

# MEDIEVAL TRACERY-CARVED CLAMP-FRONTED CHESTS: THE 'KENTISH GOTHIC' CHESTS OF RAINHAM, FAVERSHAM AND CANTERBURY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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This article is a study of three medieval chests in North Kent, at St. Margaret's, Rainham, St. Mary's of Charity, Faversham, and St. John's Hospital, Canterbury. After a brief outline of previous research on these chests, consideration is given to their construction and decoration, dendrochronological dating of the Faversham chest, and the group in relation to a broader category of chests that have been found in England, North Germany and Scandinavia. There were many types of medieval chest construction but there is no agreed classification. Eames<sup>1</sup> distinguishes between footed chests (slab-ended, ark, hutch and panelled and unfooted chests (dug-out, box, standard and plinthed), whereas Chinnery<sup>2</sup> distinguishes between dug-out, boarded and joined (clamp-fronted and framed panel) construction. Clamp-fronted refers to a front consisting one or more full-width boards held within wide stiles.

There is no clear temporal sequence in construction styles. Dug-out chests can be traced in England from the twelfth century to the seventeenth century<sup>3</sup>. Boarded chests extend in England from before the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century, when they become a cheaper alternative to framed panel chests. Clamp-fronted chests start in England around 1200<sup>4</sup> but had become uncommon by the sixteenth century, though in the Black Mountains of Wales or in the form of arks, they persisted into the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> These early chests were often bound with iron straps or decorative ironwork.<sup>6</sup> The familiar framed, multi-panelled, chest started in the mid-sixteenth century in England, and largely displaced the clamp-fronted chest.

The chests of interest here belong to a group of clamp-fronted chests without iron bands or decorative ironwork, and with deep-carved tracery fronts. This group shows a quantum leap forward in the extent and quality of carving from the earliest such English chests, which were mainly plain, incised grounded or chip-carved (the exceptions including the Newport and Climping chests). It is intriguing that in the fourteenth century, before what has been described as the 'Golden Age' of English church woodwork in the fifteenth century, carving was not applied to chests.<sup>7</sup>

The Rainham and Faversham chests (Figures 1 and 3) are better known than the Canterbury chest (Figure 4). The former two are described in Roe<sup>8</sup> and it was Roe<sup>9</sup> who introduced the term 'Kentish Gothic' for them. Conway,<sup>10</sup> a Kent-based collector, and possibly keen to connect a chest of his to others in Kent, refers to all three, and suggests Canterbury as a possible place of manufacture. Cescinsky and Gribble list all three as fourteenth century chests.<sup>11</sup> The Faversham chest was illustrated in the *Dictionary of*

*English Furniture*<sup>12</sup> and the Rainham chest is also discussed there. The Canterbury chest has received little attention, though it is illustrated in Roe.<sup>13</sup> This is odd given its similar tracery carving. Moreover, two further chests that closely resemble the Canterbury chest have not been discussed as part of the same set. They are a lost chest drawn in 1857 at Wittersham church, south of Tenterden in South-west Kent<sup>14</sup> and another lost chest drawn in 1835 at Sedlescombe church, nearby in East Sussex<sup>15</sup> (Figures 5 and 6).

There are two more chests of the Canterbury type: one survives at All Saints, Litcham, Norfolk (Figure 7)<sup>16</sup>, and one was at St Margaret's, Norwich until a 1942 air raid (Figure 8). Neither has been published. This article will refer to the group of three chests which have been studied, and to features of the wider group of seven which are visible from images. The Litcham chest has not been examined.

Although the Rainham and Faversham chests are included in *Buildings of England*,<sup>17</sup> in the post-war period the Kentish chests have received less attention. They were not among the fifty one objects including by Eames<sup>18</sup> in her magisterial survey of medieval furniture in England, France and the Netherlands, nor does she comment on these three chests, though she does discuss other tracery-carved chests in England. Nor were they mentioned by Tracy<sup>19</sup> in the introductory essay in his revised V&A catalogue. In his later survey of Continental church furniture in England, they are omitted also, presumably because he considers them to be English, or Continental but secular.<sup>20</sup> Given this apparent waning of interest in what, I hope to show, are three highly distinctive chests, it seems timely to re-examine them.

## CONSTRUCTION

*Timber.* All three chests are made of close, straight-grained, Baltic-type oak.<sup>21</sup> Almost all the wall and lid boards are quarter-sawn, or cleft.

*Dimensions.* The Rainham and Faversham chests are almost identical in size, and larger than the Canterbury chest. The Rainham chest is 1m 60 wide, 88 cm high (with lid) and 72 cm deep; the Faversham chest 1m 63 wide, 93 cm high, and 72 cm deep and the Canterbury chest 1m 48 wide, 83 cm high and 66 cm deep. Too much should not be made of the differences in the height given wear to the legs and restoration.

*Clamp-fronted construction.* The four walls of each chest are each made up of three boards with tongues which are pegged into long grooves in the stiles. The boards often taper in their width, but this would be hidden by the tracery carving or by their unobtrusive positions in the sides or back. Usually a single peg holds the top and bottom board; the middle board being unpegged. The stiles are all 23–24 cm wide, and taper in cross-section from about 4 cm outside to 3 cm inside.

*Front construction.* The two larger chests have an applied fretted board which extends across the full width of the chest at the top, fitting into a rebate in the top boards, and carries the upper part of the carved decoration. This board, which has a strengthening function, is held on by ten vertical pairs of pegs, the upper peg being cleverly concealed as a small boss in the tracery design. Above this board are two short packing pieces applied at the top of the stiles. All three chests have skirting-pieces pegged on, which taper downwards in cross-section.

*Applied framework.* Pegged to the sides, is an applied strengthening framework consisting of three rails whose tenons are held in the stiles by large pegs. The muntins are nailed (Rainham) or pegged (Canterbury) and are not jointed to the rails. This framework is much less heavy in construction than that seen in some earlier English chests<sup>22</sup> and lacks the jointing and chamfering found on those chests.

*Bottom.* The undersides of the Rainham and Canterbury chests are made of three long boards, secured in grooves cut in the lowest boards of each wall, grooves which are exposed on the Faversham chest front. Cross members are fixed under the bottom (at points roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  across the width) and over the bottom (in the centre).

*Till box and back wall groove.* All three chests have or had till boxes on each side. In addition, in the Rainham and Canterbury chests, there is a groove about 6 cm below the top of the top rail running across the width of the back between the till boxes (Figure 9).

So far these features will not appear too surprising. However a close examination of the three chests reveals that they have been constructed on the basis of a model with two distinctive features.

i. *External shape: the 'ancient sea chest' model.* Firstly, if one imagines a chest made of the bottom section of a rectangular pyramid-like structure, sliced horizontally across the base, it would have four walls that sloped inwards, and tapered from the base to the top. Roe<sup>23</sup> calls this an 'ancient sea chest' model, no doubt because of its stability, and Anker<sup>24</sup> illustrates a ninth century Norwegian iron strap-bound boarded chest of this kind from the Oseburg ship burial.

The Rainham and Canterbury chests both have inward-sloping walls and tapered sides. However, because the front and back walls are rectangular rather than tapered they project beyond the sides at the top. At Rainham, the inward sloping sides are not so obvious because the chest has been restored by the addition of skirting-pieces at the sides which have been fixed so as to make the front vertical. Fortunately, a pre-restoration picture of the chest exists<sup>25</sup> where the inward sloping of all four walls is clear (Figure 2). The inward sloping of the Canterbury chest is clear in all four walls, and grooves in the front of the Faversham chest show that its side walls too were inward-sloping. Since sloping sides can result from uneven wear in the feet, the best evidence for it comes from a close inspection of the joints between sides and stiles, which will not be at right angles (Figure 10).

The tapering of the sides, or in architectural terms, 'battering in', was noted by Roe<sup>26</sup> and described as a feature of the Rainham chest only. In fact it is a feature of the Canterbury chest too, and almost certainly of the Faversham chest. The Rainham and Canterbury chests are 5 cm and 7 cm wider at the bottom of the sides than at the top.

ii. *Internal shaping: lid and walls.* Secondly, on the inside, the chests were carefully made and shaped to produce concave, bow-shaped, internal lid and wall surfaces. The lids were all originally flat on their upper surfaces, and gently concave inside from front to back.<sup>27</sup> The front and rear boards taper in cross section towards the thinner middle board. The convex upper edges of the lid cleats 'supported' this concave internal shape. The fact that the front and rear boards need to be strong to carry the hasp and hinges means that the tapered boards also have a practical function. The walls of the Rainham and Canterbury chests, and the Faversham chest front, all show the same internal shaping: in each, the outer surface is flat, but the inner surface is a gentle concave bow shape in section from

top to bottom (Figures 9 and 11). In each wall, the upper and lower boards are thick at the outer edges and taper towards the thinner centre board. The internal shaping starts below the top of the top board and ends below the bottom; it is clearly a deliberate attempt to improve on the straight surfaces which result from quarter sawn or cleft timber. Moreover, the inner surfaces have been planed smooth. Finally, since the juxtaposition of concave walls with straight-edged stiles would lead to sharp edges, the makers of the three chests have chamfered the walls and stiles to ensure a continuous smooth surface wherever they join. This would avoid snagging valuable fabrics, or bruising fingers.

Thus, the chests are based on a sophisticated constructional model. The ancient sea chest form and the careful internal shaping are not inevitable or dictated by the materials, though the internal shaping is facilitated by the quarter-sawn or cleft boards of tapered cross-section. The craftsmen were consciously following a very specific idea of how a high quality chest should be constructed, a cultural idea no doubt passed down to them.

