

# The Absent Figure: on Authorship and Meaning in the Fourteenth-Century Eastern Arm of St Augustine's, Bristol

by

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*As part of the construction of the extraordinary fourteenth-century eastern arm of St Augustine's Abbey, Bristol (now the cathedral), interventions were made in the adjacent thirteenth-century Elder Lady Chapel. Similar work can be seen in the Berkeley Chapel on the other side of the church, raising questions about the reason for these interventions and their place in the building sequence. This paper explores the implications of these for the architecture of the rest of the choir, examining the issues of authorship, patronage and meaning which surround it, and suggesting Thomas III Lord Berkeley as a possible key patron of the building.*

In the Elder Lady Chapel of St Augustine's Abbey, Bristol a carved figure is missing: only the two birds he once held remain. These birds, with the absent figure's hands still clutching their necks, can be seen in the westernmost spandrel of two isolated bays of thirteenth-century blank wall arcading which stand on the south side of the chapel (Fig. 1). As well as raising archaeological questions about when and why the figure was cut out of this carving, the absent figure stands as a cipher for a wider question: who or what was the motivating force behind the design of the Bristol choir?

The Elder Lady Chapel is a structure begun c.1218-22 and positioned, like the Lady Chapel at Ely and the former Lady Chapel at Tewkesbury Abbey, off the north transept of the church. Blank arcading rings the chapel, except on the south side where it shares a wall with the fourteenth-century choir. Here, two large fourteenth-century arches have been cut right through the thickness of the wall into the then-new north choir aisle of the church; the two bays of thirteenth-century

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Fig. 1

The 'absent figure': cut back thirteenth-century spandrel and adjacent fourteenth-century 'buttress,' south wall, Elder Lady Chapel, Bristol Cathedral



Fig. 2

Fourteenth-century tomb arches and thirteenth-century blank arcades, south wall, Elder Lady Chapel, Bristol Cathedral. The eastern arch contains the tomb of Thomas IV Lord Berkeley (d. 1368); the female figure with him is said to be his mother, Margaret Mortimer (d. 1337)

blank arcading separate them (Fig. 2).

The large fourteenth-century arches seem designed for tombs: they are rather low to be part of an arcade, but a good size to take a tomb chest; and they are framed with mock-architecture – ‘buttresses’ and pinnacles – as one would expect of a tomb. Indeed, a large late-fourteenth-century tomb chest, with two effigies, fills the easternmost of them. Also they have unusual detailing: this is apparent in the little fake tierceron vaults which hold up a pierced frieze of blank quatrefoils inside each recess; in the thick-ribbed tunnel vault which carries each arch, which in spite of being just 4.26 metres (14ft) high carries large, well-carved bosses 41cm (16½ in) wide; in the way in which their ‘buttresses’ present an acute angle to the chapel, as if they were of hexagonal section; and most strikingly in the distinctive ‘poppy-head’ finials which top these buttresses.

The thirteenth-century blank arcade that rings the rest of the Elder Lady Chapel, on the other hand, is typical of high-quality work of its period. It is highly ornamented, with blue lias shafting, stiff leaf capitals, and richly carved spandrels, and runs in sequences of four arches to each bay of the cross-vaulted building. The string course that runs above the arcade is bitten at both ends of each bay by heads, most of them of a distinctive, smooth-featured appearance, which appear to ‘grow’ out of the mouldings of the string course itself.

Although the blank arcading which separates the fourteenth-century tomb arches is only two bays long, it fits this description precisely: here is the main carved spandrel between the arches, and in addition smaller carved spandrels on each side of them; here is the string course ‘bitten’ by two smooth-featured faces barely 182cm (6ft) apart. But this short portion of wall arcade can never have filled a complete vault bay of the chapel. Either some interruption in the wall arcade preceded the current arches, or our two bays have been moved and re-erected.

It is possible that the original design of the south side of the Elder Lady Chapel differed in some details from the northern one. The easternmost bay of the wall arcade, for example, has one narrow arch built into it so that it stops about 15cm (6ins) short of the end of its bay; the westernmost one is designed as a ‘singleton’ arch, implying that some other structure filled the rest of the bay. It is not clear what the fourteenth-century tomb arches replace, and not impossible that it involved some kind of link between the Elder Lady Chapel and the choir, though a corridor on this scale seems unlikely.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, the entire south wall of the Elder Lady Chapel bears the marks of having been substantially reworked in the fourteenth century, when it was joined to the north wall of the new choir. The string course that runs above the tomb arches has a moulding that is found in the fourteenth-century choir aisle string course and wall bench, perhaps indicating that the blocked windows above have been shortened. To maintain visual continuity, three thirteenth-century capitals have been reset in the larger, south-east window of the Chapel (also blocked) and the fourteenth-century string-course moulding run along the top of them. The wall shafts have been removed, leaving only their capitals; a fourteenth-century

image niche has been inserted; in spite of all this the finials of the tomb arches are forced to finish at different levels by the thirteenth-century architecture that remains. And the two bays of wall arcade bear the archaeological traces of having been severely disrupted.

The smooth-featured faces on the string course, for example, are squeezed uncomfortably against the later tomb arches,<sup>2</sup> but the key proof is the absent figure. Study of the spandrel makes it quite clear how this carving was originally designed: a central figure holding two symmetrical birds framed by stiff leaf sprays. Such a design could only be intended for a mid-arcade spandrel: it has been distorted to give it a size and shape appropriate to its new role as a smaller end-of-bay spandrel. The central figure has been sliced out and the symmetry of the design exploited to ensure that, with the two stones fitted back together, the two birds 'read' as one design. Only the figure's arms, and most of his right foot, remain; but to fit it into the space available, the stiff leaf framing the westernmost bird has also had to be cut away. The eastern spandrel fits more comfortably, but there may always have been a spandrel in this position, as it lines up with the end of the thirteenth-century bay,<sup>3</sup> and the only end-of-wall-arcade spandrel on the north side of the chapel is directly opposite.

All this implies a reasonably ambitious reconstruction project: both the wall arcade and the windows above have had to be reworked to insert the tomb arches; the designer has ensured that both started and finished 'properly'. The clear implication is that the designer of the fourteenth-century tomb arches went to considerable lengths to preserve sequences of thirteenth-century work, reconstructing or renovating elements such as the wall arcade so they remained symmetrical in appearance.

This would simply remain an archaeological observation, were it not for the fact that it has a parallel in another part of the church. The choir of St Augustine's has a second attached chapel, this time on the north side, and known as the Berkeley Chapel. Two details make direct links between the two: first, the unusual 'poppy-head' finials of the Elder Lady Chapel tomb arches are almost identical to those on the gables above the choir aisle door to the Berkeley Chapel's sacristy, through which that chapel is entered. Secondly, there is in the Berkeley Chapel itself further evidence for the conservation and careful re-use of work of an earlier period. The most impressive example of this is the frieze beneath the tomb in the chapel itself: the bottom half is a row of fourteenth-century heraldry;<sup>4</sup> the top half is a row of late-twelfth-century carved decoration, featuring big looped mouldings and early stiff leaf foliage (Fig. 5). This piece has clearly been kept and deliberately inserted in the wall, and the arms below carved to exactly the same width. The aumbries in the south wall also look late twelfth or thirteenth century.

Comparisons between the two buildings do not end here. The general style of the Elder Lady Chapel's fourteenth-century tomb arches is comparable to that of the Berkeley Chapel sacristy. Indeed, it is almost true to say that these structures are both stylistically similar and unlike anything else in medieval architecture: rather they look Gothick, as if invented by someone who had read about medieval

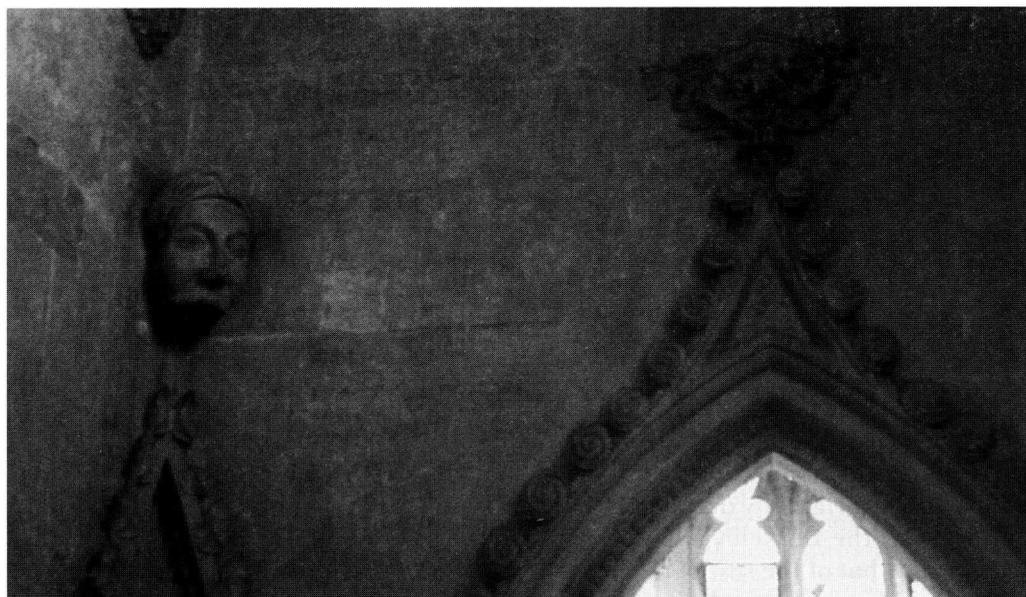


Fig. 3

'Caterpillar' crockets and internal gargoyle: among the carved detailing in the Berkeley Chapel sacristy, Bristol Cathedral

