

HUNGATE ROOD  
SCREEN TRAILS: NO. 2

## BEESTON-NEXT-MILEHAM ST MARY.

TF 895 154. postcode - PE32 2LY

Open at weekends or ring

01328 701432 or 700911. Parking.

The church's stripey Victorian spire is a landmark for miles around. Close to, the setting is a delight, with cherry trees in the churchyard and traces of a moated area to the south, creating a ha-ha at the churchyard edge. Bumps in the fields and very old trees to the south and west give an unusual sense of antiquity, aided by the baaing of sheep whose ancestors provided the wealth to build the church.



In 2010 the church won a Betjeman Award for the excellence of the very full repair programme and we can now enjoy the building in a way that was not possible in earlier years. The roofs of the nave and aisles are superb with their many carved (but sadly defaced) figures. Pinpricks of colour from the windows only make more dominant the pale washed out colour of the roofs, and are picked up by the benches with their traceried backs and bench-ends (again defaced); and also by the parclose screens at the east ends of the aisles. That on the north side is particularly delicately carved.

The chancel roof is more rustic. The pulpit is dated 1592 and there are early 17th century paintings on the east and west walls of the nave. Around the font the benches are cut back to allow the gathering of friends and relations. Above there is a tall clerestory which a will dates to 1410, but the building is basically from the early 14th century with, especially in the east windows, some of the loveliest tracery to be seen in the county.

## The Screens

Beeston-next Mileham has two parclose chapel screens and a rood screen, which means that the nave and chancel retain some of the boxed-in feel they would have had in the early 16th century, despite the loss of the rood loft and Crucifix.



The rood screen has twelve panels along the dado, which are filled with the figures of saints. The choice of saints reflects the traditional division of the sexes in church with female figures found on the north side and male on the south. On the north side they are: St Cecilia, unknown, St Agnes, St Etheldreda and another unknown figure. On the south side the saints are St Clement, St Augustine or Ambrose, unknown, unknown and St Leonard. The figures are difficult to identify because the screen has been subjected to extreme iconoclasm, which took place during the Reformation or Civil War. It is still possible to see the violence of the gouging of the figures; the wood is deeply marked by the tools used by the image-breakers.

Despite the level of damage, the design of the panels relates closely to another rood screen, at Wiggshall St Mary the Virgin, also in Norfolk. The figures of both screens stand in front of a reddish wall with sky above and the two are probably the products of the same itinerant painting workshop. This motif indicates a 16th century date for the painting of the screen, as it shows the influence of art from the Low Countries. The spandrel carvings of the rood screen are also worthy of note and include a representation of St George and the dragon.

The two parclose screens also retain some of their original polychromy and date from the 15th century. On the north screen are the arms of Fitz-Alan (lord of the manor) quartering Maltravers, probably for John Fitz-Alan, earl of Arundel, who died of his wounds in 1435.

### **LITCHAM ALL SAINTS.**

**TF 887 176. postcode - PE32 2NS**

**Normally open. Parking.**

The tower, red brick and so fitting well with the houses around, is 1669, replacing a predecessor that burnt down. It is approached by an avenue from which dark red apples may fall about you. All this prepares one for the rose-pink of the interior.

The large nave windows and the arcades are all part of a church rededicated in 1412. Yet the surprise is that the feel of everything is late 17th or 18th century. Perhaps this is because the proportions are those of a preaching church, the nave full of light set off by the charming pink obscurity of the chancel. Whatever the impression, the facts do not bear it out! The west gallery dates from 1853 (with a metal royal arms), the box pews from 1877, and the chancel windows from about 1800. The pulpit was found in a London antique shop in 1890 but is itself 15th century with a rather delightful set of steps. Even older is the 14th century Flemish chest. The 17th century altar rails at least add authenticity to the illusion. There are brasses and many ledgers, all well described in this welcoming church.

### **The Screen**

Litcham's screen was restored in 1903. The structure of the screen, bar the panels, has been brightly repainted. The original figural panels themselves are very dark, as they are coated with a discoloured varnish and some of the figures are fragmentary. Despite this disparity in appearance, the screen rewards a detailed look.

The saints depicted, and their number, is not typical. There are

four compartments containing eight figures to each side, and this is supplemented with six figures, three each side, on the doors, making twenty-two figures in total.

As the condition of the paintings is variable, some saints cannot be identified with absolute certainty. In addition, saints often had interchangeable attributes, hence the difficulty now in identification. Those on the north side of the screen are all female, while there are male saints on the south side. This reflects the traditional division of genders in church. The figures on the north side are: St Veronica or St Sitha, St Apollonia or St Margaret of Scotland, St Cecilia, unknown female saint, St Agnes, St Sitha or St Petronella, St Helena, and St Ursula.

The doors depict St Stephen, an unknown saint, and a bishop saint to the north side. The south side of the doors show a bishop saint, St Lawrence and St Jerome.

The figures to the south side of the screen are: a pope or archbishop saint (perhaps St Thomas Becket or St Gregory), St Edmund, St Armel or Armagilus, St Jeron, St Walstan, St Hubert or St Eustace, St William of Norwich, and a royal saint (possibly St Louis of France).