*Metalwork.* Today all three chests have strap hinges. The Rainham chest has very old full depth heavy duty internal straps (the external metal bands on the lid are thin and are not part of the hinges); the Faversham chest has fairly modern short internal straps; and the Canterbury chest has short external straps of different lengths that intrude into the lid decoration, as well as signs of earlier external straps. None appear to be original. The conventional wisdom is that the earliest English chests had pin hinges, and that these gave way to strap hinges in the fourteenth century.<sup>28</sup> The *Peter Gwynn* sale catalogue refers to pin hinges on the Rainham, Faversham and Canterbury chests.<sup>29</sup> However no signs can be seen of pin hinges in any of the chests, either in the rear stiles or in the single, possibly original, cleat. The clue to the original hinges lies in evidence on the Rainham and Canterbury chests of small hinges in which the upper part is very short, flat, tapered and round-ended, and the lower part is a knuckle spiked into the rear rail so that its end is hidden. Roe refers to 'four knuckle hinges'<sup>30</sup> on the Rainham chest. Today the Rainham chest has two actual hinges and two hinge-sized 'bites' where the wood is missing. The smaller Canterbury chest has one 'bite' and two hinges. Although the Faversham chest has no remains of small hinges, there are four 'bites' in the rear board of the lid consistent with such hinges. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that all three chests had the same type of knuckle hinge originally.

The three chests all had a single central lock rather than the multiple locks often found on early chests, but unfortunately no lock has survived. All the chests have a carefully shaped lock-plate reserve, with a low round arch (Faversham), a low flat arch (Rainham) or a space for a lock plate with pointed corners (Canterbury). It seems likely that all three lock-plates had pointed corners. The Sedlescombe, Wittersham, Litcham and Norwich chests also have 'pointed' lock-plate reserves (Figures 5–8). Neither the Rainham nor the Canterbury chest has handles.

#### DECORATION

The two larger chests have identical lid decoration of two large rectangles with sides of three and four arcs carved in a double line, while the Canterbury chest has two



quatrefoils with opposed 'stems', as does the Litcham chest (Figures 7 & 12).

The Rainham and Faversham chest fronts have decorative carving which carries on over the stiles, 'ignoring' them, as it were. They display nine bays of tracery in two tiers, the lower one with plain, gothic arches headed by three trefoils, above a pair of twin lights, and the upper one with round, cusped arches containing two trefoils and a flower-head, above a pair of twin lights (Figures 1 and 3). The arches are carved into a thick applied upper board which also carries further tracery. Applied off-set buttresses, nailed on (Rainham) or pegged (Faversham and Canterbury), separate the main traceried bays. The Rainham and Faversham chest fronts are identical in decoration except for the shape of the central arch, and the decoration of the narrow band close to the top edge of the front (rope at Faversham, enriched zigzag at Rainham).

The narrower Canterbury chest has six central bays of tracery, and diaper decoration on the stiles (Figure 4). Each bay has lower and upper gothic arches headed with three trefoils as in the lower part of the Rainham and Faversham chests, and with two pairs of twin lights. In the absence of an applied upper board, the buttresses extend closer to the top of the chest front.

All three chests have front skirting-pieces decorated with single or double rows of diapers which conform to the traceried design above.

The Wittersham chest (Figure 5) lacks a skirting-piece, but is otherwise identical to the Canterbury chest. The resemblance is so striking that it is only its damaged state, compared with the excellent condition of the Canterbury chest, that shows that they are not one and the same. The Litcham chest (Figure 7) appears to be in fine condition and looks identical to the Canterbury chest. The Sedlescombe and Norwich chests (Figures 6 and 8) both had five bays of tracery, and diapers on the stiles. The former had a wider central bay, while the latter had five equal bays. What is striking in these seven chests is that ignoring differences of height or width, and the applied board, the basic tracery decoration is identical. It is highly likely that they came from the same model-book, or were made in the same workshop or by the same craftsman.

The tracery is of the Decorated type found in English church windows between the mid-thirteenth and late fourteenth centuries. Roe suggests that the tracery 'is of the fourteenth century type of which Kent affords so many instances in its buildings'<sup>31</sup> hence his 'Kentish Gothic' label.<sup>32</sup>

Today, the Faversham chest has a dark brown stain finish, with its probably original red colour in the recesses of the front and in a few spots in the skirting-piece. The Rainham chest has a lid stained brown but the front has lost the colour referred to be Roe<sup>33</sup> and Macquoid and Edwards<sup>34</sup> who describe it as *tempera*. Both the Canterbury chest and the Litcham chest retain a dark reddish brown stain on the front and lid.

#### DATE

Since funding was available to date only one chest, a decision was taken to try to date the Rainham or Faversham chests due to their being better-known. An examination of the two chests by Ian Tyers suggested that dating was more likely to be successful for the Faversham chest due to the condition of the accessible end grain necessary for the dating technique. Appendix 1 contains a summary of the dendrochronological study of the

Faversham chest. The dateable boards were found to be of Polish origin, with a latest measured ring date of 1381. The probable latest felling date is 1389 and construction could have taken place at any time after this, between 1390 and 1420. (The dates of the Rainham and Canterbury chests remain unknown. The Rainham chest is likely to be of the same period, and the Canterbury chest slightly later.)

As we have seen, Roe described the three chests being considered here as 'Kentish Gothic' and Conway even believed them to have been probably made in Canterbury. The idea of a Canterbury origin for the three chests has some appeal. In 1377 Canterbury was the largest town in Kent, and the thirteenth largest in terms of taxpayers in England.<sup>35</sup> It was a cathedral town with the largest monastery in England, a major place of pilgrimage, an administrative centre, and a wool staple. In the twelfth century, Kent was described as 'more closely allied in many ways with Flanders than with the rest of England'.<sup>36</sup> Canterbury's location and economic importance would have made it a natural magnet for immigrants landing in East Kent, including craftsmen to work on the cathedral. It is known that Flemish weavers were brought to Kent by the king in the mid-fourteenth century to raise the quality of cloth production, but the number of immigrant craftsmen in Canterbury at that time remains unknown.

#### COMPARISON OF THE KENTISH CHESTS WITH NORTHERN EUROPEAN CHESTS

The next part of this article will consider some evidence about chests similar to the Kentish chests. A key step in the argument is the choice of chests for comparison. The group chosen is tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests in northern Europe. In discussing decorative patterns, Mercer distinguishes between northern Europe, that is North Germany, Scandinavia, Flanders and England, where 'furniture was treated architectonically and embellished with deeply-cut sculptured ornament' and southern Europe, that is South Germany and North Italy, where 'ornament was in low relief and was applied equally to structural and non-structural members'.<sup>37</sup> Mercer's view relates directly to tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests which are exclusively northern European. We shall focus on this type of chest from the four groups of countries as far as information allows.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, tracery-carved chests only appear in France and Spain from the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

In the following sections, decoration and construction are compared in turn.

#### DECORATION

##### *Comparison with English chests.*

The Kentish chests will be compared with seventeen 'fourteenth century' tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests, all but one located in England that I have grouped into four types according to their tracery and stile decoration.<sup>40</sup>

Type A: Intersecting round-headed arches, enclosing small roundels and gothic arches, with two or three sizes of flower-head, e.g. Broxbourne, Herts.

- (flower-heads on stiles), Hereford (diapers on stiles), and Peterborough (whorls on stiles).
- Type B: Large round-headed arches enclosing a crocketed pointed gable, enclosing a large roundel and three two-light gothic arches below, animals in rectangles on stiles, e.g. Hacconby, Lincs., and V&A W18-1920.
- Type C: Large crocketed pointed gables, enclosing a large roundel, and usually three two-light gothic arches below, separated by narrow tall gothic arches, e.g. Brancepeth, Durham, Chevington, Suffolk, Derby, Kirkleatham, North Yorkshire, Prittlewell, Essex,<sup>41</sup> Sitges, Spain,<sup>42</sup> and Wath, North Yorkshire. Except for Prittlewell where the stiles are missing, all have animals in rectangles on the stiles.
- Type D: Large gothic arches enclosing large roundels and with two gothic arches with small roundels and two lights, and one to three sizes or flower-head, e.g. Oxford, Saltwood, Kent, Sotheby's, and V&A W49-1912.<sup>43</sup> All but the last, whose stiles are probably not original, have animals in rectangles on the stiles.<sup>44</sup>

It is clear that none of the seventeen English chests are identical to the Kentish chests in terms of the decoration of their fronts: a) none has tracery that extends all over the front like the Rainham and Faversham chests; b) none has a diaper skirting-piece, and c) of the chests with original stiles, all but Type A have animals on the stiles and sometimes in the tracery too, unlike the three Kentish chests. In other words the following seven chests form a distinct type:

- Type E: All-over tracery, or tracery and diaper, carving (and flower-heads in the Rainham and Faversham chests): Rainham, Faversham, Canterbury, Sedlescombe, Wittersham, Litcham, and Norwich.<sup>45</sup>

It is not possible to compare the lid decoration of the Kentish chests with the seventeen 'English' chests, since the latter have not been thoroughly studied and many of the lids visible in photographs are not original.<sup>46</sup>

#### *Comparison with North German and Scandinavian chests*

We shall now compare the decoration of the Kentish chests with the 28 tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests in North Germany and Scandinavia dating from 1450 or earlier, surveyed by von Stülpnagel (2000) as a prelude to his detailed study of mainly plain clamp-fronted chests in the monasteries of Lower Saxony.<sup>47</sup>

Three main types of tracery can be distinguished among the 28 (his reference numbers are given here):

- Type F: animals in crocketed pointed gables or crocketed ogee arches, mostly with three light gothic arches: 16 examples, from fourteen century to 1450 (703-5, 710-714, 718-724)
- Type G: tracery alone: eight examples, from 1321 to late fifteenth century (727-8, 730-2, 734-6) (Figure 14G). Of these, six have intersecting round arches:

four with large flower-heads 727 (1321), 728 (1330), 730 (1338), 732 (no date), one with small flower-heads 736 (fourteenth century), and one with quatrefoils and small flower-heads 734 (fourteenth century); and two have separate gothic arches: with cinquefoils and small flower-heads (731, first half fourteenth century), or big flower-heads (735, fourteenth century). This tracery is distinctive from Types A-D because of the prominence of roundels often with flower-heads, except for 736 which resembles Type A.

Type H: flower-heads in crocketed pointed gables, with three-light gothic arches: two examples, from fourteenth century (740-1).

Two points can be made. Firstly, Types F-H do not resemble at all the tracery of the Kentish chests. The only similarities are the presence of diapers on some chests,<sup>48</sup> and flower-head decoration. Secondly, none of this tracery is identical to that on the 'English' chests, and none have stiles with animals in rectangles. However, there are some similarities. Some Type F chests have pointed gables like Type C, but none of Types A-D have animals as large components of the tracery as in Type F.<sup>49</sup> Type G shows intersecting arches and flower-heads like Type A and/or separate arches with flower-heads like Type D. Lastly, the crocketed pointed gables of Type H mean it has similarities with Type C. The most striking difference is that none of the Types F-H has animal stiles as on Types B-D.

