

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:



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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's of London in December 2012.

HUNGATE ROOD SCREEN TRAILS: NO.15

Suffield • North Walsham • Swafeld
Edingthorpe • Trunch • Trimmingham



Hungate
www.hungate.org.uk



SUFFIELD ST MARGARET.

TG 234 313. postcode - NR11 7EL

Normally open.



The church looks especially fine when approached from the west, standing tall in its churchyard at the top of a rise. There are few human habitations in sight. Presumably the focus of worship for the Lords Suffield moved in the 18th century to Robert Adam's church in the middle of Gunton Park (also well worth a visit and normally open in spite of the notice saying PRIVATE at the gate).

Walking round the outside, notice the chequered flushwork at the base of the tower and the pretty reticulated tracery of the easternmost window in the north aisle.

The door, as so often round here, is especially fine – and look at the inner side too. The interior, lovingly cared for, is so well-proportioned that one wonders if one of the cathedral master-masons was involved, as at Wighton. The tall tower arch is particularly elegant. The piscina in the chancel, the aumbry opposite in the north wall and the little ogee-arched stoup by the north door were respected and left untouched by the Victorian restorer. Only the greenery-gallery glass disappoints.

The Screen

The rood screen at Suffield has been cut down to the transom, but ten figures remain in the twelve dado panels. The tracery heads above the figure paintings contain fabulous carvings, which include foliage patterns, mythical and real animals, wild men and birds. Look out for the pelican in her piety, feathery owl and the pigs dancing to the harp playing of their fellow hog.

From the north the first two panels are now blank, the third contains a bishop saint (possibly St Ambrose), another bishop saint (probably St Augustine), St Gregory, St Jerome, St John the Evangelist, Sir John Schorn, and St Jeron. Sir John Schorn was a Buckinghamshire priest and beatus (someone venerated as being on the first rung of the ladder to sainthood) whose most famous miracle is shown here as his saintly attribute, the conjuring of the devil out of a boot.

Writing in the late 19th century, C.J.W. Winter recorded a figure of St William of Norwich on the screen, but this painting is now lost and probably occupied one of the blank panels on the north side. The figures on the screen were vigorously defaced in the Reformation.

Suffield's screen is quite unusual in that the red and green alternating backgrounds are not decorated with either foliate patterns or gilded stencils.

NORTH WALSHAM ST NICHOLAS.

TG 284 303. postcode - NR28 9BT

Normally open. Follow the signs to Town Centre parking and then aim for the ruined tower of the church.

What remains of the tower is still very impressive, with a large square Tudor window high up and, inside the church, a giddily high tower arch. Many Norfolk churches are large, the very elegant and slender arcades hardly interfering with the great open space. It is more like a Flemish church. Did the weavers brought here in the 14th century influence the design?

The churchyard feels more like a Close, especially on the south side, adding to the sense of St Nicholas' as the parish church of a major city, rather like the candidates for cathedral status in the 19th century. A clue to all this is on the extravagant porch with its flushwork and squared flints, for it also has, in the left spandrel of the outer arch, the emblem of John of Gaunt, a man well able to think big.

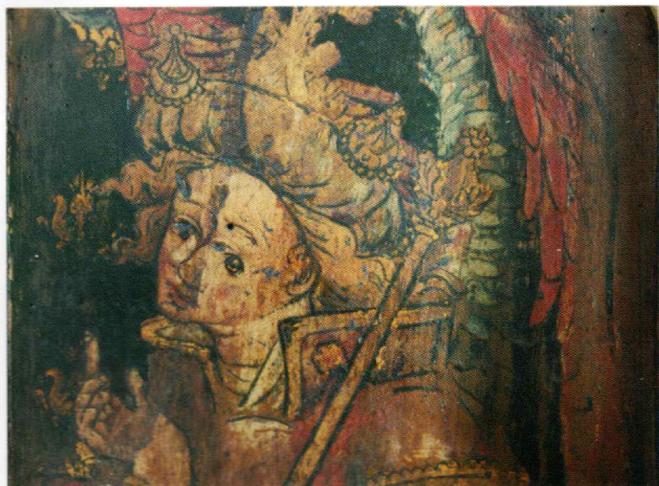
The smaller delights inside are also kingsize: a lofty font cover with the beam from which it hangs still in place; the huge monument to Sir William Paston, founder of the school, by John Key and William Wright of London 1608; a parish chest with seven locks; and a newly rebuilt organ which is the backbone of a lively musical tradition. Do not miss the rare semi-royal arms, with the symbol of the Commonwealth on one side and that of Charles II on the reverse. There are stalls with misericords in the chancel chapels, where there are also parts of late medieval screens with painted figures in the spandrels.