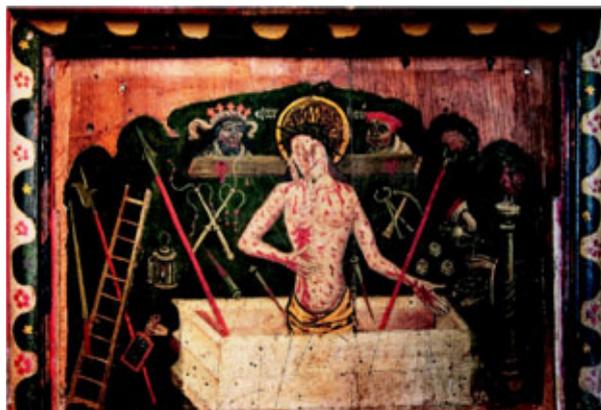
It is noteworthy that Litcham's screen includes several local East Anglian saintly figures such as St William of Norwich, St Walstan of Bawburgh and St Edmund.

### **WELLINGHAM ST ANDREW.**

**TF 872 223. postcode - PE32 2EH**

**Normally open. Parking**

As one turns off the A1065, the road to Wellingham passes some oak trees with massive trunks, surely a sign that this is a very old road.



When one reaches the church the sense of antiquity is dulled. This must be one of those churches where the quality of the Victorian restoration can only be justified by the reflection that, without it, the church might not still be here. Thank goodness, though, the building was made weatherproof, for this little church houses a truly remarkable screen.

Lancet windows indicate the early 13th century and there are attractive mixtures of ashlar and brick mixed with the prevailing flint in the walls. Here and there one can see the ghosts of earlier doors and windows. The setting, with more trees, is pleasant and for once the church is still surrounded by its houses, not chased away by the rampaging sheep.

## The Screen

The screen at Wellingham has been cut down to its dado, but there is still plenty to see. The screen is inscribed with the date 1532, just two years before the dissolution of the monasteries began and it was the gift of Robert Dorant and his wives.



The screen is unusual in that it combines depictions of saints with narrative scenes. To the north side of the door there is a blank panel followed by a St Sebastian. He is paired with St Oswald who is shown treading on the heathen king Penda. Next is a depiction of St George and the dragon set in a lush green landscape. The princess and her lamb can be seen, as can a nest of young dragons in the foreground. Strange birds race across the sky above the scene, while onlookers view the contest from the nearby castle.

To the south side, the first panel contains the archangel Michael weighing souls, set in landscape which mirrors that of the George and dragon scene. Adjacent to this is a fascinating half-scene: A Pietà, or Pity to use the English term. In this panel, Christ is shown as the Man of Sorrows, along with the instruments of His Passion. This would have acted as the altarpiece of a small nave altar. At the same time it would have recalled the legend of St Gregory, to whom a vision of Christ as the Man of Sorrows appeared as he celebrated the most sacred moment of the liturgy. The final panel is badly damaged, although it is still possible to make out the leg of a saintly figure, probably wearing armour.

**CASTLE ACRE ST JAMES.**  
**TF 816 150. postcode - PE32 2AE**  
**Normally open. Parking.**

It is only rarely that one can approach as fine a church as this and look down on it. One seems to take it all in better. Beyond the church and through the trees the ruins of the priory can be seen. When they both stood in their entirety they must have been a superb sight.

The tower is large and powerful – is there an echo here of the rivalry between parish and priory that was so unhappy at Wymondham? Money was left for the tower in 1396 and the prevailing impression of the church, without and within, is of that period. But as you walk down, note the evidence of an older building in the two-storey vestry with its animal carvings at the east end.

Inside the eye is drawn immediately to the splendid font cover. Near it is a George II royal arms. Going eastwards, there are some old timbers in the roof. The top beams of the parclose screens are all that remain but their medieval painting has survived. The wine-glass pulpit is a delight. There is some old stained glass in the south aisle. In the chancel the stalls feature reused painted panels from the screens in the aisles; only their frames remain. There are misericords below some of the seats

and there are benches with animals on the ends. On the south side of the sanctuary is a battered set of sedilia. Like the adjacent priest's door, they are relics of the earlier building.



## The Screens

Castle Acre has a rich collection of surviving medieval polychrome wood. The rood screen is now cut down to the dado, but the church also retains parts of two aisle screens, a painted pulpit and a medieval font cover.

The rood screen is notable because it is an early example of a figural arcaded screen. It might date from as early as 1400, as can be seen from the flowing hemlines of the figures' costumes, very much in the International Gothic style; however Norfolk retained an affection for the style long after it had gone out of fashion across the sea. The figures on the screen are the twelve apostles, although the final figure is difficult to identify, as his only attribute is a book.



On the north side the figures are: St Philip, St James the Less, St Matthew, St Jude, St John the Evangelist, St James the Great; and on the south St Peter, St Andrew, St Bartholomew, St Thomas, St Matthias (sometimes identified as St Paul) and an unknown saint, possibly St Simon. The final figure has been identified as Christ, but there is no sign of a cross-nimbus (which would identify the halo as Christ's).

Some of the panels originally from the two aisle screens can now be seen incorporated into the choir stalls. Crowned 'N's and 'M's can be made out on these panels and it is known that the chapels were dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St Nicholas respectively.

The magnificent 15th century wineglass pulpit depicts the four Latin Doctors of the Church, St Augustine, St Gregory, St Jerome and St Ambrose. The Latin Doctors were a popular subject for pulpits as well as rood screens. Teaching from the pulpit would fit one to go in through the doors of the screen.

The vertiginous Gothic font cover is also medieval in date and

## 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 

