

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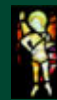
Many of the photographs in this set of rood screen trails are taken from the book "Norfolk Rood Screens" by Paul Hurst ARPS, text by Jeremy Haselock FSA, to be published by Phillimore of London in December 2012.

HUNGATE ROOD SCREEN TRAILS: NO. 9

Tivetshall St Margaret • Carleton Rode
Tacolneston • Fritton • Loddon



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TIVETSHALL ST MARGARET.

TM 164 872. postcode - NR15 2BD

Normally open. Parking.

The A140 is not far off yet the church feels very remote. Apart from the large farm next door, there are few buildings in sight. The substantial ruin of Tivetshall St Mary is close and can be seen from the train, but St Margaret's remains secretive.

The porch has a distinct lean but the carving round the doorway is far from rustic and the poppyheads on the benches are varied and quite intricate. Sadly, the figures on the arm-rests have mostly gone. The main timbers of the roof are late medieval, with bosses. There is a little medieval glass and, in the chancel, an Easter sepulchre with a tomb slab which looks older than the church itself. Did it come from St Mary's? The altar rails are Jacobean.

Even without St Margaret's great secret – the screen and tympanum above it – this is a charming building, unshowy but quietly rewarding, an opinion shared by the builders recently working on it.



The Screen and tympanum

An enormous Elizabethan royal arms tympanum (dated 1587) dominates the chancel of this church, and provides a powerful impression of how medieval screen, loft, rood group and tympanum once fitted into chancel arches. Although the rood loft has gone, the stairs to it are still visible to the north side of the screen. The Elizabethan royal arms may well cover over the

religious medieval or Marian painting it replaced. It was usual to have a Last Judgement or Doom in this location, originally behind the great Crucifix or rood.

Often it is still possible to see evidence of where boarded tympana of this kind were once fixed to chancel arches, but they rarely survive, even when repainted. When, during the reign of Elizabeth I, it was decreed that rood lofts should be taken down, many tympana were destroyed. Even though it was stipulated that Last Judgement paintings should be replaced with royal arms of this type, Elizabethan royal arms are rare.

The screen beneath the tympanum is divided into twelve compartments. As was the case with many rood screen dados, instead of the figures of saints, the panels alternate red and green and are decorated with stencil patterns. There is also a coat of arms depicting four magpies adjacent to the door. Parts of the screen have been repainted during its long history.



CARLETON RODE ALL SAINTS.

TM 115 925. postcode - NR16 1RN

Normally open.

There is a grandeur about the look of the church which stops short of the stateliness of the major East Anglian churches and

makes it seem more approachable. This may be due to the truncation of the tower by a collapse of its top section in the 18th century and the consequent insertion of three rather charming brick-framed, almost domestic windows. The unusual striped vertical flushwork here and on the west wall of the south aisle must also be part of the repairs.

The nave and aisles have large Tudor windows, one in the north aisle very large. In contrast, the chancel with its Y-tracery must date from some two hundred years earlier. The east window and the priest's door and lowside window are especially delicate. There is a charming little window in the nave gable and a delicate niche for a statue on the west face of the tower.

The vigorous Victorian repair was by Thomas Jekyll, given to bold statements rather than delicacy. This is not one of his boldest, mercifully some will say, and much remains of what was there before: consecration crosses and small amounts of 13th century stained glass in the chancel, Jacobean altar rails in the north aisle, a rather secular font and, as we have already seen, the light and elegant stonework of the chancel.

The Screen

The screen has lost its upper fenestration and is cut down to the dado, but this is filled with a lively 15th century set of apostles painted on traditional, alternating backgrounds of red and

green. These backgrounds are decorated with stencil patterns in gold.

The apostles can be recognised via their attributes. From the north side, the figures are: St Simon carrying a fish, St Jude holding a boat, St Thomas with a spear, St Bartholomew bearing a book and flaying knife, St John the Evangelist with the poisoned chalice, St Paul with his sword, St Peter with his keys, St Andrew with a book and saltire cross, St James the Great holding his pilgrim's staff and pouch, St James the Less with the fuller's club, St Philip carrying a book and basket of bread and St Matthew or St Matthias with a falchion (a sword resembling a meat cleaver).



The 'rode' of Carleton Rode stands for 'rood' or Crucifix. The antiquarian Francis Blomefield, writing in the 18th century, records that it derived from a cross standing in Rode Lane, on the road from Wymondham to Diss.

TACOLNESTON ALL SAINTS.

TM 150 956. postcode - NR16 1EF

Keyholder notice in porch. Small car park on the village side of the church.

The churchyard runs with no visible boundary onto one of those corners where the wise slow down, not only because of the danger but because two of the prettiest houses in Norfolk are on the bend. The tower was rebuilt in 1509 and most of the windows are of that period, the one next to the porch with brick tracery.

The fine door leads into an unexpectedly spacious interior, full of light and painted a now rather battered white. There is a handsome 15th century roof, but look first at the west end. The ringers' gallery has a delightful balustrade and above it is a Charles I royal arms, a rare survivor of the Commonwealth. Below is a simple but well carved font. The pulpit is Jacobean and so is the altar in the south aisle. In the chancel there's a consecration cross and, back at the west end, a second ancient door. The memorials commemorate generations of Knipes and Gobbetts.

