MATERIALITY AND REFLEXIVITY BETWEEN SEDILIA AND CHOIR STALLS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

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Sedilia are the seats situated to the south of an altar for the celebrating priest, deacon and subdeacon. They often take the familiar form of three deep stone niches, set into the thickness of the south wall by the altar, surmounted by arches and separated by shafts. This type of sedilia was particularly prevalent in England between 1200 and 1400 – around 800 examples survive in English medieval churches – and has been dubbed "classic" sedilia by the current author in his PhD thesis, the first full-length study of the genre as a group.[1] "Classic" sedilia initially developed as a practical solution for seating through the clever use of existing decorative vocabulary in middle-rank churches, which subsequently flourished in parish churches rather than great cathedrals and abbeys. This is because medieval great-church architecture tended towards open arcades flanking the high altar, which does not facilitate the recessing of seats into the wall. Choir stalls, in distinction to sedilia, had folding misericords for support during the daily offices, as they were intended to seat the entire clerical staff of a collegiate or monastic church, and thus were originally only found in greater churches. Stalls with folding misericords are not known to exist in parish churches until the mid-fourteenth century.[2] Consequently, for the thirteenth and much of the fourteenth century, sedilia and choir stalls had very separate identities that stemmed from their differing materialities and the status of the churches in which they were

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[1] James Alexander CAMERON, "Sedilia in Medieval England", PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2015.
[2] Charles TRACY, *English Gothic Choir-Stalls, 1200–1400* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1987), xx–xxi; Donald O'CONNELL, "Medieval Choir Stalls in English Churches", in John MCNEILL (ed.), *King's Lynn and the Fens, Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 31 (Leeds: Maney, 2008), 230–33.

installed. This chapter will investigate the situation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when sedilia and choir stalls more frequently came to be simultaneously included in the same ensemble of liturgical furniture in a single church, and the reflexive exchange of motifs between wood and stone.

Sedilia developed from the dado arcade, a very common motif in Anglo-Norman Romanesque and Early English Gothic architecture.[3] Therefore the language of English sedilia is primarily architectural in nature: the same as decorative wall-arcading and statue niches. Choir stalls, however, are characterised by forms suited for seating a human body, such as shaped armrests and back supports, as well as folding misericords for support while standing. This distinction can be seen in the hospital church of St Mary, Chichester (Sussex) [Fig.1]. This building is closely datable to 1290, as in that year it is recorded that a public footpath needed to be closed in order to expand the chancel eastwards.[4] The nave-cum-ward of the church, now divided into private dwellings, is covered by a huge single-span open-timber roof. The chancel is architecturally like that of a parish church, but set apart by the fact that it has the earliest complete surviving set of canopied choir stalls in England.[5] As is to be expected of wooden choir furniture, they have shaped armrests dividing the places, fold-up misericords for support while standing, and a single-screen backing, presumably to help the acoustics of the choir's singing. The sedilia, however, are based on forms taken from the sort of architectural self-referentiality popular by the year 1300.[6] As is typical, the three seats are no more than ledges in the wall, with no sign of wooden insets. The level of the seats increases in height towards the altar, meaning that the rubric of the Sarum Rite where the priest stands in front of the altar, with the deacon behind him on the *proximu gradu* and the subdeacon behind him on the *secundo gradu* would be preserved while sitting.[7] The seats are divided by polished limestone columns that support large gables, filled with pointed trefoils and topped by a leafy finial. This sort of sedilia

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[3] James Alexander CAMERON, "The Englishness of English Sedilia", *British Art Studies* 6, 2017, forthcoming, www.britishartstudies.ac.uk.

[4] Cal. Pat. Rolls 1282–92, 356, supported by stylistic comparisons.

[5] TRACY 1987, 9–12.

[6] Alexandra GAJEWSKI and Zoë OPAČIĆ (eds), *The Year 1300 and the Creation of a New European Architecture*, Architectura Medii Aevi 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); Francois BUCHER, "Micro-Architecture as the 'Idea' of Gothic Theory and Style", *Gesta* 15:1/2 (1976), 71–89.

