

NOTES ON PAINTED SCREENS AND ROOFS IN NORFOLK¹

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The following few notes have been arranged for the purpose of directing attention to a class of antiquities for which East Anglia is celebrated. No other county in England except Suffolk can exhibit such a display of painted roofs and screens as Norfolk does, and Suffolk alone equals Norfolk in the number and beauty of such remains.

I venture to call your attention to Norfolk screens and roofs for the reason that during the meeting fine examples of both will be seen.

The screens are for the most part Chancel screens, the forms of which are too well known to need elaborate description, the upper portion, consisting, beneath the rood loft, of open work tracery in various forms, the lower, filled in solidly and divided into narrow panels, varying in number with the size and divisions of the screen. All these screens are of wood, richly painted and gilt, but the interest they have for us lies in the treatment of the panels of the lower portion. These are generally enriched by a painting of a single figure in each, and the backgrounds are often beautifully powdered with rosettes and sprays, in gold and colours, to represent embroidered hangings.

The ordinary arrangement of a Norfolk screen shows in its panels the twelve apostles, six on one side of its central doorway or opening, six on the other, or if the screen, from its width, contains more than twelve panels, then the centre ones are filled with the figures of other saints, or very commonly with the four Doctors of the church, though if there are doors to the screen, these are placed on the

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door panels. Many saints are, however, represented in the panel paintings, and naturally the local saints are frequently found amongst them. Occasionally the heavenly hierarchies are represented but not commonly. Those on the screen of the church of Barton Turf are good examples, but are not equal to similar ones on the screen at the east end of the north aisle of Southwold Church, Suffolk, where the arrangement is far more complete.

Representations of subjects, *i.e.*, compositions of several figures, as distinguished from single ones, are not common. A few instances can, however, be given.

The first two panels of the screen at North Walsham contain the subject of the Annunciation, the figure of the Virgin being in one, and the Archangel in the other. Panels of the screen in Loddon Church exhibit the Martyrdom of St. William of Norwich, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Circumcision. Two subjects of singular nature are to be found on the panels of the screen at Sparham church. In the first of the southern division stand two skeletons, side by side, of a gallant and a lady, both richly attired, the gallant holds in his hand a flaming torch, with a scroll round it having the words "Sic transit Gloria Mundi," the lady offers him a nosegay. Behind both of the figures are inscriptions relating to the brief and fleeting nature of human life. In the next compartment a single skeleton, in its shroud, rises from a tomb and points to a font in the background, on which various scrolls bear inscribed a text from Job, also on the transitory nature of human life (Job, chap. x., v. 19.¹) Occasionally figures of donors kneeling, occur in late paintings, as on the Fritton screen, which perhaps may be dated as late as 1520 or later.²

Nothing can exceed the richness of detail in the painted ornamentation of some of these screens. The delicate flower and spray work which fills every hollow of the mouldings, and is powdered over the backgrounds of the figures, the wonderful elaboration of the patterns of the dresses of those figures—such patterns as are only to be equalled by the productions of the Flemish looms—the delicately applied

¹"Gentleman's Magazine," 1846. July to December, p. 135.

²"Illustrations of the Rood Screen at

Fritton," published by the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, 1872.

gilding,—all combine to make up a whole of the greatest beauty. And to enhance the effect, on some of the larger and later screens, the backgrounds of the figures are worked in gesso, in the most delicate relief, and richly gilt. Even the broad flat fillets of the mullions are covered with gesso stamped in intricate patterns of tracery, and having at intervals diminutive niches with tiny figures painted in them, which are protected by morsels of glass set in the pattern, as in a frame. For variety of detail, both in figure and ornament, few screens will equal the one at Randworth. For splendour of effect and multiplicity of forms in the gilt gesso work, certainly none can surpass that at Southwold, but this is a Suffolk screen.

Remains of this delicate plaster work occur on the Cawston screen, which though a fine and large one, fails somewhat in its figures. These are for the most part but poorly conceived and executed. In the choice of the figures the usual arrangement is followed, the whole of the Apostles being represented together with St. Helena and St. Agnes, the Doctors of the Church occupying their accustomed place upon the doors. Another effigy may be seen here, an exception to the usual saintly company, that of Master John Schorn, who is represented in the act of performing the miracle of conjuring the Evil one into a boot. This worthy, though not a saint, appears occasionally on the Norfolk screens, possibly because he was believed in the middle ages to have power to cure the ague, which, in a county possessing so much marsh land as Norfolk, must have been a malady only too common. Master John Schorn is said to have held the rectory of North Marston, Bucks, in 1290, and seems to have been at one time a canon in the Augustinian Priory of Dunstable. The well blessed by him at North Marston was an object of pilgrimage. There are two periods in the figures on this screen; some of the figures on the south side including that of the above-mentioned worthy, were painted at a later date and in a better style than the old ones, on paper or vellum and glued over the older work. The later ones may have been executed when the fabric received the further adornment of the stamped and gilt gesso work which covers the flat surfaces of its main divisions. Some of this decoration remains on these more

recent panels. On the Lessingham screen the same sort of restoration of the panel figures seems to have also been effected.

