The Renaissance Parclose Screens in the Church of All Saints Theddlethorpe, Lincolnshire.

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The Church of All Saints at Theddlethorpe has been redundant since 1974 and is maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust. The structure is principally of one build dating from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, comprising a west tower, a nave with two aisles, and an aisle-less chancel; early brick is used throughout the building. Due to the impressive scale of the building and the high quality of its interior fittings it is known locally as ‘The Cathedral of the Marsh.’

The church still possesses a large amount of its late medieval woodwork, including a number of bench-ends in the north aisle decorated with ogee headed tracery and castellated tops. The rood screen is also still in position under the chancel arch and although it is worn of its loft, retains a good deal of its original mineral pigments and gilding, particularly on the wainscot. It probably dates from the early years of the fifteenth century, and as it is directly comparable with other screens in the locality, it is certainly of local manufacture. It is, however, the remaining two screens in the church that shall concentrate on, the parclose screens, which divide the eastern bays of both the north and south aisles from the nave to form two chapels.

Structure and Style

Parclose screens in this position in Lincolnshire churches are not rare and examples can be found of their use in this context in many churches along the coast, as few possessed chancel aisles. The parclose screens at Theddlethorpe are built of oak upon low stone foundations; each divided into two sections: one to separate the chapel from the aisle, and one from the nave. The angle joining the two portions of each screen encompasses the eastern pier of both nave arcades. Each section has a doorway and the western portion of the south screen retains its original door. On either side of the doorway the screens are divided into bays, and as the doorway is frequently off-centre there are unequal numbers of bay divisions on either side. The screens are in fact quite meanly constructed. The wainscoting in particular is quite shoddily made of flimsy sheets of oak, and has been the subject of numerous repairs. The uprights too are not highly finished, and the decoration of the superstructure is confined to simple mouldings on the middle rail.

The north parclose has a series of carpenter’s marks in roman numerals where the middle rail is pegged into the upright posts, evidence that the superstructure of the screens was prefabricated before erection in the church. These are clearly visible on the uprights that join the walls, at the angle of the two sections and on either side of the doorways. They follow around in a sequence from the east, in pairs, all along the southern side, but on the western side are out of sequence. The angle post marked with the numeral XI matches up to mark V on the middle rail and the doorway post marked with V matches up to mark VI on the rail. This may indicate that some damage occurred to the screen during transit and that the doorway post was originally intended to be the angle post, or that the screens have at some stage been dismantled and re-erected wrongly.

The principal decorative scheme of both screens is provided by a series of panels at the top of each bay just below the top rail in the place where tracery is usually found. These panels are highly unusual as they show little or no Gothic influence, but are purely Renaissance forms, and as such represent two of the earliest examples of Renaissance ecclesiastical woodwork in the county. The panels consist of what is perhaps best described as open-work; packed full of imaginative grotesques, personal heraldry and a limited amount of Christian imagery all set amidst and upon a background of stylised foliage, principally vine and oak leaves. A round-headed arch divides each panel and the main composition is squeezed beneath it; the spandrels contain even more foliage forms. For example, at n2 (Fig.1) we have a thistle, at n6 cloverleaves, while at s8 what appears to be a pomegranate. The composition of many panels is dominated by pairs of peculiar hybirds with serpentine bodies and humanoid faces: panel n7 (Fig.2) and s12 (Fig.3) have two such hybrids, both bearded, who stare into each other’s eyes. Others are purely animal forms with beaks and snouts of great variety at n2 (Fig.1), s9, s10 (Fig.4), while at s11 (Fig.5) they flank a classical urn. Others almost appear to be dolphins as at n1. These fantasy creatures are always placed in pairs to form a symmetrical composition, though they are sometimes paired face to face and at other times back to back.

