

## ON KENTISH ROOD-SCREENS.

BY CANON SCOTT ROBERTSON.

THE rood-screens remaining in Kentish churches are not enriched with pictorial illumination, such as we find in Norfolk and Suffolk;\* nor crowned with graceful rood-lofts, like those at Banwell, Queen Camel, Trent, and other churches in Somersetshire, nor are they so numerous as those in Devonshire. Nevertheless, in thirty or more of our Kentish churches ancient rood-screens are still to be found; and good examples of parclose screens are numerous, throughout the county.

It is true that Shoreham Church is the only one in the county, wherein the screen is still crowned by the floor of its ancient rood-loft; but to several of the existing Kentish rood-screens, peculiar interest attaches. Few rood-screens in England rival in antiquity that in Northfleet Church, which is of the Decorated period. Few churches, again, have rood-screens which extend completely, and continuously, across the entire width of the nave and both its aisles, (like the wooden screen at Combe St. Nicholas in Somersetshire and the stone screen at Totnes, in Devon,) as do those at Eastchurch in Shepey, and Leeds near Maidstone. In both these Kentish screens, the upper part of each bay is not simply one pierced rectangular panel, but a group of four or more cusped and arched lights, surmounted by tracery, all combined within one embracing pointed arch; thus each bay resembles a good window, of four lights or more. This feature is notable not only at Eastchurch, Leeds, and Shoreham, but also at Tonge, Hernehill by Faversham, Hackington St. Stephens, Challock, Herne, and in such other Kentish screens as bear the most evident traces of having formerly been crowned with rood-lofts. Mr. Bloxam has called

\* "The number of screens [in Norfolk] which are gorgeously adorned, not only in the ordinary way, that is with rich colours in the tabernacle work, relieved by white and gold, but also with full length and very beautiful figures at the bases of the screens, is very remarkable," *e.g.*, at Trimmingham, Trunch, Worstede, Cawston, Aylsham, North Walsham, and Edingthorpe. (Geo. A. Poole, in *Yorkshire and other Associated Architectural Societies' Reports*, 1850-1, p. 97.)

attention to this window-like appearance, as a peculiarity of the screen at Leeds,\* but it is not unusual in Kent, nor in Somerset.

Ancient rood-screens still remain, *in situ*, in the churches of Wrotham, Chislehurst, Harrietsham, Boughton Blean, Wouldham, West Wickham, Erith, Stalisfield, Harty, Longfield, Cuxton, Smallhythe, Ryarsh, and Appledore, as well as in the churches already mentioned. At Iwade the screen, although not *in situ*, is still preserved in the south aisle. In the north aisle of Challock Church, and likewise in the north aisle of Herne Church, there is a screen of remarkably good design, the top of which bears indubitable traces of a rood-loft which has been removed. We know that there were such rood-lofts, in side aisles of some churches. In Ashford Church, for example, two such lofts were erected in A.D. 1472; one in the north aisle, and another in the south aisle.† A screen in the north aisle of the mother church of Shepey, at Minster, does not (I think) bear such evident traces of a loft. The Farningham rood-screen existed until the church was restored, about ten or twelve years ago, when it was removed. The lower panelling alone, but well carved, remains at Headcorn; and in Cliffe at Hoo. The chancel-screen at Wingham (destroyed about ten years ago) had never been a rood-screen. It was erected about A.D. 1682. At Ivychurch, and at Maidstone All Saints, the returned stalls of the choir divide the nave from the chancel, without any screen.

New chancel-screens, modelled from ancient rood-screens, have been inserted in the churches of Adisham, Frinsted, Rodmersham, Preston by Wingham, Cowden, Godmersham, and other parishes.

Among the numerous examples of Parclose screens in Kent, rare relics of Decorated woodwork remain at Upchurch and at Newington by Sittingbourne; others at Swanscombe and Old Romney are nearly as old. Later mediæval screen-work is found at Rainham, Dartford, Ightham, Herne, Murston, Chislehurst, Horsmonden, Biddenden, Cobham, East Peckham, Lamberhurst, St. Mary Cray, Staple, Gillingham, St. Nicholas at Wade, Rodmersham, Frinsted, and elsewhere.

\* Mr. Matthew H. Bloxam says: "In Leeds Church, Kent, the open screen-work resembles a series of pointed arched windows filled with mullions and tracery. This is the only instance of the kind I have met with in screenwork." (*Proceedings of Lincoln and Associated Architectural Societies for 1874*, vol. xii, p. 179.)

† William Whyte of Ashford by his will, dated November 6th, 1472, bequeathed 40s. "to the new work of the roodloft in the two aisles of the said church; 20s. for each aisle."

I am inclined to believe that a majority of the rood-lofts, which formerly existed in Kent, were erected during the fifteenth century, and many of them during the second half of it. The stair-turrets and doorways leading to rood-lofts, in very many churches, are evidently insertions made about that period. The wills of Kentish men, made during the same period, abound with bequests for the erection, or adornment, of such lofts.\*

After the accession of Queen Elizabeth, rood-lofts were for the most part destroyed. Some, however, remained at the time of the Archdeacon's Visitation in the year 1560; when the churchwardens "presented" that rood-lofts still stood in the churches of Faversham, Bishopsbourne, Goudhurst, Sandhurst, Brenzett, and Bidenden.

