text of the *Ave Maria* carved on shields. It is divided up as follows: (1) *Ave / Maria* (2) *gratia / plena* (3) *dominus / tecum* (4) *benedic/ta tu* (5) *in mulieribus* (fig. 2a) (6) *et benedictus* (fig. 2b) (7) *Amen* (below which, contained within the shield, is a *Maria* monogram). Of these, five are undamaged: *dominus tecum*, *in mulieribus*, *et benedictus*, *benedicta tu* and *Amen*. *Ave Maria* is just discernible, and *gratia plena* somewhat worn. Because

both *et benedictus* and *Amen* exist there can be little doubt that *fructus ventris tui Iesus* was also once present.²⁶ The phrase is unlikely to have appeared on one shield. It has twenty-two letters in four words as opposed to the longest phrase contained on a single shield, twelve in two words. Even with abbreviation this is too long, and it is likely that the phrase was divided into *fructus ventris* and *tui Iesus*. As it happens, there are two further shields, whose letters have been cut away, which could contain the missing phrases. Some letter shapes are just discernible, and it seems to me that, to say the least, they are not inconsistent with the missing words.²⁷

It is not possible to know for sure what the original layout of the *Ave* was. The phrases now appear in order (with one exception) down the central nave aisle of the church going from east to west and then back again, west to east, but with varying gaps between them (fig. 3). *Ave Maria* is on the easternmost pew on the south side of the nave aisle [C1], and is immediately followed by *gratia plena* on the next pew to the west [C2]. There is then a gap of one pew between each of the next two phrases, *dominus tecum* [C4] and *benedicta tu* [C6]. The next phrase, *in mulieribus*, is nine pews further on: that is six to the back of the church on the south side and three pews forward again from the back on the north side of the nave aisle [D10]. It is followed by *et benedictus* two pews further on towards the east [D8]. One of the defaced shields, *?fructus ventris*, then follows two pews on again [D6], and *Amen* four pews on [D2], across the aisle from *gratia plena*. These phrases, therefore, are in the order of the *Ave*. If it is part of the group, the exception to the order is the defaced shield on the south side of the north aisle, two pews from the west end [E11]. If it contains the words *?tui Iesus*, as I think it does, it is clearly out of order. It is odd that one defaced shield appears to be in the right place and the other not. If the nineteenth-century restorers were aware of the existence of the *Ave*, as they must have been, it is strange that they didn't see the significance for the missing phrase of the second defaced shield. Structurally these bench-ends are interchangeable, so there would be no difficulty in bringing the one facing north into a position facing south, even though it would mean turning it 180°. And in fact, by moving this defaced shield from its present position in the north aisle to one in the central nave aisle [D4], opposite *dominus tecum*, it would be brought back into its 'correct' place in the *Ave* (fig. 4).

Assuming the earlier existence of the missing phrases, then, the *Ave* takes up nine bench-ends. Is it possible that these originally flanked the pews of a chapel of Our Lady or of the Annunciation? The church guide draws attention to the existence of a Lady Chapel in the south aisle; but a position in the south aisle

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would not accommodate the bench-ends which must face south (see below) since the south ends of the relevant benches are attached to the wall. Given that the church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, it is entirely appropriate that they should occupy the central position, as to some extent they still do, in the nave of the church.

At present there are in all sixty-eight fifteenth-century bench-ends, of which only twenty-one have letter-carving on the poppyheads, so seemingly the difficulties of arranging them in their original order are great. Fortunately, however, one group can be fixed. The bench-ends with arm-rests can face only one way. There are two south-facing ends and two north-facing ones. This suggests that they stood at either end of two pews. Unlike all the others, they have signs of what appear to be grooves cut into them for backs, which would have the effect of joining them in pairs. One of the north-facing ends has the shield with *gratia plena* on it [C2], one of the south-facing ones, *Amen-Maria* [D2]. They at present face each other across the central nave aisle, and this could well have been their original position. At the south end of the *gratia-plena* pew is a shield with an R [B2]; at the north end of the *Amen* pew is a poppyhead with no further decoration [E2]. The arm-rests have carvings on them but as previously mentioned one has been slightly and one seriously damaged, one has been entirely cut away, and one almost so. The one that survives almost intact is that at the north end of the north pew [E2], otherwise decorated with a simple poppyhead. Its subject is a woman kneeling at a prayer-stool with her beads in her hand, while what appears to be another female figure, also kneeling, leans over her right shoulder almost enveloping her (fig. 5a and b). The carving on the arm-rest at the south end of the pew (the bench-end with the *Amen* shield [D2]) has been completely cut away. Opposite it, at the north end of the south pew (the *gratia-plena* bench-end [C2]), the figure on the arm-rest has been cut away but a prayer stool survives and on it the hands of the figure (fig. 5c). Sufficient of the knees and feet also survives to show that it was a male figure. The damaged but nearly complete carving, at the south end of the south pew (R bench-end [B2]), is of a man kneeling alone apparently at a prayer stool (fig. 5d). Two conclusions can be drawn from this. Given the common division of men from women during medieval church services, it seems more than a possibility that the southern pew was for men and the northern for women; indeed, that the northern side of the church was the women's side and the southern the men's.²⁸ More importantly, the presence of this fixed point for the bench-ends with arm-rests, two of which contain *Ave-Maria* shields, establishes the position of the *Ave Maria* as a whole in

the nave (fig. 4). This positioning perhaps suggests parish devotion rather than a separate guild, since it is clearly central to the arrangement of the whole church. What is not so clear is why the words of the *Ave* are organised in this particular way. It is possible that they were intended to link the male and female members of the congregation across the aisle, or, perhaps less likely, that they were an attempt to link just the central part of the church together in a circuit of belief. Or that the power of devotion was seen as emanating out from the centre like ripples in a stone-disturbed pool, ultimately including those seated in the aisles. Whatever the reason behind it, this layout of pews indicates the prominence being given to a verbal sign of Mary.²⁹

There are bench-ends elsewhere which contain text or are wholly made up of it, but they are not common.³⁰ The only others I know which contain the text of a prayer are again *Ave-Maria* ones, from Trent in Dorset and almost certainly of the early sixteenth century.³¹ In this case it is an abbreviated form of the prayer, with the words arbitrarily dismembered, and it is contained in four bench-ends (but duplicated, so that there are two sets): (1) *AVE MARIA G-*; (2) *RATIA PLE-* (fig. 6); (3) *NA doMI-*; (4) *NUS TECVM AMEN*. Perhaps associated with the *Ave Maria* (and also duplicated) is a bench-end design of monograms of *Iesus* and *Maria*, one above the other. The first *Ave-Maria* set is laid out consecutively on the south side of the nave aisle. It is followed by the second set which goes (out of order) to the west end of the church and comes back down the north side of the aisle but is interrupted by a patterned bench-end and a monogram one. The second set looks like a later close copy. The significance of the sixteenth-century set is unknown but its form makes it an interesting contrast with the treatment of the *Ave* at South Walsham. The nave of the church at Trent was extended in the nineteenth century, but even given its smaller dimensions there are not enough *Ave-Maria* bench-ends to make anything other than a small isolated group. The pews on the south side are divided into two blocks by the entrance passage from the south porch doorway. In the eastern block there are at present five pews. If this had been so in the early sixteenth century, it is possible that the *Ave Maria* together with the *Iesus/Maria* monogram bench-ends created a separate 'guild' space. The casualness with which the text is treated, however, perhaps tells against this. Whatever the earlier use of these bench-ends, it clearly represents a charming but less sophisticated treatment than that at South Walsham

