

SCREEN AT NORTH BURLINGHAM.

A Letter

TO HENRY HARROD, ESQ., AND THE REV. RICHARD HART,

Secretaries of the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society.

MY DEAR SIRS,

In a recent excursion in the neighbourhood of North Burlingham, among other interesting relics of antiquity, the Rood-screen in the church of Saint Andrew in that parish particularly attracted my notice. The figures of Saints upon the panels are uncommon; and, as their names are written under them, they serve as a key to similar representations upon other screens. I venture, therefore, to send you a brief account of them, and to express a hope that other members of our Society may be induced to furnish descriptions of the rood-screens in their neighbourhood, in order that a synopsis may be formed, and, by a comparative view of them upon an extensive scale, much interesting information may be obtained.

I begin with the panels nearest to the entrance to the chancel, because they may be regarded as the posts of highest distinction, as appears by St. Peter being invariably placed there, or the Cherubim and Seraphim, when the heavenly Hierarchy is described.

On the Gospel, or north side, the first figure upon the first panel (for each panel contains two figures) is that of an Archbishop, with a cross-staff in his left hand: the right hand and great part of the portrait are effaced; and the name of "St. Thomas Martyr," no doubt St. Thomas of Canterbury, is written beneath. Several screens, as at Randworth and Stalham, may be pointed out, upon which a similar figure

of an Archbishop appears without the name ; and the position occupied in the first panel marks the high veneration in which this distinguished Saint and Martyr was held.

The second figure in the first panel is that of "S̄cs Edwardus Rex," with the usual emblems, a sceptre in the right and a ring in the left hand

In the second panel appears, first a Bishop, bearing a pastoral staff in the right hand, and a book in the left, entitled, "S̄cs Benedictus Abbas." This figure also corresponds with one on the Randworth screen, immediately opposite to that of the Archbishop. There is, however, this difference to be observed between them. In the Randworth screen the Bishop is not represented battling with two devils at his feet. In this, one devil is seen on the right side, wounded and bleeding profusely,* while another is rampant on the left side of the Saint. This representation throws light upon the very curious oak carvings in the church of Saint Benedict in Horning, the same parish in which the great Abbey of Saint Bennet stood, and where such representations would naturally be expected.

The next figure in this second panel is the gem of the collection. St. Withburga, Virgo, bears in her hands a cruciform church, surmounted with a spire, and the spire surmounted with a lofty cross and a red pennon, or vane. Under it is written, "Ecclesia de Est Derham."

* On closer inspection, it appears doubtful whether the red marks are blood, or the red ground peeping through the injured black coating of the demons ; and it may be questioned whether spirits are capable of bleeding. In a fresco painting formerly in Worstead Church, a dragon-shaped fiend is represented bleeding under the stroke of Saint Michael's sword, which also is tinged with blood ; and Milton, Book VI., line 331, describing the battle between that Archangel and Satan, says :—

————— "From the gash,
A stream of nect'rous humor issuing flow'd
Sanguine, such as celestial spirits may bleed,
And all his armour stain'd erewhile so bright."



COWELL'S ANASTATIO PRESS, IPSWICH.

Figure from the Road-last Screen in the Church
of Burlingham, St. Andrew's, Norfolk.



COWELL'S ANASTATIC PRESS, IPSWICH

Figure from the Road-lift Screen in the Church
of Barlingham, St. Andrew's, Norfolk.

There are two does at her feet, one on either side. Their faces are turned to her with a most amiable expression, which contrasts well with the rage and malice depicted in the visages of the dæmons adjoining. This very uncommon painting suggests a few remarks. It has been supposed that the bearing of a church denotes the Saint to have been the founder. That, however, is not borne out in the present, or other similar instances. St. Barbara, upon the Barton Turf screen, bears the tower in which she was incarcerated; and St. Withburga, according to Dugdale, was not the founder of the church of East Dereham, but an eminent saint, who lived and died there. Her father, Anna, King of the East Angles, erected a Benedictine Nunnery in that parish, and made his youngest daughter, St. Withburga, Prioress. According to Tanner, St. Withburga founded the Nunnery herself. Tradition affirms that she, together with the nuns, was miraculously supported by the milk of two does, which, on that account, are represented on this screen. About one hundred years after her death, her body was found in a remarkable state of preservation. It was removed by stealth to Ely; and a spring of water (over which a Baptistery was erected in commemoration of her) rose from the spot where she had been buried.

The present church of St. Nicholas is, probably, on the site of that of the Nunnery; and a chapel within it bears her name, but it does not appear that she was the founder.

On the third panel the figures are entirely obliterated.

On the Epistle, or south side, the first figure is St. John the Baptist, bearing the usual emblem—the Lamb upon a book. The second figure, St. Cecilia, has the emblems of martyrdom—a crown, bearing white flowers in her right hand, and a palm-branch in her left, and not a musical instrument, as is usually the case. There are three wounds in her neck, which are descriptive of the manner in which she was put to death. Almachius, Prefect of Rome, in the absence of the Emperor, Alexander Severus, commanded her to be cast into a bath of

boiling water; but it had no more effect on her body than if she had bathed in a fresh spring. Then the tyrant sent an executioner to put her to death with the sword; but his hand trembled, so that after having given her three wounds in the neck and breast, he went his way, leaving her bleeding and half dead. She lived, however, for the space of three days, which she spent in prayers and exhortations to the converts, distributing to the poor all she possessed; and she died full of faith and charity, and singing with her sweet voice praises and hymns to the last moment. (MRS. JAMESON: *Sacred Legendary Art*. Vol. II. p. 205.) There is one circumstance respecting this panel which deserves notice. The names of the donors of each separate panel are inscribed beneath, with the usual prayer, and under this I read, "Joannis Blake et Cecilie uxoris suæ." This remarkable agreement between the names of the donors and the saints appears to indicate that the choice of these saints was made for their name's sake.

Upon the next panel, St. Walstan has a scythe in his left hand, two rings on his right, and a wallet at his girdle: he bears a crown upon his head, with reference to his royal extraction; and the designation of "Opifer," with reference to the power of healing both man and beast, with which his relics were endued. (See Blomefield, II. p. 387.) St. Catharine is represented with the usual emblems. In the last panel, the first figure is nearly obliterated; and St. Etheldreda, the second, bears a book and a pastoral staff.

The date of this screen appears to be early in the sixteenth century. The architectural details are of that period, and accord with those of the church, which consists of a nave with a square tower, chancel, and north aisle extended beyond the nave to part of the chancel. These are of Perpendicular character, except the north and south doors of the nave, which are of the Early English period, (the hood moulding over the entrance to the porch is curiously enriched,) and the

east window is of the Decorated period. The bells bear, in character of the same date as the screen, the following inscriptions:—

“Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.”

“A tempestate protegas nos, Petre beate.”

“O Magdalena, duc nos ad gaudia plena.”

The name of the donor of one of the panels, viz. “Robertus Frennys,” is upon a brass in the north aisle, which records his death in 1528. Another inscription, “Orate pro anim̄s Johannis Benet, et pro bono statu Thome Benet et Margarete uxoris suæ,” indicates, I suppose, that Thomas Benet was living at the time the screen was erected; but there is no mention of him in Blomefield.

I fear I have exhausted the subject, and your patience at the same time.

Believe me, dear Sirs,

Yours truly,

JOHN GUNN.

July 4th, 1849.