Outside again, on the label stops of the priest's door on the south side, are two charming faces that have survived both time and the Victorian restoration.



The Screens

North Walsham's magnificent church once boasted an equally fine screen and loft. It must have stretched across the whole width of the church as can be seen from the rood stair entrances at each side.



The dado of the main part of the central screen is still in place, although the figures are rather damaged (selectively, for it is the eyes and mouths of the female saints that have been gouged) and some still remain covered over with later paint. On the north side the screen depicts: a decorative red panel, St Catherine of Alexandria, The Virgin Mary, The Archangel Gabriel, St Jude, St Simon, St Philip, St Thomas, St James the Great, and St Peter. On the south side: St Paul, St Andrew, St John the Evangelist, St Matthew, St James the Less, St Barbara, St Mary Magdalene, St Margaret and, finally, an overpainted panel.

The paintings on the main screen are by the same artists responsible for the decoration at Ranworth, Old Hunstanton, Thornham, Filby and elsewhere. The figures stand on the characteristic tiled floors painted by this workshop.

Three more fragments of screens can be found on the north side of the church. These were aisle screens for chapels. In fact, two of these originally came from a guild chapel dedicated to St Thomas Becket, as can be seen from the writing on it which reads in Latin 'Pray for the souls of the brothers and sisters of the brotherhood of St Thomas the Martyr'. Another section is against the north wall and is painted in alternating red and green. You can see bare places and peg holes in the areas where there were originally figures attached in the spandrels.

SWAFIELD ST NICHOLAS.

TG 286 332. postcode - NR28 0PG

Normally open. Car park.

In this part of Norfolk, only a little elevation provides a superb view. This is true here, the church overlooking its village and far beyond.

Under the thatched roof, the handsome Perpendicular windows fill the building with light. The pretty porch, with an ancient coffin slab as doorstep, leads to a late medieval door with its original furniture. The interior is very broad – Pevsner describes the roof design as daring, so much breadth unsupported by ties. The bosses in the roof still have traces of original colour.

On the north wall is a crucifix found in pieces on Walcot beach in 1937. How did it get there? The 1900 lectern and the entrance-gate from the car park's south end are unusual.



The Screen

There are eight compartments filled with painted saints on Swafield's screen. Unfortunately, the upper part of the screen is now gone and only the dado survives. The paintings on Swafield's screen look to be the work of two different painters. The more competent artist can be seen on the north side; the saints on the south side are handled by a less able painter.

Although the figures are painted by different artists, the use of the same stencil tools in the backgrounds of panels from each side indicates that the two painters were working together at the same time. In other instances on rood screens, the work of separate painting workshops can be seen on the same screen, so it is interesting to make the distinction.


