

## SOMERSET PERPENDICULAR: THE DATING EVIDENCE

by *John H. Harvey*

The predominance of the Perpendicular style in the surviving mediaeval buildings of Somerset is very well known. Most of the churches of the ancient diocese of Bath & Wells were erected in the two centuries from 1350 to 1550; in the same period there was much building of houses and rebuilding of monasteries in the same style. Thus far we are on firm ground, but more precise dating for individual builds is unusually difficult to find. By unlucky accident, very nearly all the county's probate records earlier than 1528 had long ago disappeared without trace. The contrast with the extremely rich documentation for the London area, for Yorkshire, and particularly for East Anglia, is painful.<sup>1</sup> There is, besides, only a single Somerset licence to crenellate in the whole period, that for Nunney Castle of 28th November 1373.<sup>2</sup>

To an unusual extent the chronology of late mediaeval work in the county depends upon stylistic evidence, but there has so far been little advance upon the extremely generalized criteria available for England as a whole.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly noticeable in regard to the distinguished church towers—50 or more in number—which have been classified and re-classified on grounds of fenestration and other features, and appreciated aesthetically, yet are for the most part vaguely and incorrectly dated in the literature. An outline of dating criteria for the major towers has already been published,<sup>4</sup> but the present essay is an attempt to explore the available evidence in a more general way. As elsewhere, it consists primarily of arch forms, tracery and mouldings, together with associated details such as cusping and ornament.

To set against the general lack of evidence, there exists documentation of some kind for more than 80 separate builds at parish churches, with a few at other buildings. This yields well over 100 forms of tracery, for example, spread over the 160 years from *c* 1380 to *c* 1540.<sup>5</sup> The degree of precision in dating varies considerably but is sufficient to place every build within its appropriate quarter-century. This enables the whole period to be subdivided so that the total of stylistic evidence can usually assign a given build with reasonable accuracy to a particular generation.

As throughout England, so in Somerset, there is a major stylistic frontier which roughly corresponds to the change of dynasty in 1485. Again, as elsewhere, the onset of 'Tudor Gothic' anticipated the battle of Bosworth by some years and new forms occur after *c* 1475.<sup>6</sup> At Court, the reintroduction of Curvilinear motives and an accentuated interest in the flowing ogee line can be associated with the return of Edward IV in 1471 from his exile in Flanders, during the Kingmaker's readeption of the

Lancastrian Henry VI. Flemish influence, soon to be followed by an immigration of foreign artists and craftsmen, became steadily more marked as time went on. In Somerset, however, the county style of late Perpendicular was so robust as to provide a backbone of continuity until the Reformation and beyond. Even as late as 1610—13 Wadham College in Oxford, built by Somerset masons, was a noteworthy example of Gothic survival.<sup>7</sup> Renaissance forms are virtually absent from the county until after 1540.