Verbal signs are, of course, not uncommon in medieval art, nor is simple text. The latter is, in the later Middle Ages in England, taking on a far more central role in decoration. It had for a long time been used in art for labelling (in

explanatory scrolls, for example), for key elements of dialogue (like the angelic salutation and Mary's reply), and in diagrams, but its decorative function had been minimal except in display lettering.³² Even there it is the letters rather than the text which are central. But in the fifteenth century, text takes on a new importance as a decorative motif, and there is far more of it. Something like the Sherborne Missal³³ already represents an enormous increase in the volume of ancillary text; the margins are never silent. Much of this ancillary text in the missal is labelling or information panels, but by no means all. Characters are constantly addressing God in prayer or each other in conversation. Down the left hand border of p. 30, for example, a scroll winds with the words of the angel to Joseph (Matthew 1. 20-21), assuring him of the purity of Mary's pregnancy: *Joseph fili dauid nolite timere accipere Mariam coniugem tuam Quod in ea natum est de spiritu sancto est*. It ends in the initial H of the opening of the Mass for Christmas Eve, where the angel leans over Joseph, lying in bed, with the words: *Pariet autem filium et vocabis no[men eius Iesum]* (Backhouse, p. 10). At the foot of page 581, God and Moses converse over the burning bush, and next to them John the Baptist speaks of and to his lamb (Backhouse, p. 62). The border itself speaks to Christ on behalf of the Centurion (John 4. 48-49) on page 347: *Domine descende priusquam moriatur filius meus* (Backhouse, p. 38). This is also the case with many memorial brasses, where text curls from the mouths of those commemorated. In sculpture, something different appears in a work like the roof of the Divinity School at Oxford. There, in the form of rebuses, prayers, mottoes, initials, monograms, and simple statements, text almost dominates the decorative pattern. The middle section of the third (central) bay is, for example, threaded through with words: 'ladi help', 'Jhc mercy', 'Jhc [b]e mi [s]ped', parts of which the north and south sections repeat, also adding further text: '*Da gloriam deo tuo*', '*Edwardus rex Quartus*'.³⁴ Tiles from the Malvern tiliary also speak: in prayer, with the *Ave* for example, or at greater moral length, taking up a whole tile, in warning of the duplicity of executors.³⁵ The line of letters in Gazeley church, Suffolk, probably serving to commemorate donors and benefactors, is carved in such a way as to create a spectacular decorative frieze along the back of the pew.³⁶ In a century when text becomes a burning issue,³⁷ it also becomes at times a dominant decorative motif.

Words carved in wood or stone stand in a curious relationship with everyday use. They are no longer thoughts in the head or transient breaths of air as even the most beautifully spoken words are, but have a material form, a fixed three-dimensional shape and permanence, potentially inert but also potentially

inflammatory. Most carved words or letters are proprietorial, informational or commemorative. The carved initials at Walsham are probably one or more of these. But what of the *Maria* monogram? Is it inert? Has it the lifelessness of over-repeated prayer, or the vigour of the *Cloud of Unknowing's* single word cries?³⁸ It looks more like celebration. The questions raise themselves even more clearly in the case of the carved *Ave*. As has been already suggested, it is unusual to find a text carved sectionally on a series of poppyheads. Is it commemoration or celebration or just fulfilling the practical purpose of marking out the pews of members of a guild; or is it intended to be read? It is unlikely that we shall ever know how the words were perceived, or even whether they were after the first year or so, but it would certainly be wrong to close off the possibilities. It is even possible that the verbal sign becomes visual as it begins and ends at the east end of the nave and consequently circles back on itself, creating something of the effect of a string of beads. Some may have used it in this way. For others the carved words may simple have been a sign of status, for themselves or for the church; for others still, a work of craftsmanship; for some invisible, for others abomination.

In this century, too, the material form of the written word is given complicated theatrical life. With his careful writing of *Memento homo quod cinis es et in cinerem reverteris* Mankind gives objective reality to his commitment to a particular mode of behaviour.³⁹ But the material text, the folded paper, transforms the appearance of the commitment into a protective charm – the badge he wears on his breast. *Memento homo*, as formal commitment and as talisman, has physical form; the piece of paper with its ink is an object in its own right carrying both elements. Mankind's text is a highly emotionally charged one, potentially carrying his hope of salvation. Of a very different kind, Pilate's simulated writing of his public statement, his 'tabyl', in N.town *Passion II* brings text into theatrical prominence again.⁴⁰ Mankind's writing, though it has material form, is private. It is not public utterance like Pilate's or like the Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards forced on Parliament by being nailed to the doors of Westminster Hall,⁴¹ but it is folded and put away. Or rather within the world of the play it is private; for the audience it has been made public. And in that way it is more like the public statement of Pilate or the Lollards. Are the kinds of statement that the bench-ends make like any of these?

The Divinity School with its 'text' bosses, Mankind with his paper, the brasses with their appeals, the Missal with its scrolls, the bench-ends with their prayer, the Lollards with their Twelve Conclusions, even Reynes with his book,

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are all elements in an explosion of text. In this way they are part of a very much larger 'discourse community'. But what of the smaller one that centres on the *Mary Play*? Do Reynes's book, the bench-ends and the *Mary Play* fit into any kind of common discourse? In a general sense they obviously do, but to make a case for a more limited accessibility there needs to be detailed similarity. There are a number of details which bring Reynes's book and the N.town *Mary Play* together, most strikingly those related to the genealogy of Mary. That both should be interested in Mary's parents and relations is a point of similarity but not an uncommon one. The extended holy family is a common subject of fifteenth-century painting.⁴² But elements of the N.town genealogies and Reynes's are surprisingly alike: forms of the less common 'Nasaphat' occur as the name of Anne's mother in both (Reynes: (46) l. 3 'Nasabath'; (47) 'Nazaphat'; (48) l. 4 'Nasaphat'; *Mary Play*, p. 87); both have forms of the tag:

Est tuus Anna pater Izakar, Nazaphat tua mater (Reynes)

Est Ysakar Anne pater; Melophat sic quoque mater vel Nasaphat
(N.town);

both use the name 'Asmaria' for Joachim's mother (Reynes: (48), l. 2; *Mary Play*, p. 87); for the relations of Elizabeth, both, with minor spelling variations, have: 'Eliud, Eminen, filia, Beatus Geruasius Episcopus ' (Reynes: (46) margin to l. 19, (48), l. 12; *Mary Play*, p. 87). The last of these is the most interesting in that not only do both have exactly the same names but also they repeat the error 'Geruasius' for 'Servatius'.⁴³ These are small details but coming together with the broader similarities they seem to me to make the beginnings of a case.

