The Medieval Wall Paintings of Rochester Cathedral
Submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Medieval and Tudor Studies, March 2005
Beverley Dee Jacobs

Abstract:
This work aims to capture a record of the remaining medieval wall paintings in Rochester Cathedral to be seen today, in order to make comparison with studies and records carried out in the past.

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The Medieval Wall Paintings
of Rochester Cathedral

c.1190 - 1350

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March, 2005.
by

Beverley Dee Jacobs

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The Medieval Wall Paintings of Rochester Cathedral

c.1190 - 1350.

Introduction.

This work aims to capture a record of the remaining medieval wall paintings in Rochester Cathedral to be seen today, in order to make comparison with studies and records carried out in the past. I will endeavour to show what survives well, how much has faded and what has disappeared completely. Furthermore, it is my hope that the investigation might add a little extra knowledge about the murals, and perhaps the bishops and members of the ecclesiastical community who lived and worked within the precinct.

Written antiquarian records, visual and written records of the early twentieth century, have been consulted in pursuit of these aims. Additionally, information drawn from recent conservation work, carried out on individual paintings, has provided insight into the subjects depicted, quality of art and materials used, set within the period under discussion. Publication of the works of Medieval chroniclers and Court records have helped with the historical context of the Cathedral and Priory of St. Andrew at Rochester; also reference to people to whom the murals' origins might be linked. Published studies of other medieval art forms such as illuminated manuscripts, stained glass, embroidery and textiles also make their contribution.

Records kept as a result of extensive repair and renovation work carried out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have provided information on fragments of murals which still exist and those which have disappeared.
It is eighty years since the extensive survey of murals in Rochester Cathedral and many other churches was carried out by Professor E.W. Tristram. His records, in particular the paintings made in 1922 and 1923 of some of the most notable fragments, have provided extremely useful visual references. During the last two decades architectural historians and archaeologists have published new research on the cathedral building, including re-assessment of its chronological development, rebuilding or repair. To try to imagine how some of Rochester's lost paintings may have appeared, visits have been made to other medieval cathedrals and churches. In these buildings I hoped to find murals similar to those at Rochester, of comparable dates, which would assist in providing artistic and historical background.

The approach I have used in the study of the paintings rests on the chronological dating of the fabric of the building as it is assessed today, from the earliest part of the Norman structure (in the crypt) to the latest addition (the Perpendicular Lady Chapel), where paintings, fragments or marbling are evident. This basis has been used because any approach to an understanding of the paintings is somewhat arbitrary. What remains, for the most part, are bits and pieces from a number of periods which do not appear to have a particular relationship to each other. To assist in appreciating the importance and fluctuating fortunes of the cathedral and priory and influence it could have had on the mural art, some of the history of the town and diocese of Rochester is included. Digital photography has enabled me to keep an extensive visual record in support of the study.

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Bede says that the settlement on the south side of the River Medway was called Dorubrevis, but that the English called it Hrofaescaestrae, adapted from the name of a local chieftain called Hrof. A settlement of some sort almost certainly existed near this location of the river prior to the Roman invasion and it is clear that the Romans chose this as the place for their bridge across the Medway, because it is the narrowest point of the river for some distance (Fig.1 and 3). The Roman road has provided the direct route from Dover on the south coast to London until recent times. It may already have been the route, or close to it, before the Roman occupation. As a result, the small fortified town of Rochester has played its part in some momentous historical events.

The church of St. Andrew the Apostle, Rochester was founded by AEthelberht, King of Kent, as a college for a small number of secular canons in A.D.604 (Fig.9a). Why Rochester was chosen as the site of a second foundation in Kent seems to be lost in the mists of time. It was strategically-placed and had been an important Roman town. Historically Kent had probably once been two or more Anglo-Saxon kingdoms prior to AEthelberht’s reign, (as it once again became later in the seventh century) which may have given rise to a second diocese.

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1 Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of The English People*, p.75. William Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent*, p.332, gives it a number of Latin names, including Durobrevum, Durobrovae and comments that the British called it Dourbryf.
2 *Ibid.*, p.75. *Textus Roffensis*, Medway Archive and Study Centre: Ms.DRe/R1, f.119r (Fig.9a). *Textus Roffensis*, Ms.DRe/R1, f.119v (Fig.9b) and http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/cgi-bin/interface.cgi; p.6, records, in Old English, land given to St. Andrew’s Priory in 609 by AEthelberht, in the south-western corner of the city (considered to be a forgery).
3 AEthelberht had established himself as the Bretwalda (senior king) over all English kingdoms south of the Humber during his reign, the third English kingdom to do so.
4 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp.222-223. Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.61, states that Kent became a number of different kingdoms under several obscure kings towards the end of the seventh century. As has been found in other cities, the remains of a Roman temple within the city may have provided a site for the cathedral.
Rochester Cathedral and its community were poor when compared with other dioceses, particularly Canterbury, their nearest neighbour. This was in part because the See of Canterbury owned more land within Rochester’s diocese than the latter, and as the Archbishop of Canterbury, not the king, appointed the Bishop of Rochester the latter was effectively a suffragan bishopric. Dating from Augustine’s day, this state of affairs persisted until c.1230, at times causing resentment within Rochester’s monastic community.

William of Malmesbury records that after the death of Syward, the last Anglo-Saxon bishop in 1075, the church of Rochester was reduced to a miserable state with a handful of canons living in poverty. Gundulf was sent to Rochester in 1077 to become Bishop, and subsequently commenced the rebuilding of the cathedral. The small church which had served as the cathedral, apparently for several centuries, was replaced by a completely new structure with financial help from Archbishop Lanfranc. The secular canons were replaced by a community of twenty-two Benedictine monks in c.1083, and by the early part of the twelfth century the monks had almost tripled in number (Fig.10). Gundulf built his new church on a slightly different alignment from that of the original church. Though it was considerably larger and more impressive than its Anglo-Saxon predecessor, it was

10 *Textus Roffensis*, Ms.DRc/R1, f.172r (Fig.10) records that Gundulf built the cathedral and necessary quarters for the community within the restrictions of the site. By 1108 the community had expanded to sixty monks.
relatively small by comparison with other English cathedrals. It seems that
the Norman cathedral was still in the process of construction in 1083, when the
Benedictine Community took up residence. Gundulf is also credited with
Beginning a programme of rebuilding at the east end, a programme continued by
his successor, Ernulf, in 1115, and apparently completed by his successor, Bishop
John, when the building was consecrated in 1130.

The details of the architectural history are sometimes unclear because
written records are few. Subsequent to the latter building programme, the
devastating fire in 1137 destroyed almost the entire building and reconstruction
took place. McAleer places the rebuilding of the nave to during the 1140s,
where it appears that the first five piers on the south side of the nave (where
exposed traces of a rubble construction can be seen in some places) were clad in
Caen stone sometime after 1140. The first five piers on the north side of the nave
were apparently reconstructed at the same time. The ability to date parts of
the cathedral more accurately from recent architectural and archaeological studies
has cast light on and raised queries regarding the wall paintings.

There is evidence of painted decoration in nearly every part of the cathedral. It
is clear that much has disappeared, but there are still signs of extensive sequences

11 Tim Tatton-Brown and John Crook, *The English Cathedral*, p.42. The size of the building was
constrained to some extent by lack of surrounding space, as a result of the wall defences originally
constructed by the Romans, subsequently enhanced by the Normans and, no doubt, by other
buildings within the city walls, and accounts for minimal additions to the cathedral in later centuries.
p.151 and 158, n.6. Anne Savage, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p.253, records that
the building was hallowed on the 8th May, 1130.
pp.19-20.
15 See ground plan of the Cathedral, Fig.6.
suggesting that the building was once well decorated. What does remain (with the exception of special items recently conserved) is fading fast. It seemed important, therefore, to try to capture a record of the remaining murals before they deteriorate further. It is unfortunate that repair, renovation and restoration of the building, carried out for several centuries, has been responsible for the destruction of some of the paintings, with only scant records of what once existed being available.

Rochester has been seen as the poor relation at Canterbury Cathedral’s table, but this may not be entirely accurate. The cathedral is small, and it may receive considerably fewer visitors in modern times than Canterbury Cathedral, but that may not always have been the case. Pilgrims to the Canterbury shrines (some of which pre-date that of Thomas Becket) will have broken their journeys at various places en route from London and the north, making Rochester a logical resting point.

The monks of Rochester’s Community grasped the first opportunity to acquire a saint who was nearly contemporary with Becket, no doubt hoping to improve their fortunes (and provide the wherewithal for a rebuilding programme). William of Perth, a good and pious pilgrim on his journey to Canterbury, was murdered in 1201 just outside the city, duly providing the community with their requirements.16 His shrine, which is believed to have stood in the north-east minor transept, has long disappeared. It has been suggested that the north and east minor transepts might have

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16 William, a baker from Perth in Scotland, was murdered by his servant at or near the place now called St. William’s Way, on the outskirts of Rochester.
been built in order to accommodate the extra flow of pilgrims and visitors to his shrine, where, despite the fact that he had not yet been elevated to sainthood, miracles were reported to have taken place.\textsuperscript{17}

The minor transepts were constructed, however, after the fire of 1179 (probably pre-dating St. William’s death) for the translation of the shrines of the pre-Conquest saints, Ss. Paulinus and Ithamar.\textsuperscript{18} The expected increase in wealth from St. William’s shrine did not entirely materialise, as it seems that the rebuilding programme started in the nave in the later thirteenth century, only accomplished the completion of the first two eastern bays, owing to lack of funds.\textsuperscript{19}

What follows regarding the wall paintings seeks to throw light on the little that remains and hazard an estimate, as a result, of how some of those that have disappeared might have looked.

\textsuperscript{17} St. William’s beatification was confirmed in 1256.
\textsuperscript{18} Tatton-Brown and Crook, \textit{English Cathedrals}, p.43
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, p.43.
The Medieval Wall Paintings of Rochester Cathedral

c.1190 - 1350

The Norman Nave.

The soffits of the Romanesque arches on the north and south side of the nave, now nearly 900 years old, show remains of colour, which probably once formed patterns. The soffit of the second south-western arch appears to have pale red, deep red and possibly black pigments, which are severely smudged into an almost solid colour, and each of the other arches on the south side show traces of red, black and specks of yellow. The Romanesque and triforium arches in the nave are carved with double chevron patterns, floral, diapered and geometric devices. The fragmentary pigments that can be seen on them strongly suggest that they were all once painted in vibrant colours. Tiny fragments of colour can be seen on the masonry of each arch terminating with the south-easternmost Romanesque arch, where two carved four-petal flowers on the triforium arch still show pale red pigment.

The soaring Romanesque arches of St. Albans Abbey, Hertfordshire (Pl.1) provide perfect examples of the painter’s skill in the early Norman period with architectural designs of chevrons, lozenges or masonry blocks, with later additions of rosettes in some of the arches.1 It is probable that some of Rochester’s masonry painting once resembled that of St. Albans. Rochester’s fabric is mainly of solid blocks or cladding in Caen stone, while St. Albans is of several different building methods, the Romanesque arches being constructed from tiles, flints and possibly small pieces of stone, which have been plastered.2 Unfortunately, comparable painted decoration in Rochester has virtually disappeared.

2 Ibid., p.30.
Graffiti in the Nave - Late Twelfth Century.

Some biblical subject matter can just be detected on either side of the west door; this was probably part of a single sequence.³ Further fragments of graffiti can be seen on the north and south piers, at a height of about two to three metres above the floor, which are sequences from the life of Christ. In the crypt there are two clear depictions of ‘Christ on the Road to Emmaus’ (Pl.2).⁴ This work seems to be the oldest decoration yet found in the building. The lines, lightly carved in the Caen stone, depict at least three versions of Christ in Majesty, various saints, evangelists and their symbols, figures of angels, people, animals and birds. They may once have been coloured, much has been lost, but what remains is elegant. Confined to Norman stonework, it is suggested that the work dates to sometime after Ernulf’s rebuilding programme between c.1115 and 1124,⁵ (but apparently completed by his successor, Bishop John, by 1130).⁶ Faint figures painted in earth tones (which may have defined the graffiti or possibly covered it) still remained on the faces of the piers in the 1950s, but this has sadly disappeared.⁷ Stressing that it is almost impossible to establish an exact chronology, Swanton suggests that murals of this style would most probably have

³ Faces, one above the other, on an eastern shaft beside the great west door might represent the Tree of Jesse.
⁴ A very good photograph of the graffiti in the crypt can be seen in the Rochester Cathedral Guide, 2002, p.16.
⁶ The fire of 1137 is said to have completely destroyed the Cathedral and town. McAleer, ‘Medieval Fabric’, p.158, disputes the dates for the rebuilding of the Nave, commenting that the architectural style indicates a date after the 1137 fire.
⁷ I clearly recall seeing pale pigments on figures on the piers in the Cathedral, when I was at school in Rochester in the late 1950s.
been painted between the fires of 1137 and 1179, and that after the latter disaster an attempt was made to capture something of the remains of the wall paintings by scratching round them in outline.  