The closest parallel to these paired grotesques are to be seen at Carlisle Cathedral on a screen believed to have been erected between c.1542 and c.1547 by the then Dean, Lawrence Salkeld. At Carlisle every bay has a panel with pairs of dolphins and hybrids of almost identical form to those at Theddlethorpe, which face each other. Similar pairs of hybrids are also set face to face amid the otherwise gothic tracery of the wainscot of the Spring parclose at Lavenham, built as a result of the will of Thomas Spring, d.1527. Howard and Crossley have argued that the grotesques at Lavenham were influenced by Flemish workmanship. Quite close comparisons can be made between the Theddlethorpe panels and some of the canopy work in the windows of King’s College Cambridge. This glass came out of the workshop of an anonymous glazier, called glazier J’ by Wayment, who was quite likely a Fleming working in England at the end of the 1520s. This canopy work again has similar paired grotesques.
The Theddlethorpe sequence also includes the use of human heads in profile, a common early Renaissance feature. On the Carlisle screen such heads are placed in roundels within the wainscot. Closer to Theddlethorpe geographically, heads in roundels were also to be seen amidst the decoration of the panelling that was formerly in a chamber at the now long demolished manor house at Dunholme near Lincoln. The Theddlethorpe profile heads are not set in roundels as at Carlisle and Dunholme but form an integral part of the openwork, a rare if not a unique feature. Panel n13 (Fig. 6) has two profile heads, one (heavily restored) of a fashionably dressed man in a hat while the other, facing him, is of a woman wearing what appears to be a head-dress of the mid sixteenth century. This interesting use of imagery is reminiscent of the composition and the use of profile heads in some of Hieronymus Bosch's work, most notably Christ and the Tormentors in London's National Gallery, and also resembles the grotesque work of other Flemish artists such as Grünewald. Again, further comparisons can be made with some of the glass at King's College, Cambridge, particularly in a panel showing Christ before the high priest Caïphas where a similar composition is employed. This panel probably came from the workshop of the Flemish craftsman James Nicholson, who was working on the commission in 1528, based at a workshop in Southwark, close to London Bridge. The composition of panel n4 also brings to mind the image of Pity, an image of devotion that had a wide circulation in woodcut form in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

Despite the similarities in composition the panel is probably not intended to be an image of Christ but rather to represent the decapitated head of St John the Baptist on a platter (Fig. 9).

The roundel does not appear truly to be a nimbus, but rather the head is sitting on it. The flourishes at the base of the neck may be intended to represent where the head was severed. This may seem an unusual subject but does have precedents, particularly in the alabaster panels mass produced in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. In the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum are a number of panels depicting 'John Baptist's heads' set on a plate or charger which are quite closely comparable to the Theddlethorpe panel. Many of these alabaster images display similar curly locks and the bifid or double-pointed beard. Some of these images also show a wound on the Baptist's forehead, traditionally inflicted by Herodias, and it is possible that one of the dents on the Theddlethorpe image is intended to represent this wound. In his will of 1529 Thomas Ely of Theddlethorpe referred to an image of the 'hed hallow' in this church, which one could interpret as referring to the principal image of a saint in the church, as the church is dedicated to All Saints or All Hallows. It may, however, refer quite literally to a representation of the Baptist's head. The fact that the 'hed hallow' received xiiid. from Ely, the same as he bequeathed to the image of the virgin in the Church suggests that it was an image of some importance. As will be demonstrated later, the date of the screens precludes this wooden panel from being the image referred to by Ely. However, it is possible that the subject matter chosen for this wooden panel was influenced by the previous existence of a similar image within the Church, perhaps even in the side chapel.

Panels n8 (Fig. 10) and s7 (Fig. 11) have profile faces with much more character set within crescents, an image which was quite accurately described by one commentator as 'looking like the man in the moon wearing a night-cap, with long tassels hanging down in front'. They are again set in pairs back to back. These images are very similar to a historiated initial in a manuscript copy of the mass setting Gloria Tibi Trinitas by
Lincolnshire born John Taverner (1490-1545), made during the composer's lifetime. This initial 'E' includes a profile head of a man with a prominent nose and high forehead, intended to represent the composer. However, instead of a tassel, the initial is finished with the head of a dragon with a barbed tongue.  

Panel n9 (Fig.12) is one of the most finely executed panels in the sequence: here we have what appear to be two wyverns with their necks intertwined. The image is perhaps the least unusual in the sequence and has many parallels in wood from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, where they were frequently employed on misericords.  