There is one other most tantalising piece of evidence from South Walsham church, this time a visual rather than a verbal sign. On the south porch is a representation of the Annunciation. It fills the spandrels of the arch on either side of the doorway (fig. 7a). On the right, as you face the entrance from the outside, is Gabriel, his right leg bent and his knee braced against the arch, his left leg stretched out straight, the long toe of his sabatoun curled up to fit the acute angle in which he stands. He is in feathered armour and his wings echo the shape of the spandrel. Over his left shoulder he carries a sceptre now largely broken away. His hair sticks out in a typically fifteenth-century angelic way and behind his head is a large halo. In front of the right wing, flung out towards Mary, is the scroll of his greeting. On the left-hand side of the arch Mary kneels at a small *prie-dieu* from which what remains of the scroll, presumably of her response, rises. Framing her

head is a sun-burst halo. Behind her, filling the left-hand side of the spandrel, is a huge lily stem rising from a pot. Her hands were probably originally raised in prayer or response to Gabriel's message, but they are now broken off. The rest of the space is filled by a great sun-burst, which extends to Mary's head and shoulder, emanating from two small figures rising out of tiered rings of cloud in the top right corner (fig. 7b). The presence of two figures, rather than one, turns what is a fairly run-of-the-mill presentation of the scene into something very much more unusual.

A number of questions arise from this, but the most important for my purposes is: if the two tiny figures are persons of the Trinity, as I assume they are, where is the third? Annunciations abound with the figure of God the Father in heaven and a ray of light descending from him to Mary. Often these elements are accompanied by a dove or a figure of a small child descending the ray, or both. The presence of God the Father or of the dove does not lead to the expectation of another figure, but the presence of two nearly identical figures, clearly in or from heaven, does. Do the broken hands of the Virgin conceal the fact that there was once a dove there? Was it destroyed in some iconoclastic attack, or is it simply that it was the most vulnerable part? Or if there was never a third 'person' visible was that because the child was already in Mary's womb? If so, how was that indicated? Or is the scroll not Mary's reply but the continuation and reality of the angelic greeting, the Word? I don't know of another Annunciation quite like this one, and so can adduce no parallels that might explain it.⁴⁴

With the third person present, I would be reminded instantly of the *Mary Play* Annunciation. Gabriel has delivered his message but the persons of the Trinity are the fulfilment of that message, or, perhaps better, are that message. Hence their position between the 'bemys'. One behind the other, they embody the fact that the incarnation is the work of the whole Trinity:

Here þe Holy Gost discendit with thre bemys to Our Lady,
the Sone of þe Godhed nest with thre bemys to þe Holy Gost,
the Fadyr godly with thre bemys to þe Sone, and so entre all
thre to here bosom . . . (Mary Play, l. 1355sd)

The tiny figures at South Walsham do not descend with three 'bemys' one after the other, to each other, and finally to Mary, and for some that will make them too unlike to be worth considering further. But given the space available to the carver, a reasonable attempt is made to suggest the Trinity in the identity of the figures,

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and its creative power in the traditional shafts of the sun-burst. If only there were a third figure. I can only say that at the moment I have nothing further to offer. I have stared at the original carving and at my own photographs and can think of no obvious solution to the missing person. The only obviously missing parts are Mary's hands. There is damage to her face, to the prie-dieu, and possibly to the scroll, but no obvious place where another figure could have been. So I am left with the lame conclusion that here is an unusual iconography of the Annunciation. What would a member of my discourse community have seen? Or in other words, are both play and carving sufficiently unusual and yet sufficiently related to be part of the same way of seeing?

A similar question might be asked about the bench-ends. Allowing for the fact that the *Ave* is one of the commonest forms of devotion, does the unusualness of the bench-ends and the unusualness of an English play centred on the *Ave* offer any grounds for seeing them as products of the same discourse community? The obvious problem is of knowing how uncommon these two manifestations of interest in the *Ave* were. So much has been lost that it is impossible to be sure. Nevertheless it is worth bearing in mind that the play is text-oriented,⁴⁵ most clearly, but not only, in the conclusion spoken by *Contemplacio* as he works through the *Ave Maria*, temporal layer by layer:

How þe *Aue* was mad, here is lernyd vs:

Pe aungel seyð: *Ave gracia plena dominus tecum*

Benedicta tu in mulieribus;

Elyzabeth seyð: *et benedictus*

Fructus uentris tui; thus þe Chirch addyd *Maria* and *Jhesus* her.

(*Mary Play*, ll. 1562-66)

Clearly it cannot be said that the bench-ends are teaching the structure of the *Ave*, as *Contemplacio* is, but they are showing the same concern with its text and putting that text at the centre of devotion. Taken with the arm-rest figures, they also appear to be emphasising the seriousness of prayer; something which the play certainly does address, though it is not its central theme:

Ther is not [*nothing*] may profyte but prayour to 3our presens

With prayorys prostrat byfore þi person I wepe;

[Joachim to God] (ll. 161-62)

God is plesyd with þin helmes [*alms*] and hath herd þi prayere

Peter Meredith

[Angel to Joachim] (l. 176)

God hath herd þi preyour and þi wepynge.

[Angel to Anne] (l. 220)

For with pray3er [come] grace and mercy

[Bishop to Mary] (l. 473)

For be prayour grett knowlech men recure;

[Minister to bishop] (l. 699)

Thy prayour is herd to hy3 hevyn halle

[Angel to bishop] (l. 713)

The overall impression in the action of the play is of God's readiness to respond to prayer; and in what is said of prayer the overwhelming impression is of its crucial importance: prayer is the prompter of mercy (the emended line 473); prayer produces knowledge in a dilemma (l. 699); God responds only to prayer (l. 166). Prayer is also the saying of the psalms, and Mary lists the varied benefits that come from that (ll. 1010-25). So that though what the play is trying to do above all is to give the *Ave* emotional depth by reinstating an understanding of the human and divine context of the words (something which does not obviously concern the designers of the bench-ends), it has also as a running theme through the first part, the importance and power of prayer generally. This theme culminates at the very centre of the action of the play, the moment of the Annunciation, when it is to prayer that God responds when he first (in terms of human time) contemplates the saving of mankind (ll. 1115-18). Unlike the textual bench-ends or the textually-oriented play, this concern with prayer is not unusual, but it does provide a context of similarity for bench-end texts and for play. The *Ave* of the bench-ends is enclosed by praying figures, as, it might be said, the *Ave* of the play is.

Where does this leave the relationship between play and place? I was first attracted to *Acle* by the clear similarities that exist, both generally and in detail, between the N.town plays and Reynes's book, which despite its reaching out to the world beyond *Acle* remains very much a part of that place. General concerns and detail are most apparent in the sections dealing with the early life of Mary. I was next struck by the unusualness of the *Ave-Maria* bench-ends at South Walsham St Mary's, and by their concern with the significance of the text of the prayer to the exclusion of almost all other decoration. Again there seemed to be here a connection in approach and spirit between play and place. Finally, (admittedly to a mind ready to be convinced) the specific oddness of the

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Annunciation in the spandrels of the porch arch at St Mary's, the presence of two heavenly figures approaching Mary at the moment of the angel's greeting, seemed to spring out of the way of thinking that produced the *Mary Play* staging of that moment of the Annunciation. And, (it has to be said, to my delighted surprise) Acle was just down the road. None of these similarities is precise, but (perhaps more naturally) all seem to fit together and to expand on and grow out of each other in a way that might be expected in a community.

This, of course, leaves out the ultimate question; where were they performed? *LALME* quite properly restricts its statements about manuscripts to the provenance of scribes. I, in turn, can only say that there seems to me to be a cluster of evidence for a particular way of seeing and thinking about the *Ave Maria* and the Annunciation in this area. It doesn't yet place the play(s). I have not found a 'playing-place', let alone an author. My 'fit technique' is not in any way comparable to that of *LALME*. But it does seem to me that there is value in investigating (very carefully) apparent discourse communities whose thinking and seeing echo that of a play.