In a study of churches within a sixty mile radius of Cambridge, Violet Pritchard states that graffiti is more numerous on pillars and piers than elsewhere in the buildings she has investigated, and this is certainly the case at Rochester. Much of the graffiti described by Pritchard is simple and amateurish: representations of ordinary people, animals, swastika pelta and interlace. Crowned kings, knights in armour and shields also appear. Examples of expertly carved inscriptions in Insular and Uncial script exist, which sometimes record specific historical dates such as the ‘Black Death’. The carvings are varied in quality, diverse in content and, almost without exception, unlike that which exists in Rochester, Canterbury and Sandwich (Pls.3 a. & b.; Pls.4 a. & b. and Pl.5). Pritchard considers that most appear to date to between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. From comparison with her evidence one might conclude that the genre developed in different ways according to location and the status of the building.

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8 Swanton, ‘Mural Palimpsest’, p.134. Cleaning and lime washing of the interior of the Cathedral was carried out during the late 1950s/early 60s; Diana Holbrook, ‘Repair and Restoration of the Fabric since 1540’, *Faith and Fabric*, p.214. I have been unable to locate records relating to the reference by Swanton of Cleaning of the piers in 1964, with the exception of comments to this effect by one of the current-day vergers. I believe if this had taken place the fragment of St. Christopher, south-west pier 1, would have disappeared completely.


10 Ibid., pp.32-37.

11 Pritchard comments that heraldic representation gained in importance during and after the Crusades, when the church took a big part in ceremony for the creation of knights and the paraphernalia connected with it.

12 I am grateful to Mrs. Mallinson for drawing to my attention many faint graffiti heads including those of the possible Tree of Jesse, numerous masons marks and a graffiti inscription on south-west nave pier 1, which I am told transcribed reads: ‘The men on horses murder’ which could refer to King John’s violation of the cathedral in 1215, or that of Simon de Montfort in 1264.
The eastern end of Rochester’s crypt was extended to support the new part of the presbytery in c.1190-1200,\(^1\) which provides a *terminus post quern* for the graffiti there. Both in Rochester and Canterbury there are traces of black or red ochre in the outline of some of the figures. Scratching the outline of a mural on bare stone, with a stylus or fine chisel, might have proved to be more effective as guidelines, than thin pigment outlines.

On the other hand, the remains of paint in the incised outlines could simply be the residue from later mural painting.\(^4\) Since both Canterbury and Rochester suffered fires, the former in 1174, the latter in 1179, some of the same masons could have worked on both buildings. Evidence of this in Rochester is to be seen in the use of ‘pointed porches, dog-tooth ornament and of large quadripartite and sexpartite vaults which follow those in Canterbury’.\(^5\) As the See of Rochester did not finally gain independence from Canterbury until the early fourteenth century, their history was still linked in the period which concerns us here.\(^6\) It seems reasonable to conjecture that some of the masons employed by William of Sens and William the Englishman at Canterbury, also worked at Rochester; if so, they may have helped to create the outlines of the graffiti.

**Pier 1 - St. Christopher.**

The mural on the north face of the westernmost pier on the south side of the nave is now barely discernible, but was once an impressive painting of St. Christopher, full length.

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\(^1\) Flight, *Rochester*, pl. XII.


\(^5\) Tim Tatton-Brown, ‘The Eastern Crypt of Rochester Cathedral’, *Friends of Rochester Cathedral Report 1996/7*, p.20 and n.7 and n.8. W.H. St. John Hope, *The Architectural History of the Cathedral Church and Monastery of St. Andrew at Rochester*, p.35, says that evidence that the work at both cathedrals was carried out by William of Sens and William the Englishman was discovered by John Irvine in 1872, when fragments of mouldings were found in the south transept at Rochester, which closely resemble the mouldings of the pier arches built at Canterbury between 1175 and 1179.

bearing the Christ child on his right shoulder. It is just possible to see the outline of the saint, though the colours which were used to define his garments, those of the child and the overall scene, have nearly flaked away (Pl.6). Features which are just impressions in the plaster appear to be black on cream (probably discoloured from skin tones) and there are traces of a yellow ochre garment and possibly a flesh-coloured foot. The section of his body from waist to just below his knees has faded completely, giving the impression that the representation is a torso only. On closer inspection it is possible to see both feet, indicating that this mural was a huge, full-length painting. In 1898 St. John Hope was able to detect a few fragments of colour remaining on the defaced painting, while Whaite in his 1929 survey of St. Christopher murals throughout England, comments that he could detect traces of yellow, red, blue and purple.

Whaite classified images of St. Christopher in three main types, corresponding broadly to the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The first, a stationery figure holding staff in one hand and the child in the other. In the second he holds the staff in one hand and rests the other hand on his hip, which raises his shoulder to support the child, causing the saint to become slightly stooped. The third version is far more complex showing a stockier saint with both hands on his staff, striding vigorously to west or east, with the child either kneeling behind his neck or sitting astride his shoulders. This version also frequently includes fish and sea creatures, a hermit, mermaid, sometimes a boy fishing

18 H.C. Whaite, Saint Christopher in English Medieval Wallpainting, p. 17.
19 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
and buildings. Whaite dated Rochester’s St. Christopher to the late thirteenth century on the grounds of the costume and, in terms of stance, it belonged in his second category.

A similar painting of St. Christopher, which Whaite also dated to the late thirteenth century, survives in a better state of preservation on the south side of the westernmost pier of the nave in St. Albans Abbey. In contrast with the example at Rochester, here the Christ child is shown on the saint’s left shoulder. The child wears a red robe and has a red and white aureole, while the saint wears a yellow robe and red mantle (Pl. 7). When Whaite carried out his survey, he could detect traces of greenish-blue water round the feet of the saint. His painted record of Rochester’s St. Christopher indicates that there was very little more to be seen at that time than there is today. He comments that Rochester’s painting is of a very high standard and attributes the work to a ‘cathedral craftsman’, as opposed to those in some village churches, which are rather basic. A miniature in the Peterborough Psalter (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Ms.53, f.16) dated to the early fourteenth century shows St. Christopher, wading in swirling water, with the Christ child on his left shoulder. He stands on the left of the Virgin, who carries the baby Christ against her left shoulder. The figures convey a degree of movement not apparent in the Rochester mural, but the simplicity of the saint’s apparel gives an indication of how the garments in the mural would have appeared.

Christopher, meaning ‘Christ bearer’, was not only the patron saint of travellers, but was revered for protection against water, tempest, plague, sickness and sores. He is

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20 Ibid., p. 11.
21 Ibid., p. 11.
22 Roberts, St. Albans Abbey, p.22.
23 Whaite, St. Christopher, p.17.
24 Ibid., Plate 3.
25 Ibid., p.17.
26 Margaret Rickert, Painting in Britain - The Middle Ages, Pl.126.
believed to have been a Canaanite; an impressively strong giant, the legend says ‘XII cubytes of lengthe’.\(^{27}\) Little is known of him except of his apparent death in the third century in Asia Minor where, as with many other martyrs, he offended the king (of Lycia) by refusing to sacrifice to the gods and to denounce his newly acquired Christian faith. He was beaten with rods of iron, shot with arrows, and then beheaded.

In addition to his general popularity, St. Christopher may have had a particular local resonance. Rochester cathedral and castle stand strategically at a crossing of the River Medway, which is tidal with very strong currents. Lambarde says that the Britons described the Medway as \textit{Dwr-brif} or \textit{Dour-bryf} meaning swift stream, and William of Malmesbury described it as \textit{fluvio violentissimo alluitur}, as it is to this day.\(^{28}\) Watling Street, which crosses the river a few hundred yards from cathedral and castle, was the busiest route through Kent to and from London and the Continent. Travellers must have been greatly relieved to set eyes upon St. Christopher when they entered the cathedral. But perhaps the most important message the bishop and community wished to convey to their medieval congregation, pilgrims and travellers alike, was a moral one, ‘salvation through service.’\(^{29}\)

\textbf{The Choir.}

The decoration of the choir walls, north, south and west, though for the most part refurbished around 1875,\(^{30}\) remains of interest. This extends over the entire length of the walls from the western screen to the eastern minor transepts. Traces of the upper


\(^{29}\) Whaite, \textit{St. Christopher}, p.8.

border were found during restoration (immediately above the rear row of stalls on either side\textsuperscript{31}) indicating that it reached from the stalls to the string course below the Gothic arcading.\textsuperscript{32} The upper borders of the north and south walls differ from that of the west screen wall. The lower border, however, is common on both sides and on the west wall.\textsuperscript{33}

Sir George Gilbert Scott, who directed the restoration work, was careful to see that what remained was preserved intact and, where it was obliterated, renewed the decoration following the original work (Pls.8 and 9). In the upper borders shields, which appeared to be blank when discovered, were filled with the arms of the Bishops of Rochester.

The pattern is formed of golden ‘Lions passants regardant \textit{or} upon a field \textit{gules}’ in quatrefoils and agrees with the English flag. On the north wall the lions face east (which is opposed to the position on the flag) mirroring those on the south wall. The lions alternate with golden ‘Fleurs-de-Lys \textit{or}, upon a field \textit{azure}’.\textsuperscript{34} The lilies are reminiscent of the shield of France in colour and background at that time. It is also worth remembering that Fleur-de-Lys represents the Holy Trinity and purity\textsuperscript{35} and the lion not only represents majesty and the king, but is symbolic of Christ, the messianic king, and the Resurrection.\textsuperscript{36}

It is interesting to speculate whether the duality of meaning was considered by the monks when the design was chosen. It is suggested that the design was probably used to show support for Edward III when he launched the Hundred Years’ War in 1337.\textsuperscript{37} It was wise, no doubt, to be seen to support the monarch as well as their Redeemer. King Edward III

\textsuperscript{31} John Arnold (text), Christopher Hebron (additional work), \textit{Rochester Cathedral - Cathedral Guide}, p.16.
\textsuperscript{32} R.W. Scott Robertson, \textit{Wall Paintings around the Quire in Rochester Cathedral}, p.3.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, p.4.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, p.4.
\textsuperscript{35} John Baldock, \textit{The Elements of Christian Symbolism}, p.94.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, p.101.
(1327-1377) used lions passants and Fleurs-de-Lys on his coat of arms and was the first English king to do so. The current décor of the choir, therefore, almost certainly originated sometime between those dates.\(^{38}\)

The lower border of the choir is of complex geometric fillets in red and blue turned to form diamonds, alternating with cream rosettes on black, with black on cream trefoil detail. The fillets in the top borders of the north and south wall form squares. The squares are placed evenly almost a foot apart and between each is a shield on deep green, instead of the rosettes. The square interlaced fillet design was common in glazing during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and in paving tiles in some churches. The west wall, or choir screen, has a slender dog tooth pattern, in red, cream and blue along the top row of lions, separating the main decoration of the wall from the Royal arms and the shields of the Archbishops of Canterbury.\(^{39}\) The lions passants face each other across the Gothic arch, which is the entrance from the rear of the nave altar into the choir. The border, along the top, bottom, extreme left and right sides of the screen, is similar to that of the lower borders on the north and south walls.

