

HUNGATE ROOD  
SCREEN TRAILS: NO. 5

## **FILBY ALL SAINTS.**

**TG 468 133. postcode - NR29 3HW**

**Normally open. Parking.**

The very tall tower has, instead of pinnacles, figures of the four Latin Doctors – Saints Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Gregory & Jerome. There is flushwork at the base and at the top. In between are very tall windows with fine tracery.

Tracery in the windows is something to look at carefully here, presuming that the Victorian restorers made faithful copies of what they found – they often did. In particular, the east window of the south aisle, the chancel window next to it and the equivalents on the north side have unusual patterns. All of this is below a beautifully thatched roof.

One goes in by the west door, which gives a fine sense of the space inside. There is an early 16th century pulpit (quite difficult for some clergy to squeeze into), a font that is three centuries older and, near it, a door to the tower with a lattice of ironwork and no less than seven keyholes. In the north aisle are 19th century medallions of stained glass in the medieval style, by Gerente of Paris. A display case in the south aisle describes, with clear drawings and text, the flowers to be found in the churchyard.

Flowers are a great theme in Filby, which frequently wins prizes for the way it presents itself. That tradition of care is evident also in the church.

### **The Screen**

Filby's screen is a high-quality example of the work of artists famous for the screen at Ranworth. The artists in question were probably based in Norwich, but, as screens were decorated on site, they must have travelled here to paint the screen. Filby's rood screen is on a more intimate scale than Ranworth, and much of the upper part has been restored. However, the figure panels, especially the faces, are generally better preserved than those at Ranworth.

It is not only the painting on the screen that is wonderful; there is fine carving in the spandrels, where it is possible to see animals, grotesques and birds. Look out too for the lovely vine trail along the transom.

From the north, the figures depicted are: St Cecilia, St George, St Catherine, St Peter, St Paul, St Margaret, St Michael, and St Barbara. The male and female saints here alternate, unlike on



many other screens where they are separated into two groups either side of the door. The pairing is probably a conscious choice.

Many of the stencil patterns on the background of the panels here are shared with Ranworth and other paintings in the group, such as Thornham, Old Hunstanton and Southwold. So too, the brocade patterns on the robes of many of the saints are shared. To take one example, St Peter's robe has designs showing a leaping dog and an eagle attacking a hare; the same can be seen nearby at Ranworth.

**SOUTH BURLINGHAM ST EDMUND.**  
**TG 373 083. postcode - NR13 4EU**  
**Key from Church Farm or the adjacent house**  
**across the road. Car park south of the**  
**church.**

This is the isolated church south of the A47 between Lingwood and Beighton. Finding it may be difficult but it is worth the effort. Be guided by the ugly Victorian top to the tower.

That is the only ugly thing there. The church itself and the porch are thatched. One approaches up a short yew avenue. Both the south porch and the blocked (and unfinished) north one have Norman doorways with carving like that in so many Waveney valley churches. There is Norman flintwork to the right of the porch and a Norman window on the north side; but otherwise the style is Early English c.1300.



Inside there are old benches, the plainer ones at the back. The bench-ends have delightful carvings, among them an anatomically unexpected elephant and a scary snake. On the chancel stalls there are a bishop and a king. The star is the 15th century pulpit, full of colour and important enough to have attracted a grant from the Pilgrim Trust for its conservation.

Above are an 18th century tester and an hour glass to remind the preacher in case the faces of his listeners did not. Opposite the entrance there is a faded St Christopher and in the chancel one can make out a picture of the murder of St Thomas Becket. Other wall-paintings are indecipherable or lost. The altar rails are pleasantly vernacular as is the font cover.

### **The Screen and Pulpit**

The screen is an attractive example which still has its upper canopy, though not the rood loft. It is painted in the traditional fashion of alternating red and green, with white tracery and gilded stencilling. The large unpainted section to the north side of the screen is not damaged, but instead appears never to have been painted. This is probably because a nave altar once stood against the screen. Several holes or squints have been cut in the screen. These would have allowed kneeling members of the congregation to view the elevated host during mass.

The magnificent polygonal pulpit is the work of painters who can also be found working on screens. These painters were probably not responsible for painting the rood screen, because, although at first glance the paintwork seems very similar, the stencils are different. The pulpit is also decorated using a technique called tin relief. This method involves making repeated relief decorations in a mould which can then be cut out and applied to the desired surface.

The very same stencil patterns of exactly the same dimensions as those on the pulpit can be found elsewhere in Norfolk, at Trunch, Fritton, Alburgh and All Saints, Thwaite. As well as the same stencils, the same tin relief moulds can also be found in these locations. Not all share exactly the same range of stencils and reliefs, but all are interlinked and were doubtless the output of the same painting workshop.

**UPTON ST MARGARET.**  
**TG 394 123. postcode - NR13 6AR**  
**Normally open. Parking opposite.**

This is a large church in a small place, with high walls still rendered here and there with old render, giving them an

attractive texture. The upper parts of the original tower fell many years ago and the 20th century replacement disappoints. Inside, however, the sense of scale returns with the tall arcades and thin late medieval columns. The brick and pavement floors are a delight and the severity of the building is lightened by the tracery above the two piscinas in the north and south aisles, the latter with a consecration cross beside it.