To give the last (fanciful) word to Robert Reynes. On the Thursday before Lady Day, 1465, the new Abbot of Tintern made his first official visit to his manor of Acle. The N.town manuscript was certainly written down some time, probably not long, after 1468, and the Mary Play must have existed before then. Reynes records only the court held to affirm allegiances and tenancies(100), but what a perfect setting that visit would have been for a performance of the *Mary Play*.

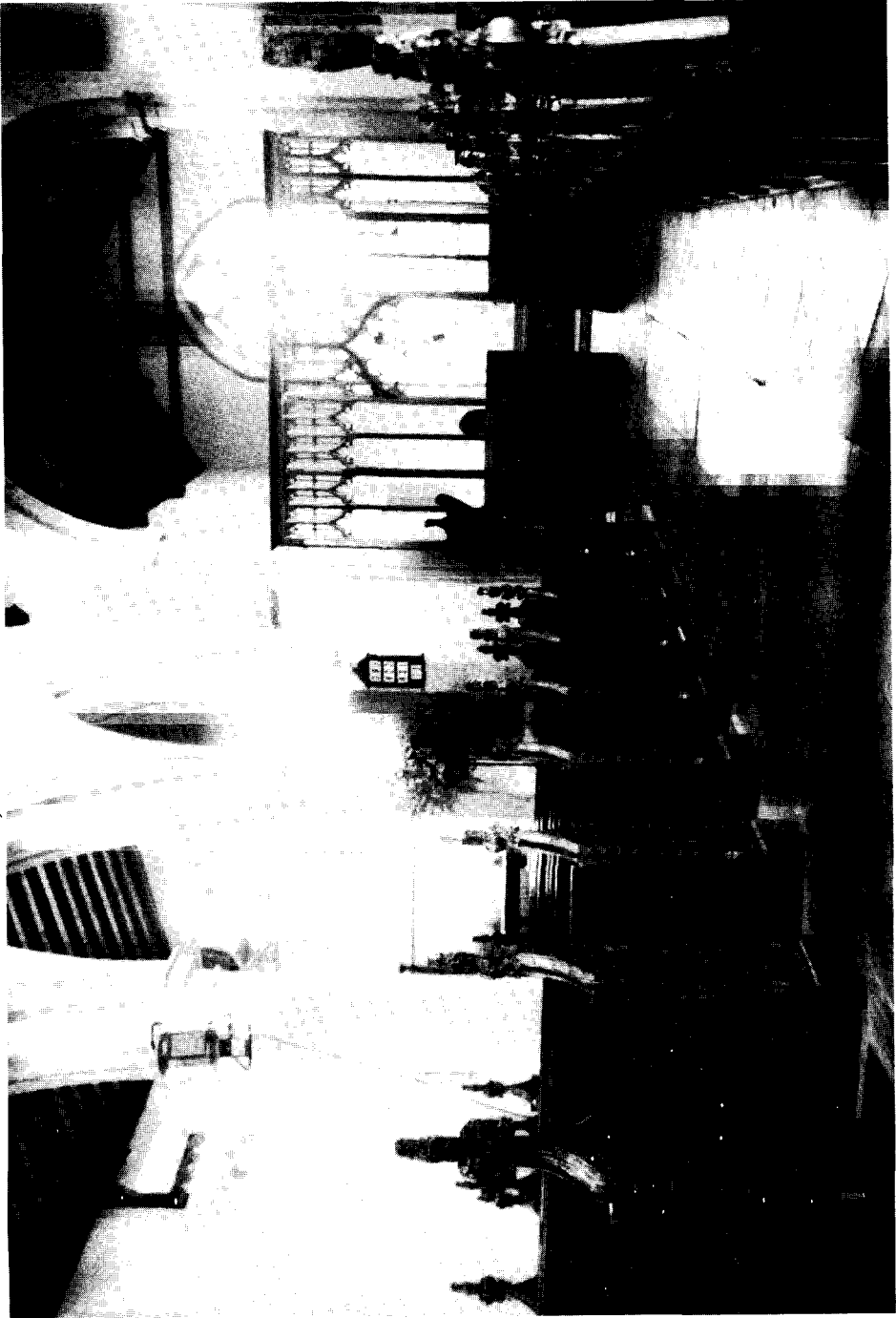
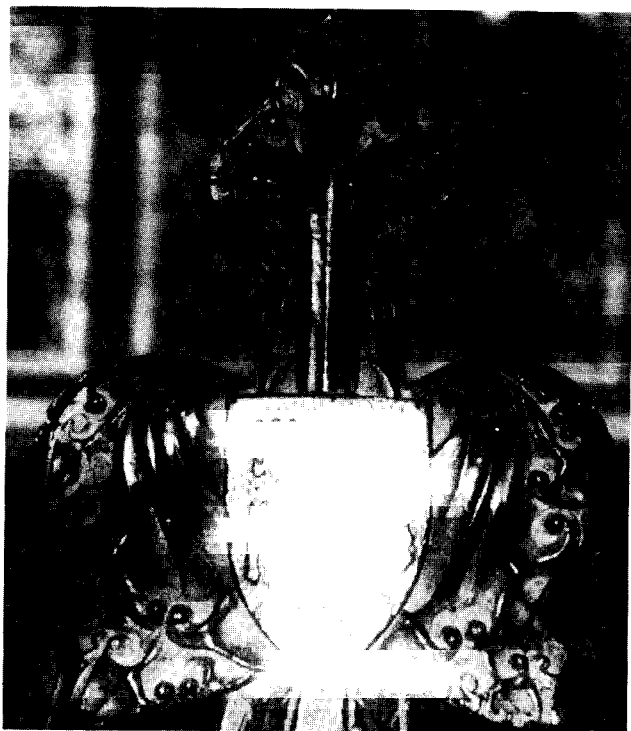


Fig. 1. St Mary's Church, South Walsham, Norfolk — the nave, looking east.



(a)
'in mulieribus'
[D10]



(b)
'et benedictus'
[D8]

Fig. 2. Poppy-heads from St Mary's, South Walsham.