Turning to lid decoration, von Stülpnagel identifies four types: i) with three cusped gothic arches at each side of the lid (which is also found on the Oxford chest),<sup>50</sup> ii) two 'rectangles' with sides made of two arcs, iii) two quatrefoils, and iv) two quatrefoils with stems (2000, pp. 138-9). In each case the area within the carving is grounded. Many chests had plain lids. Quite unexpectedly, this reveals some similarities with the Kentish chests. Firstly, although von Stülpnagel shows no chest with the lid decoration of two ungrounded rectangles with sides of three and four arcs, found on the Rainham and Faversham chests, the similarity with type ii) is striking, and the difference could possibly be accounted for by the very large size of the Rainham and Faversham chests. Secondly, his type iv) includes a grounded version of the 'two quatrefoils with stems' lid design found on the Canterbury and Litcham chests<sup>51</sup> which he says is 'typical of the late Lüneberg construction' of 1400 onwards.<sup>52</sup>

To summarise, the Type E tracery decoration of the three Kentish chests does not fit either the English or North German/Scandinavian patterns. On the other hand, the lid decoration of the Kentish chests suggests close parallels with the North German/Scandinavian chests.<sup>53</sup>

## CONSTRUCTION

Moving onto a comparison of construction, unfortunately no detailed studies of the construction of the seventeen English chests have been published, so comparison of the construction of the Kentish chests is limited to North German and Scandinavian chests.

*Comparison with North German and Scandinavian chests*

We draw here on the twenty eight early North German and Scandinavian tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests mentioned earlier, and on von Stülpnagel's outstandingly thorough study of the construction of ninety five, mainly plain, clamp-fronted chests in the monasteries of Lower Saxony, of which fifty seven have been dendro-dated.

*Ancient sea chest external shape and internal shaping.* We identified these as two highly distinctive features of the Kentish chests. It is highly significant, therefore, to find that von Stülpnagel includes in his study a drawing of the 'late Lüneberg' style of chest construction<sup>54</sup> which has the precise combination of sloping and tapering walls, and internal concavity and the same bottom fixing described earlier for the Kentish chests (Figure 14). This is a most striking parallel. Note that 'late Lüneberg' was also the style identified earlier for the lid decoration of the Canterbury chest.

*Applied framework.* This is found on quite a number of the North German and Scandinavian tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests shown by von Stülpnagel, ranging in date from 1330 to 1545. Hence it does not help in dating the Kentish chests.

*Back wall groove.* Von Stülpnagel provides a solution to the mystery of the back wall groove. He shows a photograph of a chest (319, dendro-dated 1398) with a narrow shelf held in the groove, and notes that these shelves exist, with and without a retaining edge.<sup>55</sup> These shelves are not to be confused with the till box commonly found in English chests. Of the ninety five chests he studies in detail, fourteen have the 'high shelf'. They range in date from 1338 to late sixteenth century, though most date from the fourteenth century. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the grooves observed in the Rainham and Canterbury chests were for a high shelf which could be used to retain small items which would get lost in the chest itself. Figure 14 shows the groove and shelf, though it is not exclusive to the 'late Lüneberg' construction type.

*Metalwork.* We suggested that the original hinges in the Kentish chests were probably knuckle hinges, rather than the pin or strap hinges conventionally expected in English chests of this period. Von Stülpnagel lists four main hinge types (wood and iron pin-hinges (in use until the mid fifteenth century), staple hinges and strap hinges) but does not include knuckle hinges. He does not present a systematic analysis of hinge types and chest dates, but in one photograph he shows an open chest with what appear to be three knuckle hinges with flat tapered upper leaves (323, 1m27 long, first half fifteenth century). Thus if the hinge design of the three Kentish chests is anomalous in relation to English chests, it may be slightly less so in relation to the Lower Saxon chests.

Eames suggests that lock-plate reserves arrived late in England and were cruder than on the Continent, but concludes that by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, while the absence of a such a reserve is indicative of English manufacture, its presence does not imply a Continental origin.<sup>56</sup> Since all three Kentish chests (as well as the Wittersham, Sedlescombe, Litcham and Norwich chests) have lock-plate reserves, this view prevents us from deducing any national origin. On the other hand, if she is right, the presence or

absence of lock-plate reserves on the seventeen English chests should be a key focus for research. Unfortunately, evidence on this has not yet been collected; the existing photographs are mostly not clear enough to be of use. Lastly, the lock-plate reserves on the three Kentish chests are compatible with lock plates with pointed corners.<sup>57</sup> Chinnery shows such a lock-plate and dates it to 1350–1500 for England. Von Stülpnagel shows that pointed lock-plates are predominant in the gothic chests he surveys, making clear that they were German as well as English. They appear on chests he dates from 1375 to the early sixteenth century. Earlier North German lock-plates are smaller and square or circular.

In summary, these detailed comparisons have suggested that the Kentish chests form a distinctive group compared with English tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests in terms of their decoration (all-over Type E tracery decoration, skirting piece decoration, decorated lids). Further research on the English chests may reveal whether the construction of the Kentish chests (sloping walls and tapering sides, concave internal shaping, high rear wall groove, bottom fixing, and hinge type) is also distinctive. On the other hand, in terms of both construction and lid decoration, but not tracery decoration, the Kentish chests show very close resemblances to Lower Saxon chests, and particularly to those of the ‘late Lüneberg’ type.

#### INTERPRETATION

In interpreting this mixture of similarities and differences between the Kentish chests on the one hand and the other English chests and the North German/Scandinavian chests on the other, several criteria need to be taken into account: timber, dendrochronology, spatial distribution, naming, availability of skilled craftsmen, and decorative and construction styles. In addition assumptions have to be made about the place(s) of origin of tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests, and about the directions of influence. The aim of this discussion is to bring together present knowledge and indicate directions for research, rather than to reach definitive conclusions.

*Timber.* Since Baltic-type oak, which includes slow-growing German oak, was widely available in northern Europe and is known to have been imported into England since the thirteenth century, its usage cannot be used to indicate the place of construction of the chests. This undermines Roe’s claim that the two V&A tracery-carved chests are German because of their timber.<sup>58</sup>

*Dendrochronology.* The progress made in dating fourteenth century chests in Lower Saxony is reflected in von Stülpnagel’s book. This shows the Type F–H tracery chests as dating from 1321 onwards. However the dating of the Faversham chest, included here, is the first one of a carved medieval chest in England prior to the Boughton Monchelsea tilting chest mentioned earlier.<sup>59</sup> The compatibility between the 1390–1420 dating of the Faversham chest, and the earliest dates (1400) for ‘late Lüneberg’ chest construction (Figure 16) is also relevant. Its late date compared to the German chests makes it all the more important to date the seventeen English chests.

*Spatial distribution.* Ignoring the Sitges chest and the two V&A chests,<sup>60</sup> ten of the remaining fourteen English chests are located close to the east coast. (The exceptions are the Broxbourne, Derby, Hereford and Oxford chests.) In addition the set of seven chests to which the Kentish chests belong are spread across eastern and south-eastern coastal counties. This is compatible with three hypotheses: importation, manufacture by immigrant craftsmen or manufacture by native craftsmen. Roe (1905) notes this geographical distribution and argues that contact with Continental traders and with 'skilled foreign labour' had raised the quality of production on the east coast. He insists that their 'characteristics are too intensely national' for there to be any doubt.<sup>61</sup> The problem with Roe's argument about skills is that, while it could help explain the sudden rise in carving quality of the English chests, it does not explain the subsequent decline. The other and crucial, aspect of spatial distribution is the absence of chests identical to the seventeen English chests and wider Kentish set in continental Europe. No chests exactly resembling the German chests in tracery carving are to be found in England, and no chests exactly resembling the English and Kentish chests in tracery carving are to be found in Germany. It is as though they are closely related but distinct sets. Of course, what is extant today may not represent what was present 600 years ago, but this point weighs against the importation hypothesis, and in favour of the immigrant or native made hypotheses, if not conclusively.

*Naming.* As noted above, Eames observed that 'Flanders chest' described the majority of imported chests in the medieval period. Here we enter the domain of 'folk' terminology, where popular names may have little connection with true origins, and a single term like Flanders chest may be applied to several types of chest at different periods. In particular it may refer to the place of export rather than the place of manufacture.<sup>62</sup>

Scholars have failed to identify 'Flanders chests' with certainty because they are invariably not further described. The three most likely referents of this term are a) the fourteenth century tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests of interest to us, b) the clamp-fronted 'tilting' chests, such as the Boughton Monchelsea chest, dendro dated to the mid fifteenth century, and c) the domed iron-bound chests of pine and poplar often found in churches in eastern and south-eastern coastal counties. ('Tilting chests' survive in Ypres Cathedral, the Gruuthuse Museum, Bruges, Harty, York Minster and chest fronts in the V&A.) It is perfectly possible that all three types of chest were described as Flanders chest.

The only description is given in a 1430s will of a leading York merchant and his wife which refers to 'a Flemish chest whose exterior is carved with images'.<sup>63</sup> At this early date, chests carved with images were quite exceptional. The possibility that it refers to a fourteenth century tracery-carved chest is supported by a chest front matching this description in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>64</sup> It is made of three boards, and so is likely to come from a clamp-fronted chest. It shows the Coronation of the Virgin, with twelve apostles, and twenty angels of three sizes against a Type C tracery background. It shows carving of the quality one imagines the wealthiest Flemish merchants could have afforded.

This evidence is inconclusive, and suggests that little is to be learned from popular names.