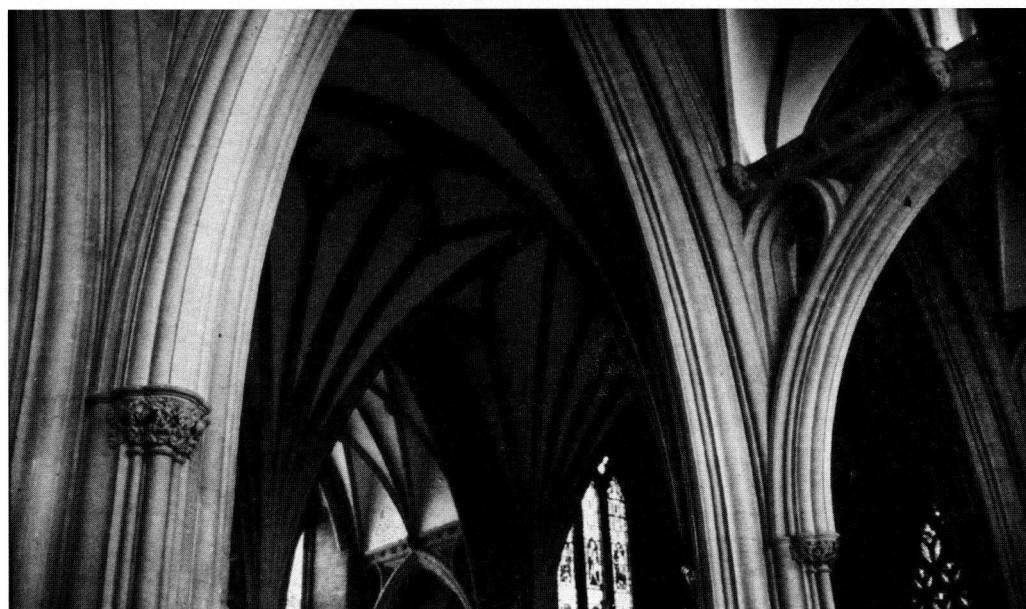


Fig. 4

The vaults of the fourteenth-century choir and aisles at St Augustine's Bristol (now the cathedral)

architecture in a book, with their heavy forms, and obstreperously original motifs.

Details of the Elder Lady Chapel tomb arches such as their vaults, poppy-head finials and hexagonally-sectioned pinnacles have been described, and in the Berkeley Chapel sacristy an entire room has been crowded with oversized detailing in a similar mode. Indeed some aspects of this space can appear as if its designer has deliberately attempted to reinvent every architectural convention he touched. For example, the arches of the row of niches on the south wall are concave instead of convex; instead of rows of crockets they carry single large leaves; instead of crockets on the south-east door are a row of what appear to be snails, or curled-up caterpillars; and instead of ball-flower the same door has a row of some kind of fruit;<sup>5</sup> there is a gargoyle above the corner niche, inside rather than outside the sacristy, and the vault is famously unfilled rather than filled.<sup>6</sup> The result is not beautiful, but it is remarkable (Fig. 3).

There are other comparisons to be made between the Elder Lady Chapel and the Berkeley Chapel. The Elder Lady Chapel is a thirteenth-century building that was probably originally detached from the Norman choir; and Richard Morris<sup>7</sup> has argued that the Berkeley Chapel, the floor surface of which is about 1.22 metres (4ft) below that of the rest of the church (including the sacristy), may have replaced a previously-existing, and presumably detached, building, from which the twelfth- and thirteenth-century stonework in it may come.

Other aspects of the architectural history of the two structures bear comparison: the east window and vault of the Elder Lady Chapel are conventional work of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century;<sup>8</sup> likewise the interior of the Berkeley Chapel is reasonably conventional in design and includes details, such as the large spherical triangle in the west wall, the ogival curves in the window tracery, and the ball-flower (surely the most oversized ball-flower in England) in the south window soffit, which probably place it *c.*1300 to 1310. Both buildings only become exceptionally unusual in the places where their structure is joined to the body of the fourteenth-century choir.

Both chapels also include large stairwells, providing access both to their roof spaces and to the choir gallery. These also incorporate apparently older work: eight Romanesque heads from a corbel table in the roof of the stairwell attached to the Elder Lady Chapel; and a single thirteenth-century bell capital at the top of the newel post of the Berkeley Chapel stairwell.

The Berkeley Chapel sacristy is clearly an afterthought – it has been inserted between two already-existing buttresses of the choir – and this means that both the sacristy, and by extension the Elder Lady Chapel tomb arches, with which it shares so much detail, are later than the choir. We will return to the question of the dating of these various parts of the church.

Finally, tomb recesses play a key role in joining both of these structures to the choir. And there are parallels between these recesses: they are stylistically unusual – the Berkeley Chapel recess is one of the series of ‘stellate recesses’ for which Bristol is famous, and the Elder Lady chapel tomb arches have already been described. Both contain the only double tombs in the series built into the fourteenth

century phase of the church (Figs. 2 & 5). They are further marked out by having arches through the thickness of the wall, allowing viewers in the choir aisles to glimpse the altar of the side chapel, and perhaps officiants at their altars to follow the service in the Choir from the Berkeley Chapel, and the Rood Altar from the Elder Lady Chapel.<sup>9</sup>

The distinctive stylistic features we have noticed in the fourteenth-century phases of the Elder Lady and Berkeley Chapels are of course only part of what makes Bristol an unusual building. The fourteenth-century work in the choir is just as distinctive, and a good deal more satisfying aesthetically. It is one of the most inventive buildings of a highly imaginative period in English architecture. Indeed, the space is at once imbued with the piety of its fourteenth century context, and formally thrilling to the most secular twenty-first-century viewer (Fig. 4).<sup>10</sup>

The initial impression – of a single, light-filled hall – is overwhelming. Indeed this may be the largest hall church of its date in Europe, and the most monumental in scale ever constructed in England, where its most immediate context lies in a series of smaller, though also highly sophisticated, hall churches constructed in the thirteenth century and linked to the court of Henry III.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 5

'Stellate recess' containing the tomb of Thomas II Lord Berkeley (d. 1321) and Joan Ferrers (d. 1309), with frieze below comprising twelfth/thirteenth-century decorative moulding and fourteenth-century heraldry, Berkeley Chapel, Bristol Cathedral

The aisles and the nave are of a single height, making for huge arcades with lancet-steep arches which blend directly into the spreading forms of the vault, and allow the aisle walls to be filled with equally large expanses of window. Yet no sooner is this unity apprehended than it is undercut. This is a church: as such the entire building's main axis is east/west. But the aisle vaults are oriented north/south, with a tunnel vault in each bay. The tension between these orientations is diffused by the piercing of these vaults into smaller east-west openings, also vaulted, which sit on bold north-south bridges of stone. These piercings provide an echo of the main dynamic while setting up a third, halfway point between the cardinal directions: diagonal perspectives across spaces between and through vaults. There are no direct contemporary comparators to these vaults in stone architecture, though they have been compared to the upended pyramids of timber created by the lintels, tie beams, arched braces and pierced spandrels in many contemporary great hall roofs, such as those at the Pilgrim's Hall at Winchester, and Bushwood Priory, Hertfordshire.<sup>12</sup>

The visual qualities of the building are brought to life by following the processional route around aisles and retro-choir. Shifting views across and through spaces are balanced by the more static clarity of the choir and Lady Chapel, its various axes resolved by the big diagonal liernes of the vault progressing inexorably east. The tomb recesses of the Berkeley and Elder Lady Chapels provide glimpses into smaller, more exclusive spaces. And throughout the route, the walls are lined by a series of ten tomb recesses. Processing through this unified space, past the sequence of tombs, might well evoke a powerful sense of the importance of prayer for the dead, as if the whole building were a mausoleum or giant chantry chapel.<sup>13</sup>

The canopies of these tombs spring out along the wall, curving energetically up and down, left to right, and at diagonals. They are made of a series of reversed curves around a central arch made of straight lines, in effect an octagon sliced in half (Fig. 5). While similar 'stellate' recesses occur at St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol and in St David's Cathedral, Pembrokeshire, none has quite the balance of dynamic curves and fixed polygons which makes these so visually extraordinary: the quality can perhaps be better related to the spiky forms visible in such contemporary manuscripts as the Luttrell Psalter.<sup>14</sup>

The way in which this sequence of tombs is built into the very fabric of the structure is also distinctive. There is evidence for short sequences of tombs-as-architecture in contemporary buildings such as the Lichfield Lady Chapel (from 1315), where there are three apparent tomb-gables set into the buttresses on the exterior south side outside the building; the four recesses in the Lady Chapel at Exeter Cathedral (from 1280), and the unvaulted hall church at St Thomas, Winchelsea (1280s) where three tombs were constructed together in the north aisle. But longer series of tombs were normally left to their individual patrons to build up over time, as the Despencers did at Tewkesbury Abbey from 1317.<sup>15</sup>

One effect of lining the entire building with identical tomb recesses is that it builds development-in-time into the architecture of the church: its design vividly embodies both change and continuity over the generations, balancing an ever-

increasing lineage of full tombs with an ever-decreasing extension into the future of empty ones. That every one of the fourteenth-century burials in these recesses belongs to a member of the Berkeley family only increases the power of this impression; assuming this was intended to remain the case, at a notional rate of one burial per generation, the church might have taken 150 to 200 years to fill up: as far forwards in time as, in the early fourteenth century, it was back to the foundation of the abbey in 1170.

While movement in time is therefore built into the architecture, the inflexibility this specific approach creates restricts the capacity for time to bring change with it. Almost every tomb is to the same design, and the effigies within them would all have to be similar single figures to fit. Like much of the architecture of the eastern arm – and indeed other inventive buildings of the period – the recesses manage to be simultaneously radical, in that their designer has been prepared to rethink architectural convention with boldness and consistency, and conservative, in that the messages implied emphasise the unchanging nature of traditional values. The result – for the modern viewer – is a satisfying architectural exercise in the poetics of space and time.

