

# PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

**Cambridge Antiquarian Society,**

4 MAY—1 JUNE 1908.

WITH

**Communications**

MADE TO THE SOCIETY

EASTER TERM 1908.

No. LI.

BEING No. 4 OF THE TWELFTH VOLUME.

(SIXTH VOLUME OF THE NEW SERIES.)



**Cambridge:**

DEIGHTON, BELL & CO.; BOWES & BOWES.

LONDON: G. BELL AND SONS.

1908

*Price Five Shillings net.*

Monday, 11 May, 1908.

Dr VENN, President, in the Chair.

The following paper, profusely illustrated with lantern slides, was read by F. BLIGH BOND, Esq., F.R.I.B.A.

### ON THE ROOD SCREENS IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

Cambridgeshire, though but a small county, possesses a wealth of ecclesiastical interest. Occupying as it does a border district between the fen-land and the chalk—sharing their geological character, even so it reflects in its architectural remains the varied types of work which characterise the several districts between which it forms the link.

Thus, for example, the spacious and stately churches of the fen-lands are well represented in the northern part of the county, whilst in the south and east are found varieties typical of East Anglia—and in association with these, a yet larger number of churches which reflect the influence of Midland examples. There is thus to be found a striking diversity of plan and interior arrangement, affecting in its turn the more individual features. Hence the remarkable variety observable in form as well as in detail in the screenwork which was once so universal in the parish churches and of which very ample remains still fortunately survive in this county.

In considering the different types of screenwork it is necessary, in order to gain a clear idea of the form and use of the screens, to look well at the nature of the plan of the church in each case, both as originally conceived and as subsequently modified during the mediaeval period—and thus we are led first to seek for those examples of the earliest types of church-building which the county offers us.

In the pre-Norman days, the separation between nave and chancel, or nave and sanctuary, was usually effected by a heavy

stone barrier in the shape of a wall containing generally a single archway of more or less narrow dimensions.

It is believed that these early chancel openings were furnished with veils or curtains, but it may very probably have been the case that lattices of wood or "cancelli" were also fixed within them. That, however, must remain a matter of conjecture since there remains no trace of any wooden screenwork in England of an earlier date than the thirteenth century, and Cambridgeshire furnishes no example of a *chancel* screen of this date.

But of the early mural screen or stone chancel barrier, we have a good instance at Hauxton, where there is a single archway of somewhat narrow dimensions, Norman in date, the balance of wall space on each side being somewhat wide and this wall space is occupied in a manner characteristic of this early type of church—that is to say that against the wall north and south of the chancel opening are found the remains of stone altars, backed by arched recesses, furnishing a shelf and a primitive reredos, the wall at the back of each recess being probably intended for the reception of a religious painting. At Hauxton, on the north side, the arched recess is richly moulded, whilst on the south it is plain, but here there is an interesting survival, for the surface still retains a fine fresco painting, in good preservation, of St Thomas à Becket.

Later instances of this peculiar form of screen wall are not far to seek—and the churches of West Wrating, Horseheath and Weston Colville offer instances of fourteenth or fifteenth century date.

Here, as might be expected, the chancel arches are better developed, and no doubt all at one time contained wooden screens within the limits of the arch, but that of Horseheath alone survives. But the evidences of the former existence of the side altars are present in the piscinae and niche work which, in spite of the ravages of time, change, and iconoclasm, still survive. Weston Colville is a church which has been shockingly treated in most barbarous taste, but at West Wrating the antiquary will find much of the old interest remaining.

The fine church of Barton, of fourteenth century date, is

another of this peculiar type, with tall and narrow chancel arch, and space for side altars in the wide flanking walls.

This church is fortunate in retaining a beautiful traceried wooden screen of the Suffolk or "East Anglian" type, full of exquisite and most refined detail, and still bearing traces of original colour decoration.

The church of Milton exhibits the peculiarity of a large recess on the south side only of the chancel arch: that of Shepreth shows recesses both sides, the northern one being blank, the southern pierced as a hagioscope.