Three panels have small putti squeezed in above the main composition, at s7 (Fig.11) one blows a trumpet or horn between the men in the moon, while its wings merge in to become part of the scroll-work.  

Of all the panels only n11 (Fig.13) is incongruous. There are no grotesques here, but simply a classical urn surrounded by scrollwork, which seems almost to anticipate early eighteenth-century work. It may indeed be a replacement of this time, as extensive work on the Church's woodwork took place around 1710, when an altar rail was fitted and the rood screen was marbled. When one considers that this panel is on the most damaged, west side, of the north parclose, where five bays have lost their panels entirely, replacement seems all the more probable.  

Where the Theddlethorpe screens differ from other early English work influenced by the continent is in the quality of the craftsmanship. The workmanship of the Salkeld screen is of extremely high quality throughout, whereas the Theddlethorpe work is often inconsistent in its quality. For example, panels n5 & 6 are quite crudely carved and contrast starkly with the carving of the profile heads and grotesques, some of which are of extremely high quality. The inconsistency of the quality may be a result of different hands working within one workshop, or a master undertaking the main elements while another craftsman completed the rest. The difference between the two hands may also be clearly seen by comparing panel n7 (Fig.2) and s12 (Fig.3). Panel s12 is carved with a much freer hand, while n7 is carved more crudely, with deep notches. The imaginativeness of the design bearing in mind the parallels with other work does lead one to the conclusion that a competent draftsman/craftsman, perhaps in the south or east of England, was at work. It may be that the main elements of the work were undertaken by this craftsman outside Lincolnshire, leaving the sequence to be completed by a less competent local carpenter, who also constructed the superstructures of the screens.  

Attempting to date the work by examining the style proves inconclusive. Pevsner suggests a date around 1535, which is not totally out of the question bearing in mind the common elements of the design and early date of the Lavenham screen, as well as the glass in King's College, Cambridge. A date of c.1545 must be equally possible if one makes direct comparison with the Carlisle screen. A date after c.1550 is equally valid, a date which appears to be compatible with the Paris cap worn by the female profile on the north screen, which has parallels with head-dresses portrayed on monumental brasses of Queen Mary's reign. A date around this time may also be more credible given the remote location of Theddlethorpe, which is not the most easily accessible place even today.  

The evidence for donorship  
The shields of arms that form an integral part of the design of both screens allow us to identify donors for the work, and
also to date the screen with precision to within a time frame of less than five years. The achievement two bars, on a chief three bezants, occurs on panel s13 (Fig.14) where it is quartered on a shield with what appears to be the arms: A chevron between three roundels charged with a mullet. The whole achievement is surrounded by a stylised vine with bunches of grapes that may represent a heraldic crest. Throughout the scheme the second coat of arms is given prominence: it is found alone at s4, flanked by the two profile heads at n13 (Fig.6), and was also recorded by the antiquarian Archdeacon Bonney in 1846 as formerly being in stained glass in the north chapel. Both coats of arms are also to be seen in other contexts within the church. However, rather than quartered they are impaled, that is the shield is divided into two halves vertically and each bearing takes half of the shield, the arms of the gentleman taking the dexter and that of his wife's family the sinister. They are set into what is an otherwise empty brass matrix of a man in armour and a lady, with a marginal inscription, in the floor of the chapel enclosed by the south parclose, and also appear on a boss in the south aisle.

The first of these two armorial bearings was held by the Angevine family, the most prominent inhabitants of Theddlethorpe from the end of the fifteenth, and throughout the sixteenth century. Although the second arms are given more prominence in the entire scheme, the placing of the Angevine arms in the first and fourth quarter of the shield on panel s13 identifies them as the main donors of the work. The stylised vine surrounding the arms on this panel is probably intended as a rebus or visual pun on the family name.