This kind of consistency also applies to the detailing of the building, which – especially in the light of the baroque marginalia of most buildings of the first half of the fourteenth century – is spare and disciplined.<sup>16</sup> All of the bosses, for example, apart from the two foliate heads paired in the easternmost recess in the Elder Lady Chapel,<sup>17</sup> are foliate – there are no figurative subjects; and the heads in the centre of each side of all twelve aisle bridges are all bearded men with flowing locks. (Interestingly, the only place where these finely-carved heads appear to show any change of expression is over the Elder Lady Chapel's eastern tomb arch and the Berkeley Chapel sacristy door.) Another distinctive feature is the use of transoms, previously unknown in church architecture at this scale, but common in secular architecture, especially Great Halls, where they were almost standard: Winchester Castle Great Hall is just one example.<sup>18</sup>

It is hardly surprising that there are different points of view about the date and significance of all this. There are broadly two positions: the first was developed by Nikolaus Pevsner from 1953 onwards, and dominated thinking about the building until at least the 1970s.<sup>19</sup> It explains the building as the work of a singular and brilliant genius working in the cosmopolitan, mercantile context of England's greatest trading city: a kind of Medieval equivalent, perhaps, to some of the great masters of early Modernism. It tends to date the entire design to the date we have for the start of building work, 1298, and thus judges it as one of the most influential structures in medieval European architecture, predating all the hall churches of northern Europe, with the first of the monumental lierne vaults that were to become standard in fourteenth and fifteenth century architecture.

The second has been expressed most thoroughly and recently by Richard Morris. It seeks to find an explanation for Bristol in the cultural context of the times, suggesting that the patron's role is key to understanding it. Morris sees in the building the evidence of an additive design process, perhaps under three master

masons, and positions the date of its most original features late in the range of available possibilities, pointing out that there was no burial in the choir until 1353 and that the glass there dates to the 1350s.<sup>20</sup> This model tends to suggest that the significance of the building lies more in the range of references it appears to embody than in any wider influence on the course of architectural history.<sup>21</sup>

This is certainly a building with a powerful sense of artistic personality. The reason for its unusual qualities may, regardless of date, simply be the 'Pevsner model': that a particularly original master mason or masons' lodge was responsible, with the patron content to play a modest role as long as the result was a functioning abbey choir. While this may seem over-simplistic, it is worth noting the existence of a handful of other buildings that are close enough in detail and spirit to the Bristol eastern arm to be by the same master or masters.

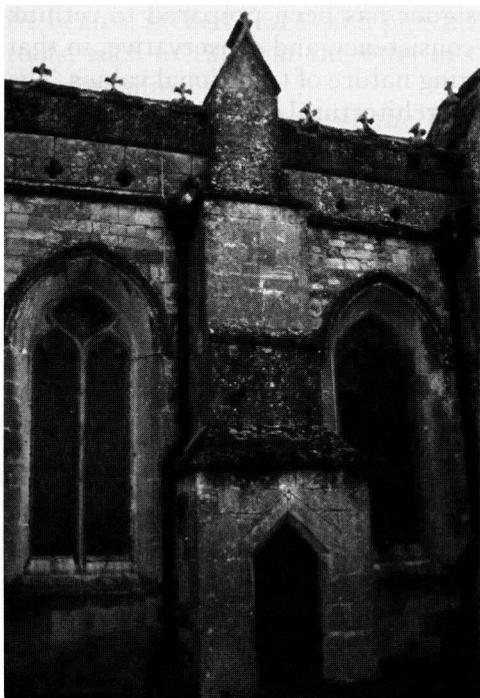


Fig. 6

Exterior, north side of chancel, St Michael,  
Urchfont, Wiltshire

The chancel of the parish church at Urchfont in Wiltshire is one example: with its single, tunnel-vaulted space and distinctive, and high quality detailing, it is almost a miniature exercise for the Bristol choir. It has a priest's door made of straight-sided arches (Fig. 6), typical of an interest in using straight lines where curves were normal, as can be seen in St Augustine's in the inner arches of the 'stellate recesses', the priest's door in the Berkeley Chapel, and the tracery of the Newton Chapel east window. The rib pattern of the tunnel vault, with its ribs crossing in mid-arch, is almost identical to the aisle vaults at Bristol. Outside, the ridge of the gable is topped by a row of simplified fleur-de-lis, as are the gable tops of the broad, flat buttresses: the same motif can be seen at the gable tops and finials of the fourteenth-century pinnacles of both the Elder Lady Chapel and the Berkeley Chapel (Fig. 6).<sup>22</sup>

Urchfont's chancel arch, Transitional work with its billet-patterned moulding, appears to have been taken down and re-erected to match the pointed curve of the fourteenth-century tunnel vault. Such an undertaking implies an interest in conserving, adapting and displaying past architecture in a way that is very similar to what we have seen in the Bristol Elder Lady Chapel and Berkeley Chapel.

Indeed, this building seems to contain the shadow of other Romanesque ideas. The vault is almost identical to twelfth-century vaults at the Toussants church,

Angers and Fougeré, Maine-et-Loire, and the broad, flat buttresses outside the building are Romanesque in character (Fig. 6).<sup>23</sup> It is tempting to wonder if it both replaces and refers to a rib-vaulted Romanesque chancel much like those still extant at St John's and St James's in nearby Devizes.

Another building with strong links to the Bristol choir is the exceptionally rich hexagonal Outer North Porch at St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol. Internally, in particular, the parallels are strong: one can profitably put the internal elevation of one of the two bays that have side doors side-by-side with the internal elevation of the choir aisles at St Augustine's. Both are two-storey elevations; both have set in their lower stage a 'stellate' arch; both have an upper stage with large windows and a highly emphatic wall passage, piercing the width of the buttresses between each bay. The emphatic, almost brutal, manner in which the window nearest the tower is simply cut in half where it meets the tower wall is both bold and characteristic: something similar can be seen in the blocking of half the choir aisle window nearest the east end of the Elder Lady Chapel at St Augustine's. In addition the newel stairs in the porch and those in the Berkeley Chapel are both topped by a distinctive 'bell' capital. There are parallels outside, too: the north door, with its 'stellate' curves; and the two side doors, with finials that are identical to the otherwise-unique 'poppy-head' finials of the Elder Lady Chapel recesses and Berkeley Chapel sacristy door. But here the similarity ends: the exterior of the building is one of the richest examples anywhere of the baroque, ogee-encrusted world created in such buildings as the Ely Lady Chapel or Heckington parish church in Lincolnshire, but very different from the Bristol east end.

At St Mary Redcliffe one can again discern an interesting relationship to the architecture of the past: in particular, at the point where the Outer North Porch joins the thirteenth-century Inner North Porch, the mouldings of the thirteenth-century outer door have been cut into. Their ends have had to be finished off by carving them into stiff leaf sprays, an act which, if it is really a fourteenth century intervention, shows an extraordinary level of understanding of past fashions in architecture (Fig. 7). The north door, with its continuously-carved orders, may draw inspiration from West Country Romanesque doors such as the south door



Fig. 7

The junction of the thirteenth and fourteenth-century work in the North Porch at St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol

of Malmesbury and the west door of the Glastonbury Lady Chapel; and its central order is a richly-carved row of nailheads, another historic motif in modern guise.

A close relationship to St Augustine's can also be seen in the strainer arches in the crossing at Wells Cathedral. The large, unfoiled open circle which fills the spandrels of these arches can be paralleled with the mouchettes in the aisle bridges at Bristol; the broad, comparatively simple, continuous mouldings of the strainer arches, as well (as Richard Morris has pointed out<sup>24</sup>) as the wave mouldings on the (earlier) interior top storey of the tower above, echo the approach to mouldings taken in the Bristol choir arcade and aisle bridges. The strainer arches combine a sparseness of detailing with a bold engineering of space and structure: these are again very 'Bristol' qualities, and they can also be seen in the way buttress bays and window bays alternate at Urchfont, and the way the St Mary Redcliffe porch's hexagonal vault sits on six colossal buttresses which penetrate the interior and exterior of the structure.

Backwell parish church, near Nailsea, has a small chantry chapel on the north side of the chancel, and here is another 'Bristol' building. Although the chapel was considerably reworked in the seventeenth century, it includes a tunnel vault with a half-hexagonal profile and a screen front with a curiously shaped arch, half curve and half straight line, enclosing a colossal carved finial.<sup>25</sup>

St David's Cathedral, Pembrokeshire, has a stellate recess, very similar to the stellate recesses in the north aisle of St Mary Redcliffe, and other 'Bristol' features can be seen in the pulpitum-cum-tomb built by Bishop Gower before 1347. But the most ambitious series of 'Bristol' motifs can be seen in the huge Bishop's Palace, especially in the straight-side arches of the doors.<sup>26</sup>

Here we are moving into the realm of secular architecture, and a fine series of such arches can be seen around and in the Great Hall at Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire. There is also the chapel, now the Morning Room, which can best be compared to Urchfont: the windows run behind a fine wall corridor, almost an aisle, and the corridor has alternate windowed and blank bays, much like the arrangement at Urchfont. Even closer are the springers for the wooden roof in the apse which, though of poorer quality carving, are in design almost identical to the vault springers at Urchfont, albeit carrying three shafts instead of one.<sup>27</sup>

Near the chapel, a small circular room provides access between the chapel and the private chambers beyond. The arch to this room has a motif that comes directly from the eccentric world of the Berkeley Chapel sacristy, indeed it is almost an architectural in-joke: an ogee arch set in a corner and as a result, broken at right angles about a third of the way across its span.

Again at Berkeley Castle there is evidence of a close attention to the detail of past architecture. The outer wall of the Great Hall has three deep Romanesque openings, faced on the other side by a row of polygonal-headed windows. More specifically, of the eleven straight-sided arches in the building, six spring from label stops that are made from poorly-carved knobs of stiff leaf (Fig. 8). It is not clear if these have been reused from elsewhere or carved specially, but either way – unless they are the result of later restoration – they betray the kind of attitude to



Fig. 8

'Stiff leaf' label stops and 'Bristol' arches at Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire

the past that we saw at Urchfont, St Mary Redcliffe, and in the side chapels at St Augustine's.

