CONCERNING CERTAIN DESIGNS IN SCREENS AND
STALLWORK FOUND IN THE BORDERLAND OF
ENGLAND AND WALES *

By Fred. H. Crossley, F.S.A.

"Rarely, rarely, comest thou,
Spirit of Delight!
How shall ever one like me
Win thee back again?"

SHELLEY.

A n interesting field for comparison in design and construction may be made between the screenwork and lofts found in the Principality and those in the English counties bordering upon Wales. In how far these were correlated or were antagonistic in their ideals, outlook, methods and traditions forms a subject which at times is as suggestive as it is illuminating. A careful analysis of the setting out, the interpretation of the detail, and the general treatment of the work denotes that the Celt and the Saxon had really but little in common; the former was imaginative, unbound by convention and free both in thought and inspiration, whereas the latter was entirely governed by architectural formulas and regulations, these contrasting differences being strongly marked in their finished productions.

The configuration of the country was an essential factor in the particular form of design employed in Welsh woodwork, for the average Welsh church was of simple character, and except in the south where English influence was stronger, was commonly a rectangular building, without architectural division between nave and chancel, generally aisleless, untramelled by the fashions of the mediæval styles (until the advent of the restoring architect). A mountainous country, the churches small and scattered, sometimes placed within a village, sometimes not, the exterior often

* See also Vol. 84, 1912, Ancient Screens of Cheshire by A. Wolfgang; Vol. 89, 1918, Church Screens of Cheshire by Fred. H. Crossley; Arch. Camb. 1943, 44, 45, Screens and Lofts in Wales by Fred. H. Crossley.
white-washed, set in a grove of yews. The interior was dominated by the timbered division between nave and chancel, stretching across the building and occasionally reaching to the wall-plates of the roof. During the 15th and 16th centuries the loft grew in importance, becoming the chief ornament and enrichment of the church, with the screen simply the framework upon which it was built. The lowliness of the churches was responsible for the horizontality of the screenwork, which in Wales is constructed with cill and head-beam; between the two are placed four posts or standards, one on each side of the doorway, and one either side the walls, whilst between them is wainscoting having a deep middle rail into which the mullions are dowelled which divide the screen into bays. Underneath the floor of the loft is a soffit or a cove, but never a vault, which if found in Wales denotes English craftsmanship. We may therefore consider a Welsh screen to be of rectangular form, built of sturdy posts and crossbars forming a strong frame upon which the overhanging loft was built.

The subject matter detailed upon the Welsh screens, particularly that carved upon the trails, has a long tradition behind it; the vine, the water-plant and the pomegranate, stretch back to Greek mythology, and by what devious ways they reached the mediæval screens of Wales we do not know. The vine, emblem of the resurrection of the earth from the frozen winter, the water-plant, from whose stems Pan fashioned his pipes, growing in streams haunted by the dryad and nymph, and the pomegranate whose seeds held not only the element of sleep but of death, all these are much in evidence in the work of the 15th and 16th century carvers. The Rev. J. E. Newell in his history of the Welsh church tells us that "it must of course be admitted that all early Christianity was Greek, that the British church from its isolated position was conservative of primitive practices and ignorant of later Latin usages, and that furthermore, the British Easter and other peculiar customs were primitive and old fashioned, not Eastern!" The Welsh treatment of plant form also goes back to the Celtic twilight, the arrangement of the plaited stalk and the twisted tendril have a close connection with the intricate patterns cut upon the Runic crosses, as well as limned in the Pre-conquest illuminated manuscripts. The
Some Cheshire Tracery Heads

From the Astbury Rood Screen

Malpas. Brereton Chantry. W.

Northendon. Honford Chantry.
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presence of mythical beasts, dragons, wyvern and amphisbaena have the same genesis, connected with dank caverns, dark forests, and secluded glens. It is common to find the main stem of a trail issuing from the mouth of one of these monsters, some depicted as scaly, winged and horned, or with a long twisted tail having a second head at the end of it. These trails contained other material beside plant form and mythical beasts, for they were occasionally employed to portray the legends attending the presiding saint as at Pennant Melangell where various incidents in the life of St. Melangel are dotted amidst the convolutions of the vine trail. This charming mood was far from exceptional, but unhappily the majority of existing examples noted at the commencement of the 19th century have been swept away during the general clean up which has since taken place, and we have now to rely upon the descriptions of earlier writers, often sparse, obscure and unenlightening.

