

ROOTS OF REFORM

CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF CHURCH
FITTINGS IN NORFOLK DURING THE ENGLISH
REFORMATION

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Cover: Crucifixion with scratched out donors. St. Andrew's Chapel, Norwich Cathedral
Norwich Cathedral, the West Front

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Contents

Chapter I: Introduction	1
Chapter II: Methodology & Sources	3
Introduction	3
Research Question	3
Question 1: Iconoclasm	4
Question 2: Authority	4
Question 3: Identity	6
Question 4: Memory	8
Regional Approach	8
Choosing Areas	8
Sample parishes	12
Distribution	12
Case study criteria	12
Physical Dataset	13
Choosing furnishings	13
Considering survivals	14
Considering iconoclasm	14
Considering new furnishings	14
Limitations	14
Documentary Resources	15
Primary Sources	15
Secondary Sources	15
Limitations	16
Chapter III: Literature & Historical Review	17
History	17
Popular Reformation	17
An Imposed Reformation	17
Pluralist Protestantism	21
Top Down & Middle Out	22
Stability Over Conformity	23
The Long Reformation	23
Sacrality	25
Death	26
Physical World	26
Material Fabric	26
Archaeology	27
Public Worship/Iconoclasm	27
Private Devotion/Material Culture	27
Dissolution/Secular Power/Corporate Charities	28
Commemoration	28
Religious Reform - Tudors	28
Religious Reform - Stuarts	33
The English Parish Church	36
Layout and Space	36
Fittings	36
Chapter IV: Survivals	38
Baptismal Fonts	38
Introduction	38
R-NW Sample	41
R-NE Sample	44
R-S Sample	47
U-N Sample	51

Screens	53
Introduction	53
R-NW Sample.....	56
R-NE Sample	62
R-S Sample	69
U-N Sample.....	75
Paintings – Wall & Ceiling.....	76
Sculptures	78
Pulpits.....	80
Hidden Icons.....	80
Conclusion	81
Chapter V: Reformation: Iconoclasm.....	82
Edwardian Inventories.....	82
Parliamentary Visitation.....	83
Baptismal Fonts.....	86
R-NW Sample.....	88
R-NE Sample	92
R-S Sample	98
U-N Sample	100
Screens	103
R-NW Sample.....	104
R-NE Sample	108
R-S Sample	115
U-N Sample.....	119
Paintings – Wall & Ceiling.....	121
Sculptures	125
Conclusion	128
Chapter VI: Reformation: Invention & Redefinition	129
Baptismal Fonts.....	129
R-NW Sample.....	129
R-NE Sample	135
R-S Sample	136
U-N Sample.....	139
Screens	144
R-NW Sample.....	144
R-NE Sample	147
R-S Sample	147
U-N Sample.....	149
Paintings – Wall & Ceiling.....	149
Sculptures	150
Communion Rails.....	150
Pulpits.....	151
Conclusion	151
Chapter VII: Discussion	153
Iconoclasm.....	153
Selective Iconoclasm.....	154
Authority	155
Central Government.....	156
Ecclesiastical.....	157
Local	157
Identity.....	158
Religious.....	158
Regional.....	158
National.....	159

Memory	159
Generational and Liturgical	160
Reverential.....	161
Chapter VIII: Conclusion	162
In Closing	162
Future Research	163
Bibliography	165

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All photographs have been taken and edited by the author unless otherwise stated.

Chapter I: Introduction

The English Reformation can be defined as a cataclysmic series of occurrences that shattered the medieval landscape and established the primordial framework for a modern western society. The religious and political upheaval, instigated by the House of Tudor, brought about socioeconomic innovation while redefining cultural expectations in regards to both identity and authority. While historians have fiercely debated if these actions were an unwelcome imposition, or reflected the emerging will of the realm, the reality cannot be disputed that England underwent a decisive break with papal authority and the Roman Catholic Church during the sixteenth century. What can be contested is to what extent the Church of England was successful in establishing a genuinely Protestant nation in the model of continental Calvinism, Lutheranism and Zwinglianism.