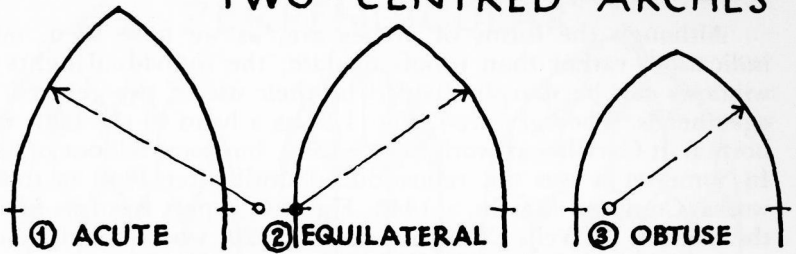
## FEATURES OF STYLE

### I. Arch-forms (see Fig. 1. 1—6)

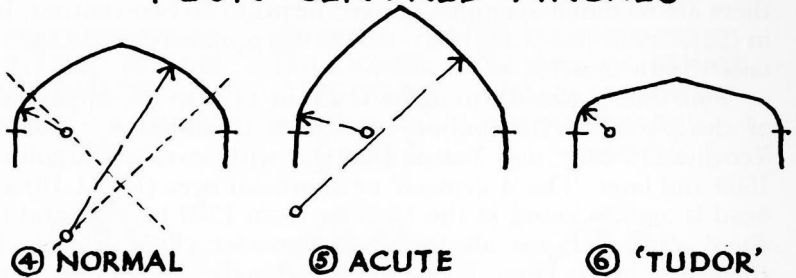
The shapes of arches are indicative of date, but not in any absolute sense: a west doorway beneath a large window sometimes has a four-centred or other flattened type of arch for convenience; and the same often applies to the windows of a clerestory. The four-centred arch had made its appearance in England *before* the onset of the Perpendicular style, in the Exeter Cathedral pulpitum of 1317—25 and in the south transept (side) windows of Gloucester Abbey in 1331—35. Therefore the existence of a four-centred arch cannot by itself be regarded as a criterion for more precise dating. Nevertheless in normal parochial work it is a form decidedly rare before 1475. Doorways at Compton Martin and Congresbury can be rather vaguely associated with the dates 1443<sup>8</sup> and 1469<sup>9</sup> respectively, and the pointed-segmental arch stilted above the springing, quasi-fourcentred in appearance, occurs at Chew Magna (Fig. 2.7) in 1448,<sup>10</sup> and again in 1486 at Hinton St. George.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, four-centred heads to windows, and especially to doors, are extremely frequent at dates from 1476<sup>12</sup> (High Ham) to 1544 (Pawlett)<sup>13</sup>—the proportions among dated builds are 23 of 1476 and later against only 3 of *c* 1420—*c* 1469. The semicircular or 'round' arch, almost altogether obsolete in Gothic, reappears about 1443, by coincidence both at Compton Martin and at Farleigh Hungerford.<sup>14</sup>

The two-centred, or typical Gothic arch, had taken on several forms by the opening period of Perpendicular. It is impossible to regard the use of acute or depressed (drop) arches, as against the normal (equilateral or 60°) Gothic arch, as precisely distinctive of date. Yet in this case also, the lowering of the apex of a two-centred arch by striking its arcs from centres moved inwards from the jambs, is in most cases a sign of relatively late date; whereas the normal or the slightly acute arch (with centres outside the jambs) is more common in earlier Perpendicular, and becomes unusual in Tudor Gothic.

### TWO-CENTRED ARCHES

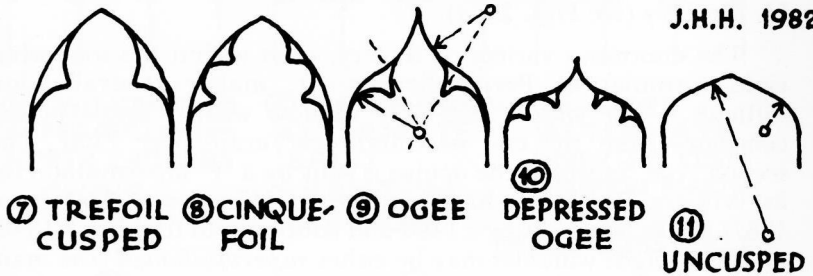


### FOUR-CENTRED ARCHES



### HEADS OF LIGHTS

J.H.H. 1982



### FORMS OF CUSPS

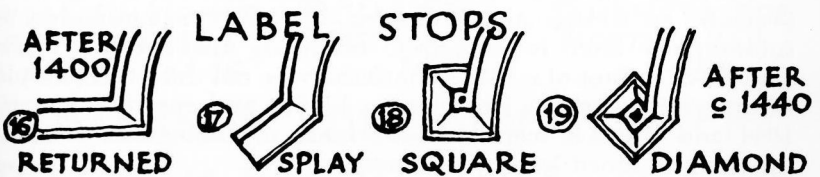
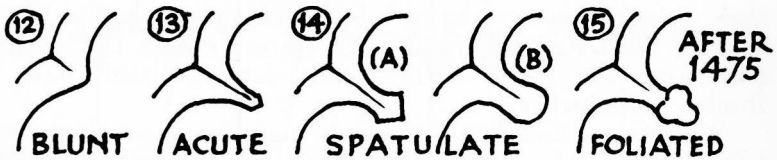


Fig. 1.