With the Montgomeryshire centre of screen making is found another free form in the abandonment of architectural restraint when applied to the design of tracery heads. These assume a deep fringe of filigree carving taken across the screen, in preference to the architectural convention of an individual head, having two, three or four archlets below the tracery, in place of an ogee-curved arch, flanked on either side above with grid lights. The patterning thus evolved is of infinite variety, and when we reach the late series of perforated panels composing the decoration upon the eastern side of the loft parapet at Llanegryn Merioneth, we discover in them a sampler of intricate designs, whimsical, fanciful, original and wholly delightful. In Wales there are several different types of screenwork emanating from centres widely apart, but ranging in time through the 15th and 16th centuries, some of a flamboyant character, others more restrained, some even dull and without interest, but usually bearing the impress of an undisciplined though often inspired mind, especially such centres as the one in Montgomeryshire which produced the most original and colourful screens of which any remains now exist. If we compare such work with that found along the English side of the Marches, we at once realize how seldom the English craftsman exceeded the bounds of propriety, and however elaborately he might decorate his structure,
he always kept it within well defined limits. This view is amply confirmed when we come to examine the screenwork of the South-west of England, East Anglia, the Midlands and the great Yorkshire school. These, though diverse in construction and in detail, remain alike in principle, bound by architectural laws and precepts which defined the limits of both the buildings and their contents. The native church buildings of Wales, however, were without architectural significance, and if in some ways they lost through the lack of it, they otherwise gained immeasurably in freedom and initiative.

It has elsewhere been quite satisfactorily demonstrated that the screens and stallwork found in the churches of Britain were not made either by the monks of the convents, by travelling gilds of craftsmen or by individual effort but in the main were the product of certain defined centres, furnishing shops, call them what you will, who in medieæval times made and distributed their wares, sometimes far and wide, as the shop in the West Riding of Yorkshire who placed a screen in Mobberley church in 1500, or the Montgomeryshire centre who did the same at Daresbury, both churches in Cheshire. With the Suppression unhappily obliterating the church furnishing trades, the localities of these various centres where they worked have been lost; however "by their works ye shall know them," and we are able to group certain of them by their style and idiosyncrasies. The Rev. J. S. Purvis, F.S.A., has through documentary evidence located an important centre at Ripon, whose work was spread through the west and north Ridings of Yorkshire as well as into Lancashire; other centres remain to be documented in the future. From close comparison of cutting and lay-out together with historical data it is possible to correlate the work of different centres, and we are upon sound ground in placing an important furnishing shop in the neighbourhood of Ludlow with perhaps another at or near Cirencester. The first extended its activities into North Wales, Lancashire, Cheshire and Herefordshire in addition to Shropshire; the second covering parts of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester. As we have noticed, at least two firms took their wares into Wales, not however to the natives, but to Englishmen stationed in important positions under the English kings. These screens, some of which remain in situ, had little influence upon
Welsh design for they were resolutely cold-shouldered and ignored. Work from the Ludlow centre may be found at Aber Conwy, Gresford and Chirbury priory now at Montgomery. We may reasonably infer that they were responsible for the stalls and screenwork once within the Stanley churches at Holt, Holyhead, Mold, Ruthin and Wrexham. The Cirencester or Gloucestershire firm show considerable remains in Herefordshire and Worcestershire; the screen at old Radnor is their work, and matches the mutilated example in Cirencester church. There are English screens at Usk priory, Monmouth, and Clynnog Fawr, Caernarvonshire. However, with the exception of certain districts in Radnorshire and an adjoining bit in Montgomeryshire, English influence is of the slightest in the development of Welsh woodwork and design.

An examination of the woodwork from the Ludlow centre suggests that they had one or two Welsh carvers upon their staff, for there is more than an inkling of it in the treatment of specialized detail. It is remarkable that of the three sister screens situated at Gresford (Denbigh), Astbury (Cheshire), and Hughley (Shropshire), the Denbighshire example is English in every particular, and the other two in England have Welsh detail howbeit they remain English in construction. There is little doubt that when woodwork came to be commissioned, the principal donor would have a controlling voice in deciding its provenance, type and style and would choose something which had pleased him when seen elsewhere, otherwise how shall we account for a Yorkshire screen placed in a Cheshire church, except by a direct order from the Talbots, or a fine example of the Montgomeryshire centre found in Daresbury church? We have noted that English work with the exception of Radnorshire made little impression upon the Welsh borderland; we will now examine how far this applied in reverse. There were direct importations from both countries, in Wales by English Constables in charge of walled towns and castles; this, however, does not apply to Welsh screens found in England as at Daresbury, St. Margaret's, Hereford, or Llanfair Waterdine in Salop. Apart from direct importations we find that the construction of screenwork remains English but in several cases part of the detail is in the Welsh mode. The English side therefore unlike the Welsh showed no antipathy to Welsh ideas, though when the English
ASTBURY, CHESHIRE: PARCLOSE SCREENS TO CHANCEL