In England until at least as late as the seventh century and probably later, the Act of Consecration had been veiled after the Eastern manner and the full change of rite did not apparently supervene until the twelfth century, for we find that whereas the oldest builders preferred the single narrow arch to the sanctuary, thus obscuring it from view, subsequent generations of churchmen retained this narrow arch in its simplicity for a long while wherever built, though under the Normans a system of building wider arches came into vogue. But shortly before the twelfth century, a greater clearance in the chancel wall was demanded, and this was effected in the older churches by the piercing of hagioscopes on one or more, frequently both sides of the chancel arch, as we see it at Shepreth, and as it undoubtedly occurred at St Benedict's Cambridge, before the existing chancel arch was substituted for the narrow old one.

There was another type of mural screen, or stone chancel barrier, which characterised a certain section of our early churches—and this exhibited a triple arcade in lieu of a single arch in the chancel wall.

The earliest known instance of this feature was at Reculver, Kent, where it took the form of three round arched openings supported by columns of Romano-British type. It dated probably from the seventh century or thereabouts. Others are known to have existed at Brixworth, Rochester, Canterbury, etc. but we lose trace of the pattern in the centuries succeeding, and only now find it re-appearing in or about the twelfth century as a favourite type. The thirteenth century gives us several instances in which a fine architectural character is given to the

triple arcade, the best specimens being those at Wool in Dorset and at Westwell in Kent—the latter a magnificent composition.

Cambridgeshire was not without specimens of stone screen-work of this order, but the earliest, which was at Little Shelford, has now unfortunately been “restored” out of existence.

But the triple arcaded form though as a complete mural barrier it can no longer be seen in the county of Cambridge, still is represented in a somewhat later form by the curious and perhaps unique stone screen of Bottisham church. Here the arcade is seen in a perfect state, but there is no wall above it. (Pl. XIX.)

The three graceful stone arches support a horizontal head of moulded stone, the spandrels being filled with “tympana” of ashlar work, pierced each with a small quatrefoil. The composition is of fifteenth century date.

Not far from the Cambridgeshire border, at Bramford in Suffolk, is another screen of somewhat similar type, but earlier in date, more solid in proportion, and having the two lateral openings filled breast-high with stone ashlar walling, probably for the reception of the two lesser altars customary in so many of our English churches at the east end of the nave. At Gedding in Suffolk is yet another.

At Harlton, in the south of Cambridgeshire, is another stone screen, but of very late date, and of a different order. Instead of an arcade of three simple lights we find here a series of narrow fenestrations, mounted upon a fairly high breast-wall, and furnished with an arched central opening. The screen as it now stands is little more than the wreck, or skeleton, of what it once was, since there is scarcely a doubt that this like other screens of its type, was once a double screen, having an additional screen to the westward, probably of open and of ornamental nature, the space overhead being spanned by the roodloft. For a perfect example of the type the reader is referred to that still standing at Compton Bassett in Wiltshire, and to a sister screen at Le Folgöet in Brittany, where in front of the traceried wall is seen a delicately enriched open arcade, and beneath, on either side, an altar, with the doorway in the centre, and the roodloft running overhead.



Bottisham. Triple arcaded rood screen in stone, and oak parclose to south chapel.



Balsham. Part of west face of rood screen shewing projecting canopy.