*Skilled craftsmen.* It is clear that high quality wood carving skills were employed on English church woodwork in the fourteenth century. But chests of the carving quality of

the tracery-carved chests of interest were an enormous departure from the production of iron strap-bound, or plain, incised, grounded or chip-carved clamp-fronted chests. Cescinsky and Gribble<sup>65</sup> distinguish between three types of craftsmen: the 'King's Craftsmen' who were either the most skilled craftsmen or managers who could hire them, ecclesiastical craftsmen who could be highly skilled, and less skilled craftsmen who worked for lay clients. They argue that, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the latter category was regulated by a carpenters' guild within which carvers were at the top, followed by carpenters, and then by *huchiers*, and that joiners formed a separate religious guild. Confusingly they also suggest that *huchiers* had a separate guild. Chinnery also refers to this organizational division, and suggests that it is *huchiers* who made chests.<sup>66</sup> But there is no evidence that *huchiers* had the necessary carving skills to make tracery-carved chests. However, guilds were only partially successful in their attempts at trade regulation. If the chests were made in England, they may have been carved either, as Cescinsky and Gribble suggest, by immigrant craftsmen,<sup>67</sup> who were not bound by guild rules, but who perhaps had experience of carving church fixed woodwork; or, alternatively, by native ecclesiastical craftsmen who had previously carved church woodwork, and who, unusually, transferred their skills to chests.<sup>68</sup> Roe takes the view that the majority of the chests in question are native English products. However, in my view, his assertions about national characteristics reflect images of England and Germany prevalent at the time he was writing, and are based on intuition rather than analysis of construction and decoration.<sup>69</sup>

*Tracery decoration.* Roe put forward the 'Kentish Gothic' label on the basis of alleged similarities with Decorated tracery in Kent. Professor Nussbaum (see Appendix 2), however, argues that all the five types of tracery Types A-E are of the *Rayonnant* Gothic type from the period 1280-1330, and that the Faversham chest shows a type which originated in northern France, spread to Strasbourg and was then taken up in North and East Germany.<sup>70</sup> His suggestion is that the carving on all the chests is of Continental inspiration. This view is not wholly new since, as far back as 1894, Hart made the same point about the Alnwick, Derby, Wath and Brancepeth chests.<sup>71</sup> However Nussbaum's view is more authoritative since he is a specialist in the field, and he is referring to all the five tracery types. On the other hand, we pointed out that there were both parallels and striking differences between the English tracery types A-E and the North German and Scandinavian types F-H observed on chests.

*Construction style and lid decoration.* We noted the very close parallels in construction and lid decoration between the Kentish chests and the Lower Saxon chests. Unfortunately, the lack of research on the other English chests prevents any wider conclusion about construction styles being drawn. (However the lid of the Oxford chest matches the Brunswick style from Lower Saxony.)

It would be risky to jump to any conclusions from either the tracery or the lid and constructional evidence. The observed similarities could a) have originated in Lower Saxony and travelled to England, b) have originated in England and travelled to Lower Saxony or c) originated in a third location and travelled to both. Only further research can throw light on this. One might also suggest that the Kentish chests represent a distinct



path of influence from the seventeen English chests. Dendrochronological evidence can potentially be helpful here since it can put chests into a date order.

Nevertheless, it is worth quoting Schmitz's view of the 'Low Saxon chests of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries' that

*in the later pieces of furniture we find pointed arches and tracery with early gothic grotesque animal figures. These chests are found in the district between the Weser and the Elbe in the heart of Low Saxony, above all in Lüneberg, Brunswick, and in the surroundings of the Hartz Mountains; but the same type is also met with in Holstein, as far north as Jutland, though the Gothic tracery and animal ornament are coarse and more stereotyped. ...The Early Gothic oak chest with carved tracery has spread along the north coast of Germany to Flanders, Northern France and England.<sup>72</sup>*

This statement is of interest because of its suggestion that tracery-carved chests originated in Lower Saxony and then spread over a wide area from there. However, unfortunately, Schmitz does not cite the evidence on which it is based so his proposal is best regarded as a hypothesis.<sup>73</sup> However the fact that lid decoration is exceptional in English chests but common in German chests, in all periods, is supportive of his argument. It is more likely that the Kentish chests show Continental influence, than that the German practice of lid decoration originated in England.

#### INTERPRETATION

It is clear that the Kentish, seventeen English, and North German/Scandinavian chests have a family resemblance but are different in particular respects. Their tracery carving is Continental in inspiration but was not restricted to its place of origin, so cannot provide firm evidence of place of manufacture for the Kentish chests. The lack of spatial overlap of the chests with Types A-E and Types F-H decoration, and the presence/absence of animal stiles is evidence (if not absolute) against the idea that the Kentish (and English) chests were imported. The differences between the two sets suggests distinct strands of development. The lid decoration of the Kentish chests allies them with the North German chests and the likely direction of influence is from Germany given the scarcity of lid decoration in England and its frequency in Germany. The construction style of the Kentish chests also allies them with the late Lüneberg style of Lower Saxony. It remains to be seen whether research on the seventeen English chests will find evidence of the same style. If not, that will be further evidence of the distinctiveness of the Kentish chests.

The distinctive hinges of the Kentish chests also separate them from the 'English' 'pin hinge to strap hinge' evolutionary pattern. Systematic work on the hinges of North German chests as well as the seventeen English chests will be useful here. Finally the dendro-dating places the Faversham chest late relative to the dendro-dated Lower Saxony chests. The evidence on craftsmanship is not conclusive. The necessary carving skills existed in England, but what is unclear is why they were suddenly deployed on chests in the fourteenth century. The two hypotheses are that they were the work of immigrants

unbound by guild restrictions, or a transfer of skills from native carvers of church woodwork. Finally, the other comparative dimensions, timber and naming, have not provided helpful in identification.

This article has aimed to provide some more precise evidence to support attributions of nationality in the study of chests in a period when the mobility of people and objects was greater than is often thought. It has also tried to counter the view that enquiry into national influences is pointless. The limitations of current research have been indicated. While some of these are insuperable (due to the absence of chests, or the inadequacy of documentary descriptions), others can be overcome by systematic national studies and cross-national cooperative effort. The many aspects of timber (especially dendrochronology), construction, metalwork and decoration discussed here indicate some ways forward for this research. Hopefully this article will stimulate research into the largely unstudied tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests in England.

## APPENDIX I

REPORT ON A DENDROCHRONOLOGICAL STUDY  
OF THE FAVERSHAM CHEST BY IAN TYERS

Ring counts were made of end grain at the top of the right hand stile (A), the packing piece in front of it (B) and the packing piece in front of the left hand stile (C), and the left edges of the centre and rear boards of the lid (F and G), with the following results:

	Width of board (mm)	Number of rings on board	Growth rate: mm/yr	Date span of measured rings	Likely felling date
Board A	242	130	1.8	1242-1372	After 1380
Board B	240	133	1.80	1242-1374	After 1382
Board C	236	132	1.79	1246-1377	After 1385
Board F	155	157	0.96	Undated	
Board G	270	c.90 (not measured) +210 (measured)	0.89	1172-1381	After 1389

The results for Boards A-C were highly correlated with each other ( $t$  values were 11.13 between the A and B sequences, 11.54 for A and C and 9.80 for B and C) and are considered to be from the same tree. A composite series of 136 rings was therefore produced from them.

The sequences for Boards A/B/C, F and G were then compared with existing chronologies, and the best matches found were with series from 'modern Poland or the countries immediately to the east or north' and with 'data from a number of other objects previously identified by dendrochronology as being derived from the same area' (Tyers, 2007, p. 5).

Board G showed a  $t$  value of 5.40 with York Coppergate planks published by Groves in 2002, 5.05 with the Thornham Suffolk retable published by Tyers in 2002 and 4.96 with material from Dabrowno studied by Wazny. (Only  $t$  values of 5.0 or more are considered statistically significant). The combined Board A/B/C sequence showed a  $t$  value of 5.37 with material from Southern Vistula, Poland studied by Krapiec. Board F, however, showed no statistically significant correlation with existing chronologies.

The latest rings in Boards G and A/B/C are 1381 and 1377. Since none of the boards showed sapwood, 8 years was added to allow for the minimum likely amount of sapwood removed before the use of the timber, yielding earliest construction dates of 1389 and 1385. The construction date of the chest is considered likely to lie in the range 1390-1420.'

*Author's note: This summary has been checked by Ian Tyers.*

## APPENDIX I REFERENCES

1. The fact that at least two sources of oak are found among the boards examined is interesting. Ian Tyers suggests this reflects the practice of mixing timber from different sources in the timber trade. The difference in growth rate between Board A (1.82 mm/yr) and Board G (0.89 mm/yr), or 14 and 29 rings per inch, shows the variability of growth rates among Baltic timber.

## APPENDIX II

COMMENTS BY PROFESSOR NORBERT NUSSBAUM  
(ART HISTORY INSTITUTE, COLOGNE UNIVERSITY)<sup>1</sup>

What I can say is that none of the patterns is genuinely English, and that all of them derive from Rayonnant style tracery between 1280 and 1330 (which should be a *terminus post quem* for the chests). Only the one with intersected arches [Broxbourne] could as well be dated some decades later, since the intersections produce rounded arches. Intersected tracery is rather rare on the continent. There are some examples in Normandy (Anglo-Norman tradition), Salem (Cistercian abbey church near Lake Constance, ca. 1300), and I even know a Cologne piece from about 1330 (wall tracery of the 'Hansasaal' of Cologne town hall), but none of these really looks like the Broxbourne.

Saltwood and the two V&A chests look closely related. Both have trefoil rosettes in the apex circles. Most interesting is V&A W49-1912, showing rosettes made of three trefoils arranged in such a way that the pattern does not produce a strict horizontal or vertical axis, but rather gives a rotating impression (2nd and 5th from right). Such patterns seem to have developed from facade designs around 1300, including blind tracery. Again I can say that the Cologne Cathedral lodge designed one or the other rosette in such a way, though more complicated of course. The funny thing is that I know an English rosette of that kind as well (lavatory wall of Kirkham Priory, North Yorkshire), but I would not take that into account. Some of the other rosettes show lancets pointing inwards, a pattern familiar in the years around 1300 as well, but well spread all over northern France (Meaux and Rouen Cathedrals), Flanders and the Low Countries and Germany.

The Faversham tracery has its origin in the 'court style' somewhere between Amiens and Paris, 1240-60, but possibly filtered through the Strasbourg facade lodge. What reminds me of Strasbourg is the fact that the mullions of the upper tracery stand immediately on top of the lower tracery arch. There are prototypes for such a design in the Strasbourg facade designs around 1270 to 1300, and during the first half of the fourteenth century this type of tracery spread over northern and eastern Germany. But again, I know not a single example that resembles the Faversham pattern exactly.