BLORE RAY, STAFFORDSHIRE: NORTH CHAPEL SCREEN

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found in the Borderland of England and Wales.

craftsmen actually essayed a copy of Welsh carving their work lacked the charm and freedom of expression of the work they emulated. The trails of water-plant and vine found upon the Gloucestershire screens at Fairford and Rendscomb are thin and wiry compared to the easy flow and juicy stalkage suggested at Llannano or Newtown. The borderland does show an interplay of ideas and methods from Welsh to English in detail, however rarely constructional, and often empirical and slight, similar to the Renaissance detail placed upon English construction found at Foy and Llandinabo in Herefordshire.

It is however in the lesser screenwork which has survived along the English border counties that Welsh detail is more noticeable, parclose and fence screens dividing the chancel from the side chapels, or placed before chantries; this is particularly the case in Cheshire, and is to be found at Astbury, Barthomley, Cheadle, Malpas and Northenden, and even as far afield as Blore Ray in Staffordshire. The true Welsh dislike of repetition for its own sake (repetition being a commonplace in English work), is to be found in the tracery heads of the above mentioned screens; often each separate head was designed with a different motive, and nevertheless was in harmony with the rest. The suggested deep fringe in place of the individual light is also demonstrated. These varied conceits are given prominence in the side screens at Astbury and the chapel screens at Cheadle and Northenden; in the main lights at Astbury and at Hughley in Shropshire; in the carved and sometimes perforated carving enriching the wainscoting at Astbury, Barthomley, and Hughley. A Cheshire characteristic is a fondness for carved inscriptions, used for decorating either the head-beam or the middle rail of a screen, as at Cheadle, Malpas, Mobberley and Northenden, and even in the hilly fastnesses of Shropshire at Llanfair Waterdine where the inscription is in Welsh; or the carved rebus, a device forming a pun upon a man's surname, originating in the canting or allusive heraldry of earlier days. There is an example of this at Cheadle in the screen surrounding the Brereton chapel where there is a curious trail of the briar interspersed with barrels or tuns, designating the word Brereton.

Welsh tracery, however, included more than simple patterning either of tracery or free ornament; at Llanrwst a tracery head is
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FRAGMENTS OF CHESTER CATHEDRAL SCREENWORK
(from Brandon's Analysis of Gothic)
designed as an oak branch, with small piglets eating acorns amongst the branches. Another contains the grouped Emblems of the Passion, and two others have branches of the vine. These whimsies are rarely followed in English work except intermittently; there is an instance at Astbury of a single head composed of the vine, and at Northenden are a pair of tumblers with a monkey sitting upon a pot. Welsh work, however, is the more adventurous, virile and gay compared with the English equivalent, the latter a reflection of order maintained through variable conditions, and with a sense of responsibility. The beasts, birds, dragons, legends of the saints and of the chase; the figures peeping through the foliage of the vine, the hawthorn and the oak, all of which we find so exciting and lively in Welsh carving, never go further in English work than regimented birds used heraldically as a repeat as at Astbury and Hughley but never as an individual motive.