[7] Walter Howard FRERE, *The Use of Sarum, The Original Texts Edited from the MSS* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), 67.

canopy design seems to have been *de rigueur* for chancels with ambition to develop their integral liturgical furnishings, an ambition which may have been inspired at St Mary, Chichester by the presence of the choir stalls.[8]

Later large collegiate churches continue to show this distinction of the furnishings immediately associated with the altar being carved from stone and integral with the wall, and the choir stalls constructed separately from wood. The chancel at Nantwich (Cheshire) – with that great rarity in the English parish church, a stone vault – has an exceptional ensemble of liturgical furnishings [Fig.2]. In the sanctuary, there are stone sedilia to the south of the altar, with nodding ogee arches cutting into traceried half-hexagon canopies, integral with a stone piscina, and opposite in the north wall an aumbry with a tiny vault inside. These stone furnishings of the 1330s or 1340s are accompanied by the choir stalls to the west, which have very impressive tiered spirelet canopies, albeit much restored.[9] The stalls were probably not designed as an ensemble with the sedilia, but instead in reaction to them some decades later when the upper levels of the chancel and its vault were constructed in the 1370s or 1380s.[10]

At the large and wealthy parish church of Ludlow (Shropshire), we can see evidence of competition between the sedilia and choir stalls. When originally installed under the tower c.1415, the stalls had no rear canopies.[11] The chancel was expanded in the 1440s, including integral stone sedilia with half-hexagon canopies with small ogival finials on each face – not unlike Nantwich in basic design. The choir stalls were then moved eastwards past the crossing on to a new stone plinth and, exceptionally, "upgraded" with single-screen rear canopies.[12]

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[8] For the ubiquity of the pointed-trefoil gable for Decorated canopied sedilia, see James Alexander CAMERON, "From Hole-in-the-Wall to Heavenly Mansions, The Microarchitectural Development of Sedilia in Thirteenth-Century England", in Ambre VILAIN, Clément BLANC-RIEHL and Jean-Marie GUILLOUËT (eds), *Microarchitecture et figure du bâti, l'échelle à l'épreuve de la matière* (Paris : Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2017, forthcoming).

[9] The Nantwich stalls appear to be derived from innovations in the St Werburgh's, Chester now Cathedral furniture, c.1390, therefore after the completion of the chancel vault; TRACY 1987, 59–61.

[10] John MADDISON, "Master Masons of the Diocese of Lichfield, A Study in 14th Century Architecture at the Time of the Black Death", *Transactions of the Lancashire & Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 85 (1988), 119–23 and 139–42.

[11] Charles TRACY, *English Gothic Choir-Stalls, 1400–1540* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1990), 9–13.

[12] The decoration on the back screen was removed in 1548; the extant carved canopies are the work of Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1859–60; TRACY 1987, 10.

Unlike in Late Gothic continental Europe, sedilia do not seem to have been conceived as a piece with the choir stalls.[13] Sedilia began to appear in permanent form in great churches as integral southern returns of stone altar screens, the earliest extant at Exeter Cathedral (1316–28).[14] Such altar screens were often destroyed at the Reformation, leaving the sedilia, such as Exeter's, standing alone. Before these magnificent altar screens, sedilia in great churches seem to have been surprisingly modest. As I have argued elsewhere, the many *cathedrae* documented in great-church inventories may represent chairs that clergy owned and had set up for themselves when they were to say mass.[15] The commission for the marvellous stalls at Winchester Cathedral, dated to around 1308, does not seem to have included any sanctuary furniture for the officiating clergy.[16] At the time of their installation, the cathedral would still have had its Romanesque apse, and it is plausible that the wooden bench dated to the thirteenth century and now in the south nave aisle was used as surprisingly humble sedilia [Fig. 3]. Its curved seat and frame show it was clearly designed for a particular space, suggesting that it could have sat to the south of the altar and represented the thirteenth and early-fourteenth-century configuration of the Norman apse.[17]

At Westminster Abbey, the choir stalls closely documented to c.1255 were unfortunately destroyed in 1775, but appear to have been the earliest "double screen" type: where a front screen of supports held up a canopy over the seats, as at Winchester Cathedral.[18] The sedilia for the high altar at Westminster Abbey, however, were not installed until c.1307.[19] They

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[13] See the chapter by Angela Glover in this volume.

[14] Percy MORRIS, "Exeter Cathedral: A Conjectural Restoration of the Fourteenth-Century Altar-Screen Pt. I", *Antiquaries Journal* 23 (1943), 122–47; Christopher WILSON, "The Neville Screen", in Nicola COLDSTREAM and Peter DRAPER (eds), *Medieval Art and Architecture at Durham Cathedral*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 3 (London: The BAA, 1980), 90–104.