This interest in re-using and referencing past architecture in fourteenth-century buildings is not solely a 'Bristol school' idea, though examples this frank and consistent are unusual. One nearly-contemporary (and perhaps not unconnected) example, the south transept at St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester (now the cathedral), stands out: Christopher Wilson has said that the entire Norman gable of this transept must have been re-erected, with its blank Norman arches intact, to allow the fourteenth-century window there to be inserted.<sup>28</sup>

Buildings such as Gloucester (from *c.* 1331) and William Joy's other work at Wells (from 1329), as well as the Lichfield Lady Chapel (from 1315), the Wells Bishop's Palace (from 1285) and St Stephen's Chapel in the Palace of Westminster (from 1297),<sup>29</sup> show signs of being key sources for, or being influenced by, the Bristol work, but that is a question of influence: the group of buildings currently under discussion share a much more narrow and specific stylistic vocabulary. Taken together they indeed suggest the work of a master, masters, or lodge working in the south west, of whose work the eastern half of Bristol is either the inspiration or the largest surviving structure.

Information on dates, masons and patrons only exists for a handful of these buildings. William Joy was in charge at Wells from 1329 and an 'enormiter

deformata' in the church is mentioned in 1338, after which the strainer arches were presumably built. The St David's Bishop's Palace was built, probably by Bishop Gower, in 1328-47. The wings of Berkeley Castle containing the Great Hall and the chapel were all rebuilt after Thomas III Lord Berkeley took the castle back from Edward II: works were carried out in 1327-8, 1342 and 1343-4. Urchfont and Backwell are undated, and we have no knowledge of the circumstances of their building, though it is hard to imagine a mason of national stature like Joy working in these otherwise undistinguished parishes.<sup>30</sup> There is also no date or patron for the St Mary Redcliffe porch, though the south aisle with its stellate arches may date from the 1330s or 1340s, and the Berkeley family were involved with the church at other periods.<sup>31</sup> Linda Monckton has suggested a master working under William Joy at Wells (and, on the basis of the above, perhaps Bristol) in the 1320s and 1330s, before going on to work independently on the St Mary Redcliffe south aisle and south transept from the 1340s.<sup>32</sup> This is one model which might fit other buildings described here.

While the precise nature of the connection between these structures remains unclear, taken as a group, they do provide us with a date range within which the 'lodge' or 'school' was known to be working: *c.* 1325 to *c.* 1345.

At St Augustine's itself, we have a handful of dates. Abbot Newland's Roll, a fifteenth-century text, states that work was begun under the treasurer Edmund Knowle in 1298. The building was incomplete in 1311, when the Canons told the Bishop of Worcester that the church was threatening ruin; and later the Canons were impoverished because of the expense of building work; in spite of this, in 1339, the building was in need of being 'properly roofed'. While there are burials in the eastern half relating to deaths in 1309, 1321, 1327 and 1337, no one was buried in the choir until 1353. The stained glass in the choir has been dated to the 1350s-60s on the basis of heraldry.<sup>33</sup>

The only mason with documentary evidence for having worked on the abbey is Nicholas de Derneford, who is mentioned in a petition of before 1316, or perhaps 1309.<sup>34</sup> On the basis of mouldings evidence, Richard Morris has linked him to the middle sections of the aisle walls of the choir, and suggested three phases of work, with another mason, Thomas of Witney, responsible for the lower parts, the Newton Chapel (a space that originated as the transept chapel of the Romanesque transept, but which was later remodelled), and the choir aisle bay adjoining it; and William Joy, for the aisle vaults and perhaps the insertion of the stellate recesses into Witney's aisle wall.<sup>35</sup>

There is more to be said, however, about the question of patronage of St Augustine's. First, it was an Augustinian abbey, and the abbot is likely to have been involved in the construction of his new choir. Here the strongest evidence for a specific connection lies at the beginning of our date range for the building. We have the account of Abbot Newland's Roll, which states not only that Edmund Knowle 'buildded the church new from the fundamentes with the vestary', starting on Assumption day 1298 at six o'clock,<sup>36</sup> but that he became abbot in 1306. The period was a significant time for the Augustinian order. It and the other older

orders found themselves upstaged by the rising popularity of the Mendicants. In 1298 Pope Boniface VIII re-confirmed the order's traditional rights;<sup>37</sup> friaries appeared in Bristol from the 1230s, with further foundations in 1256, 1266, and 1313;<sup>38</sup> by the early fourteenth century they were the only other monastic institutions of any size in the town.

Richard Morris has argued that the Newton Chapel and the adjoining choir aisle bay represent an early phase of the building's history: and the Newton Chapel does indeed contain relatively conventional late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century motifs. More distinctive is the use of short vertical straight lines in an otherwise typical Geometrical tracery pattern, very close to the east window of c. 1269-1301 at Tintern.<sup>39</sup> The choir aisle bay next to it, clearly designed for a hall church, uses a less adventurous version of the vaults present in the rest of the structure.

Although St Augustine's was the largest ecclesiastical institution in Bristol, and older orders like the Augustinians were traditionally not as committed to what we would call 'accessibility' as the new orders, the church had no special cult to attract local loyalties (apart from the small chapel of St Jordan, a local saint said to have accompanied St Augustine, in the churchyard<sup>40</sup>), and was located much farther from centres of population than the Carmelite, Dominican and Franciscan friaries. At the very least, this would have made dependence on aristocratic support all the more important, but the people of Bristol rarely gave to St Augustine's,<sup>41</sup> and it is widely accepted that across Europe the 'old' orders often found the rise of the Mendicants far more threatening than this.

The evidence for aspects of the design of St Augustine's being motivated by a desire on the part of the monastic community to 'modernise' their church may therefore appear reasonably strong, but it is entirely circumstantial. Few friars' churches of the period are known (the royal foundation of the Greyfriars in London in 1306 is the most relevant example), and in any case their requirements focused on naves, and there is no evidence that the Bristol design was intended to extend west of the crossing. Paul Crossley<sup>42</sup> has argued that both Bristol and the mendicants' churches should be seen in the context of an infusion of secular motifs, especially those from castle great halls, into church architecture from the thirteenth century.

The evidence for the involvement of the Berkeley family is much more direct. We have seen how the church appears to be built for a burial programme; and that every burial in the aisle recesses during the fourteenth century was of a Berkeley. It is also true that almost every Lord Berkeley from the twelfth century to the fifteenth was buried at St Augustine's. Indeed, the Abbey's founder in 1170 was Robert Fitzharding, the key figure in the transformation of the Berkeley family from aldermen in Norman Bristol to lordly Gloucestershire family; and the family's loyalty to the abbey over many centuries was exceptional even by medieval standards.<sup>43</sup>

The heraldic evidence at St Augustine's is explicit: of seventy-five probable fourteenth-century coats of arms known for the choir, thirty-six are Berkeley, and

of the rest five are for England. The remainder are said to split into two groups: in the stained glass, the fraternity of a series of lordly families of 'the Berkeley following',<sup>44</sup> first brought together in the campaign against Edward II and the Despensers in 1321 and then fighting for Edward III at Calais and elsewhere;<sup>45</sup> in the Berkeley chapel frieze, the marriage of Berkeley and Ferrers.<sup>46</sup> It is hard to think of a building of this scale and date more consistently emblazoned with the arms of a single family (Fig. 9).<sup>47</sup>

Thanks to the work of John Smyth in the seventeenth century, and the survival of many records at Berkeley Castle, the family is exceptionally well documented.<sup>48</sup> There were three Lords Berkeley over the period 1298 to 1353, and it is worth looking briefly at each of their lives, as represented by Smyth, to see what they can bring to bear concerning the reconstruction of St Augustine's as a unique kind of family mausoleum.

The three lords concerned are Thomas II (lord 1281-1321), Maurice II (lord 1321-6) and Thomas III (lord 1327-61). Smyth depicts Thomas II as an effective, if unremarkable, local magnate, who spent a large part of his life in military service, spending months at a time in Wales, Scotland or France on eighteen occasions in the twenty-six years from 1281 to the accession of Edward II in 1307. But he is not renowned for his piety. Smyth even rebukes his known religious giving: it was, he says, 'honorable, yet carried ... with a hand lesse extended then his ancestors'.<sup>49</sup> In particular, unlike both his ancestors and his descendants, Thomas II neglected to re-confirm early in his barony the gifts made by his ancestor Robert Fitzharding when he founded St Augustine's. This was not done until 1307, and then only jointly with the future Maurice III Lord Berkeley.<sup>50</sup> Rehl speculates that this may have been under pressure from Edmund Knowle, who had initiated the work in 1298, seeking financial stability while building work was in progress. The Augustinian foundation of Bristol was not a wealthy one, with just six monks plus abbot, sacrist and subsacrist in *c.* 1300,<sup>51</sup> and pleading poverty to the cathedral at Worcester in 1311.<sup>52</sup> Although by 1348 the number of canons had increased to twenty-five,<sup>53</sup> the foundation must have been very dependent on donors such as the Berkeleys in the early fourteenth century.

Thomas II died in 1321, aged seventy-six, and was buried next to his wife

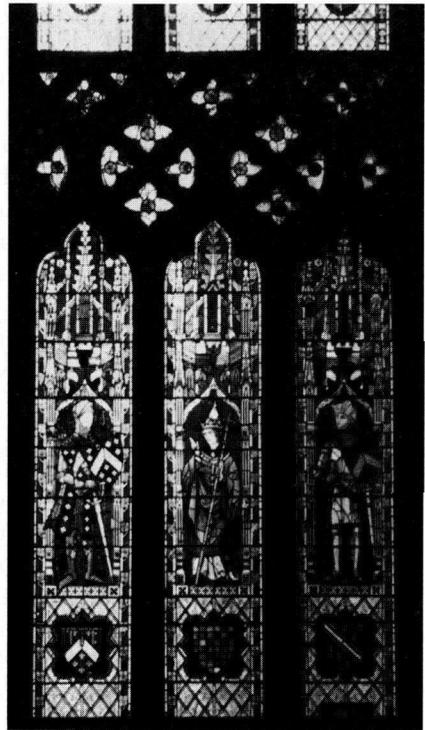


Fig. 9

Fourteenth-century glass of knights, abbot and heraldry (all much restored) in the Lady Chapel south-west window, Bristol Cathedral; the arms of Berkeley with label are in the left hand light

Joan Ferrers (died 1309) in the Berkeley Chapel tomb. Soon after his death, his son Maurice II took the side of the party opposing King Edward II and his preferment of the Despensers. Maurice fought with the Mortimers in the ensuing civil war. As a result, he was imprisoned in 1322, and the Crown took control of all Berkeley wealth until Edward II's death in 1327. Maurice II died in imprisonment at Wallingford in 1326, and his effigy is probably that immediately to the west of the Berkeley Chapel.<sup>54</sup>

Thomas III, Maurice II's successor was, by contrast, a man of energy and influence and, moreover, a man with active spiritual and perhaps cultural interests. His first wife Margaret was a daughter of Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, one of the leaders of the revolt against Edward II. Mortimer and Edward II's wife Isabella ruled England briefly together after Edward's death. Within a year of the death of his father in Wallingford Prison, Thomas III received the King himself as a prisoner at Berkeley. Within a year of that, the king was murdered within the walls of the castle. The psychological impact of all this is beyond us, but coming into the Lordship as the result of the death of one's brother at the hands of the king's party, being linked by marriage and loyalty to the revolutionary activities of Mortimer and Isabella; and the resulting regicide at Thomas's own castle, makes for a powerful combination of events.