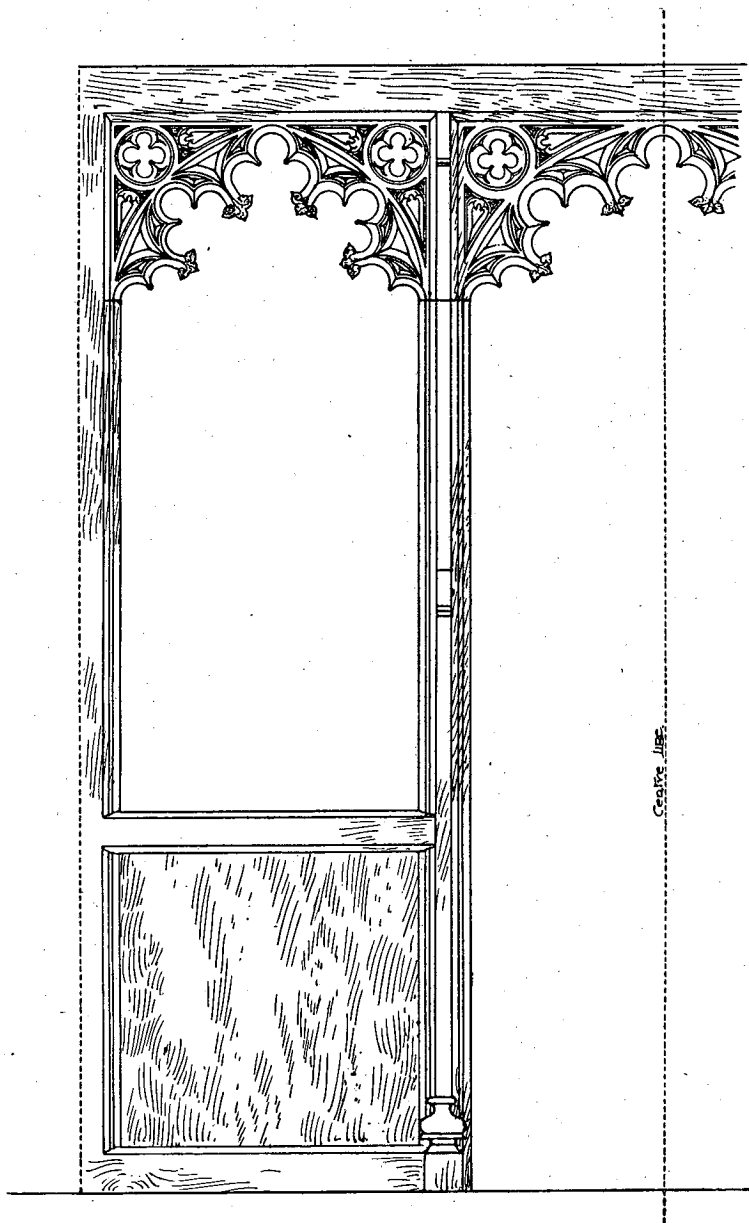


Fig. 1. Triplo. Elevation of XIV cent. Rood Screen. (Shewing the triple arcade in oak.)

The foregoing instances practically exhaust the list of *stone* chancel screens in the county of Cambridge, but the triple arcade is further exemplified in the beautiful old wooden screen at Tripflow, a model of grace and comeliness even in its present forlorn and decayed condition. The date of this work is probably about 1350.

The custom of installing the secondary or nave altars against the western face of the chancel wall or screen became subject to modification as time progressed, and a tendency becomes visible, first to fence them in, as at Ranworth in Norfolk, by wing-screens, or to enclose them completely by screenwork, forming little chantry enclosures.

These are to be found occasionally on the west side of our screens, and I believe that at Guilden Morden we have an instance of this intention. The purport of the Guilden Morden enclosures has been a matter of much conjecture amongst antiquaries, and the presence of the inscription in blackletter on the panels north and south of the interior of the gangway, referring as it does to Confession, has very naturally given colour to the theory that one if not both of the curious little compartments which exist within the area of the eastern and western screens, was for the purpose of a confessional.

Those who adopt this theory have to reconcile it with the generally accepted view that the introduction of the confessional box was a matter of far later date than the fourteenth century, which is the date of the Guilden Morden screen. But from a general survey of screen-forms in England, and a comparison with other examples, the writer certainly inclines to the view that the Guilden Morden screen enclosures are in reality chantries, and once contained small altars.

The next, or later modification of this system of placing the altars had an important effect upon the form of our screenwork. Churches began to be aisled, and the eastern extremities of the aisles north and south were often enclosed by screenwork, thus forming chantry chapels of far more liberal dimensions, whilst the chancel screen was freed from any attachment of altars to its western face, and was thus permitted to display any beauties of carving or colour decoration it might possess to the fullest



extent, so that it became customary to exhibit upon the lower panels of the screen a complete series of saints' figures in colour. These figures, which constitute the great glory of the Norfolk and Suffolk screens, seem to have been represented on several screens in Cambridgeshire, but only traces are left. Guilden Morden possesses one or two panels, which have however been repainted: and two panels from the old Fulbourne screen are preserved in Trinity College, representing Our Lord and St Elizabeth of Hungary.

Of chantry chapels enclosed by screens in the manner above described we may instance Foxton, Bottisham, and Willingham as notable among surviving examples retaining their screenwork.