[15] James Alexander CAMERON, "Sedilia in Choro Sunt Fracta', The Medieval Nomenclature of Seating in Churches", *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 168 (2015), 118–22.

[16] Charles TRACY, "The 14th-Century Choir Stalls", in John CROOK (ed.), *Winchester Cathedral, Nine Hundred Years, 1093–1993* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1993), 9–12.

[17] Simon JERVIS, *Woodwork of Winchester Cathedral* (Winchester: Friends of Winchester Cathedral, 1976), 11–12.

[18] TRACY 1987, 1–4.

[19] For a summary of the complicated circumstantial dating for this set, see James Alexander CAMERON, "Competing for Dextra Cornu Magnum Altaris, Tombs and Liturgical Seating in English Churches", in Ann ADAMS and Jessica BARKER (eds),

hold the distinction of being the first sedilia not built into a wall, but constructed between the piers of an aisled presbytery. Perhaps because of this pre-eminence, they were constructed of wood rather than the typical stone. However, they still take on the general appearance of canopied sedilia rather than choir stalls, borrowing their forms from the Crouchback Tomb installed in the opposite bay a decade earlier, with quadripartite rib-vaults.[20] That the Westminster sedilia represent woodwork imitating stone construction is further suggested by some shortcomings in their construction.[21] The gables are not entirely self-supporting but instead braced by a plank that goes between the two piers, which may be due to the carpenter working with unfamiliar forms.[22] A very similar situation can be observed at the only other great church with fourteenth-century wooden sedilia at its high altar, Beverley Minster. The cathedral-scale east end was erected around the 1230s, which was fitted out with a new reredos screen in the late 1330s, cumulating in the extraordinary Percy Tomb as the north return of the reredos in the 1340s.[23] As at Westminster, the sanctuary somewhat surprisingly was completed with wooden, not stone, sedilia. The Beverley sedilia take a number of motifs such as the figures at the base on the aisle side around a metre above ground level from the no-expense-spared *tour de force* that is the Percy Tomb, but the quality is much rougher. The backs of the arches over the seats, for instance, are

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Revisiting the Monument, Fifty Years Since Panofsky's Tomb Sculpture (London: Courtauld Books Online, 2016), 142–44.

[20] Paul BINSKI, "'A Sign of Victory', The Coronation Chair, Its Manufacture, Setting and Symbolism", in Richard WELANDER, David John BREEZE and Thomas Owen CLANCY (eds), *The Stone of Destiny, Artefact and Icon* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2003), 210–11.

[21] Lucy WRAPSON, "The Materials and Techniques of the c.1307 Westminster Abbey Sedilia", in Jilleen NADOLNY (ed.), *Medieval Painting in Northern Europe, Techniques, Analysis, Art History, Studies in Commemoration of the 70th Birthday of Unn Plahter* (London: Archetype Publications, 2006), 121.

[22] For a narrative of early medieval church carpentry imitating stone masonry, see Frank E. HOWARD and Frederick Herbert CROSSLEY, *English Church Woodwork, A Study in Craftsmanship During the Mediaeval Period* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1919), 13–16.

[23] For the Minster's east end, see Lawrence HOEY, "Beverley Minster in Its 13th-Century Context", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 43:3 (1984), 209–24. For the reredos, see Nicholas DAWTON, "Gothic Sculpture", in Rosemary HORROX (ed.), *Beverley Minster, An Illustrated History* (Beverley: Friends of Beverley Minster, 2000), 120. For the Percy Tomb, see Phillip LINDLEY, *Tomb Destruction and Scholarship, Medieval Monuments in Early Modern England* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), 167–98.

entirely uncarved. However, once they were painted, the sedilia would have surely formed a cohesive ensemble around the high altar with the other fourteenth-century fittings.[24] Although made by separate craftsmen, the exchange of motifs and techniques implies that masons and woodcarvers were working alongside one another. The rib-vaults at Westminster and Beverley are an interesting early example of reflexivity between media. It has been shown that wooden vaults may have originated alongside the earliest Gothic stone examples.[25] Whereas in stone vaults ribs are essentially aesthetic, in wooden vaults the ribs actually hold the cells in place.[26] Indeed, stone vaults would have needed the participation of a carpenter in order to provide centring for their construction, so the fact that these sedilia rib-vaults appear alongside stone sculpture suggests an exchange of techniques between professions.[27]