## APPENDIX II REFERENCES

1. Given the lack of specialist knowledge in previous writing on the tracery decoration of the chests considered here, I decided to approach Professor Nussbaum to ask whether he would be willing to comment on them. He kindly agreed and these are his comments in full, received on 20 January 2007. I sent him pictures of the Broxbourne, Derby, Faversham, Saltwood and two V&A chests, to cover the five Types of tracery, A-E.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Victor Chinnery, Nick Humphrey, and Charles Tracy for their support throughout this research; Rev. Anthony Oehring, Rev. Alan Vousden, and Stanley Denham for access to the chests; Jacqueline Boccador, Chris Currie, Gerhard Dietrich, Charles Indekeu, Michael Legg, Arthur Percival, Michael Rief, David Sherlock, Achim Stiegel and Ian Tyers, for helpful advice and suggestions; the Regional Furniture Society for awarding a bursary to pay for the dendrochronological dating and Ian Tyers of [www.dendro.co.uk](http://www.dendro.co.uk) for carrying it out; and Prof. Norbert Nussbaum for generously contributing his comments in Appendix II. Contact: C.G. Pickvance@kent.ac.uk.

## REFERENCES

1. Eames, P. Furniture in England, France and the Netherlands from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, *Furniture History*, Vol XIII, 1977, p.109.
2. Chinnery, V. *Oak Furniture: the British Tradition*, Woodbridge, Antique Collectors Club, 1979, ch.1.
3. Ibid, Chinnery 1979 p.71 and Geddes, J. *Medieval Decorative Ironwork*, London, Society of Antiquaries of London, 1999, p.31.
4. Ibid, Geddes, 1999, p.32.
5. Bebb, R. *Welsh Furniture 1250-1950* (2 vols) Kidwelly, Saer Books, 2007, vol 1, pp.144-7.
6. Ibid, Geddes, 1999.
7. Howard, F.E. and Crossley, F.H. *English Church Woodwork* (2nd edition) London, Batsford, 1927, pp.23-4. The 'Courtrai chest' at New College, Oxford, dendro dated to around 1300, is considered to be later carved, based on the closeness of the carving to nineteenth century images of the Battle of Courtrai, Didier, R 'Sculptures, style et faux', in H. Krohm and C. Theuerkauff (eds) *Festschrift für Peter Bloch*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1990.
8. Roe, F. *Ancient Coffers and Cupboards*, London, Methuen, 1902, pp.40-3; *Old Oak Furniture*, London, Methuen, 1905, pp.117-8; *Ancient Church Chests and Coffers*, London Batsford, 1929, pp.96-101. Roe (1902, fn.10) says the Faversham chest was mentioned in the 1512 inventory of St. Mary's, Faversham, but this is not so. This inventory refers to four chests: 'a chest of yern' (containing 'iiij great chalices with iiij patents of sylver and gylte'), a 'pruse chest bounden with iern' (containing 'relics closed in silver with other relics in a bag of silk lyenge'), a 'cheste unlocked' containing the 'churche evidences' (all three in the Treasury) and a chest in the vestry (containing a 'corporas casse of cipres') Giraud, F.F. 'Goods and ornaments at Faversham Church 1512', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 18, pp.103-113, 1889. It is impossible from this to confirm (or to deny) that the Faversham chest was in the church in 1512. It corresponds to neither of the first two chests, and, while it could be one of the last two, one might expect that its size and exceptional decoration would have been part of a description. Johnston refers to the 1505 will of Thomas Reade which describes the contents (altar cloths, vestment, chalice, etc.) of 'a chest standing in the Chapel of St. Thomas the Martyr' (2001, p.64), which is adjacent to the vestry where the Faversham chest is now kept. Again, this description is insufficiently detailed to confirm that it refers to the Faversham chest. However, the quotation also refers to the custody of 'the key of the chest', which suggests the chest had a single lock, like the chest in question.
9. Ibid, Roe, 1905, p.118.
10. Conway, M. 'Some Kentish Chests' *The Burlington Magazine*, 1909 vol. 15 (78) pp.362-7.
11. Cescinsky, H and Gribble, E.R. *Early English Furniture and Woodwork* (2 vols), London, Waverley, 1922, Vol.2, p.30.
12. The description says the Faversham chest 'is constructed of massive boards without styles' (Macquoid and Edwards, 1954, Vol. II, p.6), an idea that appeared in Conway (1909), though their photo clearly shows the stiles.
13. Roe, F. *A History of Oak Furniture*, London, The Connoisseur, 1920, Plate 14.
14. Ibid, Roe, 1902, p.44.
15. Ibid, Roe, 1920, Plate 13.
16. Roe (1920, p.5) was aware of the Litchum chest, but continued to use the term 'Kentish Gothic' (Roe, 1929, pp.98-9).

17. Newman, J. *The Buildings of England: West Kent and the Weald*, London, Yale University Press, 1982 and *The Buildings of England: North East Kent and East Kent*, London, Yale University Press, 1983.
18. Ibid, Eames, 1977.
19. Tracy, C. *English Medieval Furniture and Woodwork*, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1988.
20. Tracy, C. *Continental Church Furniture in England, A Traffic in Piety*, Woodbridge, Antique Collectors Club, 2001. In this book, Tracy excludes a number of 'late medieval chests' which have 'long been recognised as of continental origin' and says 'they are nearly all secular in their decoration' (Tracy 2001, p.15). Tracy does not define 'religious' and 'secular' explicitly, but uses the former for objects with religious symbols, figures or scenes; tracery alone is treated as secular. On the secular/religious distinction, there is an interesting contrast between Mercer's comment on medieval chests that 'most of the survivors are in churches and the ecclesiastical origin of the majority of them at any rate is hardly in doubt' (Mercer, E. *Furniture 700-1700*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969, p.39) and Eames's comment that 'for the later middle ages no distinction should be drawn between ecclesiastical and secular furniture' (1977, p.xxiii). Some medieval chests now in churches were made for the church, while others were willed or given to the church. Some may have been passed from monasteries, which were wealthy organizations possessing high quality objects, to nearby churches prior to the Dissolution.
21. The Canterbury chest is intact and has no structural additions. The Rainham chest is also intact, but the side skirting-pieces are post-1887 additions. In the Faversham chest, however, only the front and lid are original; the chest bears an internal inscription 'V, EWB, 1894' which may be the date of reconstruction. The term 'Baltic-type' is used advisedly to refer to straight and often close-grained oak. Unfortunately a simple count of rings per inch does not guarantee a Baltic origin, since, according to Ian Tyers, Baltic oak varies from 10-35 rings per inch, and slow growing oak in western Europe, e.g. Germany, will overlap this range. Only dendrochronological studies can establish oak origin with high probability.
22. Ibid, Chinnery, 1979, p.111.
23. Ibid, Roe, 1929, p.98.
24. Anker, P. *Chests and Caskets*, Oslo, Huitfeldt, 1975.
25. Pearman, A.J. Rainham Church, *Archaeologia Contiana*, 17, 1887, pp.49-65.
26. Ibid, Roe, 1929, p.98.
27. Today the shape of the lids follows that of the upper surface of the current cleats. Where convex cleats have been replaced by straight cleats the upper surface of the lid becomes concave, rather than flat as originally intended. In fact, all but one of the cleats are probably replacements. The possible exception, on the right hand side of the Canterbury chest, has projecting tongues at each end, which fit into rebates at the top of the stiles and help reduce lateral movement in the lid. These resemble those shown by Johnston (2001) for the Climping, Midhurst and Stoke d'Abernon chests.
28. Macquoid and Edwards, R. *Dictionary of English Furniture*, 1954, Vol. II, p.6.
29. Sotheby's, 2001, *Peter Gwynn Collection*, 27 November 2001, London, Sotheby's, p.20.
30. Ibid, Roe, 1929, p.101.
31. Ibid, Roe, 1929, p.98.
32. Charles Tracy has pointed out that the 'Kentish Gothic' style, which was invented by the royal master-mason, Michael of Canterbury, is used to refer to the late thirteenth century architectural work in Canterbury Cathedral which was then disseminated to London, at St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster. He also notes that 'Kentish Gothic' is distinct from 'Kentish', split-cusp, tracery, found at St Mary, Chartham, and also influential outside the county, e.g. in Norfolk. The key point for us is that Canterbury Cathedral does not contain tracery of the type in the three chests.
33. Ibid, Roe, 1929, p.99.
34. Ibid, Macquoid and Edwards, 1954, vol. II, p.6.
35. Dyer, A. 'Ranking Lists of English Mediaeval Towns', in Palliser, D.M. (ed) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain vol. I, 600-1540*, C.U.P. 2000. Kowaleski, M. 'Port Towns: England and Wales 1300-1540', in Palliser, D.M. (ed) *ibid*.
36. Kahn, D. *Canterbury Cathedral and its Romanesque Sculpture*, London, Harvey Miller, 1991, p.132.
37. Mercer, E. *Furniture 700-1700*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969, p.91.
38. Fourteenth century untracery carved clamp-fronted chests can be found in North Germany, with rows of roundels with animals, and in England at Dersingham, with apostolic symbols, Alnwick, with rows of animals, and Coventry, with a mixture of tracery, animals and quatrefoils.

39. These chests are typically of boarded, and usually dovetailed, construction of oak or walnut, and the front is a single board. The tracery is Flamboyant Gothic.

40. Sources of pictures of these chests are as follows: Brancepeth (Roe, 1905, p.119 and 123; 1920, Plate 15), Broxbourne (Roe, 1929, p.28), Chevington (Macquoid and Edwards, 1983, Vol. 2, p.4), Derby (Roe, 1902, opp. p.47), Haddonby (Roe, 1902, p.38), Hereford (Howard and Crossley (1929, p.348), Kirkleatham (Robinson, J. 1995 *Treasures of the English Churches* London: Sinclair-Stevenson), Oxford (Roe, 1902, p.36; Howard and Crossley, 1929, p.344), Peterborough (Vallance, 1912), Prittlewell (Roe, 1929, p.82), Saltwood (Roe, 1929, p.104), Sitges (Feduchi, L. 1975 *A History of World Furniture*. Barcelona: Blume), Sotheby's (Conway, M. 1909 'Some Kentish chests', *The Burlington Magazine*, 15 (78), pp. 362-7; Chinnery, 1975, p.414), V&A W18-1920 and W 49-1912 (Smith, H.C. 1913, 'Two German chests of the fourteenth century', *The Burlington Magazine*, 23 (123), pp.166-7; Smith, H.C. 1929, *Catalogue of English Furniture, Vol. 1 Gothic and Early Tudor London*: Victoria and Albert Museum, Plate 43; von Stülpnagel, 2000, p.313), and Wath (Howard and Crossley, 1929, p.349).