Apart from the screen, the great triumph of the church is the font. They claim it as the best in the county and this is no empty claim. There are three levels of carving. At the top are the emblems of the four Evangelists, with angels between them holding shields or musical instruments like those one sees in the county's medieval windows. Below are figures representing baptism and the Mass. Godparents stand beside the mother and baby, a godmother dressed up to the nines, which helps date the font to about 1380. At the lowest level are delightful carvings of animals.

Outside, at the south-east corner, lichen has decorated the nose and lips of an angel on a tombstone so that it looks like a clown.

## The Screen

Upton's screen has been cut down to its transom, but enough of the structure survives to see it is an early 15th century type, comparable to screens at Hempstead and Somerleyton.

Although eight figures can be seen on the screen, they are painted over pre-existing red and green backgrounds and date from 1505. The names of donors William and Agnes Wynne are revealed in the inscription on the transom over the 7th and 8th panels. It would often take late-medieval communities a long time, sometimes decades to complete the fundraising to build and decorate screens. The processes of carpentry and painting were separate. In this instance, it seems that a screen which started life as decorative has been updated to carry the figures of saints.

It has to be said that the paintings were not done by the most skilled of artists, but nonetheless, two different hands can be seen – the female saints have distinctive oversized heads and hands.

From the north, the figures are: St Augustine, St Jerome, St Gregory and St Ambrose. The south side figures are St Helena, St Etheldreda, possibly St Elizabeth of Hungary, and St Agatha. The division of male and female saints north and south marks the division of the genders in church.

## RANWORTH ST HELEN.

**TG 356 147. postcode - NR13 6HT**

**Normally open. Parking**

Although there was an earlier church here, of which only a few traces remain, what we see has the power of so many churches built in one campaign. The tall tower which, for once, can be ascended is accompanied by very tall windows, all from around 1400. The door is old and in front is the surviving font from the previous church. To its left is the tall and very thin tower arch.



The font is simple, pointing to a particular characteristic of St Helen's: the mixture of simple elegance with extreme sophistication. The screen is probably the finest survivor of its kind in the country, the antiphoner (in a display case by the door) a match for the best medieval manuscripts. In contrast the cantor's desk before the screen is almost rustic. The candlesticks beside it, the bench-ends, and the architecture itself all minister to the star performers.

The chancel roof, dated 1370, is partly restored. There are misericords in the stalls, a fine piscina and 17th century altar rails. With the huge windows, all is full of light, a truly joyful place and a perfect setting for a masterpiece.

## The Screens and Lectern

Ranworth's is justifiably one of East Anglia's most celebrated rood screens. The structure and design of the screen are elaborate and its decoration is by arguably the finest East Anglian painting workshop of the late 15th century. The screen stretches across the width of the church and has integral nave altarpieces to the north and south, separated by beautifully decorated parclose partitions. It also retains much of the original coving and floor of the rood loft.

The central portion of the screen depicts the twelve apostles. From the north to the south they are: St Simon, St Thomas, St Bartholomew, St James the Great, St Andrew, St Peter, St Paul, St John the Evangelist, St Philip, St James the Less, St Jude and St Matthew. These saints are framed to each side by parclose divisions. On the north side, the upper panel contains a bishop saint. He is sometimes identified as St Felix, but there is little evidence to enable him to be readily identified. St Stephen is depicted in the lower panel of this partition, recognisable by his symbol of stones. The westernmost panel contains a dramatic scene of St George and the dragon. The parclose division to the south mirrors that of the north. There is another bishop saint, sometimes identified as St Thomas Becket, St Lawrence, who is often paired with St Stephen and St Michael slaying the seven-headed dragon of the apocalypse.

To the south, the altar reredos shows the unusual iconography of the Holy Kinship, the legendary extended family of Christ, which included some of the apostles. The four tall panels show in turn: St Mary Salome with the infant St John the Evangelist and the infant St James, The Virgin Mary and Christ child, St Mary Cleophas with her four sons (St Jude, St Simon, St Joseph Barsabas and St James the Less) and, finally, St Margaret of Antioch, patron of pregnant and labouring women.

The north altarpiece depicts St Etheldreda, St John the Baptist (planned as a bishop saint), a blank panel (planned as John the Baptist), and St Barbara. There has been some confusion as to the identification of the saints on the north altarpiece due to an alteration in the design during painting. St John the Baptist appears twice. He was initially planned next to a bishop saint. However, the bishop saint was turned into John the Baptist and the planned John the Baptist painted over with a decorative pattern. That this was done by the original painters can be seen

from the use of the same stencils as elsewhere on the painting. This change most probably occurred because the original John the Baptist was going to be obscured by a statue, but, as the altar here was dedicated to him, he had to be retained and the bishop painted out. Instead of the usual north/south divide of the women and men in church, indications are that at Ranworth it was the other way round. The north side was dedicated to St John the Baptist, and the south devoted to subjects related to family and childbirth.

The output of this painting workshop can also be seen elsewhere in Norfolk and Suffolk as far afield as Southwold and Hunstanton. While at Ranworth, look out also for the medieval painted lectern.



## 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 