The next ten years, from 1327 to 1336, were key ones in Thomas III's life. Throughout this time he advanced politically, receiving Mortimer and Isabella at Berkeley in 1328, and entrusted with ever increasing military and judicial roles by Edward III after his accession. By the 1340s he was among an inner circle of barons consulted by the king on key matters. Yet throughout this time he was also on trial before his peers for his role in the murder of the king. The seriousness of this crime in medieval culture should not be forgotten: although the degree to which Thomas III was personally at risk – or even held to blame – is unclear. Parliament discussed the matter several times before effectively handing the decision to the king, who pardoned Thomas in 1336.<sup>55</sup>

During this time he also set about energetically consolidating Berkeley landholdings and administering them: Smyth records 104 separate land acquisitions, with considerable detail about management of the land itself.<sup>56</sup> He benefited from Bristol's pre-eminent status as a town with a key role in the Royal castle there, though tension between the town and the Berkeleys, whose lands surrounded it, as well as between the town and St Augustine's, is a constant undercurrent in the history of Bristol from the late thirteenth century until the town was granted County status in 1373.<sup>57</sup>

There is evidence for Thomas III being culturally engaged. Smyth notes that in 1340 he had a family tree drawn up; he may also have identified the potential of John Trevisa born on Berkeley lands in Cornwall, and sent to Oxford. As chaplain to Thomas IV, Trevisa later became a major literary figure of the late fourteenth century.<sup>58</sup> While as engaged in warfare for the king as any baron of his period, he is known to have attended 'months together' at tournaments, including Blyth, York, Northampton (twice), Hereford, Coventry and Exeter.<sup>59</sup> He also funded high quality

buildings at Berkeley Castle and elsewhere on his estates.

Most significantly, Thomas III made many pious gifts: over twenty-four are recorded by Smyth.<sup>60</sup> All were to churches on his estates, and included the foundation of chantries large and small and several hermitages. The bulk of these took place in the 1340s, when he was at the height of his power, with most of the rest being in the 1330s. He died in 1361 and is buried next to his second wife Katherine in Berkeley church.

At St Augustine's, he founded two chantries – his two most generous donations to the abbey. One in 1347, was to his ancestors, and included 'the purchase of the Abbot of St Augustines a place within his monastery for a chaplen of his own to dwell in, to pray daily for the soules of all faithfull people departed; which hee inclosed with a wall';<sup>61</sup> and the other, in 1349, was one of several throughout his estates for the soul of Lady Margaret of Mortimer, who died in 1337. He 'endowed the Chaplen with divers lands and houses in Bristoll for his plentifull maintainance, there to sing for the soule of Margaret his late wife, and of himself when hee dyeth, the placebo and dirge with the comendation; and to say for humself whilst hee lived, the collect dominus qui caritatis dona cm secret, et post com pertin: And after his death the collect for dominus cui proprium est misereri, cm secret et com pertin: And the morrow after their Anniversary days shall fully singe the office of the dead with a masse'.<sup>62</sup>

These dates should not be linked too rigidly to any architectural expression of the chantries: it was not unusual for chantry construction and endowment to be widely separate in time.<sup>63</sup> Here Thomas's third contribution to the abbey is relevant: the confirmation of his ancestor's foundation gifts to the Abbey in 1331. Smyth's rendering of this as 'for the health and soule of Margaret his wife and of his heires and antecessors and of all the faithfull departed' is a neat statement of the way in which the church provides for Berkeley souls past and future in its sequence of tomb recesses and side chapels.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike his father's and grandfather's joint confirmation, this act took place early in the baronage of Thomas III, and at a time when he himself was still struggling to recover from the dilapidation wrought on his estate while it was in royal hands. A new guarantee of income would have been a key spur to renew building work after our presumed pause in 1322-7. Smyth records that at this time over half Thomas III's expenditure is on 'the wages of carpenters, sawiers, masons, wheelrights, millrights, tylers and the like'<sup>65</sup> engaged in repairing neglected buildings on his lands.

The fourteenth-century work at Berkeley Castle is cited by Smyth. First, in 1327-8 he 'somewhat rebuilt, but more beautified, his castle'.<sup>66</sup> Then in 1342 he rebuilt parts of the keep, and in 1343-4 'hee built the newe worke at the Castle, (soe then called,) which is that part without the Keepe on the northeast next the little parke, and next to the great kitchen'. That one of these campaigns included the Great Hall is implied by his subsequent description of the source for the timbers of its roof; he may also mean the chapel and adjacent rooms.<sup>67</sup> The 1327-8 phase was carried out prior to the visit of his father-in-law Mortimer and Queen Isabella,

now rulers of England, with his wife Margaret, who had not before been to Berkeley.<sup>68</sup> The timing of this series of investments at the castle reflects the investment pattern we have seen elsewhere in his life, including the gifts he made to St Augustine's – initiation early in Thomas III's career, and completion in the 1340s.<sup>69</sup>

It seems incontrovertible that the Berkeley family played a key role as patrons for the eastern arm of St Augustine's. But the precise nature of the role they played may have varied greatly. From 1298 to about the 1320s, for example, while Thomas I Lord Berkeley may have been involved in giving his blessing or financial support to the initiation of a building programme at St Augustine's, the explanation for any distinctive features of that programme is likely to lie elsewhere. From c.1320 to 1327 the Berkeleys had financial and other concerns. And from 1327 onwards, but especially in the early 1330s and late 1340s, there is a good case for Thomas III being a highly engaged patron, one who might be expected to wish to demonstrate, perhaps even overstate, his status as a model knight: chivalrous, pious and loyal.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, the patronage context as well as the existence of a handful of dated, and closely related, buildings all tend to support the thesis that most of the key features of the Bristol design date to the later end of the possible range of dates. Indeed, taking all the evidence considered thus far together, it is possible to propose a building history for the abbey: rebuilding was initiated by the Augustinians in 1298. They began by modernising two side chapels, perhaps to facilitate the moving of altars while building work proceeded on the main arm. The result is the more 'conventional' work in the Berkeley, Elder Lady, and Newton chapels, complete by c.1310. On the basis of mouldings evidence, Morris suggests, they also built the lower stages of the aisles, which have blue lias shafting, and the aisle bay adjacent to the Newton Chapel. Work ceased or slowed c.1310-5 and only began again after 1327: during this time neither the abbey nor the Berkeleys was financially secure. The main body of the church was completed from 1327, including the aisle windows and vaults, and perhaps the stellate recesses were inserted into existing aisle walls. Towards the end of it, perhaps in the 1330s or even the 1340s, with the new high altar and Lady Chapel back in use, the two side chapels were converted to act partly or wholly as chantries: the Berkeley Chapel to Thomas II, 'founder' of the new building work, buried there next to his wife in 1321, and the Berkeley ancestors; the Elder Lady Chapel to Lady Margaret, who died in 1337; Thomas III, the completer of the building work, was presumably expected to join Lady Margaret in the Elder Lady Chapel recess on his death.

This reading fits the stylistic differences we have noted: early 'comparatively conventional' work in the side chapels; a later 'brilliant and unconventional' phase for the main body of the church, and a final 'odd and unconventional' phase, when the Berkeley Chapel sacristy and Elder Lady Chapel recesses were inserted.

This model suggests that what 'matters' at Bristol is the result of a hand-picked Master working for a client, Thomas III, with a very specific agenda. Indeed, if the same master, or someone from his lodge, was at work at Berkeley Castle and perhaps elsewhere on Berkeley land, we can almost see a Berkeley 'house style'

being created. But this thesis is not unproblematic, and the issue revolves around the stellate recess in the Berkeley Chapel, tomb of Joan Ferrers and Thomas II Lord Berkeley. On the inside of the chapel, there is a bevelled line in the stonework, making it clear that the recess was inserted after the chapel had been built. The insertion of the recess presumably blocked the then entrance, necessitating the construction of another entrance, and this is perhaps part of the explanation for the sacristy,<sup>71</sup> which as we have seen must be contemporary with the Elder Lady Chapel tomb arches.

This supports Morris's view that the recess is later than the chapel, but it raises interesting questions for the aisle side of the tomb. Are we to imagine that all that happened after 1298 was the modernisation of some side chapels, and perhaps the construction of one bay of the choir aisle, standing isolated against the crossing for more than a decade? Or, at the other extreme, that the stellate recesses have been near-seamlessly inserted into an existing wall?<sup>72</sup> Neither scenario is impossible, but both might have been expected to leave some more explicit archaeological clue. Meanwhile, as the sacristy must date to the same period as the recess, the perfectly proportioned world of the main choir space and the crowded, heavy one of the Elder Lady Chapel tomb arches must be contemporary with one another; as is demonstrated by the elegance of the sacristy's door as it faces the aisle, and the use of the same string course moulding on both the Elder Lady Chapel arches and the choir aisle – but later than the walls and buttresses of the choir, into which the sacristy has been inserted. Ascribing dates to all this is equally problematic: if we choose 1309, the date of the death of Lady Joan, we imply that a radical change was made to the Berkeley Chapel at a stage when it was unlikely to have been finished; if 1321, the death of Thomas II, that the new initiatives happened at a time of financial and political chaos for the family; if the 1330s and 1340s, the dates suggested by the evidence above, then the tomb in its current form is a product of work carried out some twenty years after its first creation.