Depicted on the screen are a curtailed set of the most popular apostles. From the north side they are: St Andrew with his saltire

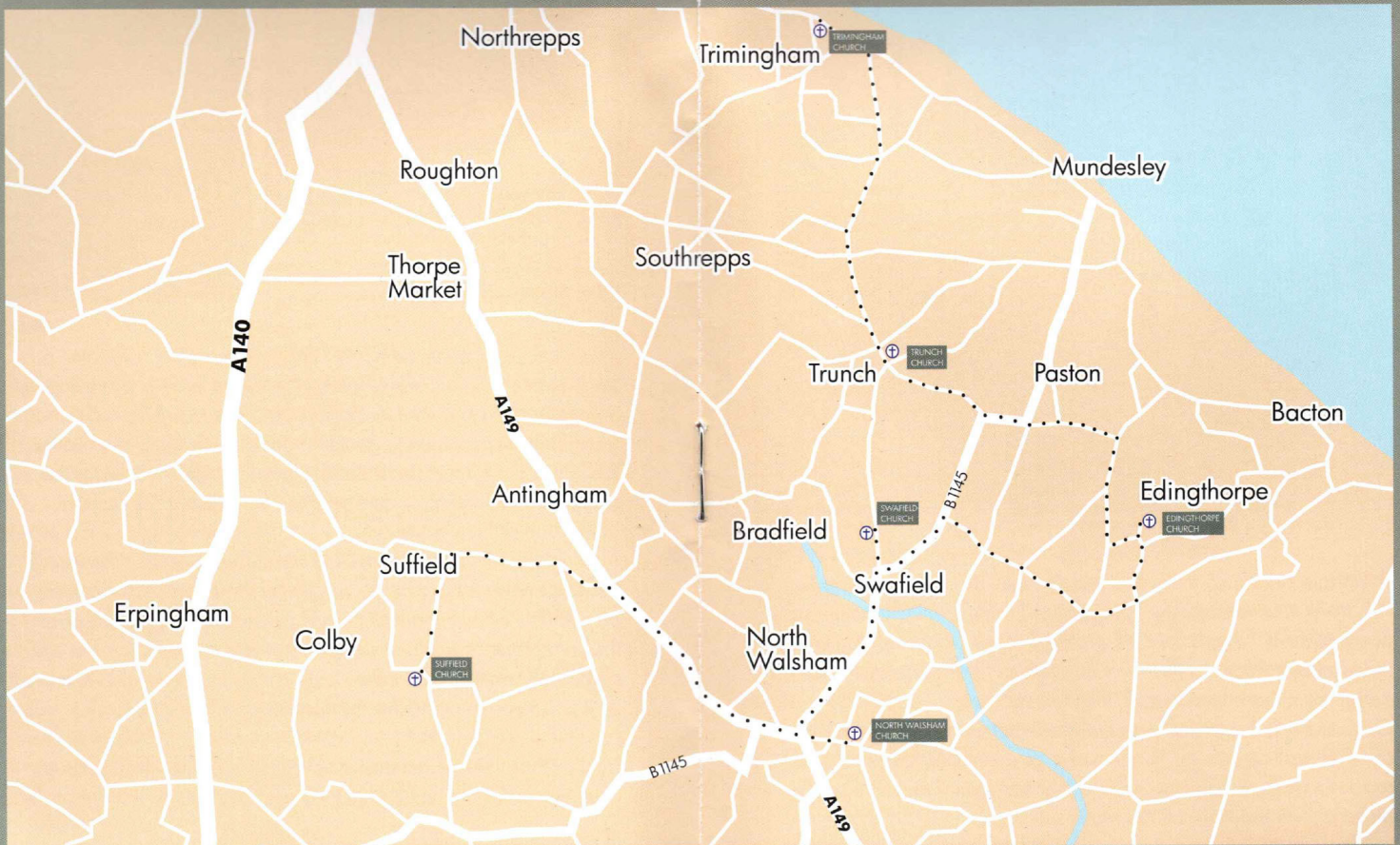
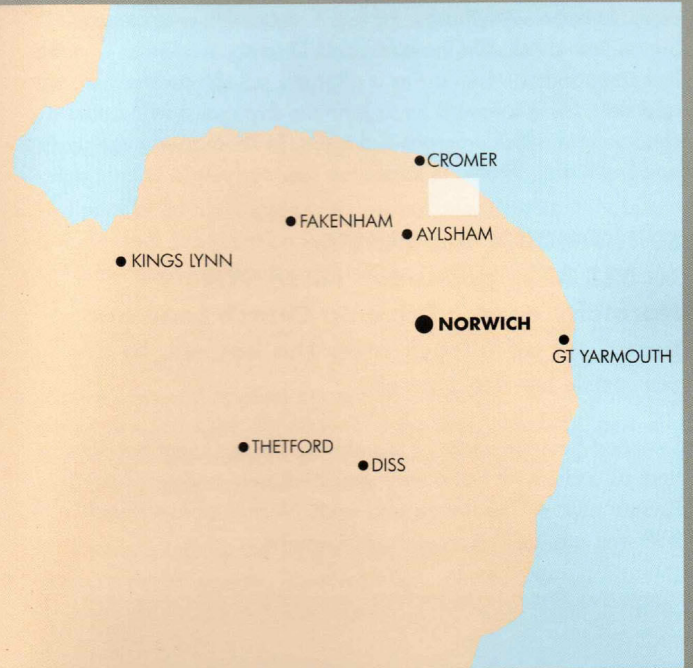
MAP OF THE TRAIL

