

HUNGATE ROOD
SCREEN TRAILS: NO. 7

HEMPSTEAD ST ANDREW

(north-east of Stalham).

TG 404 284. postcode - NR12 0SH

For access, please ring 01692 580793.

St Andrew's stands almost completely on its own, with the telegraph poles and chalets of Eccles-on-Sea not far beyond. On the two-tier porch there are three niches for saints – unoccupied – the middle one with a little ogee arch above. This is 15th century but Y-tracery in some of the church's windows suggests a date for the unaltered building of around 1300.

Originally a nave with an aisle on each side, as one can see from the windows, all is now one cell, with the delicate pale screen half concealing the chancel beyond. Left and right of the screen are a pulpit, on legs, and a prayer desk, both 17th century and a delight. There are well-carved piscinas beside the prayer-desk and in the chancel. Two medieval angels can be found in one of the north windows and on the font are unsmiling, but not ferocious, lions. Half way up the nave are a small group of benches obtained from King's College Chapel, stylistically incongruous but of a quality matching the best of the other fittings and now, as they say, part of the history.

The Screen



Both the design of the woodwork and the painting style indicate that this is an early perpendicular screen, dating to about 1420. Painting of a similar style and date can be seen on the parclose screens at Worstead, which had been part of the rood screen before it was replaced in 1512. The figure paintings are refined

and the screen is elegant, despite having suffered losses over time.

At Hempstead one can see slots where return stalls were once present to either side of the screen's doorway. The elaborate screen at Ranworth retains this feature, although here it must have been on a much smaller scale. Once, two projecting pieces of wood would have screened the north and the south sides, effectively turning them into small parclosets or chapels.

The saints depicted on the screen are rather an eclectic selection, and are mostly identifiable from their accompanying inscriptions or attributes. Beginning from the north the surviving figures are: St Juliana, St Helena, unknown (probably St Agatha), St Theobald, St Denis, St John of Bridlington, St Giles, St George, St Erasmus, St Stephen, St Lawrence, St Blaise, St Francis, St Leonard and, formerly, St Eligius.

Sadly the end panels, St Eligius and half of St Leonard, were stolen in 1982, and have never been recovered. In 1936 there still existed two loose panels from the doors, with outlines of St Edmund with arrow and St Edward the Confessor with ring.

EAST RUSTON ST MARY.

TG 364 286. postcode - NR12 9FB

Key from East Ruston Hall, half a mile north.

This is the isolated church with a tall tower right beside the B1159 from Stalham to Walcott, some three miles north of Stalham. There is a long lay-by south of the church. Take care on leaving it: the straight road from Walcott encourages speed and the slight ridge conceals the lay-by from people driving south. The village itself developed round the common, a mile to the west.

The church, built on higher, less marshy ground, dates largely from the 14th century, much restored in the 18th, when the north aisle was pulled down and the arcade bricked up; and also in the 19th. Its interior has been described as barn-like. It reminds one of the handsome barns at Paston and Waxham, not far off.

The doors and their hinges are particularly fine, as is the font; its somewhat strange features may have been re-cut in the 19th century but are well worth a close look nonetheless. In the floor are many ledgers recalling local families, at least one of them still around over two hundred years later.

The only house anywhere near is the old vicarage, which has been enriched by a huge and still developing garden, full of fantasy and delight. A superb outing is to go there first and then walk into the churchyard through the gate created by a local

blacksmith whose work is often exhibited in the church.

St Mary's is pastorally redundant and in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

The Screen

East Ruston has a delightful rood screen with eight panels containing the four Evangelists and four Latin Doctors of the Church. The entrance to the screen is framed by two door posts (a rare feature) with beautifully sculpted lions at the top. The upper part of the screen still survives, and the transom, muntins and mullions are decorated with wave and floral patterns.

The north side shows the Evangelists who are depicted with their symbols. They are in turn: St Matthew, as an angel, St Mark with his lion, St Luke with his ox, and St John with his eagle. To the south side are the Doctors of the Church. St Gregory is vested as Pope, St Augustine carries a crosier, St Ambrose is shown as a bishop, and St Jerome is dressed as a cardinal. Unusually, the papal tiara is not mutilated.



The lions are very obviously gendered (although both have manes), rather humorously pointing out the medieval division of the genders in church, the men to the north and the women to the south side. Two similar lion posts, previously from St Swithin's in Norwich, are now in the collection of the Castle Museum in Norwich. They may well have been the product of the same workshop as the East Ruston screen.

STALHAM ST MARY THE VIRGIN.

TG 374 252. postcode - NR12 9AU

Normally open.

A very welcoming church despite its austere external appearance. The tower was never completed, emphasising the

building's solid look but this is lightened by the carvings on the south side, especially the happy couple at the eave beyond the west wall of the porch. On the other side of the porch there is a gravestone apparently dated 1655, a very rare survival if so.