**The West Door and Front Elevation.**

A major part of the west front of the cathedral dates from the twelfth century (Fig.5), although exactly when is debated. It seems reasonable to think that it was a part of the reconstruction after the devastating fire of 1137. McAleer considers that it was

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\(^{38}\) The original of the restored choir design can be seen in a section of framed panelling hanging in the south choir transept. Beneath it is revealed an earlier device of diamond shapes in red outlined in black on cream, with some pale green infill and the Saltire cross, with pellets in each division of the cross (Pl.10). E.W. Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, p.240, described the design as similar to ‘tartan’, but it is unlikely that Scottish clan fabric designs had developed at this date.

constructed after the rebuilding of the Romanesque Nave. Whatever the exact date, the portal to the great west door is exceptionally beautiful.

The Christ in Majesty that adorns the tympanum above Rochester’s main entrance, though no longer bearing traces of paint, merits mention. Thought to be almost unique in England, it bears strong comparison with similar work in north central France. On the main lintel above the doorway are carved figures of the seated apostles. At either side of the doorway are the standing figures of a man and woman, believed to represent Solomon and Sheba (Pl.11 and 12) and are the only surviving examples in England of column figures from the period, with the exception of a standing Virgin and Child at Minster-in-Sheppey. Column figures, which originated in St. Denis, Ile-de-France, between c.1130-40, are carved in high relief from the same block of stone as the column itself and were used mainly in doorways, but can also be seen in cloisters and windows. The column figures have been closely compared with similar figures at the Royal Portal of Chartres Cathedral dated to c.1145. At Rochester, Christ in a Mandorla supported by two angels, surrounded by the evangelists’ symbols forms the centrepiece of five arches of highly decorated voussoirs, rising from each of five recessed shafts, topped with elaborate decoration (Pl.13). Work of this nature in France dates from c.1135 to 1145 and

41 McAleer, Rochester Cathedral 604-1540, an Architectural History, p.79. The figures are very weathered and the head of Sheba is missing, as is Christ’s face in the tympanum above the door.
43 McAleer, Rochester Cathedral, p.162.
44 Swanton, ‘A Mural Palimpsest from Rochester Cathedral’, p.131, and ‘The Decoration of Ernulf’s Nave’, p.15, comments that high above the floor on the north face of the fourth south-western nave pier is an elaborate ‘Majestas’. Christ with a cruciform nimbus in a sweeping double mandorla, is depicted with the evangelists symbols (now very fragmented), and is similar to the carving over the west door.
McAleer considers that Rochester's west doorway dates to c.1150. This would seem to be a reasonable timescale when taking into account the devastation of the 1137 fire and the reconstruction that followed.
North Choir or Minor Transept - Decorated Tomb.

On the north wall of the north choir transept (east of the elaborate tomb and effigy of Bishop Walter de Merton) is a mural decoration within the arched recess of another tomb. This was thought in the past to be the resting place of St. William of Perth, murdered in 1201 and canonised in 1256. On reflection, possibly as a result of the dating of the mural and because the shrine, at which many miracles occurred, would no doubt have been rather splendid, it is now thought to be the tomb of a thirteenth-century prior.

The vine-scroll decoration within the recess is exceptionally beautiful, being deep green on a vibrant vermilion background with Popinjays in white forming an overall diapered pattern (Pl. 14 a. & b.). The soffit of the arch also bears traces of the same vine-scroll design. There is evidence that the walls on either side of Bishop de Merton’s tomb and a further unnamed tomb to the west of de Merton were once decorated with vine-scroll design, now barely more than a stain in the plaster. On the west wall, beside three large Gothic-arched stained-glass windows, is a fainter vine-scroll or maple-scroll decoration. It is black, but was perhaps once green, with traces of red ochre as a ground, like that of the tomb recess. Examples of foliated scroll design, considered to date to the mid-thirteenth century and in almost perfect condition, can be seen on the walls of the church of St. Helen, Cliffe at Hoo, indicating how those at Rochester probably once appeared.

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46 St. William’s cult was well-known long before 1256.
Designs of this nature, vine-scroll, \textit{mille feuilles}, and \textit{mille fleurs}, have a long history in decoration and were very popular in the Medieval period and earlier,\textsuperscript{49} when finely drawn, extravagantly detailed and gilded scroll patterns were used as frames for miniatures, or grounds for their subject-matter. An unfinished secular text, Chaucer’s \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Ms.61, f.1v), dating to the first quarter of the fifteenth century, shows in its frontispiece how this delicate genre was used.\textsuperscript{50} Popinjays, or parrots, with heraldic connotations were also in vogue. Panelling in the Byward Tower, Tower of London, shows great expertise in the painting of popinjays and Fleur-de-Lys, c.1390 (Pl.15).\textsuperscript{51}

The vine or vineyard not only represented ‘Israel’ of The Old Testament, but was symbolic of life, suffering, destruction and renewal, and of the new Messianic age ahead.\textsuperscript{52} Traditionally representations of the Tree of Jesse had been linked with the vine and were also used in combination with the Crucifixion as evidence of Christ overcoming death. The Tree of Life or grapevine are a significant reference to everlasting life.\textsuperscript{53} But the living vine-scroll still represented triumph over death. The recess of a tomb appears to be a most appropriate place to find it.

\textsuperscript{49} Evidence remains of vine-scroll interlaced with human figures and birds decorating walls of Roman villas as early as the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century A.D. where the vine may have been similar to the Christian meaning of ‘life’; \url{http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/assets/aa}. Anglo-Saxon churches may have displayed similar decoration, which is no longer available to us.

\textsuperscript{50} Richard Marks and Nigel Morgan, \textit{The Golden Age of English Manuscript Painting - 1200-1500}, p.113, Pl.37.

\textsuperscript{51} Rickerby, ‘Conservation’, p.10. The Byward Tower mural was apparently created for Richard II in c.1390. Rickerby states that the closest example to Rochester’s mural is a painted screen at Willingham, Cambs, c.1340. Also that Edward III’s daughter, Princess Joan, owned a worsted hanging embroidered with Popinjays, c.1348.

\textsuperscript{52} Psalms 80:8, ‘Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt…….’. Isaiah 5:7, ‘For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel…….’. Joel 1:12, ‘The vine is dried up…….’. Baldock, \textit{Christian Symbolism}, p.119.

The Crypt.

The only parts of the crypt to survive the 1137 fire, as we have seen, were the two western-most bays and possibly a third bay constructed by Gundulf. Whatever painted decoration existed in the groin vaults of the original part of the crypt, it has almost entirely disappeared, with the exception of some pigment stains round the arches. Gervais of Canterbury recorded that the fire of 10th April, 1179 consumed the church at Rochester and the city. Recent investigation of the building suggests that the damage was not so severe, requiring some rebuilding, but not full reconstruction. On the rises of the arch into St. Ithamar’s Chapel is the graffiti of Christ on the Road to Emmaeus, dating to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century (already mentioned) and, apart from this, the fragments of painted decoration in the additional bays of the crypt date to the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

The northern quadripartite vaults (part of the additional eastern bays of the crypt) constructed between 1180 and 1220, display the badly discoloured remains of simple masonry block-work, which probably dates to the early thirteenth century. Over the blocks are peppered rosettes and stars which are black (Pls.16 and 17). Both blocks and rosettes may once have been red, as in similar decoration which appears in other parts of the building. An example that closely resembles this area of the crypt, but still preserves some of its original background colour and over-painted design, can be

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55 William Stubbs, Gervais Cantuariensis Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland During the Middle Ages, p.292.
56 McAleer, Rochester Cathedral, p.84. He considers that the fire of 1179 did not destroy the entire west front, nave or eastern end of the building, which appear not to have been too badly affected.
57 Tim Tatton-Brown, ‘Eastern Crypt’, pp.18-20, considers that this work would have been completed fairly soon after the fire of 1179, probably before the end of the century.
58 A. Caiger-Smith, English Medieval Mural Painting, p.19. He comments that decorative patterns from the early twelve hundreds onwards tended to become slimmer and more delicate.
seen in the cloister garth, and is described below. The condition of the crypt painting is particularly poor, barely adhering to the ceiling. Immediately to the east of these two bays is a bay of quadripartite vaulting with painted black-scroll design and foliage resembling oak leaves, also very discoloured and damaged.

In the extreme **south eastern chapel vault** are the remains of masonry painting over which black rosettes have been added within the blocks. They are blackened and the whole vault is dirty. Once again it would seem likely that the ground was cream and the blocks and rosettes red. On the vaulted ceiling in the chapel immediately adjacent to that now dedicated to St. Ithamar, are small rectangles of painting left exposed, but not easy to identify. In the archway leading from the main body of the crypt into St.Ithamar’s chapel, are series of murals, almost unidentifiable, painted over faded red masonry block-work. Signs of black outlines, red and yellow ochre and pink pigments are still visible. It is just possible to discern two simple architectural arches on the north side of the archway and in other places the fragments of faces which have soaked into the plaster. The plaster itself in the arch is very damaged and badly flaked on each of the edges.

**The Chapel of St. Ithamar** also has many fragments of painting, which appear to have been purely patterned decoration in several different styles. This almost certainly covered most of the walls, window soffits and probably the pillars.

In the **north-eastern chapel**, immediately adjacent to St. Ithamar’s chapel, are the most significant remains to be found in the crypt (with the possible exception of the two panels of graffiti already mentioned (Pl.2)). Three medallions once filled each of the sections of the quadripartite vault, with shields filling the spandrels. All were linked with

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59 The church of St. Helen, Cliffe at Hoo still has the remains of very well preserved masonry block-work peppered with five petal flowers on the spandrels of the arches, between the nave and the south nave aisle, providing a good comparison with how those at Rochester probably once looked.
a scroll and maple-leaf pattern in cream. Seriously decayed, they were extremely detailed and were described by Tristram as the ‘history’ of a saint. Comparison of the fragments that remain today with photographs of the paintings made in 1923, shows that more of the sequence has been lost (Pls.18, 19, 20 and 21). Medallions were a means of combining both subject matter and decoration.

In 1987, during conservation, three of the roundels in the north-eastern bay were cleaned, revealing that the circumference of each frame had been incised. Further incision was found in the detail of one of the other roundels. Beneath the medallions the remains of earlier masonry block-work in red can be seen, and in each medallion black, pink, red and yellow ochres have been used. The scenes show an individual angel, people, buildings, ships and scenery, which are defined in fine black outline. The medallions were dated to the early fourteenth century during cleaning and conservation in 1984/5, when the subjects were also identified as the Virgin returning the Deed to a Repentant Theophilus, the Calling of Andrew and Peter and the Incredulity of Thomas.

Comparison with Tristram’s paintings shows how much has vanished since he made his record, but the angel in the description of medallion three is still fairly clear and a boat with a number of small fish swimming round it, mentioned in medallion four, can also be seen. G.H. Palmer’s description of a medallion containing a boat is more vivid (taken from the New British Traveller of 1819): ‘In a circle is a representation of a vessel sailing, with

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60 Tristram, Fourteenth Century, p.242. Five of the medallions were three feet and two were two feet in diameter. The painting shows that there would have been eight large and four smaller medallions.
61 Caiger-Smith, Mural Painting, p.18. He comments that as architecture evolved from Romanesque, through Gothic to Perpendicular, medallions were used to overcome the resultant diminishing wall space and combine decoration.
a large fish in the water in front, and on one side the upper part of a monk, with his hands uplifted as in prayer', reminiscent of the story of Jonah. It is not clear to which medallion this refers.

In the little church of St. Mary, Brook, near Ashford, Kent probably built in c.1100, are the remains of extensive sequences of roundels in four tiers on the north, south and east walls dating to c.1250-1260. They contain depictions of the life of the Virgin, the Flight into Egypt, the life of Christ among other subjects (Pl.22). The roundels were linked to each other by foliated decoration, now extremely faint. The circumference was incised in the plaster and each one is about two feet in diameter. These too are deteriorating, those on the north wall having almost faded, but some of what remains can be clearly identified. Damage had already taken place not long after they were first painted, when in c.1260, windows were pierced or enlarged in each of the walls. In spite of their poor condition, they provide a clear record of the use of this style of decoration elsewhere in Kent on vertical surfaces.