The church at Foxton has a chantry of ample dimensions (now used as a vestry) formed at the eastward extremity of the north aisle, and enclosed by Early Perpendicular screenwork of simple traceried lights, the woodwork bearing traces of colour. At Bottisham the chantry screens, which are of beautiful late fourteenth century character, exist, though in a mutilated form, in both aisles. Originally they would have enclosed the whole of the eastern bay of the aisles, but are now set back further, by the shortening of their returns. The interesting church of Willingham perhaps provides the most complete series of parclose or chantry screens in the county. On the north side is one of special ecclesiological importance, since it is of exceedingly early date, and from the artistic point of view it is equally noteworthy as the design is graceful and the mouldings most delicately executed. This screenwork encloses the "Ely" chapel. A date in the neighbourhood of 1320 may be assigned for its execution. It retains traces of colour, and a curious "diaper" pattern which will be more particularly described in the later section of this paper dealing with the screens of Cambridgeshire individually.

The south or "Brune" chantry of Willingham church has a very perfect series of parclosets of Perpendicular type—early fifteenth century, containing some remarkable features. Although nothing of the kind now remains in Cambridgeshire it is probable that in some cases the side screens supported

galleries for access to the loft which was over the principal screen, such as we see standing at Dennington in Suffolk, in very perfect form.

Practically every church in England at one time possessed a loft over the chancel screen. This feature was introduced into our parish churches in the fourteenth century being at

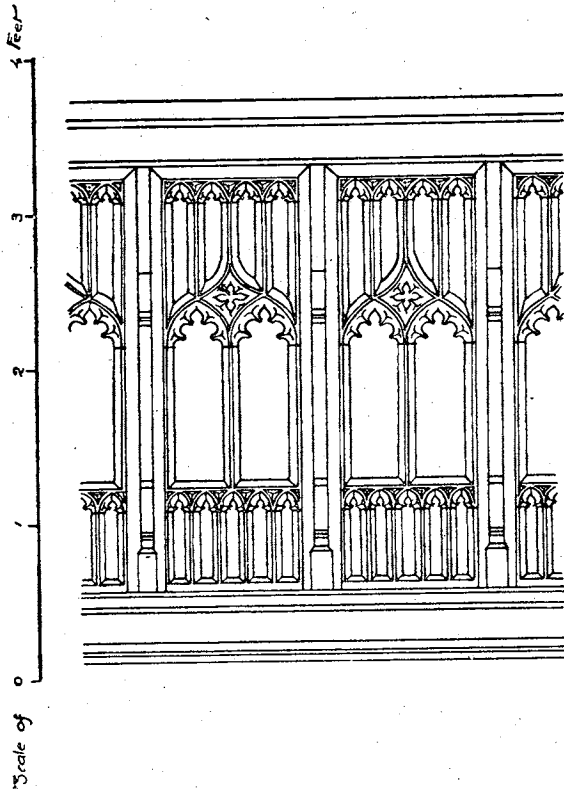


Fig. 2. Gamlingay. Traceried panels of Loft—now at the west end of church.

first an adaptation of the Jubé or pulpitum of the larger churches, but being closely connected with the Great Rood, which tradition placed upon a beam over the entry to the chancel, it was known as the roodloft, and in the earlier examples appears frequently if not universally to have held an altar to the Holy Rood. Other uses it had as well; but towards