### Heads of Lights (see Fig. 1. 7—11)

Although the forms of arches are, as we have seen, only indications rather than proofs of date, the individual lights of windows can be sharply divided by their use of two-centred or ogee heads. The *ogee-arch* (Fig. 1.9) as a head to the light was normal in Curvilinear work before 1350, but soon fell out of use. In Somerset it was not reintroduced until after 1440 in dated works (Compton Martin, *c* 1443, Fig. 2.6), apart from its use in the cloisters of Wells Cathedral after *c* 1420, where the design is markedly of Gloucester type. In the century from 1440 to 1540, there are 63 dated examples of ogee heads to 38 two-centred; but in the second fifty years 1490—1540, the proportion is 46 ogee to only 15 two-centred.<sup>15</sup>

*Four-centred* heads to lights begin in 1484 in the upper story of the porch at Glastonbury, St. John the Baptist,<sup>16</sup> then at Yeovilton (1486)<sup>17</sup> and Yatton (1491),<sup>18</sup> with several examples of 1509 and later. The '4-centred' or *depressed ogee* (Fig. 1.10) as a head is mainly found in the 30 years from 1509 to 1539 and the dated examples are all in West Somerset (Fig. 4.5—7, 9). *Uncusped* heads (Fig. 1.11) are found only after 1500; dated examples in churches range from 1509 to 1522.

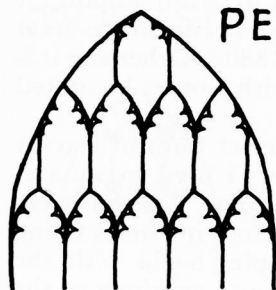
### II. Tracery (see Figs. 2—4)

The enormous variety of tracery, even within the somewhat rigid formulas of Perpendicular art, makes generalization difficult.<sup>19</sup> The simple two-light window with a single *oculus* continues from the end of Curvilinear until after 1500. The second type, in which the *oculus* is split by a 'Y' supermullion (as in William Wynford's hall windows at Winchester College of 1387) was in Somerset by *c* 1400 and continues to the end, *c* 1540.

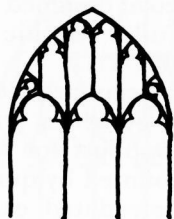
Three-light windows may be either *supermullioned* (the main mullions continuing up to the arch, together with supermullions from the apex of each side-light; e.g. Fig. 2.2, 4, 7) or *alternate*, where the straight reticulations may be open, or filled with some form of 'split-Y' tracery, or with subreticulation (e.g. Fig. 2.1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9). Dated supermullioned tracery covers 1382—1535; alternate tracery 1403—1514. These dates probably have no absolute significance.

Windows of four lights and over may be *subarcuated* (Fig. 3.2, 9). Traceries without subarcuation date from *c* 1380 (Yeovil)<sup>20</sup> to Cleeve Abbey cloister of 1535.<sup>21</sup> Subarcuation is substantially later in Somerset, occurring first in the Wells Cathedral cloister of *c* 1420,<sup>22</sup> but otherwise not until the Temple Church west window, Bristol, of *c* 1445;<sup>23</sup> and continuing until 1541 and later. It seems to be a mark of distinguished work, probably designed by major architects.