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 



cross, St Peter with church and key, St Jude with a boat and St Simon with a fish. On the south side St James the Great is in the first compartment. He carries a pilgrim's pouch, cockle shell, hat and staff. He is followed by St John the Evangelist who bears a chalice from which emerges a dragon, St Thomas with spear and book and, finally, St James the Less carrying a fuller's club.

EDINGTHORPE ALL SAINTS.

TG 323 332. postcode - NR28 9TN

Normally open. Drive up Church Lane and turn right up a track after the houses, to the car park by the church.

Siegfried Sassoon wrote of this church, having spent holidays here as a child, "It has a very special dignity and simplicity". Pevsner calls it "The image of a small Norfolk parish church". Both are true, for it is a universal favourite.



There is a round tower with a top datable by a 1357 bequest. The nave roof is thatched. One enters through a 12th century doorway, with a porch and door itself some two hundred years more recent. Almost every window has different tracery, all of it delightful. (There is a Paston link. Did this help pay for it?). Opposite the door is a fine St Christopher and there are traces of other wall-paintings. The furnishings are mostly rustic: a 1587 reader's desk, a 1632 pulpit and old benches. Do not miss the niche above the stair on the north side.

Over recent years the church has been patiently and affectionately restored, a truly noble work. The guide leaflet is one of the best.

The Screen

The story of Edingthorpe's screen is not as simple as it looks at first – in fact, the paint on the screen comes from several separate stages of painting in the medieval period.

The structure of the screen dates from the 14th century, as can be seen by the turned shafts of the uprights and the lack of subdivisions and applied tracery on the dado. The circles over the ogee arch of the doorway, and the simple profile shape of the transom are also typical of a screen of this date as is the ogee arch itself.

While there are figures on the dado, they were not the first painting on the screen. The screen was initially painted decoratively in red, green and white. The figures were later added directly over the red and green. Finally, the white tracery elements were painted on to make the saints appear as if they stood in an arcade. This emulates the compartmental dados found on perpendicular screens throughout the region.

From north to south, the figures are: St Bartholomew, St Andrew, St Peter, St Paul, St John the Evangelist and St James the Great. They are a shortened version of an Apostle set in which the most popular of the saints have been chosen, and St Paul substituted for St Matthias. The style of the figure painting probably places them in the early 15th century.

TRUNCH ST BOTOLPH.

TG 286 348. postcode - NR28 0PZ

Normally open.

The proportions of the height of the tower and roofs, the slenderness of the church and its length are particularly striking, especially when seen from the churchyard entrance by the pub to the east. Although apparently not all of one build, it seems as if different generations followed a master plan.