Such problems do not present obvious solutions, but they do raise interesting questions about the level of conscious choice involved in adopting different stylistic approaches in buildings of the period. Whatever 'model' of the building's history one builds up, it is striking how consistently the different stylistic approaches already identified are applied: all the 'comparatively conventional' work is within existing, or reconstructed, older structures; the 'brilliant and unconventional' is the entire body of the choir; and the 'odd and unconventional' is in those structures which link the two. Is it possible that these choices, whatever their dating, were made because they were felt to be appropriate to their respective roles? By this reading, the first of these respects the past, as an appropriate refit of an older chapel; the third, restricted to areas that provided views from the 'new' building into the 'old' one, is meant visibly to evoke (rather than simply 'fit in' with) the authority of the antique;<sup>73</sup> and the second represent the core agenda of the entirely new parts of the building. There are other ways in which Bristol teases at our conventional methodologies for dating buildings. Stylistic methods are undermined by the use of naturalistic foliage in the eastern Elder Lady Chapel recess, and stylised in the

western, two structures that are presumably of the same date; likewise the east window tracery combines motifs (the regular forms of the window head; the reticulation at its side; and the four-centred arch in the centre) normally separated by time as 'Geometrical', 'Curvilinear' and 'Perpendicular'. Also, I have referred to the repetition of certain mouldings – string courses, and the use of large ogival curves – as indicators of date or Master; but there is no reason different masons at different dates might not use a matching vocabulary of mouldings to ensure stylistic consistency.

That a highly informed and symbolically rich approach to architecture was possible at this time can be shown in just two high-profile examples: the construction by Edward I of Caernarvon Castle (from 1283), to designs that evoke Welsh Constantinian legend;<sup>74</sup> and Henry Yevele's nave at Westminster Abbey, dating from 1375, but a faithful continuation of designs from 1245 and after.

It is certainly the case that the building appears to be rich with imagistic architectural references. The most obvious of these has been commented on by several authors:<sup>75</sup> that the combination of transoms, aisles and nave of equal height, and aisle vaults which are very close in effect to secular wooden hall roofs is only found in one building type, and it is a secular one: the castle great hall.

Secular and even militaristic motifs can be found elsewhere. What remains of the aisle stained glass indicates images of knights in many windows, with one window pairing knights with military saints.<sup>76</sup> The double roll moulding on the interior side of the Berkeley Chapel sacristy door is a direct quote from a moulding profile typical of castle gates.<sup>77</sup> Inside the Berkeley Chapel itself, a row of crenellations runs behind each altar. The use of internal, decorative crenellations is not at all unusual in churches at this date,<sup>78</sup> but the prominence of these is unusual.

We have also seen how, both by conserving and re-presenting older parts of the structure, and by creating an apparently 'antique' style for the Berkeley Chapel sacristy and the Elder Lady Chapel tomb arches, the building displays an interest in evoking and respecting the architecture of the past. It has been suggested that this may even be true of the hall church idea itself: Romanesque hall churches are not unusual in the architecture of Western France, an area that had strong economic ties with Bristol, and Morris has suggested that the choir itself may replace such a building.<sup>79</sup> We have noted a similar possibility, also with apparent western French detailing, at Urchfont. The intention here may be to evoke the authority of the past, or to make exotic references: either or both would have been in the interests of a knight like Thomas Lord Berkeley, whose ancestor founded the abbey, who is known to have commissioned a family tree, and who, like most knights of his period, served his king loyally overseas.

If 'reading' details like this in such a way seems a little pat, it should not obscure the bigger picture: that throughout the building there are references not merely to military buildings in general, but to all the key values of chivalric culture: loyalty, good lineage, piety – even, in the double tombs of Lady Joan and Lady Margaret, honourable devotion to women.<sup>80</sup> As Geoffrey de Charny said in the 1350s, the finest kind of knight goes 'from strength to strength in joust and war,

loving loyally, and travelling to far countries in quest of martial experience'.<sup>81</sup>

The 'big idea', that the main space is meant to look like a castle great hall, also finds a ready context in chivalry: for it is in the Matter of Britain – the tales of Arthur – that great hall and church are united. Richard Morris was the first to raise the possibility of specific Arthurian meanings at St Augustine's,<sup>82</sup> and one aspect of the Berkeley Chapel sacristy may just relate to it.

The Berkeley Chapel sacristy is not only unusual stylistically, it is also unusual in function. There are other medieval sacristies built into churches, often on the south side of the choir aisle, such as at Salisbury and York. But none is architecturally elaborate. This not just a robing room or a storage space: it is built for every stage of the preparation of the Eucharist. The three recesses in the south wall include one with a chimney, one with a basin, and one with an empty hole that presumably was filled with some lost fitting. That with the chimney, it is usually suggested, was for the baking of Communion wafers, or the heating of coals for the censer;<sup>83</sup> and presumably that with the basin was a Piscina, for disposing of unused Communion wine and cleansing the chalice.<sup>84</sup> If other sacristies were used for such purposes, it is not reflected in their architecture.<sup>85</sup> The sacristy also raises interesting questions with regard to access: sacristies are almost always private spaces, with one small door off the aisle. This one is effectively also a corridor through to the Berkeley Chapel. With a grand doorway and an exceptionally elaborate interior, the Berkeley Chapel sacristy is meant to be noticed. Whatever the level of access to it or the chapel beyond, its presence is impossible to miss. Indeed, like the Berkeley Chapel and Elder Lady Chapel tombs, the sacristy at once announces and screens an apparently more private space connected with the Berkeleys.<sup>86</sup>

Bristol is architecturally and stylistically distinctive: in the Berkeley Chapel sacristy it appears to be functionally unusual too. It is only possible to suggest here a few speculations. Perhaps it relates to the architectural provision for a priest mentioned in Thomas III's chantry foundation of 1347, as do the twin doors in the Chapel itself providing access directly from the conventual buildings; or the building the Berkeley Chapel replaced was a sacristy, and the current structure represents a late replacement-cum-compensation. But the way in which the room seems to embody a unique kind of architecture for the preparation of the Eucharist does have a cultural context at this period: on the one hand, the significance of the Blessed Sacrament was being enhanced by the celebration of Corpus Christi, appearing in England from *c.*1320; on the other, in the Grail legends – the core of the Matter of Britain – the 'liturgy of the grail is given the setting not of a great church but of the hall of a feudal castle'.<sup>87</sup>

We are far beyond the evidence. Bristol is a challenging building, and in this may lie the essence of its significance. A date for its main design in the 1320s and 1330s may decrease Pevsner's pan-European vision of the building's importance, but it does make this an even more extraordinary period, producing Bristol as well as the Ely Octagon and Lady Chapel, the choir, retrochoir and Lady Chapel of Wells, and the Gloucester south transept. While the sources of the specific motifs that were used at Gloucester (and St Paul's Chapter House) – and which went on

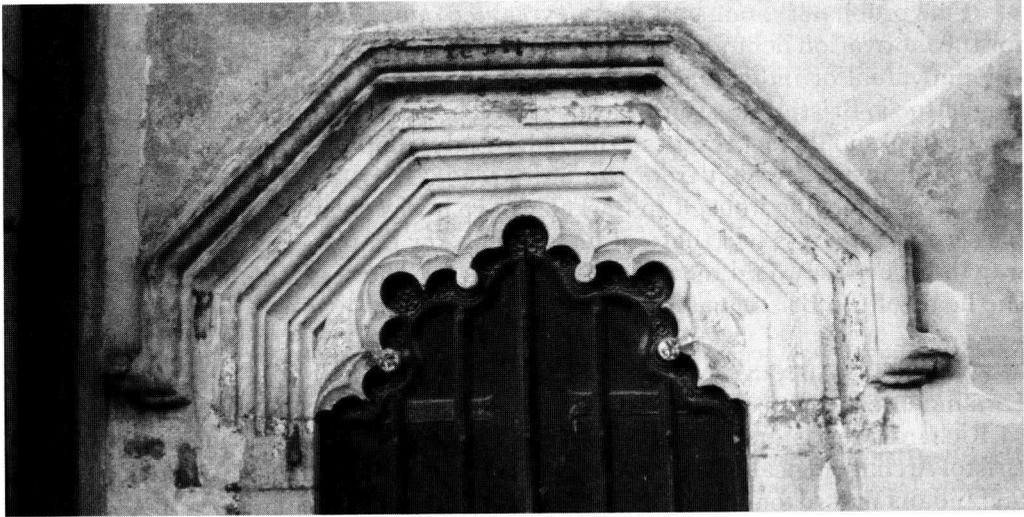


Fig. 10

Hexagonally-headed door, early fifteenth century, St Nicholas, King's Lynn

to define Perpendicular – lie elsewhere, it remains possible that Bristol represents a key aesthetic source of the style. The use of hall-like spaces, with disciplined, repeated detailing; large, smooth mouldings and an abandonment of the ogee for the rectilinear: all these ideas are more emphatically in play at Bristol than any other non-Perpendicular building of the period.<sup>88</sup> A nearby, and politically charged, comparison illustrates this: Tewkesbury Abbey (from 1317), where a Romanesque choir has been reworked to provide a florid burial place for the Despencers favourites of Edward II; then Gloucester choir (c.1351), a Romanesque choir reworked in early Perpendicular as a setting for the tomb of Edward II and perhaps associated with the agenda of the young Edward III. It then becomes rather tempting to see St Augustine's in a reaction against the luxuriance of decorated architecture under Edward II, and Gloucester as an architectural third way; rejecting some aspects of earlier fourteenth century architecture while celebrating others.