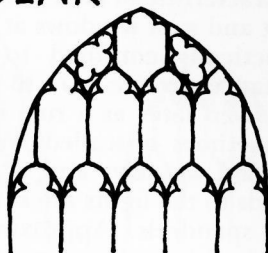
## PERPENDICULAR



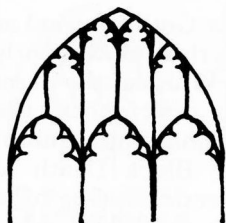
① TWO-CENTRED  
'BRISTOL SCHOOL'  
ALTERNATE  
YEOVIL S. SIDE  
c 1380



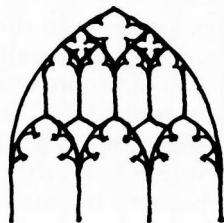
② SUPER-  
MULLIONED  
CHEDDAR  
N. CHAPEL  
c 1382



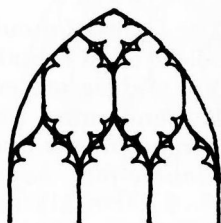
③ TWO-CENTRED  
'BRISTOL' ALTERNATE  
WELLS ST. CUTHBERT  
SOUTH CHAPEL  
c 1402



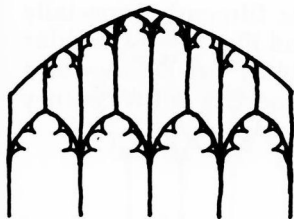
④ TWO-CENTRED  
SUPERMULLIONED  
NORTH CADBURY  
CHOIR  
c 1415



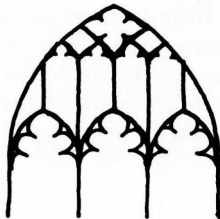
⑤ TWO-CENTRED  
ALTERNATE  
'SPLIT'  
SPAXTON  
c 1434



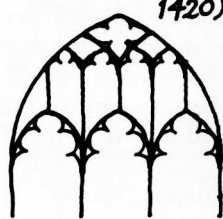
⑥ OEGE  
ALTERNATE  
INVERTED CUSPS  
COMPTON MARTIN  
c 1443  
(WELLS CLOISTER, c  
1420)



⑦ TWO-CENTRED  
SUPERMULLIONED  
CHEW MAGNA  
N. AISLE c 1448



⑧ TWO-CENTRED  
ALTERNATE  
CHARD  
SOUTH AISLE  
c 1453



⑨ TWO-CENTRED  
ALTERNATE  
HENSTRIDGE  
NORTH AISLE  
c 1454

## SOMERSET WINDOW TRACERY

DIAGRAMS NOT TO SCALE

J.H.H. 1982

*Subreticulation* (Fig. 3.4, 6—9; Fig. 4.6) is an important characteristic of later Somerset style, though it occurs in the great east and west windows at Yeovil designed *c* 1380.<sup>24</sup> Otherwise it is practically confined to Tudor Gothic with some 17 dated instances from *c* 1475 to 1540.

Even later as a rule is a peculiarly Somerset form of tracery (sometimes miscalled 'West Somerset tracery') used in square-headed windows and as a support for transoms. Cusped ogee-heads to the lights are surmounted by quatrefoils in circles filling the spandrels. Approximately dated examples begin with the north aisle at Langport (Fig. 3.9) of 1499<sup>25</sup> and continue to the belfry transoms of the Batcombe tower of 1539.<sup>26</sup> The only instance which may date back a few years seems to be the belfry transom of the tower at Evercreech, which is in any case likely to have been built very late in the fifteenth century.

### III. Mouldings and Details (see Fig. 1)

The forms of mouldings used within the late Gothic period as a whole are less valuable as dating criteria than those of the Early English and Decorated phases of architecture. Whereas the onset of Perpendicular was announced by sharp differences: the appearance of the *double-ogee* and *casement* mouldings, and of the *double-fold base*, development after the Black Death of 1348—9 is irregular and obscured by much eclectic copying for a period of two centuries. These generalizations, true of England as a whole, hold good for Somerset.

