

# HUNGATE ROOD SCREEN TRAILS: NO.11



## **WIGGENHALL ST MARY MAGDALEN.**

**TF 598 115. postcode - PE34 3DG**

**Normally open in daylight.**

With its soaring proportions this is architecturally the finest of the Wiggenhalls.

All but the tower was rebuilt in the 1430s, the floor at a higher level than that of the earlier church which had been damaged by floods; how much higher is indicated as one stoops to enter the tower. There are 15th century benches and angels carved on the corbels on which the roof rests. An old door leads to the stair up to where the parvise, the room above the porch, once was. In the tracery of the windows in the north aisle there are saints and angels dating from c.1430. Three workshops seem to have been involved, the best at the west end. Amid all this



gothic glory there is a cool, simply and elegantly lettered Commandment Board. All that is needed now is a seriously rich benefactor.

### **The Screen**

A section of screen dado with four panels can be found in the church. The panels are painted with the Four Evangelists' symbols. St Mark is shown as a winged lion with a scroll labelled Marc. St Matthew is depicted as an angel and has a scroll with Mathew written upon it. St Luke is shown as a winged ox and has a scroll inscribed Luca. Finally St John the Evangelist is depicted as an eagle with wings outstretched and his scroll reads Joh.

The Four Evangelists are often found on screens, but usually in their role as apostles with their eight companions. St John is therefore relatively rarely depicted as or with an eagle. He is more commonly found holding the poisoned chalice, the iconography of which derives from the Book of Revelation, which, in those days, he was supposed to have authored.

## **WIGGENHALL ST MARY THE VIRGIN.**

**TF 583 145. postcode - PE34 3EJ**

**Key from house next door.**

This is one of the magnificent Fen churches, the Wiggenhalls, Walpoles, Terringtons and Tilneys and now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

The tower base and doorways are 13th century. The rest is 15th, much restored by G.E. Street in the 19th. The great glory of the church is the series of carved bench ends, images of saints, most of whom can be identified but some still baffle. Perhaps they are nuns or anchoresses from the convent at Crabhouse, some four miles to the south. To judge by the clothes and hairdos, those on the south side date from the start of the 15th century, those on the north perhaps a hundred years later. Much of what remains of the stained glass consists of fragments of heraldry from the second half of the 14th century, commemorating local manorial lords. In the north clerestory there is one head, probably of an apostle, dated 1500-1510. There is a delightful font cover with pelican, an eagle lectern, a monument to the last of the Kerviles and the heart brass of an earlier one.

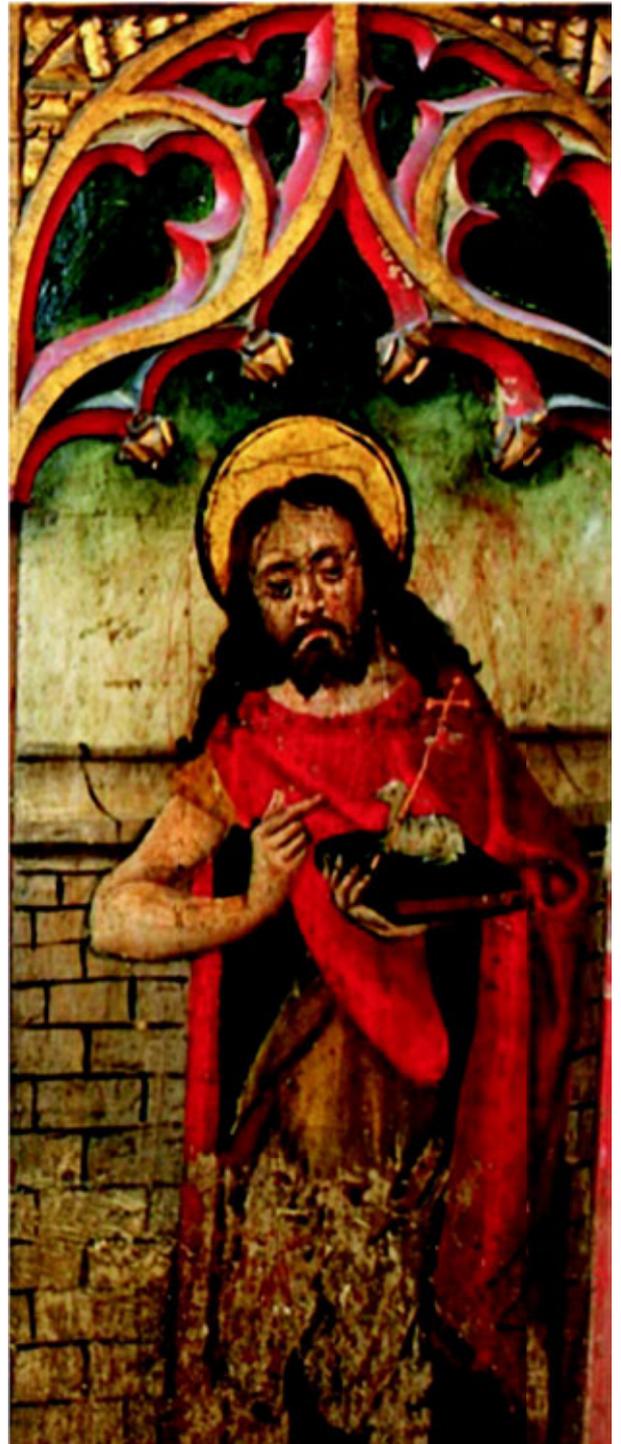
At Wiggenhall St German's, half a mile east, there are more bench ends. The fine ruin to the south is Wiggenhall St Peter.



