

The rood or chancel screen was the visual focus of the medieval parish church, separating the sacred space of the chancel from the more public nave. In East Anglia, many richly decorated screens survive as testimony to the impressive craftsmanship of medieval painters and carpenters and also to parish pride and patronage. These screens are a unique reminder of the engagement of ordinary people with the Christian Church and of their devotional preferences, representing one of the most important means of communication before widespread literacy. As a body, existing fifteenth-century rood screen paintings form the most significant corpus of late medieval English painting. This series aims to draw attention to some of these medieval treasures and to encourage visitors to explore the beautiful churches where these screens are to be found.

Remember that these painted screens are very old and fragile. Please do not touch the painted surfaces nor lean anything against them.

Collect the complete series:



Find out more by visiting Hungate:

St Peter Hungate Church
Princes Street
Norwich NR3 1AE

Opening hours:

Saturdays 10:00 – 16:00 Sundays 14:00 – 16:00
Entrance free

Written and produced by Hungate in collaboration with Sarah Cassell at the University of East Anglia as part of the 'Heaven's Gate: Medieval Rood Screens from Norfolk' exhibition. Hungate promotes the astonishing wealth of medieval art and artefacts still surviving in Norfolk. Designed by Brian Williams Korteling. Printed with support of the Barbara Whatmore Charitable Trust.

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Many of the photographs in this set of rood screen trails are taken from the book "Norfolk Rood Screens" by Paul Hurst ARPS, text by Jeremy Haselock FSA, to be published by Phillimore of London in December 2012.

HUNGATE ROOD SCREEN TRAILS: NO. 8

Eye • Yaxley • Westhorpe • Wyverstone



Hungate
www.hungate.org.uk



EYE ST PETER & ST PAUL.

TM 148 737. postcode - IP23 7BD

Normally open. Parking.

Eye is an ancient borough and fully deserves what Pevsner calls a perambulation. Its great glory is the church but stop for a moment to admire the carvings on the timbers of the 16th century Guildhall next door.

The tower is late 15th century, one of many monuments in these parts to the de la Poles. It has panels of flushwork from bottom to top, a most amazing display. One goes in through the west door and above there is a fan vault; but first, walk round the outside. The south porch, which contains the shop, is another display of flushwork but here flint has at some time been replaced with brick, a rather engaging relief from the majesty of the tower. The priest's door has a flying buttress over it as at Blythburgh and, in a Victorian version, at Yaxley. The flushwork on the buttresses at the east end is grand, probably restored but none the worse for that. On the north side the gargoyles might give the sensitive nightmares, presumably their purpose. Note the hairdo of the person on the label stop to the right of the north door.

Inside there are fine 14th century arcades. The roof is supported on wallposts with portrait corbels. Portraits they must be and one longs to know who they were - Eye's 16th century movers and shakers no doubt. The font cover is by Sir Ninian Comper and his are the figures on the rood and the ceiling decoration above. In what was the south porch there is a 13th century doorway preserved in the rebuilding two hundred years later and also a dole table where debts were paid and bread provided for the poor.

Eye's formal status may be less than it once was but its church is very much alive and welcoming.

The Screen

The screen at Eye is magnificent, having been partially rebuilt by Sir Ninian Comper in 1925. Comper added much of the vaulting, loft and rood group, but at least some of the upper parts of the screen are original as the name of a donor, John Gold, can be made out in the tracery to the south side of the central door.

The medieval parts of the woodwork at Eye were done by the same workshop as at nearby Yaxley, as can be seen from the distinctive foliage carving in the dado spandrels. The figure



paintings, on the other hand, are by a different artist. While this artist had access to the finest and most expensive materials, including gold leaf and blue and crimson pigments, the painting is not as sophisticated as at Yaxley.

On the north side, the figures are: an unknown king, St Helena, St Edmund, St Ursula, unknown king, St Dorothy, St Barbara, St Agnes, and St Edward the Confessor. On the south side, the figures are in turn: St John the Evangelist, St Catherine, St William of Norwich, St Lucy, St Blaise or Cyprian, St Agatha or Cecilia, two blank panels.

All of the saints depicted are of noble birth. This choice of noble saints and especially of kings on the screen dado reflects the tradition of the presence of kings on cathedral pulpita. The stone pulpitum is the equivalent of a rood screen in a cathedral and was often adorned with statues.

YAXLEY ST MARY.

TM 122 738. postcode - IP23 8BU

Normally open. Limited parking.

This is now a very pretty quiet corner, no longer on the main road from Norwich to Ipswich. The entrance to the churchyard is memorable. Straight ahead is the two-storey porch. At the upper level it has two large windows, most unusual, and below them, in the spandrels are a giant and a woodwose – or are they men tackling wild animals? There is a band of flushwork with capital 'M's for the Virgin Mary. The porch's ceiling is vaulted with bosses, altogether a surprisingly grand affair.

Inside there is a contrast, also to be seen from the churchyard, between the older nave and the lively restoration of the chancel. Straight ahead, on the south wall, is one of only two surviving sexton's wheels. It was used to determine the date when one would do penance. Near it are delightful remnants of the tomb of William Yaxley, who died in 1588. It's worth opening the south door, for its own sake and for the remarkably modern-looking metal birds on its reverse side.

The 1635 pulpit and sounding board are wonderfully over the top. In the east window there are many pieces of old stained glass to be found in the Victorian restorer's composition, a fine piece of work. There is also a 14th century effigy of a priest and everywhere are memorials of Yaxleys and Leekes.