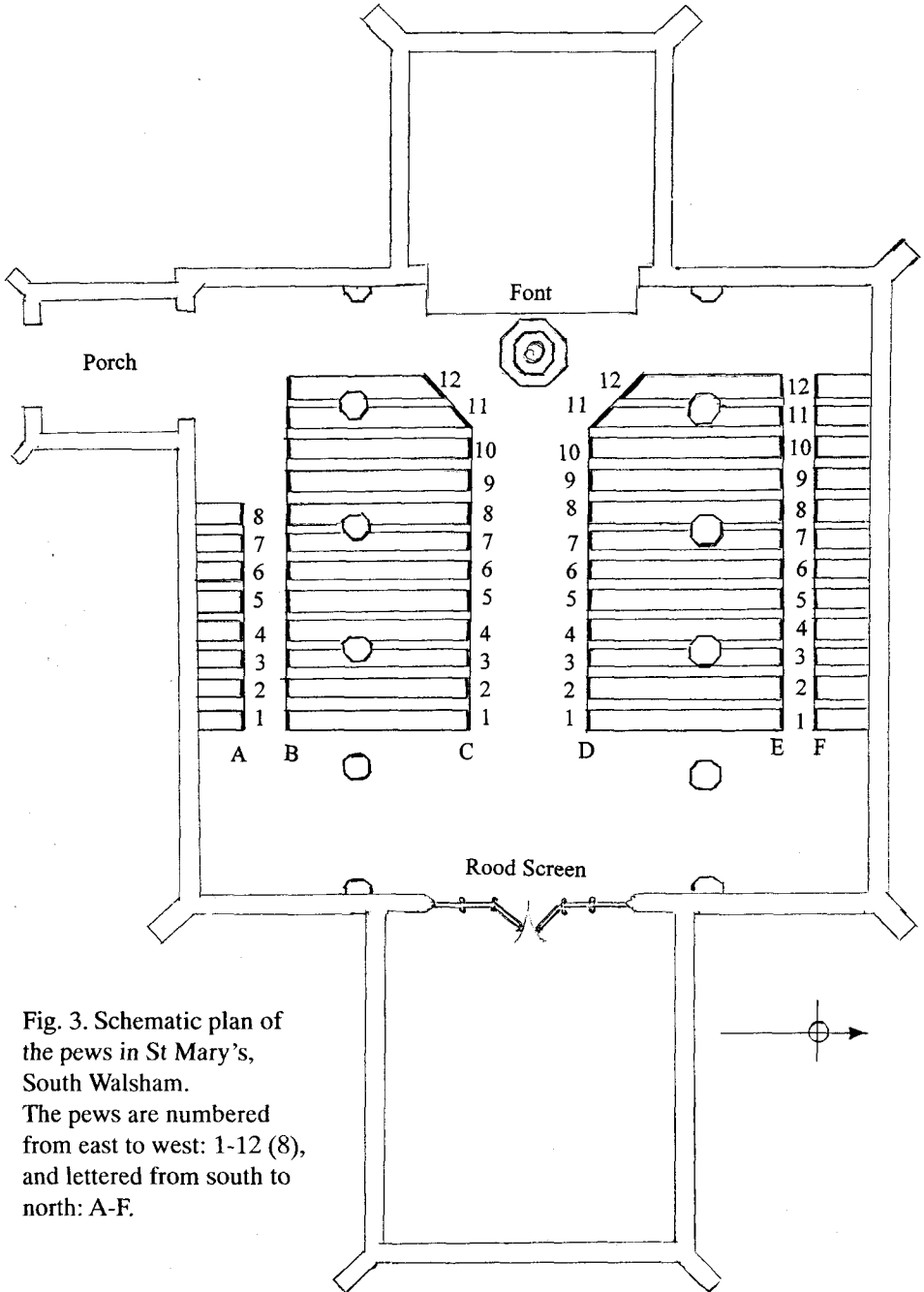


Fig. 3. Schematic plan of the pews in St Mary's, South Walsham. The pews are numbered from east to west: 1-12 (8), and lettered from south to north: A-F.

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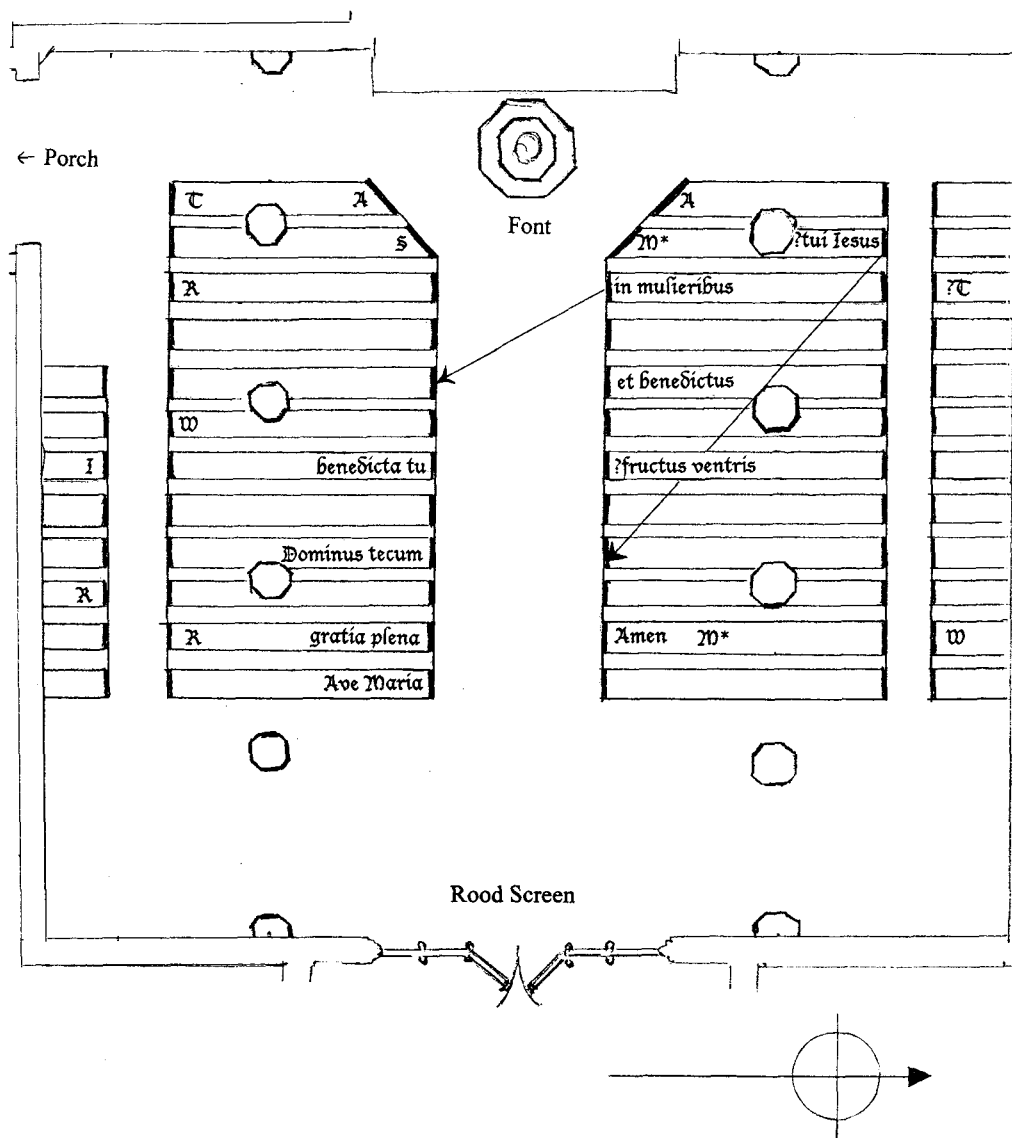


Fig. 4. Suggested original positions of the *Ave-Maria* bench-ends. Two changes are involved: moving bench-end D10 to C8 [*in mulieribus*] and E11 to D4 [*?tui Iesus*]. The asterisked Gothic M in the plan indicates the positions of the two *Maria* monograms.



(a) front view.



(b) back view.

Interrupted prayer [E2].