The Screen

The six double panels which constitute the remains of Tacolneston's rood screen now lean against the wall of the south aisle of the church. Most of the original paint has been stripped off, but two remarkable panels survive in one double bay, albeit vigorously damaged by iconoclasts.

The first shows the Temptation of St Anthony. This painting is very precisely copied from an engraving by Lucas van Leyden, which dates from 1509. Almost every detail of the print is followed, the screen painter chiefly lending only his choice of colour to the scene. The second surviving panel of the screen portrays the Annunciation. This too is copied from another engraving, this time by the anonymous Master FVB, thought to be a Flemish printmaker.

The two scenes are representative both of the 16th century move towards narrative depiction on screens, and also the increased use of fashionable continental prints as sources for imagery. That said, it is notable how poorly the copied compositions fit into the thin screen panels, designed as they are for figural

composition. This reiterates the separation of the crafts of screen-building and decoration - in this case, no allowance has been made at the design stage of the screen for the choice of subject matter.

FRITTON ST CATHERINE.

TM 227 933. postcode - NR15 2QU

Normally open

This is the Fritton near Hempnall, a few miles due south of Norwich. One turns off the B1527 just at the sign for Hempnall village and the church soon appears in the fields on the right. A lane (or loke) leads to it, most easily navigable when it has been dry. The loke itself is pretty and the emergence of the reticulated east window from the trees is very memorable, especially in snowdrop time.

The round tower is Norman with a c.1500 top storey and, inside, a tall, simple arch from the nave - simplicity is the theme here. The door is another fine one, with churchwardens' initials dating a 1619 repair. Note the heads at the ends of the arch over the doorway. The font has immensely happy lions all round it and cheerful angels with more lions above them. Opposite the door is a faded St Christopher, whose donor's name was once visible. He died in 1506. Further along the north wall is St George and the dragon and, just before the screen, a 13th century painting of the then recently canonised St Edmund Rich, Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Screen

Will bequests and evidence from carpentry put the date of Fritton's screen between c.1510 and 1530. The screen has three wide bays either side of the central doorway. The bays are subdivided, making twelve compartments along the lower dado. The upper part of the screen is a restoration, but the lower part is elaborately carved and decorated, and is original.



A rather human feature of the painting here is that the screen's donors are shown and named in the inscription. The first panel contains John Bacon and his eleven sons, the second his wife and three daughters. It is quite common that families are divided in this way in depictions in the period, and it can be seen on tomb brasses as well as screens. Saint-size donors on screens are very unusual.

The third and fourth panels depict St Augustine and St Jerome, the fifth and six St Gregory and St Ambrose. Together, these four panels depict the Doctors of the western Church. On the south side of the screen, two of the apostles, St Simon and St Jude are shown. The final two compartments are now blank. Strangely, it appears that the carpenters who made the screen never finished the carving of the tracery and the painters crammed St Jude into the shortened space. The saint's halo can be seen painted on the underside of the un-carved wood.



LODDON HOLY TRINITY.

TM 364 987. postcode - NR14 6EY

Normally open. Paying car park.

The church was built around 1500 by Sir James Hobart whose family then lived at Hales Hall, a little further south. It has the power of any large church constructed in one campaign, in this case perhaps made a little mechanical by restoration at the end of the 19th century. It is thought to have been the third church on the site, the first possibly dating from St Felix's mission to East Anglia in the 7th century.

The tower is fine, set back from the town in its large churchyard, which leads to open country beyond. The porch is a delight, large also, with flushwork, chequer-work patterning on its east

wall, intricate carving and a vault with bosses. There is a big room above in the parvise, containing a local history display. This is reached from inside the church but notice the old door to the stairs in the porch.

The font has been badly damaged by the Puritans. It is set up three deep steps. Vicars must be glad of the handrail that is now provided. The roofs are very fine. The pulpit and sections of contemporary altar rails and of old benches are in the north chapel. Make sure you don't miss the monument at the east end of the north aisle, probably by Joshua Marshall, to Lady Dyonis Williamson, whose childhood and later years had been spent at Hales Hall. She was a major contributor to the cost of rebuilding St Paul's and two other churches after the Fire of London. The carving is truthful, if severe, a remarkable work. As remarkable is the portrait of Sir James Hobart and his wife on the south wall. It's rare to see what a benefactor looked like.

The Screen

Loddon has a large screen, now reduced to its lower dado section only, which crosses the three aisles of the church. Some of the panels are now empty, others remain over-painted, and some have been damaged through over-cleaning and then restored. However the screen remains fascinating and rare because it includes narrative scenes, as well as the more traditional iconic saints. The screen is infamous for its depiction of the martyrdom of St William of Norwich, a boy-saint wrongly said to have been crucified by the Jews of Norwich in 1144 and around whom a cult was manufactured by Norwich Priory.

From the north side, the first two panels are blank, as is the north side of the door. The south side of the door is broken, but the figures which survive on it are probably St Anne and the Virgin Mary as a child or alternatively the Virgin Mary and the Christ child. The scenes from the north to the south of the central rood screen run as follows: the martyrdom of St William of Norwich, the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Circumcision, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Presentation in the Temple. The following three panels are blank and are followed by a saint who holds a dagger by its tip and may be St Alban. The final section of the south side has two blank panels followed by the Ascension and a further blank panel.

The wide panels and type of jointing used on the transom suggests that the screen was built after 1500. The narrative scenes set in a landscape suggests a date for the painting of around 1520.

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 