The Screen

The design of Yaxley's screen is similar to that at nearby Eye, although the painting style of each is very different. The painting at Yaxley is high-quality and is strongly influenced by Flemish art. The costumes of the saints indicate that the screen is of an early 16th century date.

There are eight figures painted on four bays on the screen. Some of the saints are too badly damaged to identify, but most can still be made out. It is likely that all the saints on the screen were female. While it is quite common for half the figures on a screen to be women, Yaxley is the only surviving instance where they all appear to be female. Running from the north to the south they are: St Ursula, unknown, unknown, St Catherine, St Mary Magdalene, St Barbara, St Dorothy, and St Cecilia.

The gilded patterns of the backgrounds here have been made using a mould lined with tin foil. This was an effective way of making repeat relief decorations which could be glued onto a surface and gilded.



WESTHORPE ST MARGARET.

TM 044 693. postcode - IP14 8SU

If locked key available close by. Parking.

This village has a number of pretty houses and one can see why the historian J.H.Plumb chose this as his resting place. The tower is impressive and its walls, like those of the whole church, are an attractive mixture of flint and what appear to be river pebbles. The result is a gentle set of pale colours, as are those of the interior. As you walk round, look at the lovely tracery of the east window of the south aisle.

The single storey porch is high and the door to the church has on it tracery like that of a late medieval window. The dimensions of the interior must be almost a square, a wide and apparently uncluttered space. Beside the tower arch are handsome Commandment Boards with the Creed and Lord's Prayer in fine country lettering. The font cover is Jacobean and also, still at the west end, there is an isolated box pew and the organ, seemingly adrift. Virtually all the furnishings are a delight: benches in the nave and chancel, the wine glass pulpit, with traces of wall-painting above it, the prayer desk and a Georgian royal arms that is painted over Queen Anne and King James predecessors. Most remarkable is the parclose screen in the south aisle.

In the chancel are a pale blue ceiling, a very Gothic piscina and a small brass commemorating Richard Elcock, a vicar who died in 1630. Near it is what was once an external window which now opens onto a chapel containing the monument to Maurice Barrow, who is portrayed as a young man on the other Barrow monument in the chancel. It has an elaborate inscription. The floor has decoration by an itinerant Italian artist.

On the wall outside a modern board records that Mary Tudor, Henry VIII's sister, lived at Westhorpe during her second marriage.

William Weir, of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, oversaw repairs early in the 20th century. He would have loved the pale colours of the old timbers of the roof and the brick and pavement floors. It looks as if little has been done since.



The Screens

One of Westhorpe's great treasures is the delicately coloured 14th century parclose screen at the east end of the south aisle. The screen is decorated in red, green, white and black, colours which were traditional and commonly used on rood and parclose screens in the medieval period. The screen has a floral motif painted on the dado and jaunty quatrefoils running along the transom and piers. Some of the round columns are decorated like a barber's pole and the screen as a whole is topped by elaborate Decorated period Gothic tracery and castellations.

Parclose screens such as this one were used to demarcate chantry chapels within medieval churches. Chantry chapels were set up to commemorate the deceased and were supplied with a priest to say the Offices of the Dead. It was thought that



this would aid departed souls on their journey through purgatory. Chuntries might be personal or corporate, belonging to a family or guild. In this case, the screen is once thought to have surrounded a chantry dedicated to the Elmham family.

The parclose screen is not the only medieval woodwork at Westhorpe. There are also repainted remnants from the former rood screen to either side of the high altar and elsewhere in the church.

WYVERSTONE ST GEORGE.

TM 043 678. postcode - IP14 4SP

Normally open. Parking.

The tower has unusual and attractive openings and fine gargoyles. Also unusual is the presence of clerestories on both sides, when there are no aisles and apparently never have been. Oddly the glass of the clerestory windows is almost flush with the wall. One enters through a porch largely built of old timbers but strangely not aligned with the 14th century door beyond, with its worn carvings.

The font, too, has carvings and a charming cover. On the wall above is a carved William & Mary royal arms. On the north wall is a more conventional version dated 1812. There are older benches at the back of the church and a pulpit with linenfold panelling and what appears to be paint damaged by an attempt to restore it. The timbers of the roof are old, if not original and the altar rails are Jacobean.

All is beautifully cared for.

The Screen

Wyverstone's rood screen has been cut down to the transom, its figures badly defaced and part of its dado destroyed. However it is a very unusual screen in that its dado figures are carved in relief and depict fascinating narrative scenes rather than saints. The only surviving comparable relief-carved work in Suffolk is a section of screen tracery found at nearby Gislegham.

Wyverstone's screen can be dated by a will bequest to c.1491. The first two panels of the north side depict the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. The next bay of two panels contains the Nativity, but has suffered damage from iconoclasts in the 16th or 17th centuries. It is possible in the fourth panel to make out two standing and one kneeling figure, the Magi. On the south side, only one of the bays survives. The first compartment is said to have shown the Mass of St Gregory,

but the scene is puzzling. A figure kneels before an altar on which stands a chalice and an image of Christ rising from the tomb. From a gateway behind, another figure, a pilgrim or perhaps St James the Great enters. The next compartment depicts the Visitation, when the Virgin Mary went to visit her cousin, St Elizabeth, also pregnant. The final bay is lost and is filled by 17th century woodwork.



Things to see in the vicinity:

Dickleburgh, north east of Diss and also Garboldisham St John the Baptist. One battered screen was rescued from a ruined second church in the village, another from the rectory piggery.

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 