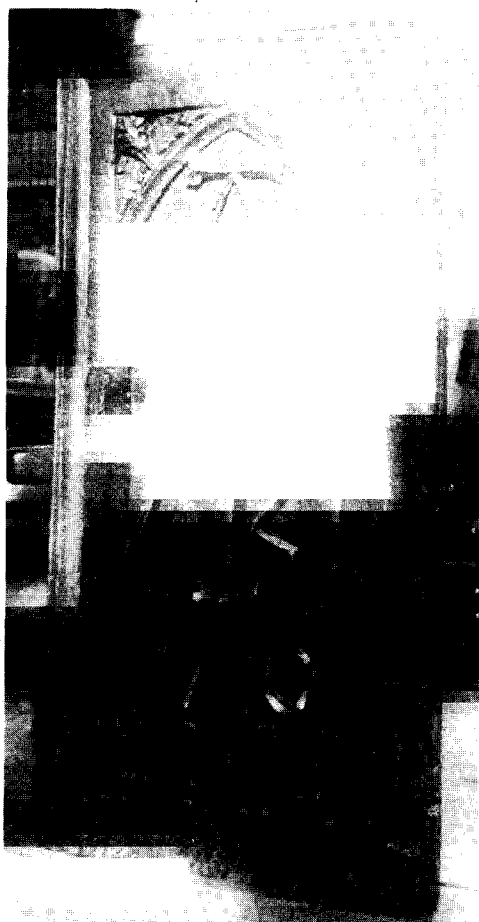


(c) surviving parts of praying figure [C2].

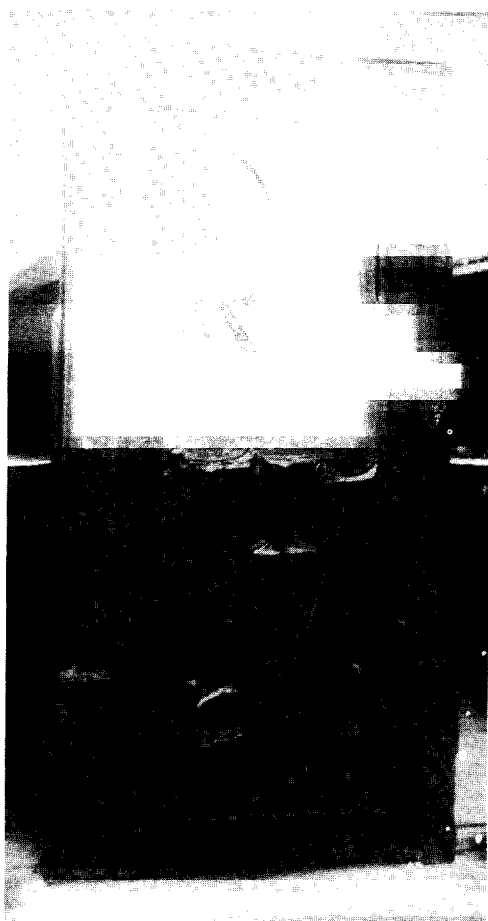


d) man praying alone [A2].

Fig. 5. Arm-rest figures at St Mary's, South Walsham.



(a) AVE MARIA G



(b) RATIA PLE

Fig. 6. Two *Ave-Maria* bench-ends from St Andrew's Church, Trent, Dorset.



Fig. 7. The south porch,
St Mary's, South Walsham.

(a) Entrance showing the
position of the Annunciation.

(Photo: E. M. Trendell).



(b) Mary and the two figures of the Trinity.

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NOTES

I should like to thank Canon Phillip MacFadyen for permission to print the photographs of the bench-ends and porch at South Walsham and the Rev A.J.H. Edwards for permission to print those of the bench-ends at Trent. I should also like to thank Mr Martial Rose for finding a photographer and Mr Michael Trendell for his assistance with the photography at South Walsham.

¹ The most recent edition of the complete N.town plays is Stephen Spector, *The N-town Play*, 2 vols, Early English Text Society SS 11 and 12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). As his title suggests, Spector is not concerned to separate out the individual plays which make up this disparate manuscript. Separate editions of *The Mary Play* appear in, *The Mary Play from the N.town Manuscript*, ed. by Peter Meredith, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997) and *Medieval Drama: an anthology*, ed. by Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 167-95; and of *The Passion Play* in *The Passion Play from the N.town Manuscript*, ed. by Peter Meredith (London: Longman, 1990). Arguments for their separateness are set out in Peter Meredith, 'Manuscript, Scribe and Performance: further looks at the N.town manuscript', in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. by Felicity Riddy, York Manuscripts Conference: Proceedings Series 2 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 109-28, and for and against in Alan J. Fletcher, 'The N-Town plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 167-78. *The Assumption of Mary* was separately edited by W.W. Greg many years ago: *The Assumption of the Virgin: a miracle play from the N-town cycle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1915). *The Purification*, the other 'separate' play, has not been individually edited.

On provenance, Spector comments:

The fact that the principal constituents of the cycle were copied out by East Anglian scribes, evidently writing at various times, argues strongly for compilation and transcription in East Anglia. And the appearance of East Anglian dialect words, several times in rhyme, confirms the notion of composition and performance in that region. (pp. xv-xvi)

² Referred to hereafter as *LALME*; ed. by Angus McIntosh, M.L. Samuels and Michael Benskin, 4 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986).

³ There are some uncertainties associated with this placing. The manuscript was analysed by Professor M.L. Samuels for *LALME* and appears as mapped source LP4280, London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian D viii (*LALME* 3, pp. 339-40). This locates the main scribe of the manuscript to the south-west of Norwich (Grid ref. 595 289, between East Harling

and, to the north-west, East Wretham). *LALME* covered fols.1-20 of the manuscript by 'analysis' and 'scanned' to 106. I am assuming that by 'scan' is meant a less intensive search. (For comments on the analysis of literary manuscripts, see 1, section 5, pp. 51-52.) *The Mary Play* occurs between fols 37v and 73v, so no part of the play was included in the analysis, only in the 'scan'. *The Passion Play*, starting on fol. 136, was not investigated at all. Not surprisingly, considering the lack of certainty about that aspect of the manuscript, there seems to have been no attention paid to the different periods of transcription in the N.town plays. Had there been, it is possible in view of what is said in the Introduction (1, p. 39) that a different kind of analysis would have been used; though it has to be admitted that the kind of difference evidenced in the N.town manuscript is not quite what is usually meant in *LALME* by 'linguistically diverse'. If any attempt is made to place the scribe of this particular play, analysis of strictly *Mary Play* text will be needed, though it has to be said that it may not materially alter the placing. Fletcher reports briefly on such findings in 'The N-Town plays', p. 185, fn. 5.

⁴ *Records of Plays and Players in Norfolk and Suffolk, 1330-1642*, ed. by David Galloway and John Wasson, Collections Volume XI, The Malone Society 1980/1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), s.v. East Harling. Kenninghall (TM 040860) is about 4 kilometres due east of East Harling (TL 995865), Garboldisham (TM 005815) about 5 kilometres slightly east of south, and the two Lophams (TM 036825 and 040817) around 6 and 7 kilometres south-east. They lie in an arc on slightly higher ground than East Harling. All four villages are now similarly small, but there is no sign that they were ever significantly larger. Each has a large church, that at South Lopham having a particularly impressive Norman tower. As with so many other rural towns and villages, there may well be a connection between games, etc. and raising funds for the church. For Norfolk churches, see H. Munro Cautley, *Norfolk Churches* (Ipswich: Norman Adlard, 1949) and Nikolaus Pevsner and Bill Wilson, *Norfolk 1: Norwich and North-East, The Buildings of England*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1997) and *Norfolk 2: North-West and South, The Buildings of England*, 2nd ed (London: Penguin Books, 1999).