Heraldic devices, such as shields, which were painted in spandrels of arches and vaults to fill awkward spaces, as well as being an acknowledgement of donors, can also be seen in the arches of Rochester’s crypt chapel (Pls.19 and 20). A whole collection of shields appears to have been painted above and between the arches in the north nave aisle in St. Peter’s church, Sandwich (late thirteenth century), providing a clear example of this alternative form of decoration to masonry blocks or vine-scroll (Pl.23). Purely decorative heraldic depictions gained greatly in importance in Henry III’s reign; after he was entertained at a banquet in Paris in 1254 by Louis IX of France, where the hall had been

64 Palmer, Rochester, p.116.
65 The Medieval Wall Paintings, St. Mary’s Church, Brook, unpublished pamphlet kept in the church.
hung with wooden shields displaying the arms of France’s highest ranking noble families. Henry subsequently commissioned painted arms carved in stone to be placed in the spandrels of the aisle arcades in Westminster Abbey. He had used this style of design in other media, however, before 1254, for example at the Tower of London in 1240 on the window shutters of the Great Chamber. Even earlier examples can be seen in the Lady Chapel of Worcester Cathedral, where the walls were painted with shields in c.1230. The arms of Cornwall, c.1245-9, can be seen in stained glass in St. Edmund’s Chapel, Westminster Abbey and the windows of Henry’s royal castle at Rochester were also embellished in 1247. Some superb later examples can be seen in Canterbury Cathedral’s west window, depicting the arms of Richard II (1377-99), Anne of Bohemia (1382-94) Isabelle of France (1396-09).

The trend for ‘roundels’ had already been employed in the manufacture of stained glass windows and in manuscript illumination from the late twelfth century. Scenes in medallions contained within leaded windows, ornament or fine scroll-work in manuscripts, was very much in use. The Lothian Bible, c.1200-1210 (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms.791, f.4v) is a good example, and a beautifully decorated single leaf from a Psalter c.1230-60, almost certainly by William de Brailes, (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library Ms. M 913) clearly shows how the shapes had evolved into

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68 Caiger-Smith, *Mural Painting*, p.89.
72 Rickert, *Britain*, Pl. 94.
simple linked ovals and then roundels.\textsuperscript{73} Eton College Ms.177, f.4v and f.5, c.1260-1270, display five whole and two half roundels on each folio with scenes from Christ’s Passion, the roundels being linked with vine leaves and three-petal flora.\textsuperscript{74} They compare with sequence stories in stained-glass windows, some examples of which, dating to c.1200, can be seen in Canterbury Cathedral, for example the windows in the north choir aisle, the corona and north ambulatory.\textsuperscript{75}

In the wide archway from the north-eastern chapel in Rochester Cathedral, which leads into the main body of the crypt, are sequences of paintings which are so faint that a description cannot be attempted today. Tristram describes this as twelve cusped panels of episodes in the life of a saint, most of which take place in the open air, as in nine of the sequences it is possible to detect trees.\textsuperscript{76} When compared with Tristram’s painting made in 1923 (Pls.24 and 25) it is possible to see once again that a great deal of deterioration has taken place.

**The Eastern Addition to the Presbytery.**

The eastern end of the presbytery was completed in c.1200 and was the location of an exquisite mural now completely lost. This was discovered in 1825 by Cottingham during his ‘renovations’ and it would seem that the only record of his discovery appeared in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* of January - June that year. On removal of the altar-piece not only were three original Gothic-arched windows revealed, but whitewash being scraped

\textsuperscript{73} Richard Marks & Nigel Morgan, *The Golden Age of English Manuscript Painting, 1200-1500*, p.48, Pl.5. The leaf is believed to have been one of a group of six leaves, the remainder being in the Fitzwilliam Museum, one of which depicts the Wheel of Fortune.

\textsuperscript{74} C.M. Kauffmann, *Biblical Imagery in Medieval England 700-1500*, p.84 and Pls.58 and 59.

\textsuperscript{75} Michael, *Stained Glass*, pp.49, 65, 71, 77, 87, and 105, 107, 119, 125, 141.

off brought to light decorations at the high altar, described as ‘all in their pristine glory’.\textsuperscript{77} Birds and beasts, Fleur-de-Lys, lilies, crescents and stars, scroll-foliage, fleury-crosses, lace-work borders in crimson, purples, azures, greens and so-on. The July - December edition of the magazine reported the discovery of three consecration crosses, beneath each of the three revealed windows,\textsuperscript{78} presumably painted there when the extension to the presbytery was consecrated. Most devices used in the decoration might have been perceived to have had an inner mystic meaning: crescents and stars represented Christ’s ordering of the firmament, but they were also the ‘badge’ of Henry III. One might also speculate on whether this exquisite mural with its scroll foliage, birds, beasts, and lilies was a more exotic example of the vine-scroll/popinjay mural in the recess over the thirteenth-century prior’s tomb. The obliteration can be described in today’s terms as close to vandalism.

The early work was replaced with three panels of mosaics behind the altar, as a memorial to Mrs. Scott, the wife of Dean Robert Scott, 1870-1887.\textsuperscript{79} They are also beautiful, but one cannot help lamenting the loss of a medieval mural described in such glowing terms.

\textsuperscript{77} Tristram, \textit{Thirteenth Century}, p.594.
\textsuperscript{78} W.H. St. John Hope, \textit{The Architectural History of the Cathedral Church and Monastery of St. Andrew at Rochester}, pp.114-115, n.* \& n.†.
\textsuperscript{79} Palmer, \textit{Rochester}, p.95.
**South Nave Aisle - Entry to South Transept.**

On the north pier of this exceptionally high arch, facing east (c.1220-1230), are the remains of a most complex design. Outlined in black, interlocking geometric shapes of five or six petals, about the size of a small dinner plate, alternate with each other in rows on the triple flat surfaces of the central portion of the pier, between delicate round shafts. This is repeated between the two round pillars on the triple flat surfaces on the nave side of the pier, facing west. The interiors of the shapes are yellow ochre with traces of red, the whole design terminating at a height of about twenty-four feet above present floor level in a band of red, two to three inches wide (Pl.26). This decoration suggests that other similar surfaces were once skilfully painted with patterns. Many of the delicate round shafts throughout the cathedral are in polished Purbeck marble, but some are marbled in dark brown and on pier six in the south nave aisle there is very clear use of dark red and yellow ochre applied one over the other, with a final deeper layer of brown to create a marbled effect. Many other painted pillars, bases and capitals exist throughout the nave, aisles and north and south transepts, in various states of deterioration. Traces of pigment can be found all over this simple, later part of the building.

**South Choir Aisle - The Crucifixion.**

The solid choir walls below the clerestory level are generally thought to date to between c.1083 and 1120, with additional work being carried out between c.1220 and 1230, (Fig.6), (probably completed in 1227). The tall Gothic archway leading into the south choir aisle from the major south transept, was constructed c.1220 to 1230, across which there would
have been a screen containing a small doorway. A similar screen existed at the entrance to the north choir aisle. The screens effectively would have made the eastern end of the cathedral private, beyond the north and south transepts. An entrance from the cloister garth in the south wall of the south choir aisle, allowed the monks private entry to a place of quiet contemplation at the foot of the Crucifixion mural. It is also immediately adjacent to the steps which lead into the crypt, where seven small chapels existed providing the monks privacy for their obligatory daily prayers, away from people in the public parts of the building.

On the north wall of St. Edmund's chapel, on the south-facing buttress which supports the rear of the choir wall, is an extremely fragmented Crucifixion (Pl.27). The buttress itself has recently been dated to c.1230-40. On the buttress, at a great height from the floor within a small Gothic niche flanked on either side by thin dark Purbeck marble shafts, the crucified figure of Christ is just visible. This was originally flanked by the Virgin and St. John, at the foot of the cross. Fragmentary today, it is still possible to see the slender cross and Christ's outstretched arms, his contorted body facing towards the west, his twisted feet secured with a single nail and bent legs (indicating that he is dead). The palette is simple, red on cream, Christ's face, hair and halo being drawn in pale brown (the latter possibly discoloured from yellow ochre). Tristram's painting, made in 1922, clearly shows the wounds in Christ's left hand, feet and side with blood flowing from them (Pl.28). It is still just possible to see blood flowing from the feet, and the definition of the

80 St. John Hope, *St. Andrew at Rochester*, pl. II.
83 Kauffmann, *Biblical Imagery*, p.178, comments that the twisted feet are a depiction of the physical torture of Christ's suffering; the 'three-nail' cross which takes the weight of his whole body portraying unimaginable pain.
draped loin cloth which covers him. Today there is no sign of the accompanying figures at the foot of the cross, nor does the 1922 copy reveal any sign of them. What remains of the Crucifixion in Rochester is elegant and very simple; the only colours that survive are earth tones.

A resemblance exists between Rochester’s Crucifixion and a Crucifixion scene in St. Faith’s Chapel, Westminster Abbey (the interior of which was constructed about 1250). The latter, although small, includes the Virgin Mary and St. John at the foot of the cross and can be seen beneath the feet of St. Faith, who is depicted above the altar. The cross is plain, Christ’s body is in the ‘S’ curve wearing a simple loin cloth and his feet twisted and secured by a single nail. The Virgin (second only to her son in suffering) and St. John (said to be Christ’s favourite disciple) started to be thought of as those who had suffered with Christ, and with whom people could identify in their own losses. Thus from the period of the tenth and eleventh centuries they, and on occasion the other ‘Maries’, appear at the foot of the cross.

Christ’s death was being interpreted as the sacramental act connected with baptism, the blood and water flowing from his wounds was the source of divine power and life, shared by those who were baptized. Blood for the forgiveness of sins and water for baptism, commemorated in the taking of bread and wine at the Eucharist.

Below the Crucifixion, on the main face of Rochester’s buttress, was a huge mural of the Virgin and Child, more than 12 feet high. This is referred to by Keyser in his 1883 publication as already ‘destroyed’, his information having been taken from earlier

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sources. Not even a shadow of Rochester’s Virgin and Child is now visible. From the mid twelfth century some emphasis was being placed on the relationship between the Virgin and the Child. By mid thirteenth century it was popular to display scenes from Christ’s infancy juxtaposed with his Passion; the former revealing and emphasising the humanity, not only of Christ’s mother, but of Christ himself (this is particularly strong in the <i>Madonna Latans</i>).

Rochester’s Madonna and Child may have resembled similar murals which can still be seen, though very faint, in the thirteenth-century church of St. Mary the Virgin, Stone, nr. Dartford where there are two paintings of the Virgin and Child, which probably date to between c.1250 and 1275. The paintings are large, one is at least ten feet high (Pl.29) and seem to have been executed with great skill, in simple earth colours, red and black (Pl.30). Stone’s church was rebuilt by Lawrence de St. Martin, Bishop of Rochester, who had also served as chaplain to King Henry III. Binski says the influence of Bishop de St. Martin probably accounts for the Court standards of building at this church in Kent about c.1260. There was already a connection with Stone in that the Manor (which was important enough to have a castle) had apparently been a gift by King Ethelred

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88 C.E.Keyser, <i>A List of Buildings in Great Britain and Ireland Having Mural and Other Painted Decorations of Dates Prior to the Latter Part of the Sixteenth Century</i>, p.209. He does not mention in his ‘List’ Rochester’s Crucifixion, although it was discovered in 1840.
89 Kauffmann, <i>Biblical Imagery</i>, pp.168 and 170.
90 Tristram, <i>Thirteenth Century</i>, p.293.
91 Marks and Morgan, <i>English Manuscript Painting</i>, pp.10-11, Fig. IV: depicts the Virgin wearing a crown on flowing hair (Matthew Paris, Virgin and Child in <i>Historia Anglorum</i>, London, British Library Ms. Royal 14 C.VII, fol.6); also Fig.V. shows the Virgin in an architectural setting, suckling the Child (probably the Sarum Master, <i>The Amesbury Psalter</i>, (Oxford, All Souls College, Ms.6, fol.4), in the disposition of both figures, and in the case of the latter particularly, which bears a resemblance to the murals in St. Mary the Virgin, Stone, showing the Virgin suckling the Child (pls.29 and 30).
93 Paul Binski, <i>Westminster Abbey</i>, p.45.
to the See of Rochester in 993. A further connection is thought to exist between Westminster Abbey and Stone’s church in that the exquisite stone scroll-work that fills the arcades of the chancel is comparable to work in Westminster Abbey. Since the construction of the buttress (on which Rochester’s Crucifixion is painted, where the Virgin and Child also once appeared) probably dates to c.1230-40, a little earlier than the date of Stone’s murals, it seems probable that Rochester’s murals also date to a similar period as at Stone.