The following facts relating to the Cawston screen are extracted from Blomefield:—In 1460 John Barker, of Cawston, “gave ten marks towards building the rood loft commonly called the candle beam.”

In 1504 Richard Browne, of Cawston, “gave four marks to paint a pane of the rood loft.”

This inscription was painted on the screen itself. “Prey for the Sowlis of William Atereth and Alice his Wyff the weche dede these iiii ¹ Penys Peynte be the Executoris lyff . . .” Unfortunately we have nothing further and the date of the painting is therefore lost.

Not perhaps so interesting as the Cawston screen but much better executed, is the one in the chancel at Aylesham. Only the lower panels remain and they show the usual arrangement of Apostles and Saints, amongst the latter being a figure of Moses. Like the one at Cawston it bore its date, and happily in this instance the date is preserved. The work appears to have been executed in 1507 at the charges of Thomas Wymer, Joan and Agnes his wives, John Jannys, and others whose names are now lost. This same Thomas Wymer was a prosperous worsted weaver of Aylesham who, according to an inscription on his brass, (he died in 1507) gave largely to the adorning of the church during his life, and left the means for continuing that good work, after his death. The other donor whose name has come down to us, John Jannys, Blomefield tells us, was father to the Robert Jannys, Mayor of Norwich in 1517 and 1524, whose portrait may still be seen in the Council Chamber of the Guildhall of that city, and whose fine early Renaissance tomb adorned with his coat of arms, composed of those of the Grocers’ Company and his merchant’s mark, yet exists in the church of St. George, Colegate, Norwich.

Noting only the screens in Tunstead and in Trunch churches as pleasing and complete examples, with the remark that the latter one carries an inscription giving its date as 1502, I must pass on to speak of the two screens of Barton Turf and of Randworth.

¹ History of Norfolk, vol. vi, pp. 264-266.

At Barton Turf we first come across an exception to the usual row of Apostles. The paintings are well executed and the subjects not common, for the greater number of the figures represent the heavenly hierarchies.

Commencing on the north side we find St. Apollonia, St. Sitha, then comes the display of the Heavenly Host, the Powers, Virtues, Dominions, Seraphim; and on the south side, Cherubim, Princedoms, Thrones, Archangels, Angels, and in the last panel St. Barbara.

Unfortunately when we would most wish to know it, the date of the work is not to be discovered. That it is late fifteenth or early sixteenth century however, there can be no doubt.

What gives this screen an exceptional interest, is that some of the panels exhibit examples of armour, such examples on screens being confined to the warrior saints and and archangels. Two of the figures, the "Potestates" and "Archangeli" are in complete armour of plate, and seem to show a singular mixture of late and early forms in their panoply.

The screen above mentioned is the chancel screen, but another exists at the east end of the south aisle, the panels of which display three regal saints, St. Edmund, carrying an arrow as his emblem, St. Edward the Confessor, with his ring, and St. Olave with two cakes or loaves in one hand, and a halbert (to represent the Danish battleaxe), in the other. A fourth panel is filled with the figure of King Henry VI, whose effigy is likewise to be found on other screens.

Less well executed than those of Barton Turf, the paintings on the screen at Randworth have also less interest in themselves. But the profusion, the multiplicity and richness of every detail, and a certain completeness of arrangement, make up a whole only to be equalled by the great screen at Southwold, in Suffolk. The Randworth screen with that at Southwold must be placed at the head of the painted screens of East Anglia.

The usual row of Apostles occupies the panels of the chancel screen, the interest, therefore, belongs to the retables of the altars on each side of it. The one on the north contains figures of St. Etheldreda, St. John the Baptist, a repetition of the same saint, and St. Barbara.

The southern retable has figures of St. Mary Salome, wife of Zebedee with her two children, St. James Major, and St. John the Evangelist, St. Mary the Virgin, St. Mary wife of Cleophas with her four children, St. James the Less, St. Jude, St. Simeon, and St. Joseph. The last figure on this retable is St. Margaret. The first figure of the Baptist in the northern retable is evidently that of a female saint altered. The second is only in black outline, the usual way of commencing a subject. The reason for the alterations here, we shall probably never discover.