Just as evidence of great-church sedilia is very rare, so are indications of the equivalents of monastic and collegiate choir stalls in parish church chancels, especially before the fifteenth century. Most choir furniture found in parish churches was brought in from dissolved monasteries during the English Reformation, and is not representative of the sort of furniture that would have been there in the Middle Ages.[28] However, some thirteenth-century parish churches must have had seating in the western half of their chancels for attendant clergy and the lay patron who held the right of advowson, as documented in medieval inventories as "*sedilia in choro*".[29] However, like sedilia in great churches, they seem to have been of relatively utilitarian form. The only indication of what the equivalents

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[24] The sedilia were stripped of polychrome in 1876; see Nicholas DAWTON, "The Percy Tomb at Beverley Minster, The Style of the Sculpture", in F. H. THOMPSON (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Sculpture* (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1983), 146 n.8, citing *Beverley Minster Magazine* 119, July 1876. Some small traces of gilding apparently still remain. From 1822 to 1867 the sedilia served as a screen in the retrochoir where one seat was destroyed for a passage under the current eastern canopy; Matthew Hays WOODWORTH, "The Architectural History of Beverley Minster, 721–c.1370", PhD thesis, Duke University, 2011, 209–13.
[25] M. F. HEARN and Malcolm THURLBY, "Previously Undetected Wooden Ribbed Vaults in Medieval Britain", *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 150 (1997), 48–58.
[26] Ibid., 55–56.
[27] It has recently been suggested that the remaining portion of the famous thirteenth-century "sketchbook" in the Bibliothèque nationale de France is the product of a carpenter looking at architectural forms; George BROOKS, "Villard de Honnecourt, Gothic Carpenter", *AVISTA Forum Journal* 18 (2008), 6–23.
[28] O'CONNELL 2008, 230–33.
[29] CAMERON 2015, 115–17.

of choir stalls in ordinary parish churches may have looked like comes in the form of stone armrests. These armrests often seem not to be *in situ*, but instead excavated by nineteenth-century restorers and reconstructed as a single sedile for the high altar. Sedilia in the shape of single stone chairs occur in small regional groups: for instance Farcet, Stanground and Houghton in Huntingdonshire.[30] However, many such stone chairs have only one genuine medieval armrest, its companion and the seat being modern, lending doubt to the authenticity of their construction.[31] Dateable parallels can be found in stone for such armrests: such as the Prior's throne in Canterbury Cathedral chapter house, c.1304.[32] However, as we have seen, sedilia generally eschewed references to wooden furniture, suggesting another function. At Campsall (West Yorkshire) two stone armrests form terminal ends for benches against the side walls of the chancel [Fig. 4].[33] This context can also be seen at St Peter, Aldwincle (Northamptonshire), where an armrest is set in a stone ledge behind the nineteenth-century choir stalls. It is plausible that many of these stone armrests could have enclosed stone or wooden benches in the western half of the chancel up to the chancel arch. When the seats of this simple furniture were removed, the stone uprights would have become redundant and discarded, and is therefore perhaps why they are interpreted in this variety of contexts by Victorian restorers.

The earliest proper choir stalls with misericords made for a parish church are generally accepted to be at Clifton Campville (Staffordshire). These stalls are usually associated with the founding of a chantry in the south chapel in 1361 and it should be noted they are also contemporary with a set of stone sedilia in an extension to the chancel that was

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[30] Farcet and Stanground are both just outside of Peterborough, and Houghton is 15 miles south of this near Huntingdon. Charles O'BRIEN and Nikolaus PEVSNER, *Bedfordshire, Huntingdon and Peterborough, The Buildings of England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 482, 518, 654.

[31] Other pairs of stone armrests in parish churches: Evenlode (Gloucestershire), Welsh Newton (Herefordshire), Sookholme (Nottinghamshire), Compton Beauchamp (Berkshire), Rodbourne (Wiltshire) and Linslade (Bedfordshire). Thornton Steward (North Yorkshire), Woodeaton (Oxfordshire) and Corhampton (Hampshire) have only one original armrest paired with a modern facsimile.

[32] Attributed to the post-court career of Michael of Canterbury in Christopher WILSON, "The Origins of the Perpendicular Style and Its Development to circa 1360", PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1979, 93–94. Woodman dates the chapter house and the throne earlier on account of their pre-ogee character, to at least before Pecham's tomb in the north transept c.1292; Francis WOODMAN, *The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral* (London: Routledge, 1981), 145.