Unhappily there is now scant material for our analysis and comparison, for the major portion of screenwork has suffered eclipse. Of the screen at Daresbury a few carved panels from the soffit remain; at Runcorn some tracery heads from the wainscot of the old screen; Stoak has a little panelling in the west gallery; otherwise as at Thornton-le-Moors even the sites have been defaced and obscured, the staircases abolished, the tympanums destroyed, and new stone arches have been inserted where formerly screen and tympanum divided nave from chancel. Many have disappeared in Cheshire, as instance Daresbury, Mobberley, Runcorn, Prestbury, Thornton-le-Moors and Wilmslow. A tympanum remains at Baddiley and part of one renewed at Brereton, otherwise the restorers have made a clean sweep. In Chester Cathedral, until the year 1845 there remained a fine parclose screen in one of the quire arches; this was taken down and broken up, but before that happened Charles Brandon made a drawing of six tracery heads. A few years since some modern stallwork was unearthed from what was in those days known as the black hole at the east end of the north quire aisle, and upon their panelled backs was the missing tracery from the destroyed screen; the stalls are now placed in the nave for the use of the nave choir. These traceries are composed of twelve arched heads with intricate designs, six upon each side. Though of geometrical design they are flamboyant in their treatment.
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CHESTER CATHEDRAL: FRAGMENTS FROM DESTROYED SCREEN
NOW USED IN NAVE CHOIR STALL BACKS
the alternate sides of each head do not of necessity match, nor are any two designs quite alike; they are completed below either in an ogee cusped head or two arches, in one case three, some of semi-circular form, others pointed possessing a close affinity to Welsh work. In the new church at Runcorn are a series of small tracery heads, now enriching the stall fronts in the chancel; they are of diverse patterning similar in treatment to the larger ones at Chester. They have been taken from the mediaeval screen and show distinct Welsh influence.

To develop our theme it is necessary to analyse the motives employed upon the screens already mentioned; this may prove a little tedious to the uninitiated, they however have the illustrations to help them, for the pictures are intended to point a moral as well as adorn a tale; the analysis will be made as short and explicit as may be. We must take in order the tracery of the heads, the designs upon the middle rails and the wainscot panelling both of the main and the lesser screens, together with a description of Welsh imported screenwork as it exists today, completing our survey with a glimpse of the work of the Ludlow centre as far as we have been enabled to trace it. In the two Rood screens at Astbury and Hughley the tracery, though principally of a geometric character, is varied from bay to bay, and in both screens the heads are completed below by four small cusped archlets, sometimes pointed, at other times semi-circular. The tracery is closely woven in its patterning, having small openings. At Hughley one light has two circles with quatrefoils, in another an arcade of three in place of four arches; at Astbury however the heads approach conformity. In both screens the boarding is thin, carved upon one side, the tracery set too high Welsh fashion, and suggests more a band than individual heads. The one head of the vine is cleverly thought out, but somewhat marred in that the lower edges have been broken away.

The parclose screens show much variety of patterning. The ones surrounding the Lady Chapel at Malpas, now called the Brereton chapel, have at least four different motives in the heads. They are completed below either with an ogee, a double shallow arc, or a segment of one, this interspersed with five cusps. One type has solid carved spandrels, another has open ones. Two are placed beneath a semi-circle with fillings sufficiently
delicate to suggest samples for embroidery. Two others have squared tops, one with brattishing half way up, the other plaited in ovals. In the screens surrounding the Cholmondeley chapel there are at least ten designs displaying no lack of invention, each with an ogee arch below, rarely true to form. The strange screen at Blore Ray in Staffordshire has eight tracery heads all individual, finishing below in cusped ogees while above several exotic conceits are tried out.

When Northenden is reached the carving is cut upon boarding not more than half an inch in thickness. The lower ogee arch has disappeared, and the heads finish below either as a border of lacework or in a horizontal line. There are ten variations of closely patterned carving cut upon one side, displaying a delicate and uncanny instinct in the manipulation of material. In the parclose screens at Astbury a horizontal line is introduced which completely banishes the idea of individual heads; the effect is both unusual and attractive, cut as it is upon one side. The basely mutilated and malignantly maltreated chantry screen round the Brereton chantry chapel in Cheadle church remains perhaps the most fascinating of them all. Below the head-beam holding the trail of the briar and the tun, was originally curious head tracery, composed of four small quatrefoils forming a larger one, the repeat filled in at the corners with cusped ogees; the larger quatrefoils having a leaf placed in the centre of each unit. This amusing design has been stripped from its context, turned upside down, and used as a filling for a double wainscot rail, the original material destroyed. That this melancholy exhibition should be given countenance by the church authorities speaks little for their intelligence, good taste or sense of responsibility to look after the treasures of the church. This particular design in its tracery has eliminated the horizontal lines below, and has splendidly picked up the Welsh idiom, re-vivifying it and introducing a new form.