Inside the church is wide and feels unexpectedly lofty. The tracery of the windows is often impressive. Where it is Victorian it may well reproduce what was there before. Victorian respect for the past is visible in the font, said to have been found partially buried in the 19th century, with its carvings plastered over (often done to save the images from desecration by reformers). With the plaster gone, what we now have is 15th century carving in nearly new condition. On the left as one goes out is a less well-preserved, but still remarkable holy water stoup on a stem.

The Screen

The screen at Stalham is fragmentary and all that survives are five panels now mounted on the wall. These panels contain the figures of saints, and they are quite an unusual selection. Many screens depict the twelve apostles along the screen dado, but here a more eclectic set of saints are present. Starting at the east end, they are in turn: St Andrew with his saltire cross, a bishop saint, probably St Thomas Becket, St Edward the Confessor, St Sebastian or St Edmund (he appears to be wearing a hat, not a crown, so St Sebastian is more likely) and St Roch.

Saints such as St Roch and St Sebastian were popular because of their roles as intercessors. Intercessory saints were thought to plead for deliverance and salvation on behalf of the sinner. They were used as an intermediary between people and God. Both St Sebastian and St Roch were thought to be especially efficacious against the plague and skin diseases.

Some of the other saints here, St Edward the Confessor and St Thomas Becket were specifically English saints and it might be for this reason that they were chosen for the screen.

SMALLBURGH ST PETER.

TG 334 239. postcode - NR12 9NB

Please ring 01692 536088 for access.

This church is best seen from the unexpectedly busy road from Beeston St Lawrence, particularly before the leaves come out. Then the fine 15th century windows stand out, distinguishing a small building made smaller by the fall of its tower in 1677.

Devotedly cared for, this is a church where the details give

unexpected pleasure: the medieval south door and its porch; the portrait of Richard Oram, vicar for fifty years till 1763, and his monument in the chancel by Thomas Rawlins of Norwich, architect and sculptor; the heraldic Gidney stove fittings. The elegant font was rescued from garden duty and the parclose panels from a stolen chest. The roof timbers were decorated by the 1902 vicar's German wife. On the wall by the door one can read a story about a previous vicar, Mr. Ugge, who was succeeded by Mr. Rugge. This is a church whose history cannot be separated from that of its vicars (and their wives).

Also note the excellent simple chairs, locally made, and, outside, the eloquent and elegant Bond monument.

The Screen

Smallburgh's rood screen is fragmentary, having been cut down to the transom. There are eight surviving figures on the screen and a further three loose panels now mounted on the wall.

On the screen itself, from the north side the figures are: St Anthony, a king (either St Edward the Confessor [ring] or St Edmund [arrow] depending on the identification of the attribute in his right hand), St Gregory, St George, St Giles, St Lawrence, a bishop saint and a further unknown bishop saint. The figures mounted on the wall are, from left to right, an unknown bishop saint, St Petronella and St Martin.

On the reverse of the panels of the rood screen there is a design of red and white flowers on red or green backgrounds. These patterns mimic the expensive brocade fabrics of the period, and similar designs can be seen on other screens, such as Ranworth and Houghton St Giles.

TUNSTEAD ST MARY.

TG 308 227. postcode - NR12 8HT

Normally open.

Tunstead seems to have been a holy place for many decades before the Norman Conquest. Nowadays this magnificent building feels like one of the great Cistercian abbeys of France, its austerity only slightly lessened by the wavy carving around the tower and more decoration above the west and north doors. The church we have was started in 1327. Work was interrupted by the Black Death but resumed courageously by the survivors in 1371. Their faith was duplicated in William Weir's repairs in the 1920s, the rebuilding of the north aisle in the 1950s and a massive amount of more recent work, steadily supported by English Heritage.

For this is now one of Norfolk's remote churches. After long stretches of agribusiness one suddenly comes upon the huge building standing almost alone. Where other churches have a clerestory there is a line of flushwork arches above large decorated windows, the geometry a little mocked by the wavy line of the roof, green with verdigris. On the north side take care if you want to look at the clerestory for whatever has dug there – rabbits, foxes, even badgers – has dug deep and hidden under the vegetation.

On the door there is superb ironwork. If only one knew the maker's name or where he was from. This was a wool-wealthy area in the 14th century and clearly could command the best workmanship. Inside, the sense of space is made greater by the extreme slenderness of the columns of the arcade. The 15th century roof retains many of its original timbers and the rood beam has survived, perhaps too high up to be safely reached. Its gentle colours are perfect among the subdued colour of the whole building.