[33] A. NEEDHAM, *How to Study an Old Church* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1944), 48.

undertaken at the same time.[34] Woodwork became much more common in the fifteenth-century parish church: finely carved roodscreens and lofts, font covers, as well as seating, moved towards a new concept of a building as a single architectural entity, with a unifying aesthetic. As I have argued elsewhere, micro-architectural ambition led to sedilia "breaking out of the wall" and being conceived as separate furnishings rather than integral with the elevation of the building.[35] A prime example of this is the prebendal church of Sandiacre (Derbyshire), provided with a magnificent new chancel sometime in the middle of the fourteenth century, perhaps while the prebend was held by the Bishop of Lichfield in 1342–7.[36] The sedilia [Fig. 5] demonstrate the increasing depth of the *mise-en-abyme* reflexivity with carpentry, as they are a box-like structure with tall traceried gables not unlike the Westminster Abbey sedilia: therefore a stone structure resembling a wooden object imitating stone.

After the Black Death and into the fifteenth century, integral stone furnishings fell dramatically in popularity. Despite the Perpendicular style enduring for over a century and suffering the least from subsequent changes, only around one-eighth of the corpus of English sedilia dates from this time. It is not that a plethora of sedilia had been provided: hundreds of new Perpendicular chancels were built with blank walls to the south of the altar. We might assume that wooden furniture took the place of stone sedilia, but are faced with an epistemological quandary. Firstly, wooden sedilia are very rarely documented in church accounts.[37] This is in contrast to wooden Easter Sepulchres, which are widely documented in medieval inventories and as being sold off and destroyed at Reformation; even if the only extant example is at Cowthorpe (North Yorkshire), we can be sure they were a widespread phenomenon found in many parish churches.[38] Secondly, there

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[34] S. A. JEAVES, "Medieval Woodwork in South Staffordshire", *Birmingham Archaeological Society Transactions* 67 (1948), 48; George Lyons REMNANT, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 139–40.

[35] CAMERON 2017, forthcoming.

[36] John Charles COX, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire* (Chesterfield and London: Palmer and Edmunds; Bemrose and sons, 1875), vol. 4, 370. Maddison shows that the chancel is based on motifs from Lichfield presbytery and Lady Chapel, but associates it with the "Tideswell Master" and places it in the mid-1390s; John MADDISON, "Decorated Architecture in the North-West Midlands, An Investigation of the Work of Provincial Masons and Their Sources", PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1978, 305–08.

[37] CAMERON 2015, 118–22.

[38] Charles TRACY, in Richard MARKS and Paul WILLIAMSON (eds), *Gothic: Art for England, 1400–1547* (London: V&A Publications, 2003), 388–89. For Easter

are only five wooden sedilia in English parish churches.[39] Almost unknown is the piece of furniture in St Oswald, Durham [Fig. 6]. Buried among some fifteenth-century choir desking is an extraordinary bench, with lavish decoration characteristic of mid-fourteenth-century Decorated style – indeed a number of motifs, such as the trefoil wave-parapet, find comparison with the late 1340s Beverley sedilia.[40] This carving goes over the joins, proving that the bench is not a palimpsest or cut-down. The right-hand armrest is uncarved on the exterior face – the side that would face towards the east wall if it were set up on the south side of the altar – compelling evidence for its function as sedilia. However, it is highly surprising that it has few parallels surviving in English country churches. The next example, probably dating from the late fourteenth century, is the pair of high-backed chairs at Much Hadham (Hertfordshire) which appear to be the dismembered remains of three-seat sedilia.[41] Similar to this is the little-known sedilia, in the form of a coved settle, in St Peter, Sheffield (now Cathedral) [Fig. 7].[42]

Sepulchres generally, see Veronica SEKULES, "The Tomb of Christ at Lincoln and the Development of the Sacrament Shrine, Easter Sepulchres Reconsidered", in T. A. HESLOP and Veronica SEKULES (eds), *Medieval Art and Architecture at Lincoln Cathedral* (London: The BAA, 1986), 118–31; Christopher HERBERT, "Permanent Easter Sepulchres, A Victorian Recreation?", *Church Archaeology* 7–9 (2006), 7–19.