An elaborately canopied alcove to the west of the Crucifixion buttress, on the same south-facing wall in Rochester, contains a tomb thought to be that of Bishop John de Bradfield, who died in 1283. The wall above the tomb is painted with simple red masonry blocks on a cream ground. These are not painted on a level with the floor, but slant slightly downwards west to east. The painting is not by any means complete and, though not as faded as the painted masonry blocks which can be seen behind the Crucifixion, would seem to date to a similar period.

The Abbey of St. Albans still has the remains of six painted crucifixions, five of which are visible on the west faces of the first five piers of the nave on the north side. That of pier four is very faint and has been repaired, but shows Christ outlined in red on a simple cross painted over masonry blocks in black, in a similar ‘S’ curve to that of Rochester. The Crucifixion of pier five, though

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94 G.E. Street, ‘Some Account of the Church of St. Mary Stone, Near Dartford’, Archaeologia Cantiana, 3, p.98. H. Wharton, Anglia Sacra, p.384: ‘Ethelredus Rex dedit manerium de Stone Godrico Episcopo Roffensi’ dated A.D.1360. It would appear that this may have lapsed at some time before the Conquest. But between 1143-48 when Bishop Ascelin was in Rome, the Pope conferred on the monks of Rochester ‘Ecclesiam de Stanes’ and many others which had been expropriated by one archdeacon Robert.

95 Pevsner observed that the trefoil foliage in the arcading of the chancel at Stone is identical with similar arcading in Westminster Abbey, in A Guide to the History of St. Mary the Virgin, Stone, p.11.

96 Roberts, St. Albans Abbey, p.16.

97 Tristram, Thirteenth Century, p.327
more elaborate and distinct, again depicts Christ on a simple cross, the disposition of his body shows his agony in death, bent more obviously to the right, with his loin cloth draped as at Rochester. He is accompanied by the Virgin Mary on his right and St. John on his left, but the background to the scene, unlike that of pier four, is deep red with groups of pale dots (forming flowers or stars) and *mille feuilles* scroll-work at the top and sides(Pl.31). Tristram dated this painting to no earlier than c.1275. The two St. Albans' murals seem to bear a stronger resemblance to each other and to the Rochester painting than to the stylised paintings on St. Albans' piers one, two and three. This is not to suggest that the artist at Rochester was one and the same as at St. Albans, but to provide a general artistic context for the work in Kent.

**The Choir - Book-rests.**

The back row of stalls on each side of the choir are thirteenth-century 'misericords' believed to date to 1227, when renovation of the choir was completed. The back-rests of the centre row of benches on either side of the choir, have been attached to the top of the book-rests which serve the rear choir stalls (when occupants are in a kneeling position). The centre benches are in three sections and the book-rests behind them are beautifully designed, mounted on Gothic-style arcades which have the remains of elaborately painted designs on them (Pl.32). Carved hexagonal pillars and trefoil arches rest on solid oak ground-level stretchers. The pillars, capitals and arches emulate the pillars and arcading along the top of the west choir screen on either side of the entrance from the nave (Pl.33). It is extremely difficult to discern the designs on the arcading of the book-

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99 Each of the three tiers of benches is different. Tatton-Brown and Crook, *English Cathedral*, p.43: Rochester Cathedral's rear choir stalls are considered to be the oldest in England.
rests, which seem to have been painted on a ground of thick white paint or plaster and, here and there on some, black pellets survive. The Gothic arcades show traces of green paint, which in places has discoloured to a shade closer to cobalt blue; there are also traces of both red and yellow on mouldings. From the fragments that remain, it appears that the layers of paint were very substantial. Tristram describes the spandrels of the arches as representing lancet and round windows and suggests that the overall design was also emulated in the original boarding of the choir walls (Pl.10). Today the pillars of the arcaded panels of the west wall choir screen are painted alternately red and green as is the arcading above the shields (Pl.9), suggesting the same scheme was used under the book-rests.

**The Wheel of Fortune.**

The thirteenth-century Wheel of Fortune is by far the best preserved of Rochester’s mural decorations. One half of the work has survived as a result of being covered for several centuries by a pulpit. ‘Fortune’ was a popular theme among others during this period, as was the Wheel of the Five Senses, an example of which can still be seen at Longthorpe Manor. Wheels of the Seven Sins, of the Virtues, of Life and of Pride survive in other locations. The conflict between virtues and vices emanates from Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* of the early fifth century: man must arm himself spiritually to defeat the forces of evil, and all living creatures are woven into the rotating wheel of fate.

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101 Rickert, *Painting in Britain*, pp.140, 142 and plate 147(B).
The wheel at Rochester is placed in a prominent position in the choir to remind the monks, and no doubt their bishops, of the fickle nature of man's fortunes (and perhaps of the sins of ambition and greed).

Rochester's wheel is on the north-east pier of the choir, with the base at a height of about four to five feet above the floor. It depicts Fortune as a beautiful young woman clothed in an elegant gown in deep beige/greenish tones, her skin being quite pale but with orange blushes on her cheeks. She wears a crown and from her shoulders an elaborate cream cloak falls beneath her left and right arms, partially covering the right-hand side of her gown. She holds the ascending spoke of the wheel with her right hand. The background of the wheel is bright vermilion, whilst the spokes and the outer rim are in orange or gold. A part of the outer rim at the lower half is missing, between the first and second spokes. Two men climb the wheel, while a third sits on a gold cushion decorated with a fine black-line diamond pattern at the apex of the wheel. It is believed that he would have been crowned, as is the corresponding figure in similar works, but the crown has almost entirely been erased, giving the top of his hair a cropped appearance.104

The men's garments become more elaborate and richer in colour as they move round the wheel, the man at the lowest point in a simple brown monk-like habit, with the man at the top dressed in a heavily draped tunic in cream to orange, the folds defined in red, and draped in a vermilion cloak. Each male has red blushes on his cheeks and wears black shoes. The vermilion ground is dotted with little cream flowers,105 the definition of the

104 Tristram, Thirteenth Century, p.287. The miniature of the Wheel of Fortune in the twelfth century L'Hortus Deliciarum (referred to below in n.133) shows a crowned man sitting on top of the wheel. The Chaworth Roll, (The Daily Telegraph, 14.02.2005) an early fifteenth-century manuscript, which traces the history of the monarchy from Anglo-Saxon times to Henry IV, includes a 'wheel of fortune', with, at its apex, a crowned man, indicating that the theme was still popular in later centuries, being commissioned by private patronage, perhaps as a teaching aid.

105 These are described by Tristram as 'greenish'.
whole work is drawn in black line. It is considered to be of special interest because of its artistic quality and also close in style to the Westminster School.\textsuperscript{106} Behind the man at the top of the wheel, on the left-hand side and at the lower part of the wheel, the faint remains of other designs can be seen with traces of delicate pigments in green, blue, cream and pale brown, with the clear outline of a shield in the top left-hand corner (Pl.34).

Henry III is known to have ordered the Wheel of Fortune to be painted on at least two occasions, firstly in the King’s Hall, Winchester, 1235-36, then in the King’s Hall, Clarendon Palace in 1247.\textsuperscript{107} Although no references have been found to suggest that Henry III requested certain subjects be painted in Rochester Cathedral, it is possible that he sponsored or encouraged such works by giving donations for them. Court artists almost certainly worked in Rochester Castle’s Chapel Royal and may have influenced the painting of the ‘wheel’ in the cathedral. An example of this subject can be seen at the Cathedral of Amiens where there is a half-wheel, carved round the upper part of the rose window above the south door. It displays eight figures who are climbing the wheel on one side of a king, who sits at the apex, and eight figures who descend on the opposite side.\textsuperscript{108} Emile Mâle considers that this is a representation of ‘Fortune’, as the eight figures in descent are in threadbare clothes, worn-out shoes or bare feet.\textsuperscript{109} The wheel is a reflection of power, riches, glory and of life on earth and shows the instability of all things. For the monks and clergy of a religious house, a reminder that the object of work is not riches, nor is it glory; but that labour and knowledge are the instruments of inner perfection.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{106} T. Borenius and E.W. Tristram, \textit{English Medieval Painting}, p.17.
\textsuperscript{108} Emile Mâle, \textit{Religious Art in France: The Thirteenth Century}, p.98; the king is envied, but will be replaced with another in the future. We must not place our desires in transient, fragile worldly goods.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.95-96.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid.}, p.95. ‘Dame Fortune turns things upside down faster than a windmill’, p.96.
In *L'Hortus Deliciarum* (Paris Bibl.Nat., Fonds Bastard, Cab.des Estampes, A d 144 a, fol.215r) of the twelfth century, a most detailed wheel appears with Fortune sitting outside the wheel turning it with a handle, as men climb and fall. Those who have been elevated to power and riches often fall into poverty and misery.\(^{111}\)

After some investigative work during the mid to late 1980s by the Perry Lithgow Partnership and Courtauld Institute/Getty Conservation Institute it was thought that the pigments used might be oil-based. Should this be so, Rochester’s ‘wheel’ would be the earliest wall painting in England, so far known, where an oil-based medium was used.\(^{112}\)

It has been found, during conservation work, that the pigments used in the early fourteenth-century vine-scroll mural which decorates the recess of the tomb in the north minor transept (discussed above) were mixed with walnut oil.\(^{113}\)

**South Choir Aisle - St. Andrew.**

Rochester was the first English cathedral/foundation to be dedicated to St. Andrew.\(^{114}\) It is just possible to detect a large painting of a saint, St. Andrew (Pl.35) brother of Simon Peter, on the north side of a Gothic recess (thought possibly at one time to have been a door into the south transept Lady Chapel) in the west wall of St. Edmund’s Chapel, south choir aisle. Tristram dated it to c.1300.\(^{115}\) If the wall on which St. Andrew appears was reconstructed, or simply altered, earlier than c.1300 (as it is the rear of the south transept east wall) the painting could be earlier. A double horizontal inscription in black lettering, contained


\(^{112}\) Rickerby, ‘Conservation’, p.12.

\(^{113}\) Ibid., p.11.

\(^{114}\) Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints*, p.21.

within three thin straight black lines can be seen above the saint’s head. It is too faint today to be deciphered at ground level and Tristram did not transcribe it. It may have separated the saint from other paintings of standing saints that once existed along the length of the wall.116

During restoration, commenced in 1921, the simple masonry decoration on the north wall of St. Edmunds Chapel was revealed, as was the large figure of St. Andrew, identified by the Saltire cross he held.117 The Saltire cross which gained popularity after the tenth century, can no longer be seen.118 Standing figures of saints and devotional paintings such as the Virgin and Child and Crucifixion (discussed above) were quite often located in small chapels or close to side altars.119 During the later thirteenth century such figural murals and sequences were being painted in the public parts of the building.120 It seems likely that there was much more to be seen in the nave at Rochester at one time.

High above St. Andrew’s head is the remains of dark masonry painting, which appears to form a cross, though this may simply be an optical illusion. To the north of St. Andrew, extremely high above floor level on the same wall, adjacent to the soffit of the Gothic arch leading from the south transept, further masonry painting on a cream ground can be seen, decorated alternately with rosettes in red and Fleur-de-Lys in a dark colour, possibly green (Pl.28).121

116 Ibid., p.288.
117 Holbrook, ‘Repair and Restoration’, p.213.
118 The Saltire Cross, a fishing net or scallop shell were part of St. Andrew’s iconography, alluding to his trade as a fisherman.
119 Caiger-Smith, Mural Painting, p.2.
120 Kaufmann, Biblical Imagery, p.170.
121 Shown in the bottom left-hand corner of Tristram’s ‘Crucifixion’ painting dated 1922, pl.28.
South Transept - Original Lady Chapel.