The descent of the Angevine family is known from the early fourteenth century: the first recorded member is a William Angevine, who was seated at Ashby-by-Horncastle in Lincolnshire and served as a juror at an inquisition in July 1331. Later in the century his son or grandson, another William, had acquired by purchase half of the patronage of All Saints' Church at Theddlethorpe, which he held jointly with a man called Lawrence Moigne. In 1380 the same William describing himself as 'of Theddlethorpe,' disputed the right of Revesby Abbey to present an incumbent to the living of West Keal where he held a manor. His son William appears to have been in the goldsmith's trade and to have built up considerable wealth. By marrying the heiress of Sir Andrew Leeke of Boston, William Angevine brought the arms of Leeke into the family: Argent a chief gules, over all a bend engrailed Azure, in sinister chief a fleur-de-lis Or, on a bend a mullet for difference. By the end of the fifteenth century the representative of the family, Michael Angevine of Theddlethorpe, held the manors of Theddlethorpe, West Keal and a further manor in Skegnness. By this date the resources of the family seated at Theddlethorpe in the fifteenth and sixteenth century were depleted in comparison to those their ancestors possessed in the mid fourteenth century, as major property holdings had passed to cadet branches. By the sixteenth century they were settled into the lower rank of the gentry and never attained high rank in county society.

Having established something of the background of the family, who are the most likely candidates among them for donorship of the screens? In order to ascertain this we need to examine the second coat of arms to narrow us down to a particular couple or era. There are really only two couples among the Angevine family that are chronologically compatible with the style of the screens. John Angevine, who died in 1572, and his wife Dorothy Holbeche; or their son William Angevine and his wife Cicely, daughter of Sir Christopher Hildyard of Wistead in Yorkshire. As the Hildyard family are known to have borne the arms Azure a chevron argent between three mullets or, which probably corresponds to the arms in Theddlethorpe A chevron between...
three roundels charged with a mullet, the second couple are
the likely candidates. Further weight is added to this
assumption, as there is no evidence of the Holbecke family
bearing arms.

We can now attempt to narrow down the possible time
frame for the construction of the screens. In the first instance
the laws of heraldry suggest that the screens must have post-
dated the marriage of William Angevine and Cicely Hildyard.
Unfortunately the date of the marriage of William Angevine
to Cicely Hildyard is unknown. However, a rough calculation
can be made based on other evidence. Cicely’s father, Sir
Christopher Hildyard, did not marry his second wife, Joan
Constable, Cicely’s mother until 1532, and died on active
service in France sometime between February and April of
1537. Cicely is thought to have been the fourth child of the
marriage, so her birth can probably be assigned to around
1537. This being established a date in the mid 1550s seems
quite likely for the marriage of Cicely to William Angevine,
when she would be in her late teens or early twenties. They
had probably been married a few years by 1562, for by that
year they had four children with a further child being born in
and around 1563. If we accept that the use of the Hildyard
arms by the Angevine family must post-date the marriage,
the screens must post-date that point as well. Thus they cannot
really be any earlier than the mid-1550s, and in fact cannot
be earlier than 1550.

An understanding of what this alliance represented socially
for the Angevine family explains the peculiar use of heraldry
giving prominence to the Hildyard arms. Though the marriage
brought no property it represented a rise up the social ladder
for the Angevine family. During his lifetime, Sir Christopher
Hildyard, Cicely’s father was a man of some substance with
influence in both Yorkshire and Lincolnshire; for example
he served as High Sheriff in both counties. The Angevine
family of Theddlethorpe failed to attain any office in this
period and were unlikely to have done so due to their relatively
low income. Sir Christopher also had influence at the court of
Henry VIII, serving as one of the King’s spears and seeing
active service in France in the company of the Duke of
Buckingham, and was knighted shortly before Anne Boleyn’s
coronation. The Hildyards also had much property in
Lincolnshire, and Cicely’s half brother Martyn, the eldest son
of Sir Christopher, was seated during his lifetime and after
his father’s demise at the family manor of Little Coates near
Grimsby. His presence there may have brought the Hildyards
in contact with the Angevines. A small part of the Hildyard
estate included property at Fulstow and Marshchapel, seven
miles north of Theddlethorpe, which formed part of the
inheritance of the powerful Lascelles family. The Lincolnshire
properties of the Hildyards dwarfed those of the Angevines
quite considerably. To use the Hildyard arms quartered, and,
more particularly unquartered, giving it prominence over their
own, is clear evidence of the obvious sense the Angevines
had that this was an important social match.