The building, because of its uniqueness, also raises methodological issues. It challenges us to think about patronage, and authorship, and style, and what the stylistic vocabulary available at a given time might have meant to those who used and viewed it. While the message of the building is aggressively conformist, it uses non-conformist means to get that across, albeit at a time when inventiveness was common in high status buildings. At the core of the current essay is an attempt to get to grips with this by analysing that which is atypical: further fruit for such studies may be found in current theoretical interest in marginality, liminality and queerness. What is certain is that its very uniqueness makes it an unusually eloquent repository of the values and culture of a fourteenth-century lordly family: and in that may lie its chief significance.

One problem remains. We have explained one absent figure, and in searching for the motivation behind this disappearance, perhaps been searching for another: the individual or individuals who motivated the design of the eastern arm of St Augustine's, Bristol. It is tempting to view Thomas III Lord Berkeley as our man: but he, too, should be present in the Elder Lady Chapel, lying next to his first wife Margaret, just a few feet from the wall arcade. Even allowing for the chivalrous gesture of removing himself to Berkeley once it was clear he would be buried with his second wife, it is odd that – if he is such a key figure – he did not go out of his way to ensure he would be buried in his church. There is still an absent figure at the heart of the Bristol eastern arm.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Sir Nikolaus Pevsner for inspiring in me a love for St Augustine's; to Richard Morris and Linda Monckton for conversations during and after the Bristol Archaeological Association conference at Bristol in 1996; to Matthew Reeve and Julian Luxford for organising the West Country Gothic conference at Cambridge in 2000, at which an early version of this paper was given; and to Matthew in particular for his comments and encouragement thereafter; and to Paul Barnwell, Anna Eavis, Allan Brodie, my Bristol University Continuing Education classes, and John McNeill for comments at various stages. The traditional assertion that in spite of this the opinions here are mine can only be strengthened by the speculative nature of some of my comments. The illustrations in this article are from photographs by the author.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. When the Elder Lady Chapel was built there was open space on its south side, separating it from the Norman choir, which was significantly narrower than the current one; the bays of the chapel do not relate to the bay width of this choir. (See plan in Paul, W. R., 'The Plan of the Church and Monastery of St Augustine's, Bristol', *Archaeologia*, 63 (1912), 231-50.). At Ely a hundred years later a passage indeed bridged such a gap, but this is a much larger church, and does not have direct access to its Lady Chapel from the transept (see Dixon, P., and Heward, J., 'A Report on the Lady Chapel Bridge, Ely', unpublished archaeological report prepared for the Dean and Chapter of Ely, 1999, cited in Maddison, J., *Ely Cathedral: Design and Meaning* (Ely, 2000)). For transeptual Lady Chapel, see Hearn, M.F. and Willis, L., 'The Iconography of the Lady Chapel at Salisbury Cathedral', *Medieval Art and Architecture of Salisbury*, BAA Conference Transactions XVI, 1996.
2. To confuse matters, thirteenth-century work throughout the Chapel, which was largely carved by a mason 'on loan' from Wells, also shows some signs of not quite fitting, perhaps as a result of having been carved *ex situ*. All the string course heads, for example, have been 'scalped' to allow for main wall columns.
3. Though, as in the easternmost bay of the chapel, it is separated from the wall column by a gap of some six to eight inches.
4. For the heraldry, see note 47 below and related text in the article; a good drawing of the frieze can be found in Paul, W. R., *op. cit.*, 241.
5. It has been suggested that these are ammonites, or (more convincingly) the snakes turned to stone by St Kenya of Keynsham, which is on the land of the Lords Berkeley; or that they may represent Medicago fruit (Rome, A., in Rogan, J., (ed.), *Bristol Cathedral: History and Architecture* (Stroud, 2000), 102), and that the fruits in the moulding are Medlars. The symbolic implications

of the very fine naturalistic carvings here and in the Elder Lady Chapel recesses alike deserve further study; some were identified by Roper, I. M., 'Flowers in Stone as Applied to Church Architecture in Bristol', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* [hereafter TBGAS or BGAS] (1913), 153-65.

6. This vault has attracted much comment. A similar unfilled vault can be seen in the pulpitum at Southwell Minster.
7. See Morris, R. K., 'European Prodigy or Regional Eccentric?: the Rebuilding of St Augustine's Abbey Church, Bristol', 46, in Keen, L., (ed.), *op. cit.*, 41-56.
8. Similar tracery in the Wells Chapter House has been linked by Peter Draper to c.1260-70 ('The Sequence and Dating of the Decorated Work at Wells', *Medieval art and architecture at Wells and Glastonbury*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions IV (1981), 18-29); the vault, however, is later: see the 'seaweed' foliage on the bosses.
9. John McNeill, *pers. comm.*
10. Not all: the spare detailing and hall-like space have given it a reputation among Bristol taxi drivers, who sometimes steer visitors arriving at Bristol Temple Meads and asking to see the cathedral towards St Mary Redcliffe, after claiming that 'Bristol has a cathedral that looks like a railway station, and a railway station that looks like a cathedral.'
11. Crossley, P., 'The Nave of Stone Church in Kent', *Architectural History*, 44 (2001), 195-221, identifies a tradition of high-status thirteenth-century hall churches, all quoting from castle 'great hall' architecture, including Winchelsea, Sussex, Nantwich, Cheshire, and Stone, Kent. He suggests that all can be linked to the court of Henry III and an emphasis on Royal *caritas*, and discusses the Bristol choir as a late and monumentally-scaled example.
12. For examples of internal aisle 'bridges' in French hall churches, see Bony, J., *The English Decorated Style: Gothic Architecture Transformed 1250-1350* (Oxford, 1979) and Rehl, B., unpublished PhD thesis, *The Fourteenth Century Choir of Bristol Cathedral* (New York University, 1984). It has been pointed out that these need not be connected to Bristol: the designer of any hall church in an otherwise basilican architectural tradition might perceive there to be a need for added support in the aisles to replace external buttressing.
13. The rapid development of tomb architecture and the increase in chantry foundations during the fourteenth century has been linked to the increased importance of the doctrine of Purgatory (Paul Barnwell, *pers. comm.*).
14. These are not only decorative: intriguingly, Fol 202v of the Psalter, which is c.1340 has a large portrait of the patron, Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, and the armorial crests on his helmet and horse take just such a form. For an illustration, see Camille, M., *Mirror in Parchment* (London, 1998). In architecture, concave patterning is not unusual around the end of the thirteenth century, albeit bounded by circles and thus less striking in its effect: see Bony, J., *op. cit.*
15. Rearrangements to the tombs must have taken place from soon after the first burial in each. Joan and Thomas II Lord Berkeley in the Berkeley Chapel died more than a decade apart; although the canopy is original, the current monument is a seventeenth-century tomb chest and there is no trace of what form the original took; Lady Margaret died before her husband Thomas III and, after he married again, is said to be buried with her son Thomas IV who died in 1368 from wounds sustained at Poitiers, in the Elder Lady Chapel recess; the presumed tomb of Maurice III next to the Berkeley Chapel is slightly too large for its recess; that of Thomas I, which follows, is too small and has been inserted from the previous church. Previous Lords Berkeley were buried in the crossing and the nave; the site of many of their tombs has probably been lost. Similar problems exist with regard to chapel dedications: there were in total five side altars by the end of the fourteenth century, but the dedication of none of them is known for certain, though St Maurice had a chapel somewhere in 1281 (Paul, *op. cit.*, gives the north choir aisle) and one of the altars in the Berkeley Chapel has been said to be to St Kenya of Keynsham. John Rogan says this chapel was once dedicated to the Virgin Mary; it has traces of much wall painting including, in the soffits of the south window, the robbers at the Crucifixion (Eleanor Pridgeon, *pers. comm.*); see Rogan, J., (ed.), *Bristol Cathedral: History and Architecture* (Stroud, 2000); Bagnell-Oakey, M. E., 'On the monumental Effigies of the Family of Berkeley', *TBGAS* (1890-1), 89; Paul, W. R., *op. cit.*, plan.