Alterations to the east wall of the south transept, or creation of the huge recessed Gothic arch on that wall, was apparently carried out prior to c.1322. This appears to be supported by a ‘grant’ of the latter date, for a lantern to be placed at the altar de novo constructa of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which it seems already stood in the south transept. There is further support for the establishment of the Lady Chapel at an earlier date from a record dated c.1305(?), which refers to ‘altare beate Marie in novo opere’.\(^{122}\) While St. John Hope dated the wall and Gothic arch to c.1280, McAleer believes it to be closer to, possibly even preceding, the date of alterations to the north transept, estimated to have been in c.1240.\(^{123}\) Although the official altar to the Virgin Mary in the cathedral was apparently established during the early part of the fourteenth century, it is not improbable that the murals had existed for some time before that.

It seems that the rebuilding/redesign of the Lady Chapel east wall has been linked to the date of the ‘grant’ of 1322, which may also have influenced the dating of the murals to c.1350.\(^{124}\) Furthermore, towards the end of the thirteenth century the use of complex architectural devices (evident in the Lady Chapel murals) in which the static figures were placed, as a method of linking them to each other, had largely been superseded. In the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, groups of figures were placed in closer relation to each


\(^{123}\) McAleer, Rochester Cathedral, pp.122-124.

\(^{124}\) Tristram, Fourteenth Century, p.241, suggests the Lady Chapel was built c.1322 and the murals at the eastern end seem to date to c.1350. McAleer, Rochester Cathedral, p.161, believes that the addition of the Perpendicular Lady Chapel in c.1480-1530, was constructed where a slightly narrower chapel of an earlier date had previously existed, which may have been the location of the ‘chapel de novo constructa’ mentioned in 1322 and 1389.
other (sometimes still in architectural niches, but structures which were much simpler),
displaying body lines that were more natural, with a greater degree of movement.\textsuperscript{125}

The soffits on each side of the arch still bear fragments of design which from the
ground appear to be in roundels in black and possibly red with traces of green, perhaps
discoloured. Tristram described them as 'painted green and ornamented with red lions
rampant within medallions', now extremely difficult to discern.\textsuperscript{126} The wall above the
position of the altar on either side and above the huge Gothic arch still bears the remains
of scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary and a number of saints. Well above eye-level,
the faded sequence is almost impossible to see clearly, even with binoculars. Tristram
made copies of some of this decoration in 1924, but eight decades later the murals appear
as little more than stains in the plaster (Pl.36 and 37). Only two tiers of a three-tier
sequence remained containing some detail in 1924. They indicate that the design was
finely drawn and painted with expensive pigments by talented artists.

On the north side of the arch in the topmost tier the shadowy remains of two
figures in niches are just visible; traces of beige/cream pigment and the very faintest green
still exists. In front of this appears the Angel Gabriel, holding a scroll and extending his
right hand towards the Virgin Mary, who occupies the corresponding niche on the south
side of the arch - forming a ‘traditional’ Annunciation scene (Pl.38). Beyond Gabriel is a
space of unidentifiable blurred outlines, recorded by Tristram as an extremely elaborate
empty niche (Pl.39). On each side of the apex of the arch are the faint traces of figures,
that once again appear today to be beige/cream, but without exact definition. Tristram’s
record shows these to be censing angels clothed in beige/green robes; furthermore he

\textsuperscript{125} Caiger-Smith, \textit{Mural Painting}, p.16.
\textsuperscript{126} Tristram, \textit{Fourteenth Century}, p.241.
describes the background to the two figures as 'semy of lions'. His record also shows five green quatrefoils separating the top and second tiers on each side of the arch, but this detail is now virtually lost (Pl.38).

On the extreme north side of the second tier is the faintest figure in the remains of a very elaborate niche. Described by Tristram as St. Margaret (of Antioch) spearing the dragon under her feet, she is again almost impossible to identify today. Next to her is a figure kneeling in supplication; now very obscure, this is said to be a male donor. On the opposite side of the arch is the best-preserved figure: a woman in a simple green/beige gown, a wimple and veil obscuring all her hair, with her face turned towards the onlooker; she too is said to be a donor. The details of her face are actually still clear today, even from ground level. Tristram’s record shows her kneeling with her hands together outstretched in prayer, an open book on a lectern at her side (Pl.40). Once again there are elaborately vaulted arches in which each donor kneels. Much of this can no longer be seen.

McAleer’s contention that this wall was rebuilt/altered at the same time as that of the equivalent north transept wall, in c.1240 or 1250, might also suggest an earlier date than c.1350 posited by Tristram. The figures in the sequence of paintings also bear some resemblance to the drawing styles and colour schemes of the second and third quarters of the thirteenth century. The incised outline in black or brown and similar colour schemes used by Matthew Paris, and to some extent the colours used in the more complex work of the ‘Sarum Master’, are reminiscent in the Lady Chapel murals. In particular the *semi en-face* disposition of the male and female donors resemble the faces drawn by

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127 Ibid., p.241.
128 Ibid., p.241.
Paris, with clear simple features, half-turned towards their audience. The use of incised outline in black or brown, the garment drapes and green on cream emphasised with red or brown on the fabrics is also similar, but these can only now be discerned in Tristram’s records.

The donors themselves present a further conundrum with regard to the dating of the Lady Chapel murals. These have not been found in mural art until after the date to which the rest of the Rochester sequence appears to belong (perhaps third quarter thirteenth century). This could be simply explained as a result of the poor survival of the medium. Binski suggests, however, that the appearance of a praying Benedictine monk on the right of St. Faith, St. Faith’s Chapel, Westminster Abbey, might be the ‘donor’, in view of the growing trend in monastic patronage in late medieval Westminster. Should this be so, Rochester’s Lady Chapel donors could reflect the trend. Although Tristram’s male donor does not resemble a Benedictine monk, the female donor could represent an abbess from the nun-like habit she wears, or a lay woman displaying her modesty (Pl.40).

Depictions of donors had been added to manuscripts for some considerable time before the mid-thirteenth century. An early example (c.934) shows King Athelstan, in a copy of Bede’s Lives of St. Cuthbert, presenting the saint with a copy of the book (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Ms.183, fol.1v). The Amesbury Psalter (Oxford, All Souls College, Ms.6, fol.4) shows an Amesbury nun kneeling beside the Virgin and Child (probably c.1230-60). The Missal of Henry of Chichester, dating to the fourth

129 Richard Vaughan, The Illustrated Chronicles of Matthew Paris - Observations of Thirteenth-Century Life, pp.50 and 56, (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Ms. 16: f.183r; a man, possibly a monk, kneeling in prayer; CCCC, Ms. 26: f.58v; the martyrdom of St. Alban and CCCC, Ms 26: f.132r; the martyrdom of Becket).
130 Binski, Westminster Abbey, p.169.
131 Elzbieta Temple, Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts, p.37, pl.29.
132 Marks and Morgan, English Manuscript Painting, p.11, Fig.5.
quarter thirteenth century, shows a tonsured cleric - probably the eponymous bishop - as the donor in a miniature of the Virgin and Child (Manchester, John Rylands Library, Ms.lat.24, fol.150). Later manuscripts also show donors, for example, the ‘Annunciation’ in the Beaufort Book of Hours (dated prior to 1415) the donors kneel in prayer on either side of Mary and Gabriel, each with a book on a lectern (London, British Library, Ms. Royal 2 A. XVIII, fol.23v).

As far as Rochester’s Lady Chapel murals are concerned, perhaps the whole sequence was painted a little later than the fashionable style of the times of Matthew Paris, William de Brailes or the Sarum Master. Perhaps the donors were added to the mural at a later date, after renovation or restoration of the existing painting. A further possibility could be that the Gothic arch, around which the paintings appear, was pierced through the existing mid to late thirteenth-century mural, as has happened during additional work in other churches, where arches or windows have been constructed through wall paintings.

The declining fortunes of the priory during a major part of the fourteenth century (discussed below), also suggests that c.1350 is a late estimate for the Lady Chapel murals.

In his Chronicles, Paris included a painting of Rochester Castle and Cathedral in the section devoted to 1250, which referred to the visit in that year of Archbishop Boniface to Rochester Priory. It is a very simple depiction of Rochester’s two most important buildings (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Ms.26, fol.i.r), but suggests he

133 Ibid., p.54, pl. 8.
134 Ibid., p.103, pl. 32.
135 Evidence of such piercing seems to exist at the church of St. Helen, Cliffe at Hoo, where a lancet window has apparently been cut through the sequence of paintings on the east wall of the south-east chapel, where Christ in Judgement is depicted among other subjects, and where the mural of St. Margaret of Antioch, mentioned below, can also be seen. Similarly, St. Mary’s Church, Brook, nr. Ashford, has had windows pierced through murals causing damage (Pl.22).
136 Vaughan, Matthew Paris, p.147.
may have had personal knowledge of them, as he places the castle on the right of the cathedral, how they would have been seen when approached by a traveller crossing the river. This is not to suggest that Paris directed work in Rochester Cathedral; paintings with this distinctive style can be found in other churches in Kent, reflecting the fact that it was a fairly wide-spread, London-based genre.\textsuperscript{137}

At the extreme southern side of the second tier Tristram detected the remains of a painting of St. Catherine (of Alexandria) identified from the remaining fragments of the ‘wheel’ on which she was to have been broken for her faith. It is impossible to detect any of this saint, and most of the architectural vaults and beautifully drawn pillars that Tristram recorded in his paintings are hardly visible. The lower tier is so faded that it is not possible to describe exactly who was there, but the outline of a figure within a vault is just visible on the north side of the arch. When Tristram made his paintings it was possible to see the head and shoulders of another female saint beneath the feet of St. Margaret on the extreme northern side of the arch, still just possible to discern. All the figures were standing on stone plinths or kneeling on beige cushions with green foliage, once again hardly identifiable.\textsuperscript{138} Ss. Catherine and Margaret, who epitomised virtuous women, were both extremely popular in Europe. Many representations of both can be found in England, as well as in other countries. St. Margaret would have set a moral example to medieval women and her appeal was enhanced because she was believed to protect women and

\textsuperscript{137} Very faint remains of the depiction of the martyrdom of Thomas Becket can be seen in the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Stone. From Tristram’s 1924 painting it appears that the content and grouping of the figures (though not the colours used, which might have discoloured) bears some similarities to Paris’s ‘martyrdom’ in his \textit{Chronicle}: Vaughan, \textit{Matthew Paris}, p.73 (Cambridge, Corpus Christie College Ms.26, fol.132r.).

\textsuperscript{138} Tristram, \textit{Fourteenth Century}, p.241.
their infants against the dangers of childbirth.\textsuperscript{139} In the south transept of the thirteenth-century church of St. Helen, Cliffe at Hoo, where there was also a Bishop’s palace, there is a fragmentary history, in five tiers, of St. Margaret of Antioch (Pl.41). The style is fluid and more realistic, particularly of St. Margaret as she slays the dragon (or devil) under her feet. It provides a comparison with the stiffer sequence in Rochester Cathedral.

Henry III had the history of St. Catherine painted in the Church of St. Peter, Tower of London in 1240 and in the Chapel of St. Catherine, Guildford in 1251.

St. Margaret the Virgin was painted in his upper chamber at Clarendon Palace in Wiltshire in 1246,\textsuperscript{140} and many of his chosen schemes are known to have been created in tiers, just as in ninety-nine per cent of all narrative cycles. Henry also instigated the redecoration of the royal chapel at Rochester Castle in 1239;\textsuperscript{141} an enthusiastic patron of the arts, it seems likely that he would also have taken an interest in the Cathedral. The artists in Henry III’s patronage, described as the ‘Court School of Westminster’ by Tristram, were apparently active in other parts of the kingdom,\textsuperscript{142} it is, therefore, probable that they were employed by the king in Rochester castle.

\textbf{Cloister Garth - Masonry Painting.}

On the right-hand side of the Gothic arched doorway, covered by a modern glass porch, leading from the south choir aisle into cloister garth, behind a small wooden door about three feet from the ground, is a fragment of delicate painted masonry. It is block-work in red on a strong cream ground with five petal rosettes in the interior of the blocks (five

\textsuperscript{139} Farmer, \textit{Dictionary of Saints}, pp.91 and 327.
\textsuperscript{140} Borenius, ‘The Cycle of Images’, pp.47 and 49.
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Calendar of Liberate Rolls, Henry III, 1245-51}, (ed.) Deputy Keeper of the Records, p.113.
\textsuperscript{142} Tristram, \textit{Thirteenth Century}, p.443.
petal rosettes represented the five wounds of Christ) now seriously flaking (Pl.42). It is difficult to determine today what part of the cloister buildings would have contained this fragment, but it clearly was not decoration of outside walls. In this position or close to it was thought to be the (disputed) lesser tower, built by Gundulf, to balance the tower on the north side of the Cathedral. It is considered more likely that it was a part of the cloister buildings abutting the cathedral at this point.