#### EASTCHURCH ROOD-SCREEN.

The screen at Eastchurch, which is shewn in the annexed plate, reduced from an admirable drawing by Mr. Edward J. Tarver, suffers greatly from the loss of its rood-loft. To supply, to some extent, the obvious lack, the present rector, Mr. Dickson, has caused a neat cresting to be affixed to the top beam. This screen is about 46 feet long, and consists of eleven unequal bays; five spanning the nave, and three across each aisle. Three of these bays are occupied by folding doors of the same pattern as the rest of the screen. Each bay consists of a pointed arch (springing from slender round shafts with moulded caps and bases), the upper part of which contains mullions and transomed tracery like a window. In each of nine bays, there are four lights, arched and five-cusped; surmounted by trefoiled triangles above which runs a transom, supporting minute, trefoiled, arches. Two bays, however, one on each side of

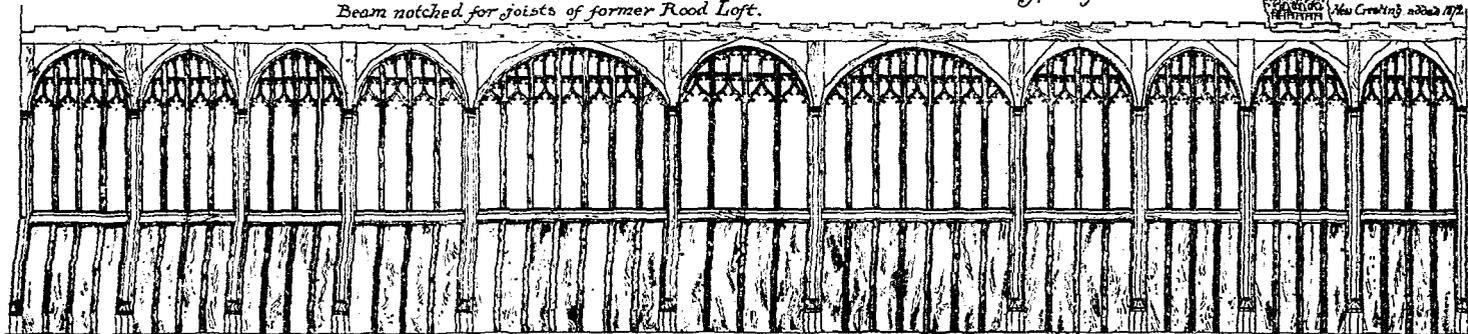
\* In 1464 William Saundrys of Elham left 20s. for the cost of painting "the roodeloft" there. William Dane of Throwley bequeathed 3s. 4d. towards making the roodloft in his parish church in 1471. Alexander Goddard of Murston, by his will, made in October 1473, left 6s. 8d. "to the work of the church there, videlicet le rodeloft." Robert Wybarn of Sittingbourne, on the 25th of January 1473-4, left directions for his feoffees respecting making in the parish church "one bastard roffe, or painting the rodeloft." The little church of Stone near Faversham, now a ruin in which the chancel walls seem to contain Roman masonry, possessed a roodloft, and to its reparation no less a sum than 40s. was bequeathed by Robert Lavender of Stone in his will made on the 24th of May 1474. The erection of aisle lofts at Ashford in 1472 is mentioned in the previous note. In 1488 John Fane of Tonbridge left 10 marks to the erection of a rood-loft provided it was built within two years. At the Visitation of Archbishop Warham, in 1511, the churchwardens of Hartlip "presented that John Adowne oweth to the painting of the roodloft £6." At Smarden a new rood-loft was made in 1508; and in the same year James at Well bequeathed 20s. "to the new paynting of the new roodlofts" at Wingham.

*The Parish Church of All Saints, Eastchurch, Sheppey*

*Rood Screen extending across Nave or Aisles.*

*Beam notched for joists of former Rood Loft.*

*New Casting added 1872*



*New folding Doors  
of Teak to distinguish them  
from the old Oak work.*

*Doors  
West Elevation*

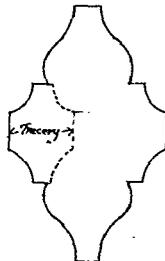
*Doors.*



*Edward J. Tarver. Arch. Surv.  
10 Gough Court, Charing Cross 1880*



*Section of Post.  
C<sup>o</sup> removed.  
Section*



*Plan of Muntin.*

*Posts 6 1/2 wide*

the central doors, are much wider than the rest; and their arches contain seven cinquefoiled lights, surmounted by tracery similar to that in the other bays. This feature of the Eastchurch screen is unique, in Kent. The Rev. R. Henry Dickson, the rector, has caused the whole screen to be put into thoroughly good order by Forsyth of London at a cost of £160, raised by subscription.

The Leeds screen, although it spans all three aisles, is not so handsome as that at Eastchurch. It has the same number of bays, but they are equal in width (or nearly so); and each is pierced with four lights only, surmounted by simpler tracery without transoms. At Tonge the screen across the chancel arch has remarkably good tracery, with sloping transoms in it, above the four lights of each bay; and the Hackington screen is similar, though its tracery is not so rich.

The more common character of screen, having simple rectangular panels pierced each with one cusped light, is found at Appledore, Ryarsh, and Smallhythe, where perhaps there were no rood-lofts.