## The Screen

Eight figures can be found on the dado of the screen, the upper part having been cut away and destroyed. The screen is quite unusual in that most of the figures depicted are female saints, and because the Virgin and Child are shown. From the north to the south side they are: St Mary Magdalene, St Dorothy, St Margaret, probably St Scholastica or possibly St Anne, St Catherine of Alexandria, St Barbara, The Virgin and Child and St John the Baptist.

It is possible to make out most of an inscription which runs along the base of the panels and which lists the donors. It reads 'Thom[a]s Lacy, Umfrey Kervyle armiger, Matthu Clerke, John [...]'. The last donor's surname is indecipherable. Although two wills for persons named Humphrey Kervyle survive, it is most probable that the man who died in 1526 is the one listed here, as that accords with the style of the screen.



The screen appears to have been painted by the same workshop as the rood screen at Beeston-next-Mileham, also in Norfolk. Both screens share the same pinkish wall set behind the figures, and have similar landscapes behind the saints, inspired by paintings and prints from the Low Countries.

Although the church, like many, is dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, it is relatively unusual to find the Virgin and Child depicted on the dados of screens. Before the Reformation, there were many other places in the parish church where Marian imagery might be found, for example in statue form as one of the patronal images, on altarpieces, in a Lady Chapel and on top of the rood loft itself next to Christ on the cross. It may be that Wiggshall St Mary the Virgin was on one of the many pilgrimage routes to the Marian shrine at Walsingham, and for this reason that the Virgin and Child are depicted on the screen, or it may reflect a particular devotion on the part of one of the donors, maybe to the nearby convent at Crabhouse.



**WALPOLE ST PETER, ST PETER.**  
**TF 503 168. postcode - PE14 7NS**  
**Normally open. Parking by church.**

What one has to do at this amazing building is to allow enough time, to take in the whole, then the details and then, pausing, its numinous quality.

The date is mid-14th century (as people were coming round after the Black Death) to mid-15th, with the tower earlier, the only surviving part of a previous church otherwise destroyed in a flood. There was money for expensive ashlar for the walls, giving a squared dignity to the building. Everywhere there are little carvings, one of a man carrying the north turret. Look especially at those within the processional way at the church's east end. Rings on the wall there are for the horses which brought the parishioners to church.

The south porch has two storeys and double depth. Outside it is a splendid copper beech. Note the tiny windows on the stair to the upper room. The porch is vaulted and every carving is worth scrutiny – animals and a Pieta among them. Both porches have old doors.

The large squared quarries of the windows let in floods of light. Unusually the different dates of the furnishings, mostly 15th and 17th century, complement each other and there is a further harmony of gentle colours throughout the building. Before going through the handsome west screen, note the huge table on the left at which people sat to receive communion in the 1600s and the 'hudd' used by the parson for funerals in inclement weather.

Unusual also, on the left once beyond the screen, is the baptismal grouping of font with its tall cover, poor box and rocking cradle to calm the most important person present. There are box pews at the back, a fine range of seating to go with the 1620 pulpit, some earlier benches in the south aisle, misericords and carved animals on the stalls in the chancel and an early 16th century latten lectern.

A visiting bishop from overseas is said to have fallen to his knees on first seeing this interior. One knows how he felt and can only be grateful to the devoted people who look after the church and maintain the delicate harmony of colour within it.



## The Screen

Like many others, the screen has been cut down, so that only the dado survives. Missing too are the elaborate carved tracery canopies which originally framed the heads of the figures. There are twelve compartments, and these are filled with a mixture of apostles and virgin saints, including the Virgin Mary and Christ child.

It has been suggested that not all the panels here came originally from the rood screen, as only nine out of twelve apostles are present. It is possible that the screen is a palimpsest, a conflation of two objects, the apostles coming from the rood screen and the virgin saints from a parclose screen. However, the shape or void left by the removal of the tracery is very similar on all the panels which would imply that they were always part of the rood screen.

What is certain is that more than one painter was involved: one of the artists was evidently less skilled than the other, as the paintings of the virgin saints are less refined than those of the apostles. They also stand on stone pedestals rather than on tiled floors. There are a number of rood screens which are evidently decorated by more than one hand, and indeed, more than one workshop.

On the north side the figures are: St Catherine of Alexandria, the Virgin and Child, St Margaret, St John the Evangelist, St James the Great and St Thomas. On the south side the figures are: St Peter, St Paul, St Andrew, St Mary Magdalene, St Dorothy and St Barbara.



## MAP OF THE TRAIL

Please note these maps are to be used as a guide. We suggest you use the postcode or co-ordinates on the information pages for more detailed directions



### Key

Trail Route ••••••••

Church 