41. Roe (1929, pp.82-3) shows two boards from this chest (but no stiles), one with the bottom half of tracery and one with two wyverns, similar to the Alnwick chest. It is possible that they were the middle and lower boards of the front, with the missing top board having the top part of the tracery.

42. The Sitges chest came from Mallorca. Given the similarity of the design, and Majorca's position on the trade route to the Mediterranean (Spufford, P. 2000 *Trade in fourteenth-century Europe*, in M. Jones (ed.) *The New Cambridge Medieval History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p.175), there seems no reason to treat this chest as Spanish.

43. This typology brings out an interesting correlation: animals are found on the stiles when tracery is of Types B, C and D, but never when it is of intersecting arches (Type A). In Type C small animals appear as minor elements in the tracery. (There is a debate about the meaning of the animal images; Klingender, F. (*Animals in Art and Thought to the end of the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971 p.332) suggests that they had different meanings for different social groups, symbolising evil for the illiterate and reassurance to the literate; both he and Kahn (1991) stress the role of Islamic fabric and manuscripts in their transmission.) At the bottom of each chest front there is generally a narrow row of quatrefoils, or occasionally diapers, birds or animals with tails, lozenges, or bi-foils. This appears to be a secondary feature that does not correlate with the four tracery types.

N.B. All typologies depend on judgements about what similarities are significant and what differences insignificant. A 'similarity analysis' of the four Types can be carried out in terms of whether they share four features: arch type (separate or intersecting), crocketed gables, flower-heads, and animals on stiles). This shows that: i) Types B and C are identical, apart from Type B having round-headed arches, ii) Type D has two similarities with Types B and C (separate arches, animals on stiles) and two differences (flower-heads, no crocketed gables), while iii) Type A has no similarities with Types B and C, but two similarities with Type D (flower-heads, no crocketed gables). In terms of decoration, Type A is thus most different from Types B and C while Type D has an intermediate position. Hopefully, later research will be able to explain this pattern.

44. One issue which requires further research is whether these chests were made as chests, or whether the carved panels were made and then assembled later. Cescinsky and Gribble (1922, Vol. 2, pp.110-5) suggest the latter. Nick Humphrey of the V&A reports that chest W18-1920 has a front of Baltic-type oak and the remainder (including animal stiles) of fast grown oak.

45. Eames (1977, p.159) has described decoration which ignores the structure of an object as 'decadent', the implication being that it is produced when a style is in decay. On this basis it could be argued that the Rainham and Faversham chests are decadent versions of the seventeen chests where the carving does respect the structures. However, it is not clear that such decoration tells us anything about the timing of the making of an object. Firstly, it would imply that the Rainham and Faversham chests are more 'decadent' than the Canterbury (or other four) chests since, on the latter, the tracery decoration stops where the diaper decoration starts on the stiles. However, the basic tracery decoration is identical in all seven chests and it seems likely that all were produced at around the same time. Secondly, a particular workshop could be producing to a 'decadent' design for reasons of economy at the same time as up to the minute decoration is being used elsewhere. Lastly, it is not obvious that an all-over design would necessarily have been seen as inferior.

46. Victor Chinnery reports that he has seen one lid with rectangles of arcs used as a door in East Sussex, and three others in the Norwich area (probably including Litcham).

47. The full survey included 80 decorated clamp-fronted chests, but many were not tracery-carved, e.g. some

had animals in roundels, or were dated after 1450. The three types distinguished here differ from those used by the author.

48. The earliest chest to show single diapers is dendro-dated 1338 (730) and the earliest to show a horizontal row of diapers (at the base of the front) is 14th century (719). (Single dendrochronological dates are helpful in identifying earliest or latest dates for particular features but only a larger sample can establish the period over which a feature persisted.)

49. The presence of animals in Type F, and in non-tracery-carved fronts of the same period, links up with the preference for animal ornament in early Romanesque churches in Lower Saxony noted by Klingender (1971, p.295).

50. Von Stülpnagel (2000, p.138) illustrates this lid decoration on a 'Brunswick type' chest with intersecting tracery and a dendro date of 1330 (728). His study identifies four main constructional types: Celle, Lüneberg (early, mid and late styles), Brunswick (early and two late styles) and Hanover. These towns are between 30 and 125 km apart.

51. Von Stülpnagel, K-H. *Die Gothische Truhen der Lüneberger Heidekloster*, Cloppenburg: Museumsdorf Cloppenburg, 2000, p.139

52. Ibid, von Stülpnagel, K-H, 2000, p.138.

53. Given the economic dynamism of Flanders in medieval times, one might expect to find numerous surviving tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests. Unfortunately, while the Belgian cultural heritage inventory, which covers museums and churches, includes two plain 13th century clamped front chests, and one of 15th century date, with Flamboyant Gothic tracery, there are no 14th century tracery-carved clamp-fronted chests. Indeed it only shows six chests in total from the 14th century. A possible Flemish 14th century chest front is discussed below. I am grateful to Charles Indekeu for drawing my attention to the Belgian cultural heritage inventory <http://www.kikirpa.be/www2/wwwopac/nl/object.html>. The parallel inventory for the Netherlands is much less developed.

54. Ibid, von Stülpnagel, 2000, p.234.

55. Ibid, von Stülpnagel, 2000, p.99. A similar groove appears in the mid fifteenth century (dendro dated) Boughton Monchelsea chest sold at Christie's, South Kensington, on 3 November 1999 (see the long analytical catalogue entry by Victor Chinnery, Christie's, *Oak and Country Furniture, Folk Art and Works of Art*, 3 November 1999 London: Christie's), and in a small boarded dovetailed chest, dated 1539, at St. John the Baptist, Cirencester. The Oxford chest has a rear shelf with retaining edge.

56. Ibid, Eames, 1977, pp.142-3.

57. Ibid, Chinnery, 1979, p.144.

58. Salzman, L.F. *Building in England down to 1540*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966 p. 245). Roe notes that 'the material of which they are constructed very much resembles Rhineland oak; the grain is too fine and regular for the indigenous twist of our national product, with its grander medullary rays' (Roe, 1930a, p.379). Smith also had no doubt about their German manufacture and denies that they were exported from England to Germany and then re-imported (Smith, 1913, p.70). On the other hand, von Stülpnagel (2000, p.312) does not question the two chests' English origin. The V&A chests were omitted by Tracy in his 1988 V&A catalogue, no doubt taking a cautious view of the scope of a catalogue of English furniture.

59. An attempt to date the Chevington chest by Oxford Dendrochronological Laboratory, as part of David Sherlock's study of Suffolk chests, was unsuccessful.

60. The V&A chests came from Cologne and Aachen. The main museums in these cities, the Museum für Angewandte Kunst and the Sürmondt Ludwig Museum, have no clamp-fronted tracery-carved chests of any kind.

61. Ibid, Roe, 1905, p.126.

62. The Derby chest is described as a Flemish chest in the church guide. On the other hand, the sixteenth century chests at East Dereham and Northchurch, which are known locally as 'Flanders chests', are Northern French (Tracy, 2001, pp.146-9). See also Lavallée who refers to Scandinavian timber bought in Flanders in the second half of the 15th century by Norman merchants and sold in Normandy as 'bois de Flandre' (1990, p.22).

63. (Alsford, S. 2004 Testaments of a devout husband and wife (1430s) *Urban Florilegium website*: <http://www.trytel.com/~tristan/towns/florilegium/lifecycle/lcdth16.html>. Tracy (2001, p.269, fn.52) and Eames (1977, p.137) note that the Wath chest has been identified with the 'Flanders Kyste' mentioned in a 1557 will, and Hodges (1892, p.299) refers to a 'Flanders chest' left in a 1419 will, which is too early for a 'tilting' chest, but neither reference includes a description of the chest.

64. Rorimer, J.J. 'An English Woodcarving of the Late Fourteenth Century', *Bulletin of the Metropolitan*



*Museum of Art*, 25, (a), 1930, pp.186–9. Rorimer considers it English. He notes its similarities with two V&A chest-fronts, one with a tilting scene and one with scenes of the Nativity and Annunciation, considered Flemish by Cescinsky and others, but follows Roe's view that they and their like are English (see above).

65. Ibid, Cescinsky and Gribble, 1922, pp.19–21.

66. Chinnery, 1979, pp.41–3, 110.

67. Ibid, Cescinsky and Gribble, 1922, Vol 2 p.10. Cescinsky and Gribble emphasize the intermingling of French artisans and English craftsmen, and say that the wandering Flemings and Walloons who settled in England in the fourteenth century, exercised 'a powerful influence on the development of the English *buchier*' and that the Faversham chest 'shows this influence in a very marked manner' (1922, Vol. 2, p.10). According to Chinnery, 'for most of the fifteenth century [the joiners] were affiliated to the religious guild of St James Garlickhythe, which dates from 1375' (1979, p.41). The date may be significant since, if immigrant craftsmen with the ability to carve tracery chests were arriving in the mid/late 14th century, there would be every reason for native workers to form a defensive organization.

68. Roe says the V&A chest W18–1920 has a 'certain lumpiness and heaviness of execution very different from the [Saltwood] example' (1920, p.13) which he regards as its prototype. Later he says of the V&A chests that 'the mouldings are heavy, without exhibiting the sturdy directness of the English carver, however rugged might be his execution. (Roe, F 'English or German?' *The Connoisseur*, 85, 1930, pp.377–379). But his comments on workmanship are too vague and intuitive to be usable for identification.

69. Roe, F. 'Genuine or forgery? The 'Rufford Abbey' panel: I-the woodwork', *The Connoisseur*, 86, 1930 pp.76–9 also argued that one of the V&A 'tilting' chest fronts was English, on the basis of its being of English oak and showing 'English' handling of carving. His view was disputed by Beard, C R 'Genuine or Forgery? The 'Rufford Abbey' panel: II The Armour', *The Connoisseur*, 86, 1930, pp.79–83 on the basis of manuscript evidence of the armour depicted which he identifies as Netherlandish, mid fifteenth century.