At the east end of the chancel is a narrow platform, with steps up to it and the original door leading to a barely lit room below. The purpose of this, a unique example, is disputed. Around the walls are stone benches – for the weak. Between the arches of the arcades are empty niches for statues, with small carved faces as corbels, another slight departure from the austere beauty of the whole. From the tree-like arcades one goes out to one's car between the real limes of a short avenue.

The Screen

Tunstead's screen and rood beam are among the most striking survivors in East Anglia, beautifully sited in this bright, lofty church. The painted rood beam still has visible mortises where it once held the Crucifix and attendant figures of Mary and John the Evangelist. The screen has delicate tracery, an elaborately carved transom and is also decorated with painted saints. Part of the flooring of the loft survives.

The saints on the screen are rather typical for East Anglia; the twelve apostles and the four Latin Doctors of the Church. From the north side of the screen, the figures are: St Augustine, St Jerome, St Matthew, St Bartholomew, St Simon, St Jude, St Thomas, St Paul (instead of St Matthias), St Peter, St Andrew, St James the Great, St John the Evangelist, St Philip, St James the Less, St Gregory and St Ambrose.



All the saints have their names painted beneath them - but St Jerome and St Ambrose have been muddled up by the painters. Although St Jerome can be seen in the second panel from the north with his cardinal's hat and lion, he is labelled 'Ambrosius'. Ambrose, in his usual bishop's garb, is termed 'Geronimus'.

A quick look at the painting style of the figures reveals that more than one hand was at work here. The first six panels from the north side and the last six on the south appear to be the work of the same painter. The four in the middle are more elongated in proportion and lack the inscriptions at the base of the figures. The two painters do use the same stencils, and so were most likely part of the same workshop.

WORSTEAD ST MARY.

TG 303 262. postcode - NR28 9RW

Normally open.

The place gave its name to a type of cloth made here for six centuries and evidence of the resulting wealth is to be seen in the high standard of the village's delightful houses and in the detailing and soaring proportions of the church and its tower, over 100ft. high.

This is a 14th and 15th century building, respectfully restored in the 19th and 20th. It has a rare sense of unity, as if the vision of the first generation involved in the construction was followed by their successors.

The two-tier porch has flushwork and a carving of the coronation of the Virgin. Around the tower there is more flushwork, two tiers of it, the upper simpler and unexpectedly tall. The more modest north door has delightful carving around it. Above, on both sides of the church, are splendid gargoyles, from whose mouths extended spitters now carry the rainwater into large catchpits well away from the church walls.

Inside, angel corbels hold up the wall-posts of the hammerbeam roof added in the 15th century. Below them are box pews with elegant chest-high screens to protect the faithful from draughts. At the west end, the ringers' gallery is dated 1501 – the screen below is excellent 19th century work. In front of it is one of those fonts with three steps so narrow that many a mother must have had palpitations, watching the priest with his precious burden.

The Screens

Worstead's lofty screens consists of sixteen sections and its design resembles nearby screens at Ludham and Trunch. Although the inscription on the transom of the screen records the

donor as John Alblastyr, this painted part is 19th century in origin. Only the carved part of the inscription on the transom which begins '...et Hilde uxoris eius...' is original. John Alblastyr's name was painted on the screen in the 19th century and his wife was called Agnes, not Hilda. Nonetheless, the original inscription does provide a date for the screen, 1512.

There are sixteen figures in the dado panels, of which the first two are mid-19th century in date and depict Christ as the Man of Sorrows and St Paul. The following figures of the north side are: St James the Less, St Philip, St Simon, St Jude, St Matthew and St John the Evangelist. On the south side, the figures are St Andrew, St Peter, St James the Great, St Thomas, St Bartholomew, St Matthias? (labelled Jerome in 19th century overpaint), St William of Norwich and St Julia of Corsica. This final female saint has previously been identified as St Wilgefortis. However, there is infra-red evidence that she was neither bearded nor naked, and so the identification as St Julia of Corsica might be a possible alternative. The screen at Worstead is essentially an apostle screen with four additional saints, two of which have been lost.

Some of the paintings compare closely with panels of the screens at Aylsham, Cawston and Marsham, as well as Bramfield in Suffolk. The same workshop and artists seem to have painted screens in these locations. Also notable is that this workshop used up-to-date print sources from the continent. The figures of St Philip, St Simon, St Andrew, St Peter and St Bartholomew all derive from early 16th century prints.

The two aisle screens, now separated, formed Worstead's previous rood screen before the current one was finished in 1512. The figure painting on the two aisle screens is closely comparable to that on the rood screen at Hempstead, which dates from the early 15th century. The figures on the north screen are: St Lawrence, an archbishop saint, St Bartholomew and St Philip. The figures on the south screen are St Peter, St Paul, St John the Baptist and St Stephen. The two parts of this screen are covered in discoloured varnish and more than one campaign of over-painting, but the quality of the painting is high.



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 ⊕