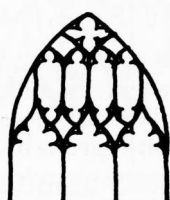
Little can be deduced from the mere occurrence of a moulding-form. The double-ogee, characteristic as it is of the earliest Perpendicular, may be found until the end (e.g. Chewton Mendip west doorway and tower-arch of *c* 1540).<sup>27</sup> The wave-moulding, in general use in Decorated work of the earlier fourteenth century, is found throughout the fifteenth, especially in tower arches (see *Towers*, pp. 179—80 and Fig. 1): at Cheddar and Banwell soon after 1400, at Mells (1446),<sup>28</sup> at Dundry and elsewhere in towers of the third and fourth quarters of the century and as late as 1533 at Old Cleeve.<sup>29</sup>

### Cusping

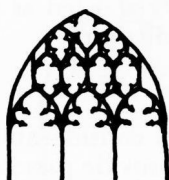
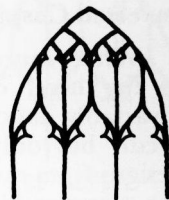
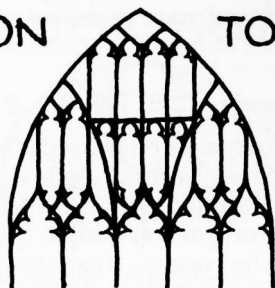
The main division, between trefoil and cinquefoil cusping of the heads of lights, is not an indication of date within the Perpendicular and Tudor periods.<sup>30</sup> When trefoil cusping (Fig. 1.7) is used at a date later than *c* 1450 it may rather indicate the influence of the Gloucester 'school', some of whose influential masters worked outside their own region. On the other hand, the use of cinquefoil cusping (Fig. 1.8) in narrow tracery lights is a mark of high-class work, carried out regardless of expense



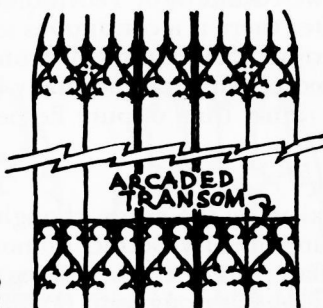
## TRANSITION TO TUDOR



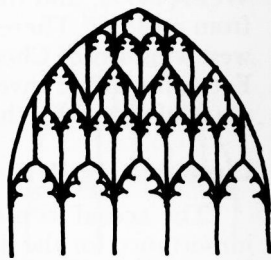
OGEE ALTERNATE AND SUBARCUATED  
 ① CHANCEL ② EAST WINDOW ③ NAVE  
 HIGH HAM 1476



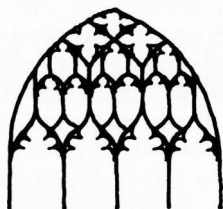
④ 2-CENTRED  
 ALTERNATE  
 SUBRETICULATE  
 YEOVILTON  
 c. 1486



⑤ OGEE SUPERMULLION  
 WELLS CATHEDRAL  
 CLOISTER LADY CHAPEL  
 1477-1488



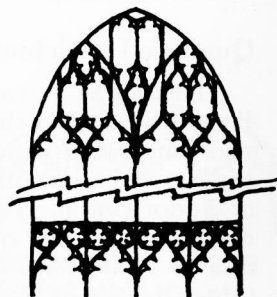
⑥ 2-CENTRED ALTERNATE  
 SUBRETICULATE  
 TAUNTON, ST.  
 MARY MAGDALENE  
 1488



OGEE ALTERNATE SUBRETICULATE  
 ⑦ ST. CATHERINE'S  
 EAST WINDOW  
 c. 1490



⑧ TICKENHAM  
 WEST WINDOW  
 c. 1497



⑨ OGEE SUBARCUATED  
 'W. SOMERSET TRACY.'  
 LANGPORT N. AISLE  
 c. 1499

# SOMERSET WINDOW TRACERY

DIAGRAMS NOT TO SCALE J.H.H. 1982

Fig. 3.