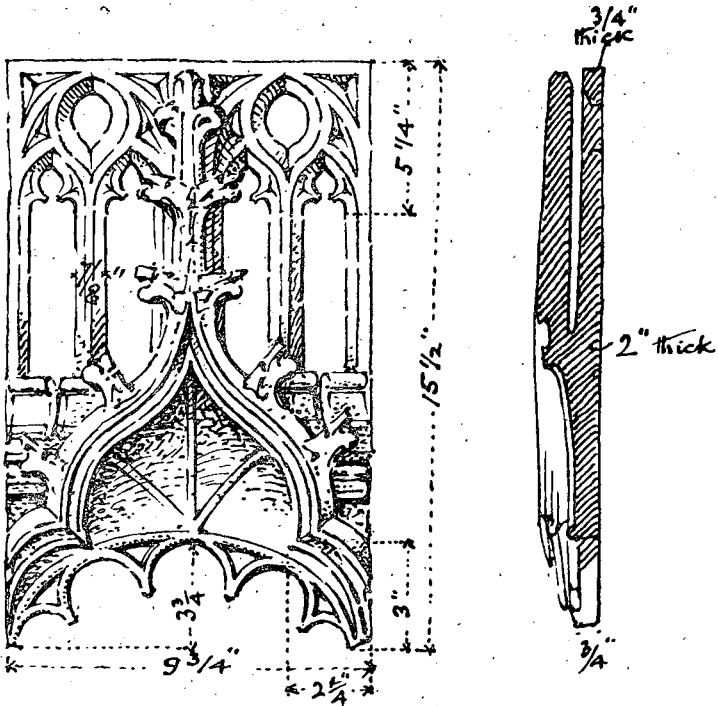
the fifteenth century it seems to have changed its character, becoming used more and more as a musician's gallery, until at last this appears to have been its principal 'raison d'être.'

Roodlofts were erected in large numbers during the latter half of the fifteenth, and the early years of the sixteenth, century, and the late J. T. Micklethwaite was strongly of opinion that this was in consequence of the increased use of polyphonic music for church services in the years prior to the Reformation. Old parochial accounts yield abundant references to the organs which were in the Roodloft, and which were often placed over the choir door in the position assigned in the earlier lofts to the Rood altar.

A fair number of Roodlofts remain in Great Britain, and most of these exhibit gallery fronts of great richness, often prepared for the reception of figure paintings or statuary. Others had a plainer treatment of traceried panelling. There remain in Cambridgeshire no instances of ancient lofts preserved in their position over the screens, but at Gamlingay, above the screen in the tower arch at the west end, is a section of ornamental panelling believed by the writer to have been brought from such a position. It is of light Perpendicular panelling (fig. 2), pierced, and traceried, but without any indication of colour or sculptured enrichments. In the University Museum of Archaeology in Cambridge is preserved a canopy-head which it is believed formerly belonged to the gallery-front of a screen. This was taken either from Madingley church or from an old church long ago destroyed at Histon, and was preserved for many years at Madingley Court. It is of excellent design. A slight sketch is given of this interesting fragment which indicates that the loft from which it was taken would have possessed the true character of an Iconostasis if, as we may reasonably infer from other existing examples, it was one of a series (fig. 3).

There is a striking difference of design noticeable between screens of the earlier and those of the later period. In the earlier the tracery forms are usually simpler, and although the arcaded form is often observable in the heads of the lights, these are usually found to be set within a rectangular framework

of moulded uprights and horizontal head beam. The loft usually projected over this to the westward, and was ceiled beneath with a rising soffit of panelling, at times flat, but often coved or hollowed, and diversified with ribs and bosses.



Fragment of Canopywork  
 formerly in Madingley or Histon Church  
 (demolished) — now in Univ<sup>y</sup>. Museum of Archaeology  
 at Cambridge.

Fig. 3.

In later times beautiful modifications of this type were invented, and we see such examples as is afforded by the screen at Balsham where the loft is carried over the east side as well as the west of the screen, and the western coving is groined and broken into ribbed vaulting in its lower part with magnificent effect. (Pl. XIX., XX.) This fine screen dates from the



Balsham. East side of rood screen shewing chancel stalls returned on north side.



Over. East side of rood screen shewing the vaulting.

beginning of the fifteenth century and is remarkable for the beauty of its proportions.

It is more worthy of note since there remain unfortunately but few examples of perfect vaulting or coving to the heads of screens in Cambridgeshire. Most of them have suffered grievous loss in the removal of almost every feature of interest or beauty over the head-rail and but few retain even their cornice enrichments.

At Over (Pl. XX.) may be seen the original vaulting of the screen on its east face, but on the west it has been removed. There is probably no other ancient example now standing in the county which exhibits the perfect form of the vaulting as we see it at Balsham.

In a succeeding paper it is hoped that a detailed description of screenwork in Cambridgeshire may be attempted, together with a full list of screens, or parts of screens now remaining, together with an analysis and comparison of their design, and other matters touched upon by the writer in his lecture recently delivered before the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, which, for the better division of the subject, are relegated to the supplementary article.

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