16. The work of Thomas of Canterbury, for example in the choir screens at Canterbury Cathedral (1304-20), is perhaps the nearest contemporary comparison.
17. The frequent association of foliate heads, or 'Green Men', with tombs at this time (for example, Edmund Crouchback, Westminster Abbey; Gervase Adelard, St Thomas, Winchelsea) adds to the evidence that this arch was planned as a high-profile tomb.
18. A key precedent in church architecture may be the unvaulted hall church at Nantwich, Cheshire. In aesthetic terms, the simple, but finely detailed massing of Welsh castles such as Caernarvon is a good comparison, and is the origin for the large wave mouldings used in the choir piers and elsewhere, Maddison, J., cited by Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, 46 and 51.
19. Pevsner, N., 'Bristol Troyes Gloucester: the Character of the Fourteenth Century in Architecture', *Architectural Review*, 113 (1953), 89-98; *An Outline of European Architecture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1954), 67-9; *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol* (London, 1958), 372, etc.; Bock, H., 'Bristol Cathedral and its place in European Architecture' in *Bristol Cathedral: 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 1165-1965* (Bristol, 1965), 27; Bony, J., *op. cit.* John Harvey has in many publications speculated about the possible Islamic or other 'eastern' sources for the use of 'stellate' arches made of concave curves.
20. Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, 42.
21. Rehl, B., (1984), *op. cit.*; Coldstream, N., *The Decorated Style: Art and Ornament 1240-1360* (London, 1994); Morris, R. K., *op. cit.* Wilson, C., in Alexander, J., and Binski, P., (eds), *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400* (London, 1987), cat 487, bridges the two approaches, giving the building a firm cultural context while assuming an early date and a precocious design. The formal argument is made in more detail in his PhD thesis (see note 28 below).
22. The Elder Lady Chapel pinnacles are something of an architectural fantasy, with their 'toy' castellated flying buttresses. One is tempted to ascribe them to an ill-informed restoration, but they are visible in early engravings and on close inspection are plainly original; likewise the fleur-de-lis at Urchfont, shown in an engraving of 1806 (see Critall, E., (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Wiltshire* (London, 1975), facing 176). For evidence of a marked change of mind while building the choir parapet at St Augustine's, see Holmes, J.G., 'A Lost Architectural Feature at Bristol Cathedral', *Proceedings of the Clifton Antiquarian Club*, IV (1899), 217-9.
23. For the Toussants, see Rehl, B., *op. cit.*; Bony, J., *op. cit.*, ills 292-4, provides photographs of the Fougeré, Urchfont and Bristol aisle vaults.
24. Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, 48.
25. The heraldry is fifteenth century. For Backwell church, see Burbridge, Rev. E., 'Historical Sketch of St Andrew's Church, Backwell', *Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society's Proceedings*, XXVII (1881), 15. Pevsner wonders if the tower is also Bristol-related.
26. See Turner, R., and contris, 'St David's Bishop's Palace, Pembrokeshire', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 80 (2000), 87-194; for other citations see Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, n 76.
27. See Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, 49, and Faulkner, P. A., 'Berkeley castle', *Archaeological Journal*, 122 (1965), 197-200. The castle at Beverstone, Gloucestershire is also cited by Faulkner; it was built by Thomas III Lord Berkeley and includes further sophisticated work of the period.
28. Wilson, C., *The Origins of the Perpendicular style and its Development to circa 1360*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of London, 1980). The south west window of this transept has an arch built of reclaimed zigzag moulding, *à la* Urchfont.
29. For St Augustine's and William Joy, see Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*; for Wells Bishop's Palace see Rehl, B., *op. cit.*; for Lichfield, see Maddison, J., 'Building at Lichfield Cathedral during the Episcopate of Walter Langton', *Medieval art and architecture at Lichfield*, BAA Conference Transactions XIII (1993), 75; for St Stephen's and Gloucester, see Pevsner, Bony, 19, and Wilson, 19, all *op. cit.*;
30. The side chapel at Backwell may be to a member of the Rodney family, which expanded its holdings in the parish in 1342, Burbridge, Rev. E., *op. cit.*, 17. Urchfont was owned by the Nunnaminster at Winchester, and the rector was ordered to renew the chancel in 1302, while a chantry was founded in the church by a minor local landowner in 1349; Crittall, E., *op. cit.*, 173-90.
31. For the dating see Monckton, L., 'The Myth of William Canynges and the Late Medieval Rebuilding of St Mary Redcliffe', in Keen, L., (ed.), *op. cit.*, 57-67; and Wilson, C., *op. cit.* For

- Berkeleys in the same church see, for example, the reputed effigy of a thirteenth-century Lord Berkeley in the north transept; and the Berkeley heraldry on a late fourteenth-century boss in the north aisle. St Mary Redcliffe in the Berkeley manor of Bedminster.
32. Monckton, L., in Keen, L., (ed.), *op. cit.*, 63.
  33. Jeayes, I. H., (ed.), 'Abbot Newland's Roll of the Abbots of St Augustine's Abbey by Bristol', *TBGAS*, 14 (1889-90), 128; Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*; Bettey, Dr J. H., 'St Augustine's Abbey 1140-1539', in Rogan, J., *op. cit.*, 27; Sabin, A., 'The 14<sup>th</sup>-Century Heraldic Glass in the Eastern Lady Chapel of Bristol Cathedral', *Antiquaries Journal*, 37 (1957), 54-70. It is worth noting that Abbot Newland's Roll gives as much space to the Berkeley foundation of the abbey as to the history of the abbots themselves; indeed a copy of it was among the muniments at Berkeley Castle.
  34. Taylor, A. J., 'A Petition from Master Nicholas de Derneford to Edward II', *TBGAS*, 98 (1981).
  35. Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, 41.
  36. Jeayes, I. H., (ed.), *op. cit.*, 128. Knowle also built the 'Kynges Hall' and the 'Kynges Chamber' and repaired and covered the 'Freytoure'. The Gothick-looking door at the south end of the current cloister may date from this period.
  37. Rehl, B., *op. cit.*
  38. Lobel, M. D., (ed.), *The Atlas of Historic Towns*, 2 (London, 1975).
  39. For a reconstruction of the window based on work of 1848 see Robinson, D. M., *Tintern Abbey* (Cardiff, 1995), 54-5. Robinson also reconstructs the pulpitum and links its design to Bristol.
  40. Leland mentions a chapel there containing the tomb of this reputed companion of St Augustine of Canterbury. The foundation story of the abbey is bound by association with this cult and the possibility that it reflects a Saxon church of some kind in the vicinity. See Dickinson, J. C., 'The origins of St Augustine's Bristol', in McGrath, P., and Cannon, J., (eds), *Essays in Bristol and Gloucestershire History: The Centenary Volume of the BGAS* (1976), 109-26; Ross, C. D., 'College Green in the Middle Ages', Ralph, E., and Rogan, C., (eds) *Essays in Cathedral History* (Bristol, 1991), 19-22; the latter also mentions, without substantiation, the possibility of Berkeley family interest in the saint.
  41. Ross, D., in Ralph, E., and Rogan, C., *ibid.*, 19-22.
  42. See note 11 above.
  43. Golding, B., 'Burials and Benefactions: an aspect of Monastic Patronage in Thirteenth Century England', in Ormrod, W. M., (ed.), *England in the Thirteenth Century*, Harlaxton Symposium Proceedings for 1984 (Stamford, 1985), 71-3.
  44. Sabin, A., *op. cit.*, 67.
  45. *Ibid.*
  46. Paul, W. R., *op. cit.*, 240.
  47. For heraldry, glass and burials see Sabin, A., *op. cit.*; Brown, S., 'The Stained Glass of the Lady Chapel in Bristol Cathedral', in Keen, L., (ed.), *op. cit.*; Paul, W. R., *op. cit.*; Bagnell-Oakley, M. E., *op. cit.*, 89-100.
  48. Smyth, J., in Maclean, I., *The Berkeley Manuscripts: Lives of the Berkeleys, Lords of the Honour, Castle and Manor of Berkeley, in the County of Gloucester* (BGAS, 1883).
  49. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 201.
  50. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 201.
  51. Rehl, B., *op. cit.*, 10.
  52. See note 33 above.
  53. Bettey, Dr J. H., 'St Augustine's Abbey 1140-1539', in Rogan, J., *op. cit.*, 27.
  54. Bagnell-Oakley, M. E., *op. cit.*
  55. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 75-80.
  56. See note 69 below.
  57. Thomas II was punished financially by the Crown after a series of violent confrontations with the merchants of Bristol relating to control of Redcliffe Hill; these flared up again under Thomas III in 1331; the city's founding charter ignored the existence of a Liberty around the abbey close, itself on Berkeley land. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 26-34, 69, 61; Fleming, P., 'Conflict and Urban Government in Later Medieval England: St Augustine's Abbey and Bristol', *Urban History*, 27 (2000), 325-43.

58. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, attributes this to Thomas III, but his dating is based on an error made by William Caxton when he typeset Trevisa's translation of the *Polycronicon*. Fowler, D., *The Life and Times of John Trevisa, Medieval Scholar* (Washington, 1995).
59. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 301.
60. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 333-9. That to St Maurice in Newport contained interesting stipulations as to the purity of lifestyle expected of its priest.
61. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 334-5.
62. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 335.
63. John McNeill, *pers. comm.*
64. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 333-4.
65. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 299.
66. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 308-9.
67. Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 308-9.
68. *Ibid.*
69. Of 104 purchases recorded by Smyth, thirty are in the 1330s and fifty-four in the 1340s: Smyth, J., *op. cit.*, 301-2, 325.
70. If Sabin, *op. cit.*, is right he even requested a heraldic scheme in the glass which celebrates the role he and his peers played in the rebellion against Edward II and their subsequent loyalty to Edward III, while passing over the arms of Thomas's rather politically sensitive father-in-law.
71. Or, as Richard Morris suggests, the Berkeley chapel itself was intended to be a sacristy until the decision was taken to focus its function on Berkeley interests, Morris, R. K., in Keen, (ed.), *op. cit.*
72. Although Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, n44, cites Warwick Rodwell as pointing out that those on the south side all have relieving arches over them. The Berkeley Chapel tomb is markedly less seamlessly fitted on both sides than any other.
73. In other words, it appears Gothick precisely because it is attempting to evoke the past without understanding it.
74. See Colvin, H. M., (ed.), *The History of the King's Works*, I (London 1963), 370-1.
75. For example, Wilson, W., Morris, R. K., and Crossley, P., all *op. cit.*
76. Brown, S., in Keen, (ed.), *op. cit.*, 110.
77. A Romanesque example is the Barbican gate at Castle Rising, Norfolk.
78. Examples abound in high status buildings of the period: the motif may originate in the intention of St Stephen's Chapel in The Palace of Westminster.
79. Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, 51.
80. For chivalry see Keen, L., *Chivalry* (Yale, 1984); Huizinga, J., *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London, 1924).
81. Keen, L., *op. cit.*, 12.
82. In Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, 51; see also Morris, R. K., 'The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm: Castle Symbolism in the Reign of Edward I and his Successors', in Strickland, M., (ed.), *Armies, Chivalry and Warfare in Medieval England and France*, Harlaxton Symposium Proceedings for 1995 (Stamford, 1998), 63-81.
83. Suggestions from Pevsner (1958), *op. cit.*, 377; Rogan, *op. cit.*, 102.
84. This is more sink than piscina in the usual sense; it has a lead filling and hole, with the plug chain intact, all of uncertain date.
85. Wilson, C., in Alexander and Binski, (eds), *op. cit.*, cat 487, points out that the provision of elaborate architectural furnishings is typical of the period: see the Easter Sepulchres of Heckington, Lincs., and the stone desk in the south choir aisle at St Peter's Gloucester.
86. Both the inner and outer doors of the sacristy are designed to hold doors; the Elder Lady Chapel, on the other hand – while its use after the new Lady Chapel was open is not certain – is likely to have remained more open.
87. Keen, L., *op. cit.*, 62.
88. Direct influence is harder to demonstrate. Morris, R. K., *op. cit.*, 52, has suggested All Saints and Temple churches in Bristol; I would like to add to this the fifteenth-century church of St Nicholas, King's Lynn, which has Bristolian polygonal door arches (Fig. 10).