On the south side of the chancel is a rarity: a porch for the priest's door supporting a buttress. There are others like it at Beccles and Warham St Mary. Once inside, one immediately sees Trunch's other famous rarity: a fine oak canopy over the font. Mancroft in Norwich has one, as do Durham cathedral and Luton parish church.

Behind the font is a timber arch with its original colouring. Above is a hammerbeam roof and there are pale pannels underfoot. Beyond the screen are stalls in the chancel, those backed by the screen with misericords and others showing signs of the chancel's use as a schoolroom around 1700. These have been built on sounding boards to make the singing more resonant. All in all, this is one of Norfolk's most rewarding churches to explore.

The Screens and Font Cover

A delightful 1502 screen with much of its upper structure and a remarkable font cover make this church well worth a visit. The date of the screen is borne on the elaborately carved transom, which resembles other screens at Worstead and Ludham in its design of diagonal bands.

It appears that two different workshops, and at least three painters were therefore involved in the decoration of Trunch's rood screen. It may be that the panels were renewed in the medieval period, perhaps replacing an earlier scheme which did not have figures.

The painting on some of the muntins, mullions and transom of the north side of the screen is by the same workshop as on the pulpit at Burlingham St Edmund and the screen at Alburgh, among other places. This can be identified by comparing the stencils, motifs and cast relief decorations, (the stencils and cast reliefs being made with the same tools and moulds). The paintings in the panels themselves are by another workshop, using different stencils. On the south side the muntins, mullions and transom seem to have been decorated by a different workshop. The panels there were certainly done by another hand, this may have been from the same workshop as the north side panels, although they use a different background stencil.

The north side saints are: St Thomas, St Philip, St James the Less, St Matthew, St James the Great, St Peter. The saints on the south side are: St Paul, St Andrew, St John the Evangelist, St Jude, St Simon, St Bartholomew. The popular St Paul has been substituted in place of St Matthias.

The elaborate wooden font canopy is a true gem. It is similar to another font canopy at St Peter Mancroft in Norwich. Some of its sculpted elements have been lost – consequently, on one of the faces, it is possible to see the outlined shape of a ghostly Crucifix, Mary and John on a rood beam.

TRIMINGHAM ST JOHN THE BAPTIST'S HEAD.

TG 279 387. postcode - NR11 8EG

Normally open.

There is only one other church in England with this dedication. Its origin seems to be an attempt by medieval monks to cash in on the pilgrim business. Trimingham is on the way to Bromholme Priory and one of the routes to Walsingham.

By the mid-19th century the church was badly decayed. It was restored by one of the wilder Victorian architects, Thomas Jekyll. Here he was unusually respectful of what he found, copying the old church and reincorporating elements, such as the screen, which had been stored in a barn, the piscina and sedilia. Was he responsible for the cheerful blue starry ceiling of the chancel?

A special feature of the church is the collection of carvings by the vicar from 1909 to 1923, the Revd. Reginald Page. There is also a 14th century font and a royal arms of George III. Despite the threat of the encroaching sea, the parish continue to keep the church in good repair.

The Screen



This originally eight panel screen has had two half lights added to either side to make it fit in its current location. It retains a lot of its original painting and gilding, and the figures are lively, despite having been subjected to iconoclasm during the Reformation. The unusual dedication of the church to the head

of John the Baptist is reflected in the carving of the screen. The Baptist's head can be seen on a platter in the spandrel over the head of St James on the north side of the screen and is a sure indication, if any be needed, that the screen was built and decorated for this church.

Like the dedication, the saints painted on the screen are also unusual, and their identification is not always straightforward. From north to south they are: St Edmund, St Clare, St Clement, St James the Great, St Sitha (or St Petronella), St Dorothy, St Barbara, St Jeron. The reasons for the confusion are that both St Petronella and St Sitha are depicted with keys as a saintly attribute. St Sitha tends to be found more widely in East Anglia than Petronella, but the saint might be either. Equally, St Bavo and St Jeron are also difficult to distinguish; both having a falcon as an emblem.