143 McAleer, Rochester Cathedral, p.197, n.77 and p.253, n.75.
144 An almost perfect example of similar design can be seen in the recess of the sedilia on the south chancel wall, St. Mary’s Church, Brook, nr. Ashford.
Painted Panelling of the Sacristy.

The entrance to the sacristy is through a small Perpendicular door from the minor south choir transept, the wall of which was built between c.1340-1400. As there is no evidence of a door into the sacristy through the panelling, it seems reasonable to think that its erection corresponds with the same date.

At the top of the stairs leading from the south choir aisle into the south choir transept, immediately above the stairs to the crypt, is an area of oak panelling which screens off the sacristy. This consists of fourteen tall lower panels on the side facing west, with beading between each panel, above which is a four-inch wide strip separating fourteen further short panels also separated by beading. Above this is a five inch wide band culminating in a finial bar. At the corner of the right angle with a similar set of panels on the south facing screen (which appear either to be new or to have been cleaned) is a solid octagonal post. The wood has been painted or dyed with a red pigment, which has faded to pinkish red and displays on its west face black stars staggered alternately in each panel to the top rail (Pl.43). The south-facing panelling is a similar colour, but does not display the remains of black stars, with the exception of the top board, rail and final octagonal post. It is not entirely clear if restoration has taken place to the screens, but because they are sufficiently faded it is possible to see that older designs do not exist underneath those presently there. If restoration has taken place, it seems to have followed the original design.

There are many examples of stars in churches, great and small, throughout the country, used purely as decoration and as background to figural work. The use of stars, to illustrate the cosmos, shows the divinity of Christ bringing light to the darkness and order
to the world.\textsuperscript{145} It seems appropriate decoration for a room in which religious objects such as sacred vessels and crosses, vestments and possibly valuable manuscripts, were kept and where the bishop or priest would robe in his special garments for services.

A damaged thirteenth-century mural of Christ in Majesty in Eastbridge Hospital, Canterbury (said to closely resemble the style of Matthew Paris) appropriately depicts stars in the background to the mandorla in which Christ sits holding the orb (the world) in his left hand.\textsuperscript{146} Examples of stars used as background and other decoration can also be seen in manuscripts. In the \textit{Missal of Henry of Chichester}, c.1250, Christ’s loin cloth in the Crucifixion is decorated with stars (Manchester, Rylands Library, lat.24, f.125).\textsuperscript{147} Stars were sometimes shown on the crown of the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven,\textsuperscript{148} and can also be seen on her robes, for example the Madonna Lactans in the \textit{Amesbury Psalter} (Oxford, All Souls College, Ms.6, f.4). A miniature by Matthew Paris, which shows the image of Christ on Veronica’s handkerchief (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Ms.16. fol.53v) has a series of small dots in the background, which appear to represent stars.\textsuperscript{149}

\textbf{Effigy of Bishop John de Sheppey - c.1360.}

A tomb was discovered in 1825, which had long been concealed, possibly in advance of the Reformation or the destructive forces of the Commonwealth. Bishop John de Sheppey (1353-60) whose tomb it is, still bore the remains of elaborate decoration on the effigy of its occupant (Pl.44). The monument can be seen today, restored and unfortunately

\begin{footnotes}
\item[146] Tristram, \textit{Thirteenth Century}, p.274, compares the head of Christ at Eastbridge Hospital with the type in the \textit{Chronica Maiora}, attributed to Matthew Paris.
\item[147] Kauffmann, \textit{Biblical Imagery}, Pl.VII.
\item[149] Vaughan, \textit{Illustrated Chronicles}, p.114
\end{footnotes}
repainted, in the north choir transept, close to the entrance to the presbytery and has provided an exceptional record of the garments, shoes, jewellery, headgear and decoration of a bishop of his time. Palmer comments that (at the time of its discovery) it was considered to be perhaps the very best example of painted carving from the second half of the fourteenth century in England. Certain parts of the stone carved figure had become detached: the fingers, parts of the feet, the top of the mitre and the head of one of the dogs, but all were found and replaced. The figure is thought to have been painted in c.1361, and though the colours had faded when discovered, it was still possible to see the different tones used in each garment.

In 1840 the garments were repainted in vivid colours: the chasuble, which was pink when found, in strong red on which is a floral pattern in black, with gold edging and a green lining. The shoes are mustard with brown jewelled decoration and the gloves, mitre, collar and maniple are richly decorated with gold and studded with gesso jewels. On his left hand the Episcopal ring is a gold set ruby also in gesso. The dalmatic was almost entirely colourless when discovered, but is now green decorated with a pattern in gold. Beneath the dalmatic, the alb is full-length covering part of the shoes, with a pale back-ground also decorated in gold. The Bishop’s face is rather damaged, but traces of an almost natural flesh colour can just be detected. The pillows that support his mitred head are a similar red to that of the chasuble and decorated in elaborate dark patterns. The little dogs at his feet have red collars with gold bells on them.

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150 Palmer, Rochester, pp.99-100.
151 Ibid., p.102.
Tristram comments that much of the later repainting has been removed, but the colours seen today still appear to be brighter than those recorded by a Mr. Harris in 1825. He made two drawings of the sculpture, one as it was found and a second as the architect thought it would have looked originally. It seems that Harris was distressed by the resultant repainting, considering that the remains of the exquisite original work had been lost. The stone plinth and carved arched canopy are very beautiful, although the latter has been rebuilt to some extent, and was probably painted in strong colours, similar to the canopied tomb of Bishop Hamo de Hythe in the north choir aisle, which has traces of red ochre still visible on the carving. Other monumental tombs created for various of Rochester’s bishops have not survived nearly so well.

The fourteenth-century mural of St. William of York, to be seen in the Saint’s Chapel, St. Albans Abbey, provides an example of vestments, fabric colours and decoration of a fourteenth-century bishop, for comparison with those of Bishop John de Sheppey. St. William’s vestment colours are still strong and the definition of the figure perfectly clear (Pl.45). When revealed in 1847 the colours quickly faded, but what remains is still rich, although there is no indication of embroidery on the chasuble. Clearly ecclesiastical garments were made in expensive fabrics dyed in vibrant colours and, whether being worn, painted on a wall or decorating a tomb effigy, they were intended to make a strong statement and lasting impression. A beautifully embroidered chasuble (c.1248) and equally fine decorated cope (c.1300) can be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which indicate the level of expert workmanship and expense lavished on such

153 Ibid., p.241.
154 Palmer, Rochester, p.100.
155 Ibid., p.102.
156 Roberts, St. Albans Abbey, pp.52-53.
garments.\textsuperscript{157} English medieval embroidery was of incomparable quality and records from the twelfth century show that large sums of money were paid by the church and the wealthy, for embroidered garments made from expensive fabrics, with quilting, appliqué, gold thread and jewels.\textsuperscript{158}


\textsuperscript{158} Christie, \textit{Medieval Embroidery}, p.138.
The New Lady Chapel.

The final addition to Rochester Cathedral was built between 1480 and 1530. This was the so-called Lady Chapel constructed in the Perpendicular style to the west of the south transept. It was intended, it would seem, as the nave to a chapel in the south transept which had been created in the early fourteenth century (the original Lady Chapel).\footnote{McAleer, ‘Medieval Fabric’, p.183. Palmer, \textit{Rochester}, p.70, comments that the new Lady Chapel was constructed as a choir to the original south transept Lady Chapel.}

McAleer considers that this part of the building appears to have replaced an earlier chapel, which was not quite as wide. He further comments that the earlier narrower chapel may have been the site of the \textit{chapel de novo constructa} mentioned in the grant of 1322.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp.183-184, for origins and date of this addition to the cathedral.}

This being so, it might resolve some of the mystery concerning the original Lady Chapel east-wall murals, explaining why their origins appear to date to sometime during the third quarter of the thirteenth century. There is no evidence remaining of wall painting in the new Perpendicular Lady Chapel, only marbling on some of the piers, pillars and slender shafts.
The Medieval Wall Paintings of Rochester Cathedral
c.1190-1350.

Conclusions.

If at first sight Rochester Cathedral seems largely devoid of mural decoration, close inspection of the fabric and of antiquarian sources reveals that, formerly, the reverse was almost certainly the case. The cathedral is an organic building, a mélange of spaces and styles some of which, because of its modest size, are not quite as difficult to recognise as they are in other cathedrals of similar origin.

References to Rochester (though not to the cathedral per se) can be found throughout the Close and Liberate Rolls of Henry III, (and in those of monarchs that preceded and followed him) indicating provisioning of Rochester’s royal Castle, as well as the king’s visits, which are too numerous to mention here. There are, however, a number of references made for payments to messengers from the king to visit the Bishop of Rochester.

In 1237 a Contrabreve was issued to the Sheriffs of London for four tuns of wine to be delivered by the king’s order to Gravesend, two tuns of which were to be sent to Rochester castle.¹ In the Liberate Rolls for February, 1239 there is a record of instruction to the Sheriff of Kent: ‘to cause the walls of the king’s chapel within Rochester castle to be plastered (plastrari) and whitewashed (dealbari) anew, and to cause the chapel itself to be painted and to cause [God’s] majesty to be repainted in the place where it was before, and to cause the chapel

to be roofed \textit{(cohoperiri)}, but so that the roof \textit{(cumulils)} of the chapel shall not be thrown down by reason of this.\footnote{Calendar of Liberate Rolls, Henry III, 1226-1240, p.365.} An order in March 1247 for glass for the King’s Hall at Rochester Castle, to be painted with the arms of King Henry III and the late Count of Provence, is an indication of the importance the king placed on his residence at Rochester, on his links with France and great enthusiasm for heraldry.\footnote{Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry III, 1247-1251, p.113.} In the year 1250 the \textit{Close Rolls} record a \textit{Mandatum} to the \textit{vicecomiti Kancie}, in advance of a stay at Rochester by \textit{(De) regina Scocie}, for preparations, suitable for a queen, to be made at Rochester Castle for her visit.\footnote{Ibid., p.340.} It does not seem credible that Henry III, his predecessors or successors, neglected to visit the cathedral, in some official form of procession for services, particularly when a monarch or high dignitary was visiting, or that some influence would not have flowed to the artistic endeavours within and without the cathedral building.

The painters of Rochester Cathedral’s murals may have been servants of the priory community, but could also have been peripatetic artists, travelling from place to place to fill commissions. The wall paintings reflect changes in beliefs, style, technique and quality of materials, and provide an insight into the financial status of the cathedral’s community. As Rochester was the smallest of the medieval cathedrals, its resources almost certainly poor in relation to those of other Sees, certain limitations for luxuries or extra-mural work must have existed.

It has been estimated, however, that towards the end of the thirteenth century their annual income would have been in the bracket of £500 per annum (or less).

If small when compared with that of Canterbury’s income of £1,500-2,000 per annum
at the same period, £500 represents a large sum of money for the late thirteenth century - furthermore, when related to Rochester’s cathedral and community, which was itself small by comparison with Canterbury, it represents a not insignificant per capita sum.

With the exception of some fragmentary remains of painted decoration in the nave and the interior walls adjacent to the west door, which were probably very colourful at one time, the remainder of the mural art in Rochester Cathedral dates to the period between c.1200 and 1350. Rebuilding of the destroyed cathedral in 1137 and further reconstruction of some parts of it in 1179, probably accounts for the majority of the remaining wall paintings being no earlier than about first quarter thirteenth-century. Dating of much of the structure, however, is still unresolved; further excavations of parts of the building’s foundations, for example the original Lady Chapel, are needed to determine hypothetical sequences and their contexts.  