(contrast the chancel and nave windows at High Ham, 1476, in Fig. 3.1, 3)

### **Inverted Cusping** (see Fig. 2.6; Fig. 3.1, 2, 4, 5, 9; Fig. 4.1, 4, 5)

Where *inverted cusping* is employed, that is at the base as well as the head of narrow vertical lights in tracery, it almost invariably denotes a date later than *c* 1460. Earlier instances do occur, but only in work of very high quality and probably in designs from outside the county. Instances are the west window in the tower at North Cadbury (? *c* 1400) and the east cloister at Wells Cathedral (*c* 1420), markedly of Gloucester derivation. Otherwise the earliest firm datings are in the chancel at High Ham (Fig. 3.1, 2) of 1476,<sup>31</sup> the Cloister Lady Chapel (Fig. 3.5) at Wells (1477), and the west window of Yeovilton (Fig. 3.4) dating from *c* 1486.<sup>32</sup> Thereafter there is a continuous series down to the west windows of Chedzoy (*c* 1539)<sup>33</sup> and Chewton Mendip (1541). Extensive use of inverted cusping can normally be regarded as a mark of Tudor Gothic rather than of pure Perpendicular.

### **Cusps** (see Fig. 1.12–15)

The actual forms taken by the cusps, though of considerable importance for the dating of early Gothic, do not provide precise criteria in Perpendicular. Acute cusps of long projection, and spatulate cusps, are found throughout (*c* 1370–1540). The shorter blunt cusp (Fig. 1.12) of slight internal projection, is rarely found after 1450. On the other hand, foliated cusps (Fig. 1.15) are mostly late (Wells Cloister Lady Chapel, 1477; Yeovilton, 1486).

### **Quatrefoil enrichments**

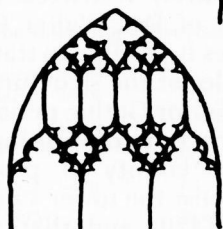
There was extensive use of quatrefoils before the onset of Perpendicular but this had died out in Somerset well before 1400, and the reintroduction of bands of quatrefoils in squares, with or without shields or other enrichments held in the cusps, is a mark of Tudor Gothic. This applies to bands of quatrefoils as surface decoration, to the quatrefoil parapet (see *Towers*, Fig. 3), and also to quatrefoil-roundels in tracery as we have already seen (above p. 54). This motive seems always to be a clear mark of work designed after *c* 1485, so far as Somerset churches are concerned, and is the most generally useful criterion.

### **A note on vaulting**

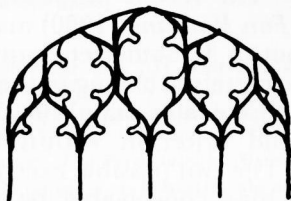
Outside the cathedrals, vaulting is rare, apart from decorative miniatures in niches. Various forms of lierne vault are almost universal in Somerset Perpendicular. The structural vaulting that



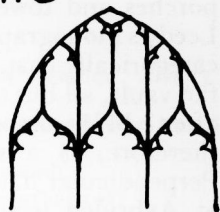
## TUDOR GOTHIC



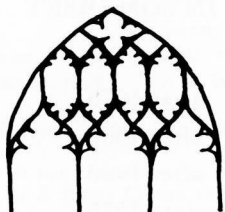
① DOUBLE-CUSPED  
OGEE ALTERNATE  
WESTON  
ZOYLAND  
SOUTH TRANSEPT  
(c. 1493-1510)