It is also interesting to note that quartering the Hildyard
arms in this way was against heraldic custom, as it suggests
that Cicely was an heiress when in fact she was not. The blazon
may have been used by mistake, or deliberately to emphasise
the importance of the match. As John Angevine, the father of
William Angevine, was still alive at this time it is probable
that he paid for the construction of the two screens to celebrate
his son’s alliance. However, it is possible that the two profile
heads flanking the Hildyard arms at panel n13 may represent
William and Cicely as donors, a secular image, replacing the
more usual late medieval image of a kneeling donor
juxtaposed with a standing saint. This perhaps illustrates the
secular purpose of the screens as vehicles for the expression of
social advancement. It is also likely that the brass matrix,
which still bears the impaled arms of both families,
commemorates William and Cicely. As well as being a useful tool in understanding how wealthy
patrons could utilise ecclesiastical art to advertise their social
and marital success, the heraldry suggests a date that has
implications for one aspect of Reform History. In religious
terms, the erection of these parclose screens defining side-
chaplars, bearing in mind the heraldic limitations on the date,
can only be sensibly tied down to the period 1553 to 1558,
that is the reign of Mary Tudor. It is improbable that screens
around side-chapels would be erected in the reign of
Edward VI. In Edward’s reign there was a swift movement
away from stone altars in favour of wooden tables, and side
altars of all descriptions were suppressed by Privy council in
November 1550, making parclose screens defunct. Indeed
most scholars believe that their removal was virtually universal
and began before this official legislation was set in place.
Neither can the screens date from the reign of Elizabeth I,
as side-altars were ordered to be removed without undue
destruction, which may explain the screens survival, but
cannot account for their erection. We have no evidence of
what existed in the place of these screens before they were
erected; perhaps parclose screens existed in the same place,
which were destroyed in Edward’s reign.

There are two alternatives open to us: either they were
erected in a position where screens did not previously exist,
or were updated models replacing existing screens. If either
of these hypotheses are correct, the screens have serious
implications on our understanding of the Marian restoration
of Roman Catholicism, and may reflect in Lincolnshire a
confidence in this process. The re-establishment of churches
that had been closed by intervening legislation of previous
rulers cannot have been rather limited and not to have taken in side altars, which
are thought to have been defunct both for ideological reasons and
for lack of priests to celebrate in them. The erection of
screens during this period would suggest that, in
Theddlethorpe at least, this was not the case. It may be that
further work on artistic patronage from this period may add
to the corpus of Marian art, and help us to understand more
fully what was going on in this period. If the image on the
northern parclose is intended to be the Baptist’s severed head, it
may also be worth bearing in mind whether there is another wooden panel
at n4 was installed as a replacement for a lost image, which
was no doubt destroyed in Edward VI’s reign.