On the fine parclose screens extending 6 ft. into the nave are represented St. Felix (?), St. George, and St. Stephen on the northern one, on the southern, St. Thomas a Becket (?), St. Lawrence, and St. Michael.¹

No date is to be found on this screen and a bequest in 1419 of Thomas Grym, of Randworth, of five marks "*ad fabricam cancelli*," must refer to the building of the chancel. The paintings, if not the screen itself, may probably be of the end of the fifteenth century or even later.

Leaving the subject of painted screens I now turn to note the painted roofs which are still to be found in the county of Norfolk. The forms of decoration on these, fall into three or four classes. The first consists in the picking out only of the prominent features with colour and the colouring of the carved detail, leaving the greater part of the roof untouched, the natural wood forming a background.

For instance, in the nave roof of North Creak Church, the figures of angels at the ends of the hammer beams are painted white with red or black wings, the mouldings of the principal beams, and the fine cornice, being coloured red, green, white and black.

The north transept of Outwell Church has a roof similarly painted, and that over the nave of Mattishall Church, a rude example, is thus adorned. Necton Church may also be named for traces of colour in the details of the nave roof, and that of the porch of Oxburgh is said to have been likewise painted. An example where the colouring has advanced a step further will be found in the roof of

¹ For this screen see "Illustrations of the Rood Screen at Randworth," published by the Norfolk and Norwich

Archæological Society, 1867, from which the identification given above, of the figures upon it, has been taken.

Knapton. It has received a coat of yellow colour throughout, none of the natural wood being left, and the figures and mouldings are touched with red, green and white.

The second class relies still further on colour, and painted ornament is introduced to a great extent. The whole surface of the exposed rafters is covered with some one colour, the mouldings of the principal divisions of the roof are picked out in another, and ornament executed either by the stencil or by hand, is spread over every available surface.

Such is the case with the nave roof of Salle Church. Here, white is employed for the ground, the main lines are of a brilliant red, and the rafters and interspaces are diapered all over with crowned MS alternating with the sacred letters I.H.C. in red and black. A cornice filled with angels holding scrolls on which are texts in black letter, now scarcely legible, completes the scheme of decoration. A fine roof exists over the nave of Palgrave Church, Suffolk, precisely similar to this in its colouring, but differing from it in the forms of the ornament.

A variety of this class is to be found in the roof of the S. transept of Cawston Church. Here the face of the rafters is coloured a madder-brown, and the interspaces are white, both rafters and interspaces being enriched with stencilled ornament in black and red. The main lines of the roof are brilliant in scarlet blue and green, and the bosses at their intersections are for the most part coloured gold colour and scarlet.

Much richer in effect than either of these classes is the third I have to mention, a system of ornamentation associated only with panelled roofs, which in their divisions present a larger surface for display than where the simple rafters only are treated with colour. A good but comparatively simple example in this style, may be seen in the panelled roof of the chancel of the church appropriated to the uses of the Great Hospital in Bishopgate Street, Norwich, and now called the Eagle Ward. The general ground of this roof is gold colour, and each panel is occupied by a painting of a fine black eagle, displayed. The delicately carved and gilt bosses at the intersections of the thin mouldings of the panels, add much to the beauty of the composition.

Of course, panelled roofs offer an opportunity for an infinite variety in their painted ornamentation, but the favourite arrangement in the East Anglian roofs is that of a wreath enclosing the sacred name, or the initial letter of that of some saint. As an example, may be cited the panelled roof of the north transept of East Dereham Church. Here the general tint of the ground is a very pale green, and the panels bear alternately green wreaths encircling a crowned letter T in red, and double-headed eagles in black. A small chapel on the south side of the same church has a panelled ceiling of a far more elaborate character. On the same pale greenish ground as in the transept roof, green wreaths of a most intricate description are painted, each wreath containing a representation of the holy lamb. The mouldings forming these panels are coloured red, black, and bluish grey, and heightened in effect with a good deal of gilding.

Another panelled roof, with colouring of a much simpler description, exists at the end of the north aisle of Mattishall church. The colours here employed are scarlet approaching to orange, madder brown, white and black, the ground of the panels being alternately scarlet and white with simple wreaths in each, encircling a crowned letter T.