70. His only hesitation concerns Type A since he says that 'intersected tracery is rather rare on the continent'. However, we saw above that six of the eight Type G tracery North German and Scandinavian chests have intersecting round arches, so perhaps it was a pattern commoner on chests than in churches. An intriguing issue concerns the apparent fact that the tracery is 'out of date' relative to the likely date of construction of the chests. Various explanations are possible: guild restrictions, intellectual property in the use of the latest designs, or that the carvers were not trying to be up to date but had in mind the tracery of a specific church.

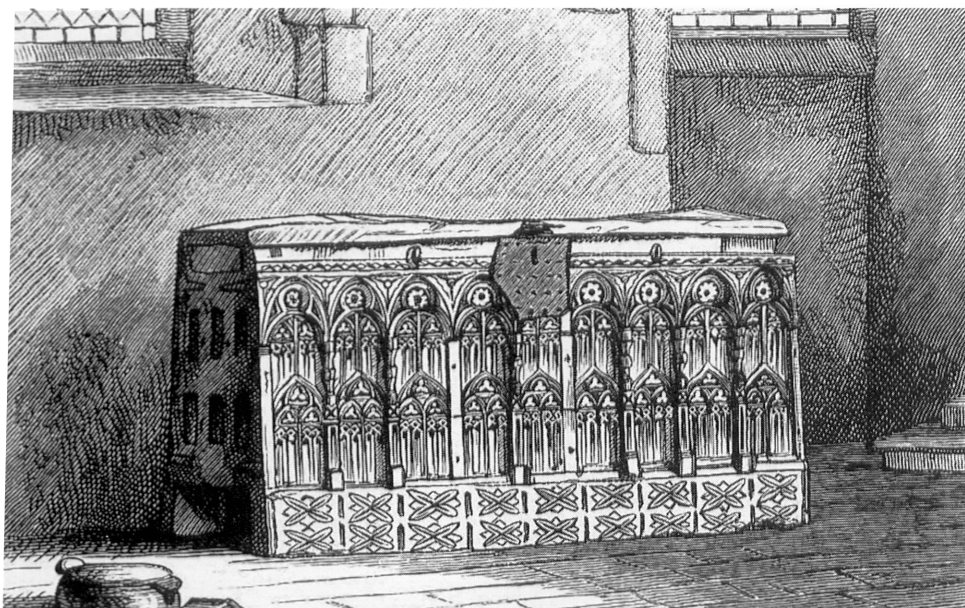
71. He says of them that 'below the mullions are two-light window openings, having the peculiar lanky mullions and tracery that are so essentially characteristic of the Flemish and the German Gothic of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries' (Hart, C.J. Old chests, *Birmingham and Midland Institute Transactions*, 20, 1894, pp.60–94).

72. Schmitz, H. *The Encyclopedia of Furniture*, London, Zwemmer, 1936, pp.xv–xvi.

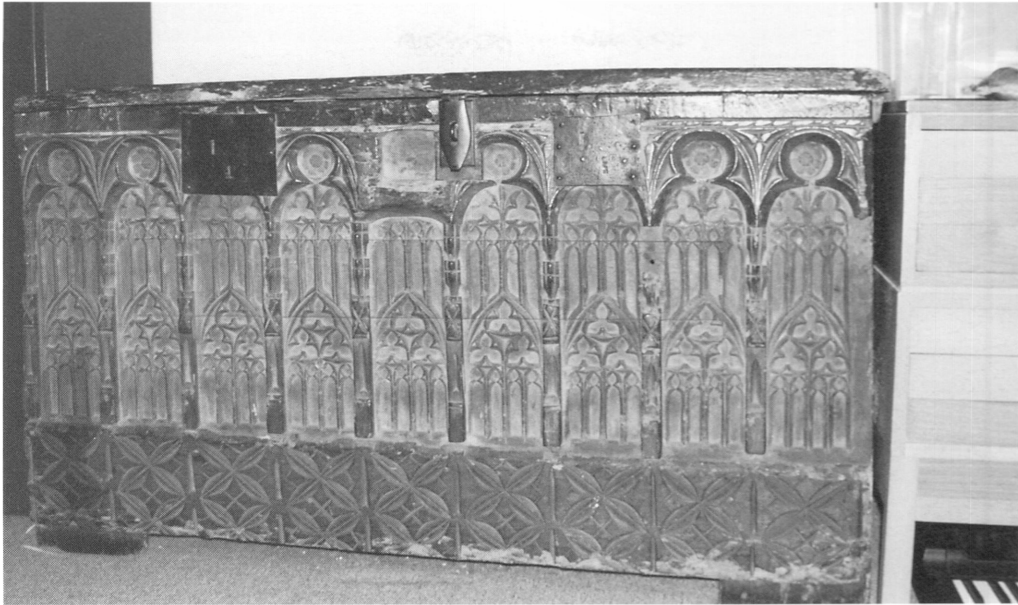
73. On Schmitz's interpretation, this area of Germany was the first in northern Europe to apply tracery carving to chest fronts, whereas France was the first country to introduce gothic window tracery and gothic carved woodwork in churches. This raises the question of why the 'leap' from stonework and church woodwork to tracery-carved chests was first made in North Germany. Was it facilitated by a specific type of guild organization in North Germany? Were iron bands dispensed with on chests, freeing wooden surfaces for carving, due to a more peaceful environment?



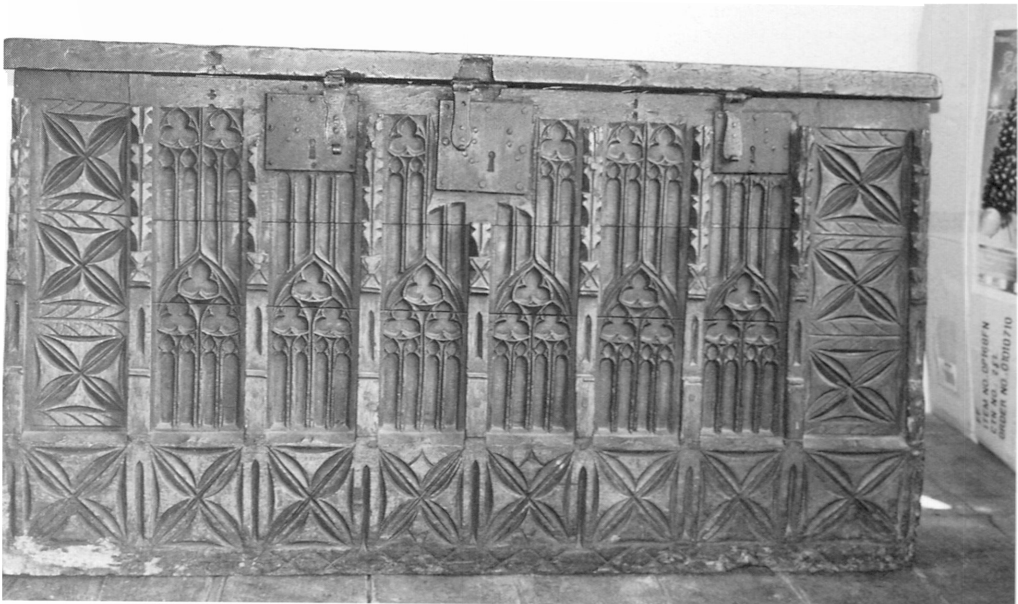
1. Clamp-fronted chest, St. Margarets Church, Rainham, Kent  
*Photo: author*



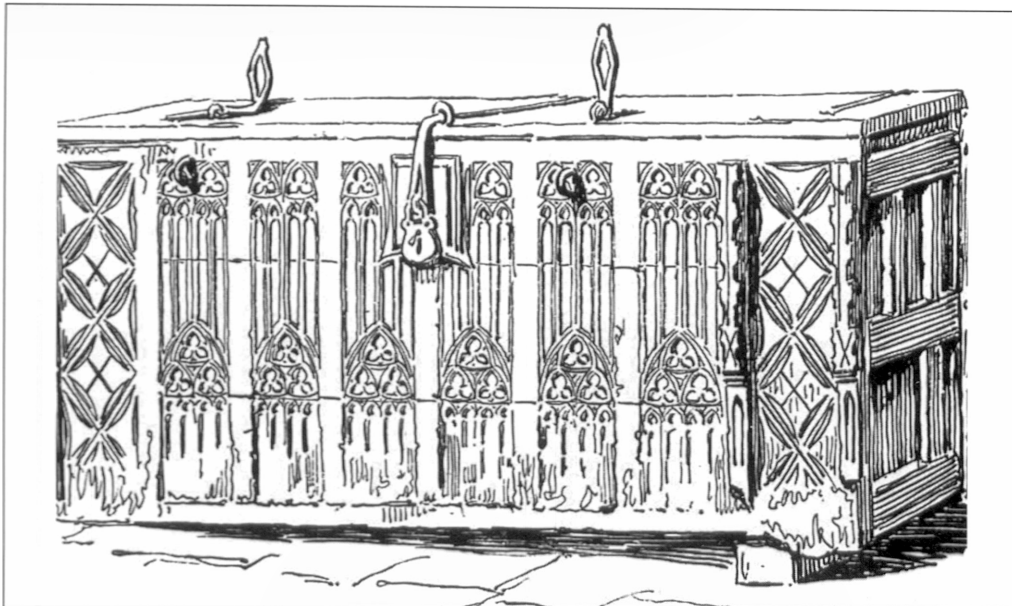
2. 'Ancient Chest, Rainham Church'  
*From: A J Pearman, Archaeologia Cantiana, 1887*