The parclose screens in All Saints’ Church, Theddlethorpe,
deserve to be better known. They certainly have stylistic
significance as fine examples of the early influence of
continental derived forms on woodwork. However, it is hoped
that this article has demonstrated at least briefly that their
significance goes far deeper than this. They tell us something of
the utilisation of art as a vehicle for the public display of
the social achievements of the gentry within their parishes.
Also by carefully dating they are helpful in adding to our
understanding of the restoration of the trappings of the Roman
Catholicism in parish churches during the reign of Mary
Tudor.
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Notes
2. Clear comparisons can be made with the screens at Tetney, Marshchapel and South Somercotes.
3. The last and only previous article on the screens was little more than a two page note: E. Mansell-Symons, ‘Chantry Chapel Screens at Theddlethorpe All Saints Church’, Lincolnshire Notes and Queries 11 (1911) pp.161-62. In the absence of an east window the south chapel contains an interesting canopied niche in its east wall. It appears to date from the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century. There are similar niches at Theddlethorpe St Helen and Saltfleetby All Saints. The purpose of the niche is not known, but may have housed a statue or a reliquary. Altar slabs have also been reinstalled in both side chapels and still bear the remains of consecration crosses.
4. Theddlethorpe, Croft, Friskney and Winthorpe are examples of screens in the same position, they are all buildings of a similar scale. For an illustration of Winthorpe see: F. E. Howard & F. H. Crossley, English Church Woodwork A study in Craftsmanship during the Medieval Period 1250-1550, (London, 1917), p.221.
5. Only the western portion of the north screen is arranged symmetrically, with four bays on either side of the central doorway. Its southern portion has four bays to the left, with only three to the right. The western portion of the south parclose has the same arrangement, four bays to left and three to right, while its northern portion has three bays to the left and four bays to the right.
6. A numbering system has been adopted for the screens that will be used throughout the article. Each panel is given a number, and the sequence moves around from the eastern respond of the arcade toward the aisle wall. Panels are numbered ‘n’ or ‘s’ depending on whether they are of the north or the south parclose.
11. This paneling was removed from the Manor house when it was demolished in the 1890s, and was purchased in the 1920s by Sir Francis Hill. At present the whereabouts of the paneling are unknown. The details of the work are known from an engraving first published in 1898 in Lincolnshire Notes and Queries, T. R. Leach & R. Pacey, Lost Lincolnshire Country Houses, (Lincoln, 1992), vol.1, pp.27-30.
12. The extent of the restoration of this panel is clear in the illustration in: Mansell-Symons, Chantry Chapel Screens, p.160.
16. Lincoln, Lincolnshire County Archives, LCC Wills 1520-31, fol.106.
20. The work is recorded on the ledger slab in the Chancel of All Saints; it commemorates Mrs Newcomen who paid for the work.
21. This coat of arms has the following tincture: Argent, two bars Gules, on a chief Vert three bezants. B. Burke, The General Armory of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, (London, 1844), no pagination.
23. Brief note should be made of the shield of arms that occurs three times on the screens, it is a simple cross on a plain ground. It may be, although there is no evidence to support this, that this represents another Angesins alliance, or else may represent the cross of St George. No satisfactory answer for its presence can be given. It may be that there is some connection between this shield and the boss in the Nave with the instruments of the passion.
26. The crest of the family was ‘a vine vert, fructed proper’. Metcalf, Visitation of Lincoln, p.340.
29. By the early sixteenth century the manor of West Ashby had passed to a cadet branch of the family who established themselves at Hebdon in Yorkshire. Maddison, Notes and Queries, pp.3-4.
30. Azure a chevron between three mullets argent, was borne by the Hidyard family. B. Burke, The General Armory, no pagination.
32. Penny Hebesin-Barnes also made the connection between the marriage of William and Cecily and the heraldry on the screens, and concludes that the arms of Angesine formerly in stained glass in the north chapel were probably contemporary. P. Hebesin-Barnes, The Medieval Stained Glass of the County of Lincolnshire, Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi summary catalogue 3, (Oxford, 1996), p.335.
34. The brass matrix mentioned above is a bit of an anomaly. The brass indents appears to be that of a man in armour wearing a basinet, and appears to be from the middle of the fifteenth century. George Jeans suggested a date as early as c.1400. However, the cost of arms inset into the slab suggests a date between the mid and late sixteenth century, as it is the bearing of William and Cicely. It is possible that the brass was an earlier one, appropriated to cover the grave of William and Cicely, and made their own by the insertion of their achievement. There is another empty matrix in the same chapel that formerly held a marginal inscription and central achievement, which may have commemorated another member of the Angesine family. G. E. Jones, A List of the existing sepulchral brasses in Lincolnshire, (Hornsea, 1895), p.77.
35. The chancies act of 1547 removed the purpose of many side chapels. C. Haigh, English Reformation: Religion, Politic and Society Under the Tudors, (Oxford, 1993), p.171. The process of removing stone altars particularly those in side chapels was well under way before November 1550 when Privy Council ordered the removal of all altars and replacement with wooden tables. Robert Parkyn reported that north of the Trent altars were coming down but with much grudging. C. Haigh, English Reformation, pp.176-77.