Occasionally, as a variety, the figures of angels are combined with the wreaths, alternating with them, or otherwise arranged, as may be seen in the panels of the roof of the Lady Chapel in the Church of St. John Maddermarket, Norwich. The grounds of these panels, originally white or pale buff, are darkened by dirt, damp, and time, but the figures and the scheme of ornamentation may still be made out. The grounds on which the angels are depicted are diapered alternately with a flower and with the letters M.R. crowned and forming a monogram, and the angels, who wear the most wonderful headdresses, bear scrolls having upon them the words of the angelic salutation.

The last panels of the ceiling are ornamented with groups of wreaths, a centre one and a small one in each corner, bearing within them the letters I.H.C. At the end of the north aisle of the same church, formerly existed a similar ceiling, wherein, as a pleasing variety in each

panel of which an angel formed the centre, a little wreath filled the corners.

This roof, I believe, became so decayed that it was found necessary to remove it. The colours employed were black, white, and brownish red, or madder brown.

To find a much more elaborate composition of this description, we must travel to the south of the county. The panelled eastern bay of the nave roof of the church of St. Mary Magdalen, Pulham, exhibits an elaboration of painted ornamentation, scarcely to be surpassed. Wreaths of green vine leaves and branches encircling the sacred letters, I.H.C. and M.R. painted in red, fill the panels together with figures of seraphim, arranged in a curiously irregular way. Some of the seraphim, strangely crowned and feathered beings, six winged and brilliant in red and purple plumage

“ in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow.”

Whilst others are employed in censuring. It may be noted that the whole of the ground work is white, whilst in the cornice for the first time, the use of blue in a mass is to be observed, this not being at all a usual colour in East Anglian painted roofs.

The preceding remarks have been confined to examples to be found in Norfolk, but the list of painted roofs might be considerably increased, if I included in it the fine specimens to be found in Suffolk. A notice of these, however, scarcely comes within the scope of this paper.

But little is known as to the date of the paintings of these roofs. The roof at Knapton “was erected by one John Smythe in the year 1503¹” and we may conjecture that it was coloured soon after. In the fabric expenses of the College of Mettingham in Suffolk entries occur as to the painting of the roof of the church there, some time after 1420, by Edmund de Bradwelle “peyntour,” who received £13 6s. 6d. for his work.² The roof of the nave of All Saints’ Church, Garboldisham (long since a ruin) was according to Blomefield “boarded and painted all

¹ Norfolk Archæology, vol. iv, p. 301.

² “Original Documents. Extracts from the ancient accounts of Mettingham Col-

lege, Suffolk. Communicated by the Rev. C. R. Manning,” in Archæological Journal, vol. vi, 1849, p. 67.

over with the names of Jesus and Mary, and this in the midst :—

Betwex syn yis and
Ye Rode Loff ye yongling
Han payd for yis cost " &c.

That is to say that between the inscription and rood loft, the young men of the parish had paid the cost of the work. Unfortunately we have here again no date.

We may be a little more certain as to the method of painting employed for these roofs. This was, without doubt, tempera; size, sometimes made from skins, sometimes from the sounds of fish, being used to bind the colours. In the fabric expenses of the College of Mettingham, already referred to, a certain Henry Barsham, of Yarmouth, is entered as supplying in 1418-19, "fifty Soundys pissium, 2d." Though occasionally used as glue is now in joinery, these "Soundys" may have also served the painters as well. Much of the ornamentation, I am convinced, was stencilled, tendrils and touches accompanying the monograms and wreaths being added by hand, for they would be much too troublesome to stencil. Figures of course, however rude, would be painted by hand. With respect to the finer and more artistic painted work of the screens, it has been confidently asserted that this was executed in tempera also, but if we take into consideration the lateness of the dates at which many of the finest screens were either made or painted, it is far more probable that the figures, if not the ornamental details, were executed in oil. Of course, such fragments of painted work as may exist before the latter half of the fifteenth century are probably in tempera. The intercourse between Flanders and Norfolk must be considered, where oil painting had been a flourishing art since the time of the Van Eycks; and a certain Flemish influence in some of the details of the panel paintings shows signs of such intercourse.