[39] In addition to Westminster and Beverley, Hexham Abbey (Northumberland) and St Davids Cathedral (Pembrokeshire, Wales) have wooden sedilia. For Hexham, see John Eric CLARK, "Hexham Abbey: The Various Movements of the Fittings since the Dissolution", *Archaeologia Aeliana* 5th series, 39, 378–89. The St Davids sedilia amazingly always seem to escape scrutiny among the other woodwork of the cathedral. For stalls and throne, see Charles TRACY with Andrew BUDGE, *Britain's Medieval Episcopal Thrones* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2015), 57–71. They are probably coeval with the late-fifteenth-century choir stalls but have not been visited by the current author.

[40] As far as I am aware, this unique survival has never been included in a survey of sedilia. It is itemised (somewhat inaccurately) in Nikolaus PEVSNER and Elizabeth WILLIAMSON, *County Durham, The Buildings of England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 223.

[41] Frederic Gordon ROE, *Ancient Church Chests and Chairs in the Home Counties Round Greater London* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1929), 38–42. This furniture would have covered the thirteenth-century double piscina, forming a new ensemble with the contemporary single piscina to its east.

[42] The bibliography on the Sheffield sedilia is sparse; see brief mentions in Ruth HARMAN and John MINNIS, *Sheffield*, Pevsner City Guides (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 54; Francis BOND, *The Chancel of English Churches* (London: H. Milford, 1916), 198. The sedilia now stand in an eighteenth-century

The remaining two sets are found in the parish churches at Doddington and Rodmersham, only three miles apart in central Kent.[43] These sedilia are incorporated into wooden parclose screening between a south chapel and the chancel, and emphasise the seating below by the means of a wooden cove. The actual bench at Doddington, closely comparable to St Oswald, Durham in size if not elaboration, no longer stands under this cove, now kept on the north side of the chancel. Rodmersham, in contrast to this, is a more impressive and cohesive feature. The reason for the choice of the material is clear: as the chancels are aisled on the south side, traditional stone mural sedilia were impossible. Despite their proximity, the sedilia appear to be of quite separate dates. The cinquecusped panels at Doddington are typical of a mid-fifteenth-century screen, with refined foliate in-fills to the spandrels. Rodmersham is of very different motifs: round-headed cusped panels and debased rose-window motifs that could suggest an early sixteenth-century date. It appears to have been important to maintain visibility through these sedilia through piercing the back. This is because a chantry priest in a side chapel would need to be able to see the high altar in order to subordinate his elevation to that of the parish.[44] This secondary function as chantry screens means that many such sedilia would have been destroyed in the 1547 Dissolution of the Chantries, hence why there are so few remaining.[45]

An unusual reflexive stone version of such a screen is in the Trinity Chapel of Circencester (Gloucestershire). This outer north aisle dates from c.1430 and the elaborate arcade has a built-in stone screen.[46] Like Rodmersham and Doddington, the eastern bay of this screen has sedilia

extension of the north chancel aisle; the original length can be seen by the medieval piscina to their west. The typical site of the high altar sedilia in the south wall of the chancel itself is now occupied by a sixteenth-century tomb.

[43] HOWARD and CROSSLEY 1919, 140; John Charles COX, *English Church Fittings, Furniture and Accessories* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1923), 19.

[44] Eamon DUFFY, *Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 97–98. So-called "squints" or "hagioscopes" to the chancel are an extremely understudied area; see a partial bibliography in Simon ROFFEY, *The Medieval Chantry Chapel in England: An Archaeology* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 113–15.

[45] Screens between nave and chancel, after the destruction of rood and rood loft, were explicitly ordered to be kept during the Elizabethan settlement of 1561, hence why these survive in such great numbers in England; Lucy WRAPSON, "East Anglian Medieval Church Screens, A Brief Guide to Their Physical History", *Bulletin of the Hamilton Kerr Institute* 4 (2013), 38.

[46] This date is ascertained from a combination of heraldic and testamentary evidence; David VEREY, *Cotswold Churches* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1976), 35.

which would otherwise be obviated by the open bay of the arcade. As well as preserving in stone what we have lost in wood, the Trinity Chapel sedilia are also significant for their reflexive relationship with woodwork. The delicate canopies over the sedilia bench are half-hexagons with gablets on each face. This design is essentially the same as the mainstream form of choir-stall canopy such as at Nantwich: a stacked-up form very much suited to woodwork. Such sedilia canopies are very common in the smaller number of fifteenth-century sedilia that we have, a good example being the grand sedilia inserted into the presbytery of Furness Abbey (Cumbria) in the late Middle Ages, which plausibly could have referenced the choir stalls of this now ruined Cistercian church.