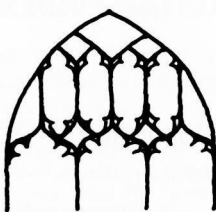
② OGEE TREFOILED  
SUPERMULLIONED  
NORTH  
PERROTT  
EAST WINDOW  
c. 1500



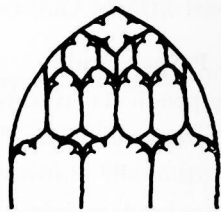
③ OGEE SUPER-  
MULLIONED  
WANSTROW  
SOUTH CHAPEL  
EAST WINDOW  
c. 1504



OGEE ALTERNATE  
INVERTED CUSPS  
④ DUNSTER  
NORTH AISLE  
1504



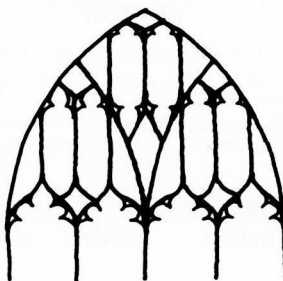
DEPRESSED OGEE ALTERNATE  
⑤ HILL FARRANCE  
WEST WINDOW  
c. 1509



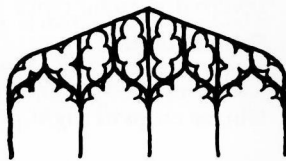
DEPRESSED OGEE ALTERNATE  
SUBRETICULATE  
⑥ BISHOP'S  
HULL  
EAST WINDOW  
c. 1523



⑦ DEPRESSED OGEE  
SUPERMULLIONED  
BROOMFIELD  
NORTH AISLE  
WEST WINDOW  
c. 1535



OGEE ALTERNATE  
SUBARCUATED  
⑧ BATCOMBE  
WEST WINDOW  
c. 1539



DEPRESSED OGEE  
SUPERMULLIONED  
⑨ CLEEVE ABBEY  
CLOISTER  
c. 1535

## SOMERSET WINDOW TRACERY

DIAGRAMS NOT TO SCALE

J.H.H. 1982

Fig. 4.

does occur in parish churches is almost entirely restricted to porches and towers. The recent publication of Dr. Walter C. Leedy's monograph *Fan Vaulting* (1980) makes it possible to state categorically that, out of 37 Somerset examples of the structural fan vault, all but two certainly belong to the Tudor Gothic period after *c* 1475; almost all are later than 1490. This form of vaulting, therefore, is a sound criterion within the county of post-Perpendicular date. The two possible exceptions: the tower vault at Axbridge which may conceivably be *c* 1420, and that at Croscombe, perhaps inserted as early as *c* 1450–75, are isolated peculiarities, if indeed they have been correctly dated.

### SUMMARY OF DATING EVIDENCE IN SOMERSET

#### I. Perpendicular

Perpendicular tracery		after 1370	
Tracery with 'split Y' supermullion		after 1380	
Horizontally returned label mouldings		after 1400	
Ogee heads to lights	(Decorated)	before 1375	
	(Perpendicular)	after 1420	(Wells)
	generally	after 1440	
Subarcuated tracery		after 1420	(Wells)
	generally	after 1440	
Four-centred openings		after 1440	
Diamond-stops		after 1440	
Inverted cusping (with rare exceptions)		after 1460	
Subreticulation	generally	after 1475	
	at Yeovil, possibly elsewhere	from 1375	
Obtuse cusps of slight projection	mostly	<i>before</i> 1450	

#### II. Tudor Gothic

Subreticulation	generally	after 1475
Four-centred heads to lights		after 1475
Quatrefoil enrichments and battlements		after 1485
'West Somerset' tracery (so called)		after 1490
Depressed ogee heads		after 1500
Uncusped heads to lights		after 1500

## Notes

The following abbreviations are used:

Colchester & Harvey 1975	L.S. Colchester and J.H. Harvey, 'Wells Cathedral', <i>Arch. J.</i> , CXXXI for 1974, 1975, 200–14.
Harvey 1949	J.H. Harvey, <i>An Introduction to Tudor Architecture</i> (Art & Technics).
Harvey 1978	J.H. Harvey, <i>The Perpendicular Style</i> (Batsford)
RCHM	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England)
SANHP	<i>Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society.</i>
SRS	Somerset Record Society.
TAMS	<i>Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society.</i>
Towers	J.H. Harvey, <i>The Church Towers of Somerset</i> , TAMS, XXVI, 1982, 157–83.
VCH	Victoria County History.
Wadley 1886	T.P. Wadley, <i>Wills . . . in the . . . Great Orphan Book and Book of Wills, . . . Bristol</i> , (Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society).
Weaver 1890	F.W. Weaver, <i>Wells Wills 1528–1536</i> .
Wickham 1952	A.K. Wickham, <i>Churches of Somerset</i> (reprint, with a preface by B. Little, 1965).
Woodforde 1946	C. Woodforde, <i>Stained Glass in Somerset</i> .

1. It has been shown in regard to the parish churches of Norfolk by Paul Cattermole and Simon Cotton that there are some 900 items of documentary evidence from before 1500 for dating builds in 350 churches; of these some 68 churches have evidence going back before 1400. I am much obliged to Mr. Cattermole and Dr. Cotton for a preview of this material.
2. M. McGarvie, *Nunney and Trudoxhill: an historical sketch*. (Nunney Silver Jubilee Committee, 3rd ed., 1977), 10; cf. S.E. Rigold, *Nunney Castle* (H.M.S.O.) 1956.
3. For the period, see Joan Evans, *English Art 1307–1461* (1949); G. Webb, *Architecture in Britain: the Middle Ages* (1956); Harvey 1978; Cf. *Towers*, 173 note 9.
4. TAMS, NS XXVI, 157–83; hereafter cited as *Towers*.
5. Figures 2–4 show in chronological order a selection of the most firmly dated traceries, to provide a rough key to the development of style in the county. The designs in Fig. 2 are strict Perpendicular; those in Figs. 3 and 4, with extensive use of ogee curves and inverted cusping, trace the emergence of the distinct 'Tudor Gothic' style.
6. See Harvey 1978, 13, 208, 235–6; Harvey 1949, 78 (the Abbot's Tribunal, Glastonbury of c 1515) for an example of simplified uncusped Tudor windows.
7. RCHM, *City of Oxford* (1939), 118.
8. SRS, XIX, 337.
9. Wadley 1886, 148.
10. SRS, XIX, 346
11. SRS, XVI, 263
12. Wickham 1952, 33
13. SRS, XL, 63
14. Above, note 8; T.J. Miles & A.D. Saunders, 'The Chantry Priest's House at Farleigh Hungerford Castle', *Medieval Archaeology*, XIX, 1975, 177.
15. Statistics refer only to builds where there is some evidence of fairly precise date, though the degree of accuracy varies.
16. A.M. Boyd, *A History of St. John's, Glastonbury* (n.d.), 11; Cf. Woodforde 1946, 47.
17. SRS, XVI, 261.

18. SRS, IV: Churchwarden's accounts.
19. For the nomenclature, with diagrams and distribution maps, see Harvey 1978, 68–72; figs. 6–9, 12; maps V–X.
20. SRS, XIX, 287.
21. R. Gilyard-Beer, *Cleeve Abbey* (H.M.S.O., 1960), 8.
22. Colchester & Harvey 1975, 209–10.
23. Wadley 1886, 54, 91, 129; *Worcestre Itin.* (ed. Nasmith, 1778) 228 (MS., p. 138)
24. SRS, XIX, 287.
25. *Ibid.* 3.
26. SRS, XXI, 54; XL, 24; SANHP, LXI (1916), 57, 99.
27. SANHP, LXI, 57, 95.
28. SRS, XIX, 345.
29. Weaver 1890, 77.
30. Trefoil cusping preceded cinquefoil cusping in the pre-Perpendicular age, but the distinction after 1350 is more relevant to the identification of the topographical 'school' than to dating.
31. Wickham 1952, 33.
32. SRS, XVI, 261.
33. Somerset Record Office, DD/X/SR, p.40.

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