⁵ 'At the Cherk gate' presumably means an outdoor performance. The *Assumption* with its boisterous action and partly outdoor setting, would make an excellent outdoor play; less so the *Purification*. The scenes of elaborate liturgical staging combined with the intimate tone of the *Mary Play* seem to me elements which mark it out as an indoor play. But for the moment it remains an open question.

For discussion of the word 'interlude', see Nicholas Davis, 'The meaning of the word "Interlude"', and 'Allusions to Medieval Drama in Britain (4): Interludes', *Medieval English Theatre* 6:1 (1984) 5-15 and 61-91.

⁶ *Norfolk and Suffolk*, s.v.Thetford. Thetford (TL 875831) lies on the southern edge of Norfolk, on the border with Suffolk. Places from which entertainers come that appear in both

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the East Harling and the Thetford records are marked with asterisks and grid references are not repeated: Bardwell (TL 945735) [1505/6, game], Croxton (TL 874866) [1506/7. 1524/25, gild], Finchingfield, Essex [1524/25, *ludus*], Gislingham (TM 075715) [1505/6. game], Ixworth, Suffolk (TL 931702) [1508/9, play], Kenninghall* [1511/12, play], Lopham* [1504/5, game], Mildenhall, Suffolk (TL 710746) [1505/6, play], Shelfanger (TM 108837) [1508/9, play], Snarehill (there is now no village but a number of place-names just east of Thetford indicate the area meant) [1510/11, procession], Spalding, Lincolnshire [1533/34, *Iocatores*], Walsham (probably but not certainly North Walsham, TG 285302) [1505/6, game], Wangford, Suffolk (TM 465791) [1524/25, minstrels], Wymondham (TM 115015) [1533/34, *Iocatores*]; Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk [waits], Colchester, Essex [waits], Hull, East Yorkshire [waits], King's Lynn [waits], Norwich [waits]. Interestingly, only the waits and the Croxton gild appear more than once. I have divided off those referred to as 'waits', but '*Iocatores*' and 'minstrels' could as easily be 'waits'. Except for those from Bury, waits come from greater distances. This is perhaps another reason for identifying the *Iocatores* and minstrels as waits, since Wangford and Spalding are both more distant locations. Finchingfield [*ludus*] is distant, but Galloway and Wasson suggest that this is a record of a monetary contribution to a play performed elsewhere rather than a visit by one. See also Richard Beadle, 'Plays and Playing at Thetford and Nearby, 1498-1540', *Theatre Notebook* 32 (1978), 4-11, and Fletcher, 'The N-Town plays', pp. 166-67.

⁷ The original intention seems to have had more to do with using local art as source material for modern stagings of medieval plays (see Clifford Davidson's remarks in the Introduction to the York volume, p. iii).

So far *Chester* (ed. by Sally-Beth Maclean, 1982), *Coventry/Stratford-upon-Avon/Warwick and lesser sites in Warwickshire* (ed. by Clifford Davidson and Jennifer Alexander, 1985), *The West Riding of Yorkshire* (ed. by Barbara Palmer, 1990), and *York* (ed. by Clifford Davidson and David E. O'Connor, 1978) have been published. Norfolk will appear soon (ed. Ann Eljenhom Nichols). All are Medieval Institute Publications from Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, in the Early Drama, Art, and Music Reference Series. I am grateful to Professor Nichols for generously sharing her Marian findings in Norfolk with me.

⁸ I have borrowed the term from R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-c. 1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 9: 'Christendom might then be portrayed as a series of "discourse communities" (in the terminology of the rhetorical theorists), sharing perceptions, aspirations, and vocabulary, and operating independently at a variety of levels . . . '.

⁹ G.G. Coulton, 'A medieval inscription in Acle church', *Norfolk Archaeology* 20 (1921), 141-49.

¹⁰ Robert S. Gottfried, *Epidemic Disease in Fifteenth Century England: the medical response and the demographic consequences* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), pp.

2 and 135.

¹¹ Place names in Norfolk and Suffolk are followed by a grid reference since many are small and not always easy to locate. Using the grid, however, also launched me into using 'kilometre' which does not come naturally.

¹² For Acle, see Pevsner/Wilson, *Norfolk 1*, pp. 357-58. Colin Richmond identifies the donors as 'Robert Bataly and Joan his wife'; see 'Religion', in *Fifteenth-century attitudes*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 184. According to Richmond, Robert died in 1494 'leaving 20 marks for the building of the porch; Joan was his executor'.

¹³ For South Walsham, see Pevsner/Wilson, *Norfolk 1*, pp. 668-69. There is a short but informative church guide by Nicholas Groves (1995) and a note on *Shared Churchyards* (also by Groves, 1994) available in the church.

¹⁴ *A Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, ed. by Peter Wade-Martins, 2nd edn (Norwich: Norfolk Museums Service, 1994), pp. 88-93 and end-maps.

¹⁵ David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (London: Longmans, 1953), pp. 75 and 159.

¹⁶ Francis Blomefield, and Charles Parkin, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, 5 vols (Fersfield, Norwich, Lynn, 1739-75). Acle is in volume 5, pp. 1457-60.

¹⁷ G.S. Amos, *A History and Description of South Walsham, Norfolk*, rev. ed. (South Walsham: South Walsham Parish Council, 2000), pp. 25-28. Colin Richmond, *The Paston Family in the fifteenth century: Fastolf's will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 68-70.

¹⁸ *The Commonplace Book of Robert Reynes of Acle: an edition of Tanner MS 407*, ed. by Cameron Louis, *Garland Medieval Texts 1* (New York & London: Garland, 1980).

¹⁹ It is worth noting here that by 1350 a school administered by the Bishop of Norwich existed in Blofield. It lies about 7 kilometres east of Acle and 5 south-east of South Walsham and was the centre of the Deanery in which both lay (Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 144, n. 5).

²⁰ Reynes is discussed in Louis's introduction pp. 24-39, and in Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 71-75. A number of the entries from Reynes's book appear in *Medieval Popular Religion 1000-1500*, ed. by John Shinnors, *Readings in Medieval Civilisations and Culture: 2* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997), pp. 335-76. Duffy's description of Reynes as a 'rural artisan' seems also to underplay his literacy, the range of his literary, social and legal interests and his curiosity. For what it's worth, his brother James calls himself 'gentyلمان' in his will (*Commonplace Book*, p. 518).

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²¹ See Louis's discussion in *Commonplace Book*, pp. 99-103.

²² *Commonplace Book*, pp. 34-35.

²³ *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 73.

²⁴ The numbers refer to Louis's division of the contents of the manuscript.

²⁵ For discussion and photographs of these bench-ends see, under their place names, Cautley, *Norfolk Churches*, and his *Suffolk Churches and their Treasures* (Ipswich: Norman Adlard, 1937), and also J. Charles Cox, *Bench Ends in English Churches* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916).

²⁶ There is a slight complication in that beneath the words '*et benedictus*' there is at the foot of the shield a capital 'I' (fig. 1b). This could be an abbreviation for the missing '*Iesus*', placing it before rather than after '*fructus ventris tui*', though this would be an odd position for it. The 'I' is very shallowly cut and may have been an error later shaved away.