Rochester Priory’s fortunes were apparently frequently in some disarray. This was the case during the thirteenth century when funds from the shrine of St. William of Perth had largely been used, much of the demesne lands had been leased (in an attempt to reduce expenditure on upkeep, repair and maintenance) and large debts were incurred in legal proceedings with Gilbert Glanville. A number of years of poor harvests during the first thirty years of the fourteenth century brought about hardship to many parts of the country and probably affected the income of

6 McAleer, Rochester Cathedral, p.165.
similar establishments to Rochester Priory, not to mention tenants of their estates. The Black Death followed from 1348 to the early years of the 1350s, decimating populations of towns, villages and countryside alike. The disease, the ‘pestilence’, swept through Rochester between 1349 and 1352, seriously reducing the priory’s complement of monks and servants. Immediately prior to the Black Death it is estimated that thirty-five to forty monks lived in the priory, but by the latter half of the fourteenth century this was reduced to twenty-three. The effect was long-term, as it seems that their numbers never again reached the levels enjoyed before the pestilence. The Bishop of Rochester’s household (already described as modest) was reduced by: ‘four priests, five squires, ten household servants, seven young clerks and six pages’, leaving him without servants.

Income from their leased manors, already poor, was affected further for the lack of people to work them. £100 only was returned from their estates in 1349.

From what remains in Rochester Cathedral there is no apparent evidence of figural paintings later than first quarter fourteenth century. There are few signs of secondary murals (with the exception of the redecorated choir walls of c.1337, and those paintings made over simple early thirteenth-century masonry blockwork, for example those of the thirteenth century in St. Edmund’s Chapel and of the fourteenth century in the crypt), or tertiary painting having taken place in the

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8 Ibid., p.52.
9 Ibid., p.51.
11 Ibid., p.73. For the year 1349 it is recorded that the buildings and walls of all the manors of the diocese were crumbling and the manors barely yielded £100 for that year. The monks of Rochester’s monastery were so short of food, they were obliged to grind their own bread.
late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as is the case in other churches. This might be partially accounted for as the result of fewer servants to do the work, lack of funds, or extremely effective obliteration of later works at the time of the Reformation and later.

More accurate dating of the remaining paintings from the style and materials used, in relation to extant exemplars such as stained glass and manuscripts, may assist in confirming dates of some of the building’s fabric. Further research into the origins of the graffiti, over which hang some significant question marks, could help to settle just what the extent of reconstruction or repair was essential after the fire of 1179. It requires careful study to see where all the fragments of murals remain, but from those discussed above and those which have of necessity been omitted (many scraps of pigment or strong stains in the plaster) it seems that this cathedral, like almost all medieval cathedrals and churches, was decorated with vibrant colour, as was the custom. Rochester Cathedral, however, retains some murals which have become almost unique; the Wheel of Fortune being considered one of the finest thirteenth-century wall paintings in this country.12

During the thirteenth century increasing importance was placed by the church, on their religious writings, on devotion and remorse by laymen for their sins; texts were given stronger impact with supporting visual imagery.13 Texts and images, not only from manuscripts but stained glass and artefacts, were translated onto walls. It therefore seems extremely probable that the solid walls of Rochester Cathedral

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12 Rickerby, 'Conservation', p.9
13 Kauffmann, Biblical Imagery, p.147; in a concerted effort to gain control over the laity, stricter rules were laid down for worship, confession and penance in the thirteenth century. The religious works of the time were written with these disciplines in mind, the imagery used was in support of them.
were no different to any other contemporary religious buildings. No doubt the nave, transepts and minor transepts were decorated with sequences of murals that were popular during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries and as we have seen it is possible to link the style of some of the remaining murals with people, those in other buildings and media.

We may assume that ninety per cent or more of Rochester’s murals have faded or have been thoroughly obliterated. The high quality of the fragmented bits and pieces that remain suggest that what has disappeared would also have been high in quality, worthy of our interest and understanding. The historian is provided with the opportunity in Rochester Cathedral to view the evolutionary nature of subject matter, iconography and materials used on walls, vaults and shrines, in relation to particular fashions and developments in architecture. It would be rewarding to think that there are secrets yet to be found in the building, as there have been during restoration and repair in previous centuries.
Romano-Saxon Rochester.

THE MEAD WAY, THE STREET AND ROMAN WALLS IN ROCHESTER

© Beverley Jacobs, 2005
Rochester c. 1150

The south-east quarter of Rochester, c. 1150
Maps showing the situation of Rochester
A translation of the Charter reads as follows:—

For the Citizens of Rochester. - Henry, by the Grace of God, King of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy and Acquitaine, Count of Anjou, to the Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Priors, Earls, Barons, Justicians, Sheriffs, Reeves, Ministers and all Bailiffs, and all his faithful subjects who shall see the present Charter, Greetings. Know ye that we have granted and by this our Charter confirmed to our Citizens of Rochester and to their heirs, the City of Rochester at fee farm by paying £25 to our Exchequer, to wit, half at Easter and half at the Feast of St. Michael, to hold from us and our heirs for them and their heirs for ever with all appurtenances liberties and free customs belonging to the aforesaid City, and that they shall have a guild merchant, with a house and all liberties and customs belonging to that guild; so that no sheriff of Kent shall intervene in any plea plaint or occasion, saving pleas of our crown for us and our heirs for ever, which are to be attached by our same citizens until the coming of our Justices. We have granted also to the same citizens that no one of them shall plead without the walls of the City of Rochester any plea saving pleas of land without the City, excepting the moneyers and our ministers. We have granted also that they shall be quit of murder within the City and portsmoken and none of them shall do battle; and of the pleas of the crown they may deraign themselves according to the ancient custom of the City; no one shall take lodging within the City forcibly, but by the livery of the marshal. We have granted to them also that all the Citizens of Rochester shall be quit of toll and leage throughout all England and in the sea ports, No Citizen shall be adjudged of an averment of money, save as in the time of King Henry our grandfather (King Henry II), and in no plea in the City of Rochester shall there be miskenn, and the portmote shall be held once in fifteen days; their lands, holdings, pledges and debts they shall have justly, whoever the debtor be; and of their lands and holdings within the City right shall be done them according to the custom of the City; and of all their debts lent at Rochester and pledges there made pleas shall be held at Rochester. Moreover if any one in England shall take toll or custom of the men of Rochester, and shall fail to do them right, the reeves of the City of Rochester shall take reprimals thereof in Rochester. And moreover for the repair of the City of Rochester we granted to them that they shall be quit of brithole, childwyte, jeresive and scotale, and the Bailiffs of the same city nor any other bailiffs shall make scotale there. Wherefore we will and strongly enjoin that our aforesaid citizens of Rochester with all its appurtenances at fee farm by paying £25 sterling yearly to our Exchequer at the aforesaid terms and that they have all the aforesaid liberties and quietances for ever well and peaceably and freely and quietly, honourable fully and entirely, as is aforesaid saving the liberty of our City of London.

Witnesses E. (1) of London J. (2) of Bath W. (3) Cardinal Bishop H. (4) de Burge Earl of Kent Justiciare of England Ph. (5) de Albinaco William (6) son of Warin Ralph (7) son of Nicholas Godfrey (8) of Crouecumb and others. Given by the hand of the venerable father Ralph (9) Bishop of Chichester and our Chancellor, at Westminster on the sixth day of November in the twelfth year of our reign."

Note: (1) Eustace de Pouconberg, Bishop of London
(2) Jocelin Trotman, Bishop of Bath
(3) Walter Walclerc, Bishop of Carlisle
(4) Hubert de Burgh, Earl of Kent
(5) Philip de Albinaco
(6) William FitzWarin
(7) Ralph FitzNicholas
(8) Godfrey de Craucumb
(9) Ralph Neville

See Calendar of Charter Rolls vol.1 p.64.
ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Authorized by
The Dean & Chapter

A Pitkin Cathedral Guide
Fig. 9a.

Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre
Textus Roffensis
DRc/R1 f.119 r
nullus episcopalis aliquanctulus cellula sit, nec est terminus mei donum. Fratrem sub clave
peste mandunci palesi dornam et ador alae aeli. Ilam in hortus, sperat, sperat. Sperat dornam et ador hortus,
Sperat in hortus sperat ador. Et si praesens munita sunt, contra quidem pra
misit. Hoc qui consultam laureatam. Epi se omnis
pati me zelo. Signo se crucif consecravit eum.
In hoc ut metiu idem facerent. AMEN.

Deuteroque ante quem Vocantem:
Hominum adscibis, hanc hannam.
Hici deit mi thumipe ego adhauerit reddem
triumque donum aliquis parte terce pri
dcho annum me zelo; inuidi genem deete zelo
me zelo episcopatis beat antheq apsi au
erable in trocalculo et viaa seedie antheq
inregionis quic vocatur hosh inlaeq
dictur: antheq hann redit dede aram
nyca aestimatione, principae enus
hui
Plate 2. Rochester Cathedral crypt - graffiti Christ on the road to Emmaeus

© Beverley Jacobs, 2005
Plate 3a. Rochester Cathedral nave - graffiti Eagle

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Plate 4a. Canterbury Cathedral crypt - graffiti Eagle

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Plate 4b, Canterbury Cathedral crypt - graffiti Figure of a Man

© Beverley Jacobs, 2005
Plate 5. Church of St. Clement, Sandwich - graffiti - Eagle
Plate 9. Rochester Cathedral choir - west wall choir screen

© Beverley Jacobs, 2005
Plate 10. Rochester Cathedral south presbytery aisle - framed original of choir paneling
Plate 13. Rochester Cathedral west door - Tympanum, Christ in Majesty

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Plate 14a. Rochester Cathedral north choir aisle - vine-scroll decoration in tomb recess

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Plate 14b. Rochester Cathedral north choir aisle - vine-scroll decoration and carved tomb

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Plate 15. Byward Tower, Tower of London - Popinjay mural
Removed due to permissions pending.
Plate 17. Rochester Cathedral crypt - quadripartite vault decoration
Plate 18. Rochester Cathedral crypt, north-east chapel vault - medallions as seen today - Angel &
Plate 19. Rochester Cathedral crypt, north-east chapel vault - medallions Tristram's Painting 1923
Plate 20. Rochester Cathedral crypt, north-east chapel vault - medallions as seen today
Plate 21. Rochester Cathedral crypt, north-east chapel vault - medallions Tristram's Painting 1923
Plate 22. St. Mary's Church, Brook, Nr. Ashford - roundels

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Plate 23. Church of St. Peter's, Sandwich - shields

© Beverley Jacobs, 2005
Plate 24. Rochester Cathedral crypt, north-east chapel archway - cusped story of a saint, seen today © Beverley Jacobs, 2005
Plate 25. Rochester Cathedral crypt, north-east chapel archway - cusped story of a saint - Tristram
Plate 26. Rochester Cathedral south nave aisle - pier at entry to south transept
Plate 27. Rochester Cathedral south choir aisle - Crucifixion as seen today

© Beverley Jacobs, 2005
Plate 28. Rochester Cathedral south choir aisle - Crucifixion, Tristram's painting, 1922
Plate 29. The church of St. Mary the Virgin, Stone - Virgin & Child, as seen today
Plate 30. The church of St. Mary the virgin, Stone - Virgin & Child, Tristram's painting, 1922
Plate 31. St. Albans Abbey, nave: Crucifixion north pier five

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Plate 32. Rochester Cathedral choir - book rests

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Plate 34. Rochester Cathedral choir - Wheel of Fortune

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Plate 35. Rochester Cathedral south choir aisle - St. Andrew
Plate 36. Rochester Cathedral - Lady Chapel as seen today - north side of arch.

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Plate 37. Rochester Cathedral - Lady Chapel as seen today - south side of arch

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Plate 38. Rochester Cathedral - Lady Chapel, Tristram's painting, 1924

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Plate 39. Rochester Cathedral - Lady Chapel Angel Gabriel, Tristram's painting, 1924
Plate 40. Rochester Cathedral - Lady Chapel female donor, Tristram's painting, 1924

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Plate 41. The church of St. Helen, Cliffe at Hoo - St. Margaret of Antioch
Plate 42. Rochester Cathedral - Cloister Garth - masonry painting
Plate 43. Rochester Cathedral sacristy - painted paneling
Plate 44. Rochester Cathedral entrance to presbytery - tomb of John of Sheppey

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