The consequences of this transition during the sixteenth century would unfold in the following century against the backdrop of a new royal dynasty, as the Stuarts met the challenges of sovereignty, finances, religion, foreign policy and local control. Within this chronological context, this study will provide new insight into the causes of the Reformation, while gauging the effectiveness of its success by the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

While the English Reformation has often been the domain of historians, due to the expansive collection of documentary sources available during the period, archaeology can contribute to this discussion by assessing the variances in religious inclinations held by both the ruling class and commonality. Religious structures, including parish and cathedral churches, retain a vast wealth of material that existed or was created, throughout the period in review. Church fittings, defined as any furnishings or fixtures, all possess a religious purpose through either their liturgical function or chosen decorative motifs. An evaluation of the material record should not succumb to the temptation to draw conclusions based solely on the evidence for destruction, as the extreme acts of iconoclasm is one of the hallmarks of Reformation archaeology. Instead, a thorough appraisal of medieval survivals and early modern innovations provides an even richer context by revealing the real attitudes towards Reformation in practice, rather than principle. Furthermore, it will offer a glimpse into local dynamics that may have influenced parishioners to either take action themselves or allow external forces to disrupt,

destroy or seize the physical trappings and valuables of *their* churches.

Archaeology is also capable of supplementing the historical record in regards to the evolving sense of sacrality. The widespread 'erosion of the sacred' compromised the medieval ideals of spatial holiness within consecrated buildings. Also, the secularization of religion's monopoly on charity, education, and healthcare played a significant role in engineering the archetype of the modern state.

This study utilizes both an archaeological approach and the written record to simultaneously challenge and augment earlier historiographies of the English Reformation through an extensive research of fittings surviving in parish churches across the county of Norfolk in the area of East Anglia, located in the East of England. The material record considered includes both medieval furnishing and fixtures and early modern innovations up 1660. This research is both timely and felicitous as the current state of affairs sees a country experiencing the consequences of withdrawing from a sociopolitical institution that transcends European borders in favor isolationist nationalism.

This work incorporates five research questions, which will be outlined and expanded in the following chapter in greater detail, designed to answer the central inquiries of how the Reformation happened and to what extent it succeeded. The endurance and creation of church fittings during this period were intimately tied to the prevailing theology of the Reformation, with both iconographic ornamentation and liturgical function being the two most crucial factors. Concurrently, the role of sacrality within the consecrated domain of a church will be examined through the placement, or removal, of such fittings.

This work is arranged as follows:

Chapter II outlines the research questions and methodological approaches used to interpret church fittings and assess their role in identity and authority in urban and rural Norfolk during, and beyond, the English Reformation, with the 1534 Act of Supremacy and 1660 Restoration serving as chronological boundaries for early modern refittings.

Chapter III will provide both a literature review designed to offer proper context for this study. This

overview of the previous historical and archaeological work and arguments on the English Reformation will provide the requisite background needed to place this study's contributions within the broader historiography.

Chapter IV presents the quantitative data and qualitative case studies for medieval church fittings produced before 1534 across the four sample groups, as defined in **Chapter II**.

Chapter V presents the quantitative data and qualitative case studies for church fittings produced up to 1534 that retain traces of iconoclasm across the four sample groups, as defined in **Chapter II**.

Chapter VI presents the quantitative data and qualitative case studies for church fittings produced

between 1534 and 1660 across the four sample groups, as defined in **Chapter II**.

Chapter VII discusses and interprets the results of the preceding three chapters while addressing the central inquiries regarding the English Reformation. These investigations include: what occurred, why it happened, when it took place, who was involved and how such a monumental shift in society could transpire in such a relatively short period.

Chapter VIII summarizes the conclusions of the research, readdressing the five research questions asked in **Chapter II**. This Chapter will also introduce recommendations for additional research which could expand this study.