²⁷ The original content of the defaced shields is made slightly less certain by the existence of other carved poppyhead shields. Their decoration consists of a number of initial letters: A (twice), I, R (three times), S, T (possibly twice), and W (twice), and a *Maria* monogram. The initials are most likely to have proprietary or commemorative significance and represent donors, churchwardens or other local benefactors. The apparently random row of letters on the pew back at Gazeley, Suffolk, seems to be commemoration of that sort (Cautley, *Suffolk Churches*, p. 150). As there is no sign of any mutilation of 'initial' shields and as the little that is still visible on the defaced shields looks most like the missing elements of the *Ave*, however, *fructus ventris tui Iesus* must remain their most likely content.

²⁸ See Cox, *Bench Ends*, pp. 17-19 and *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 171.

²⁹ There are two further questions that occur to me: was there a matching bench-end with inscribed shield placed opposite the *Ave-Maria* one on the other side of the nave aisle, and was the *Ave-Maria* bench-end always immediately in front of the *gratia-plena* one, rather than one pew away like the other phrases? As regards the first question, apart from an initial the only bench-end that would naturally fill the gap is the *Maria* monogram. But as there is already a monogram on the *Amen* shield, that seems inappropriate. Besides which, if there were no matching decorated shield opposite, it would give greater prominence to the opening of the *Ave Maria*, which is perhaps the intention.

³⁰ The best-known is probably the Simon Werman one in Broomfield church, Somerset, which may record the name of the carver. There is a good collection of photographs of bench-ends published in Peter Poyntz Wright, *The Rural Benchends of Somerset* (Amersham: Avebury, 1983), but it relates only to one county and Cox, *Bench Ends* remains an essential source. For some discussion of 'text' bench-ends, see Wright, *Rural Benchends*, pp. 152-59.

Wright also has photographs of three bench-ends with beads on them (see pp. 77-80), two at Kingston St Mary, which parallel South Walsham's concern with prayer.

³¹ There is a useful guide to Trent church, Margaret Webster, *St Andrew's Church, Trent* (Trent, 2000), which contains drawings of a number of the bench-ends. There are photographs of all the *Ave-Maria* ones and a brief discussion in Cox, *Bench Ends*, pp. 91-93.

³² For some discussion of text in art, see Roger Ellis, 'The Word in Religious Art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance', in *Word, Picture, and Spectacle*, ed. by Clifford Davidson, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 5 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1984), pp. 21-38.

³³ The Sherborne Missal, once in the possession of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle, is now British Library Additional MS 74236. It is dated between 1396 and 1407. For full descriptions see Kathleen Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390-1490*, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles 6, 2 vols (London: Harvey Millar, 1996), II, pp. 45-60, and Janet Backhouse, *The Sherborne Missal* (London: The British Library, 1999). References in the text are to illustrations in Backhouse.

³⁴ H. Edith Legge, *The Divinity School, Oxford: a guide for visitors* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1923). The central bay is described on pp. 7-9 and a list of the texts used appears in Appendix 1. There are individual photographs of most of the 'text' bosses, and Plate 21 shows the middle section of the central bay.

³⁵ See Elizabeth S. Eames, *Medieval Tiles: a handbook* (London: The British Museum, 1968), especially pp. 22-24 (the Malvern tiling and its inscribed tiles); Jane A. Wight, *Medieval Floor Tiles: their design and distribution in Britain* (London: John Baker, 1975), especially pp. 136-47 (Malvern and inscribed tiles), and Elizabeth Eames, *Medieval Craftsmen: English Tilers* (London: The British Museum, 1996), see especially pp. 60-63. Malvern was not the only tiling to make inscribed tiles, nor, of course, do pavements with inscriptions first appear in the fifteenth century. The great pavement at Westminster Abbey, for example, with its elaborate inlaid latten inscription, dates from 1268; see Paul Binski, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets: kingship and the representation of power, 1200-1400* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 95-97, and Richard Foster, *Patterns of Thought: the hidden meaning of the great pavement of Westminster Abbey* (London: Cape, 1991).

³⁶ Cautley, *Suffolk Churches*, pp. 147 and 150.

³⁷ Three Lollards were burnt in Norwich in 1428; see Norman P. Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31*, Camden Fourth Series 20 (London: The Royal Historical Society, 1977), p. 8. It is perhaps worth mentioning, though at the cost of a long footnote, that Acle was not unacquainted with Lollardy. In one case, that of Margery Baxter (1 April 1429), the defendant's penance required her on two occasions to walk barefoot around Acle market place, as well as on four Sundays around the parish church of her then home town of Martham (about 10 kilometres to the north-east); see Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, pp. 41-51 (for the court's decision see p. 43), and Shinnars, *Medieval Popular Religion*, pp. 491-96. Tanner does not

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comment on the reason for this double penance, but it seems likely that it was because she was born in Acle.

The 'heretical' conversations took place in Joan Clifland, the deponent's, home in Norwich where Margery Baxter was sitting and sewing by the fire. Amongst other things, the accused apparently called 'Walsingham' 'Falsingham': '. . . quod prefata Margeria docuit et informavit eandem iuratum quod ipsa nunquam iret peregre ad Mariam de Falsyngham nec ad aliquem sanctum vel alium locum' ['. . . that the said Margery instructed and told the witness that she should never go on pilgrimage to Mary of Falsingham or to any saint whatever or other place'] (Tanner, p. 47).

³⁸ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. by Phyllis Hodgson, Early English Text Society OS 218 (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), pp. 73-75.

³⁹ *Mankind: an acting edition*, ed. by Peter Meredith (Leeds: Alumnus, 1997), pp. 25, 35 and 58.

⁴⁰ Meredith, *The Passion Play from the N.town Manuscript*, p. 126, l.874sd

⁴¹ For the 'Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards' see *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. by Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 24-29 and 150-55. For further discussion see Fiona Somerset, 'Answering the Twelve Conclusions: Dymmok's halfhearted gestures towards publication', in *Lollardy and the Gentry in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by Margaret Aston and Colin Richmond (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), pp. 52-76

⁴² Up the road from South Walsham is the rood screen in Ranworth church with its painted reredos for the altar of Our Lady depicting Mary and her half-sisters with their offspring (illustration in Richard Tilbrook and C.V. Roberts, *Norfolk's Churches Great and Small* (Norwich: Jarrold Publishing, 1997), pp. 76-77).

⁴³ See Louis's discussion of the names in *Commonplace Book*, pp. 406-16, especially 411-12.

⁴⁴ Gertrud Schiller has no comparable Annunciation scene; see *Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. by Janet Seligman, 2 vols (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), pp. 33-35 and figs 64-129.

An alabaster of the 'Annunciation' in the Victoria and Albert Museum (A58-1925) has, however, two figures of God the Father and the Holy Spirit seated in heaven, identical except for their poses and the attributes held in their left hands (God the Father, an orb; the Holy Spirit, a book). In the centre the Christ-child descends in a mandorla towards Mary. The scene is surrounded by the four daughters of God bearing scrolls with texts from Psalms (Vulgate) 84 and 118. Mary is at the bottom right in an Annunciation pose, but there is no Gabriel. See Francis Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters* (Oxford: Phaidon/Christies, 1984), p. 175.

⁴⁵ For some discussion of another kind of text-centredness see Peter Meredith, 'The direct

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and indirect use of the Bible in medieval English drama', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 77:3 (1995), 61-77, especially 69-73. There is also the acrostic of *MARIA* (*Mary Play*, ll. 545-50) which celebrates the name in a way similar to, but more expansively than, the bench-end monogram.