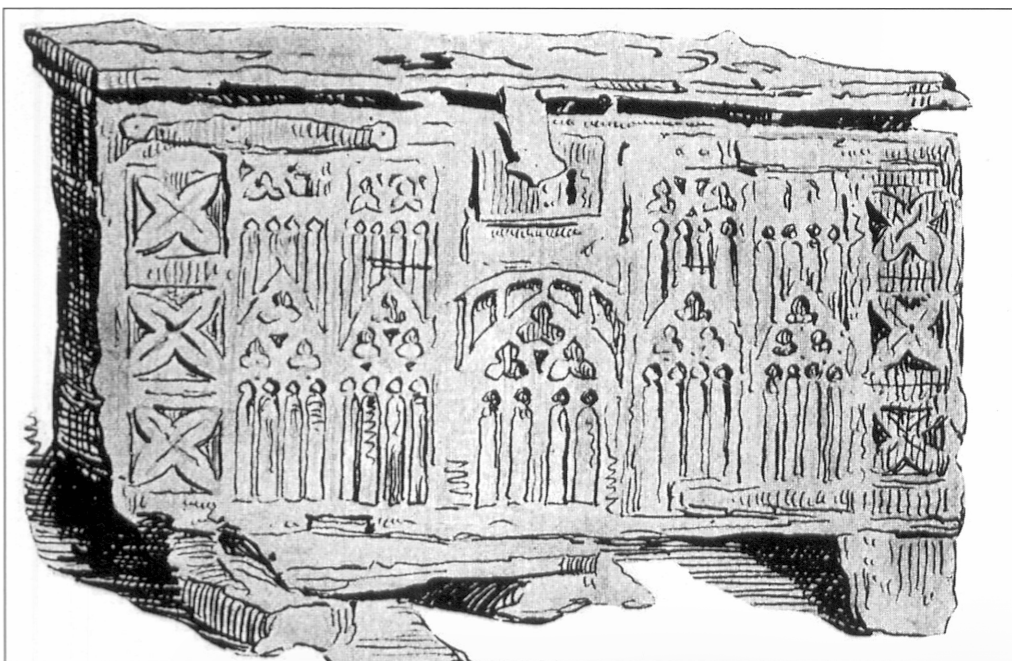
3. Clamp-fronted chest with painted decoration, St Mary's of Charity, Faversham, Kent  
*Photo: author*



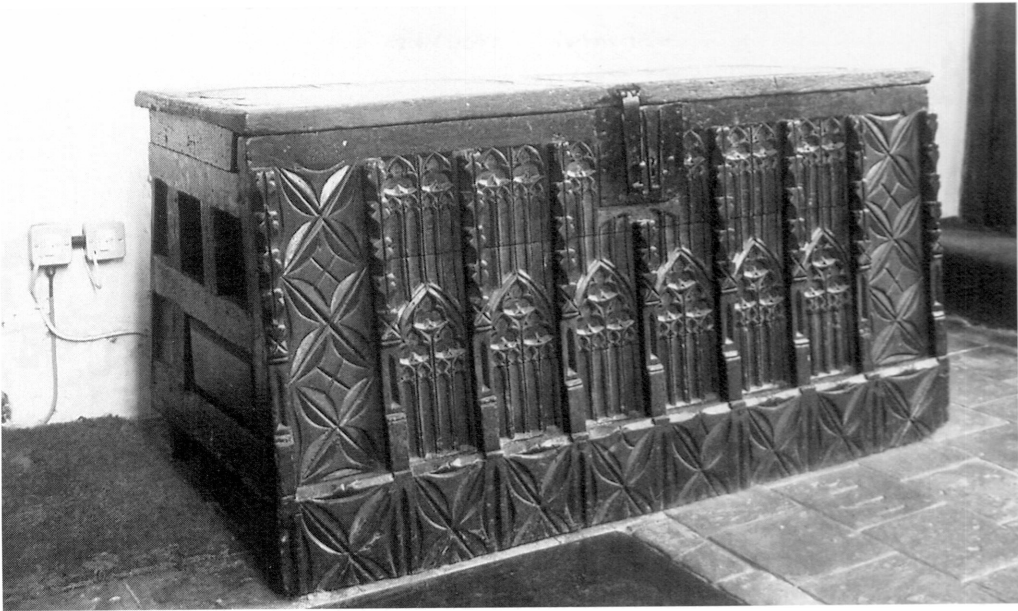
4. Clamp-fronted chest at St. John's Hospital, Canterbury, Kent  
*Photo: author*



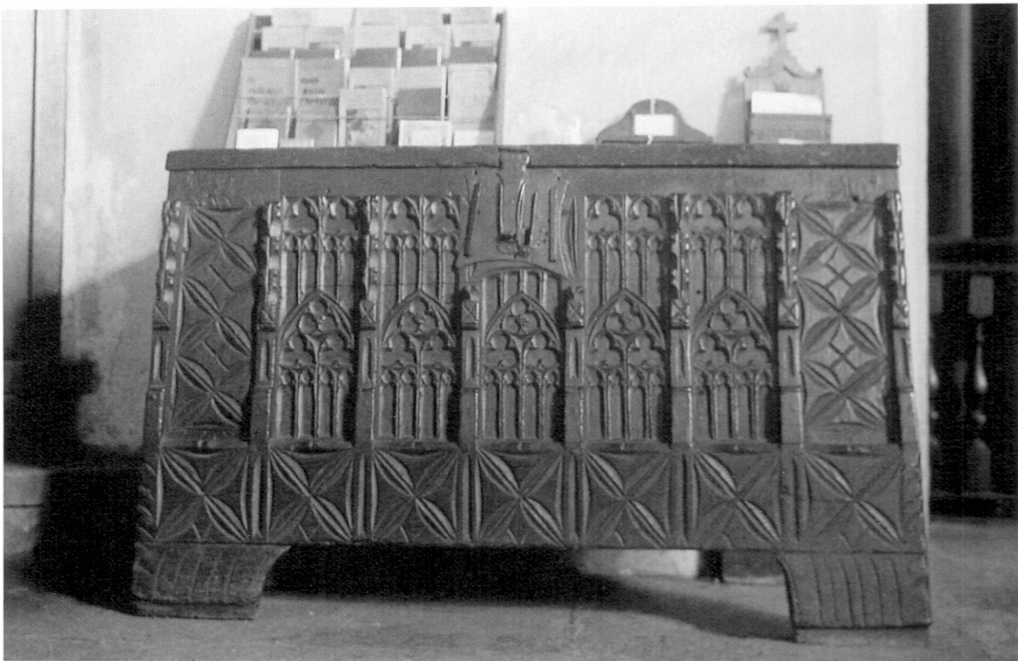
5. Chest formerly at Wittersham Church, Kent  
*From: F. Roe, Ancient Coffers and Cupboards, 1902*



6. Chest formerly at Sedlescombe Church, East Sussex  
*From: F. Roe, A History of Oak Furniture, 1929*



7. Clamp-fronted chest at All Saints, Litcham, Norfolk  
*Photo courtesy Chris Harrison*



8. Clamp-fronted chest at St. Margaret's, Norwich  
*Courtesy Jonathan Plunkett for permission to reproduce photography by George Plunkett*

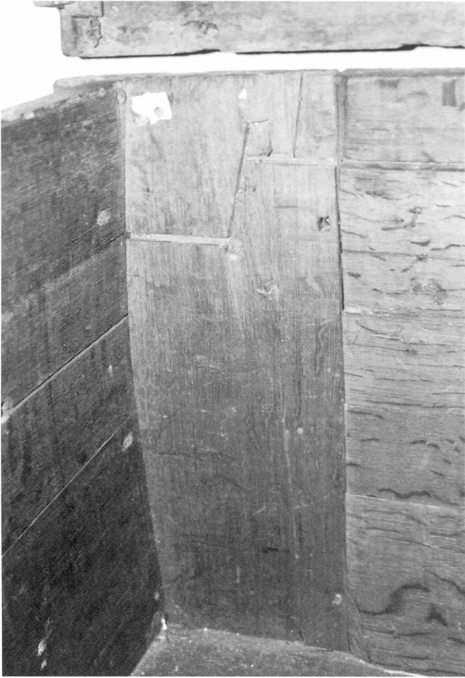


9. Rainham chest, inside view  
*Photo: author*



10. Canterbury chest, view of right hand end  
*Photo: author*





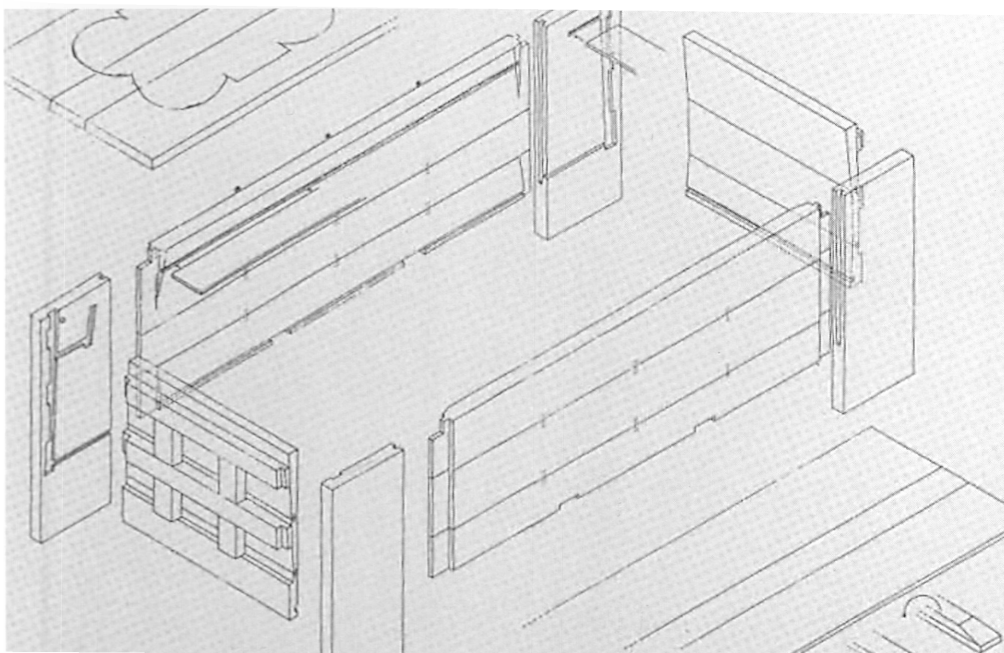
11. Canterbury chest, showing  
concavity of left hand end  
*Photo: author*



12. Canterbury chest, lid  
*Photo: author*



13. Faversham chest, lid  
*Photo: author*



14. Constructional drawing of 'late Lüneberg' type of chest  
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