Who were the men who worked upon the Norfolk screens? Happily to this question there seems a possibility of a reply. For the "Illustrations of the rood screen at Barton Turf," published by the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society, Mr. L'Estrange was able to supply the following list of painters, stainers and glaziers, extending from Edward III to Henry VIII, all from Norwich itself,

48. Edw. III. Johannes de frence Peyntour.
Johannes de Bradewelle Peyntour.
2. Rich. II. Johannes Leggard Peyntour.
- 10 & 11. Ric. II. Stephanus frence Peyntor.
Robertus frence Peyntor.
Thomas de Ocle Peyntor.
9. Hen. IV. Robertus Ocle Peyntor.
3. Hen. V. Robertus Syluerne Peyntour.
4. Hen. V. Robertus Grey Peyntour.
8. Hen. V. George Knot Steynour.
7. Hen. VI. John Stonhale Steynor.
John Pery Steynor.
13. Hen. VI. John Garner Peyntor.
21. Hen. VI. Thomas Hervy Peyntor
proved the liberty of Wm. Hervy,
Graver, his father.
- 24 & 25 Hen. VI. John Maughtild Peyntour
Willelmus Castleacre stenyor & Peyntor
Robertus Mayhew Steynour
Thomas Chapel Steyno
John Roo Steynor
- 31 Hen. VI. John Longys Peyntor
- 33 Hen. VI. Rob. Hykelyng Peyntor
- 8 Edw. IV. W^m Warner Steynor app John Stonhawe
Steynor
- 22 Edw. IV. Nicholas Peyntor Glasier
W^m Skyunner Steynor
- 3 Hen. VII. Robert Hervy Steynor son of Thos. Hervy.
- 14 Hen. VII. John Terry Steynor
- 1 Hy. VIII. Rich Euxston Paynto
- 31 Hy. VIII. W^m Moton Steynor¹

¹ I am enabled through the kindness of the Rev. W. Hudson, Vicar of St. Peter Permouthergate, Norwich, to give here, another and earlier list of painters, living in Norwich in the thirteenth century. This list is extracted from deeds of conveyance, called Court Rolls, dating from 1285 to 1298, preserved in the Municipal Archives of that city. It runs as follows. Under the head of Pictor or le Peyntur we find,

Thomas de Lint.
Lawrence de Kirkstede.
Ralph de Attleburgh.
Roger le peyntur, of Norwich.
Peter le pictor, son of W^m de Racheya
le peyntur.

Giles le Fleming of Bruges.

John le p.
Richard pictor.
Olyve le peyntur.
Alan pictor.

The names of other painters at a slightly earlier date still, are preserved in the Sacrists' Rolls of Norwich Priory, under the year 1277. the principal artist in which group seems to have been a certain Master William. Under the date 1288 we have an entry of sums paid to the painters William and Henry. See "Extracts from the account rolls of Norwich Priory." Proceed. of Archæol. Inst., Norwich, Vol. 1847 pp 207-208.

With this list is printed an extract from the will of Margaret, widow of Sir Robert de Berneye, Kt., dated 1416, in which mention is made of a certain table, or panel, painted with the history of St. Katherine, for doing which Robert Okyll of Norwich had received 34s. 4d. This, it will be observed, is one of the names (with slightly different spelling) of the painters in the list given above, under date of Henry IV (1407-8). I find another trace of this painter. In the accounts of the College of Mettingham, is an entry under the year 1413-14, of 66s. 8d. given in part payment to him for making and painting a table or panel for the high altar of the chapel there, and three years after, he receives the balance of his account. In these same accounts another painter's name occurs, this time not a Norwich man. In 1416-17, Thomas of Yarmouth receives £6 10s. in part payment for making and painting two images. In the following year he receives £8 10s. for the two images with their tabernacles, as also for making a table or panel for the altar, and the same entry with the sum of 100s. paid to this painter, occurs in the following year.¹

Possibly the paintings of different dates, preserved in the Church of St. Michael at Plea, Norwich, may be from the hands of Norwich men, and I am fain to see their handiwork also in the beautiful retable, one of the treasures of the cathedral church of the capital of East Anglia, a work of earlier date and greater merit than any I have previously noticed.

An authority on painting, Dr. Waagen, in his "Treasures of Art in Great Britain," considers that this latter is executed in tempera and that the date of its execution lies between 1380 and 1400. He says of it, "Both the figures and the raised elegant patterns of the gold ground entirely resemble the indubitable English miniatures of the same period, so that there is no question in my mind as to the English origin of this picture."

Thus while the Van Eycks and their followers were working in the Netherlands, we had here, in East Anglia, the beginnings of a school of painting which might have rendered Eastern England famous in the records of art.

¹ See extracts from ancient accounts of Mettingham College, &c. *Archæol. Journ.*, Vol. vi, 1849, pp. 64-65.

The great political and religious changes, however, of the sixteenth century gave a blow to that school from which it never recovered. It was not until the early part of the last century that the art of painting rose again in this part of England, but in a different form, with Gainsborough, a Suffolk man, and at a somewhat later period was practised successfully by Crome and his contemporaries, now known to fame as "the Norwich School."