Both Rodmersham and Doddington have another form that is even more suited to wood: the cove on top. This comes from the natural properties of wood; that is, being able to warp flat panels. Such ceilings are also seen on the other two wooden parish church sedilia: tentatively at the cresting of the dismembered set at Much Hadham, and very clearly in Sheffield Cathedral. The coving at Sheffield is not formed of individual pieces placed between ribs, but seemingly of a single plank that has been bent via heat or pressure.[47] Of the few fifteenth-century stone sets of sedilia we have, many of them emulate this form in stone, moving away from the traditional architectural form towards more of a piece of furniture, a prime example being Piddlehinton (Dorset).[48] Another is at Southwold (Suffolk), famous for its carpentered screens and stalls, and documented in-building from the 1430s.[49] The high altar stone sedilia combine micro-architectural forms traditional to their genre with those of furniture to create a hybrid [Fig.8]. It is an undivided stone bench with shields on its base, with a mouchette wheel underneath the piscina and cruet shelves that finds close comparison with motifs on the rood screen. The vaulted coving gives it the appearance of a piece of furniture like the

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[47] For various techniques of choir-stall coving, see TRACY 1987, 67.

[48] Oxborough and Upwell (both Norfolk) are further examples that represent this uniquely fifteenth-century type of stone sedilia.

[49] The date of the new church comes from the record of a fire. Birkin HAWARD, *Suffolk Medieval Church Arcades, 1150–1550* (Ipswich: Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History, 1993), 337. The screen is dated by bequests and workshop connections to the 1450–60s, Lucy WRAPSON, "East Anglian Rood-screens: the Practicalities of Production", in Paul BINSKI and Elizabeth NEW (eds), *Patrons and Professionals in the Middle Ages, Proceedings of the 2010 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2012), 401–03. The stalls with bulky, coarse vegetative ornament and highly restored canopies, interface with the screen but are clearly later additions, probably sixteenth century; H. Munro CAUTLEY, *Suffolk Churches and Their Treasures* (Ipswich, 1937), 316–17.

Sheffield sedilia rather than a "classic" set, in keeping with the Perpendicular notion of separate furniture rather than integrated architectural fittings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sedilia and choir stalls in England began as very disparate objects despite their seemingly similar function of seating clergy. Sedilia are in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries generally only found in parish churches, as convenient ways to use walls in the sanctuary to seat the priest and his assistants to maintain visibility of the high altar. Choir stalls are generally only found in great churches until the fourteenth century, but in the fifteenth century, such elaborate woodwork makes its way into the parish church. Consequently, architecture becomes more separated from liturgical function, and integral mural sedilia fell in popularity. Even though more woodwork has been lost due to its susceptibility to decay and destruction, we can see this process set in stone in the reflexive exchange of motifs between the mason and the woodcarver in the design of sedilia.

Fig. 1: South wall of chancel with sedilia, and choir stalls, Hospital Church of St Mary, Chichester (Sussex), c.1290. © James Alexander Cameron.

Fig. 2: South wall of chancel with sedilia, and choir stalls, collegiate church (dependent chapel) of Nantwich (Cheshire), c.1330s and c.1370s. © James Alexander Cameron.

Fig. 3: Bench (former sedilia of eleventh-century apse?), north nave aisle, Winchester Cathedral, probably thirteenth century. © James Alexander Cameron.

Fig. 4: Stone choir seating, parish church of Campsall (West Yorkshire), late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. © James Alexander Cameron.

Fig. 5: Sedilia in chancel, prebendal parish church of Sandiacre (Derbyshire), possibly 1342–7. © James Alexander Cameron.

Fig. 6: Wooden sedilia, choir, parish church of St Oswald, Durham, c.1340s–50s. © James Alexander Cameron.

Fig. 7: Wooden sedilia, north chancel chapel of the parish church of Sheffield, now Sheffield Cathedral (South Yorkshire), fifteenth century. © James Alexander Cameron.

Fig. 8: Sedilia in chancel, parish church of Southwold (Suffolk), c.1430–60. © James Alexander Cameron.