The adaptation of Welsh motives in the work along the English border counties is further particularized in the perforated carving employed upon the wainscot, again cut upon thin boarding and placed in the upper half of the panelling. We find it at Astbury, both in the Rood Screen and the parclose; at Hughley, Barthomley and Stoak, the majority in Cheshire. In this work
MALPAS, CHESHIRE: BRERETON CHAPEL SCREEN

NORTHENDEN, CHESHIRE: CHAPEL SCREEN

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BARTHOMLEY, CHESHIRE: WAINSCOT OF SCREEN

ASTBURY, CHESHIRE: WAINSCOT OF PARCLOSE SCREENS

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we find the patterning extraordinarily minute in its detail. The openings are formed by ten to a dozen tiny grid-lights, having elaborated window tracery, sometimes transomed, or with two rows of enriched quatrefoils. The perforated enrichment is carried across each panel of the screen in the woodwork at Astbury, Hughley and Barthomley; the last mentioned design being deeper and more open than the others. It is further enriched with solid carving upon the middle rail also up the muntins. Other middle rails share in this type of ornament, separate quatrefoils at Hughley with a second row above; and upon the main screen at Astbury where the carving is continuous. At Stoak now in the west gallery are a few genuine panels having perforated grid-tracery similar in design to those found upon the eastern parapets at Llanwnog, Llanrwst and Llandderfel, and were probably used for a like purpose. At Blore Ray are a series of planted on heads placed on the wainscot panels, each panel sub-divided; they are fanciful and a little weird in design with a slight resemblance to the panelling at Llanfair D.C. The middle rail has a wondrous example of strapwork reminiscent of the Welsh plaited tendrils, probably intended for Stafford knots. Betley in Staffordshire has a chantry chapel screen, a simplified version of Barthomley, having the same type of blind tracery upon the standards, which also figure upon the wooden pulpit at Marbury in South Cheshire.

Screens imported from Wales to England are at St. Margaret's and were at Daresbury, with probable additions to the list at Runcorn, Stoak, Llanfair Waterdine, and Llanyblodwel; some however are in so fragmentary a condition as to make it impossible to arrive at a conclusive statement. The best preserved is the screen at St. Margaret's in Herefordshire; it is actually now a loft without a screen, placed before the east wall of the nave and crossing the 12th century round-headed small chancel opening. A beam at low level is taken across the full width of the church against the east wall and is used as the springer for the coving built up with two horizontal ribs and fifteen vertical ones dividing the cove into forty-two square panels; where the ribs intersect are carved bosses surrounded by crows' feet. The bressummer-beam supporting the parapet is strengthened beneath by two strong posts or standards linable with the chancel opening and forming an advance screen of three bays. These posts are oc-
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tagonal in shape, having carved spandrels placed beneath the bressummer. The posts are enriched by diagonal buttressing and between each runs a carved upright trail. Near the head of each post they are cut back to form a niche with elaborate canopies formed of pinnacles and cusped arches. The beam against the wall in addition to top and drop crestings is adorned with an oak trail; the bressummer beam has two trails, the upper the vine, the lower one a twisted leaf circling a stem from which foliage sprouts, the crestings much renewed. The parapet front is now composed of plain panelling divided by moulded muntins, twenty panels across originally enriched with carved canopied nichework similar to the ones now upon the posts. The top or Rood-beam has also a dainty trail, its cresting broken or missing. Behind the loft are three panels painted with the Decalogue. When Mr. W. M. Dodson visited the screen in 1905 he remarked "the screen was restored about five years ago and is very harmoniously painted in white, yellow ochre, and light red. The back of the screen is the chancel wall, the staircase going up in the north-west corner of the chancel, the floor of the loft being solid. Before the restoration there were evidently stone altars upon the west side of the screen, as one a facsimile of Patrishow has been moved against the east wall, almost touching the north end of the present altar. The two canopied brackets upon the western posts supporting the bressummer are a jumble and a modern make-up. When examined it was found that the two canopies were old, taken from the front of the loft, the sides were the division boards used to separate the niches, and the remainder bits of cornice enrichments from the screen. They are exceedingly fragile, tacked on lightly without any care or thought. Behind and above the loft the wall has been boarded, for the mortise holes for a tympanum remain along the beams into which the planking was originally fitted."

The destroyed screen at Daresbury was more glorious. All that is left of it are thirty-four panels, fifteen inches square and half an inch in thickness, completely filled with perforated carving of a free geometrical patterning showing eleven distinct designs. These squares now do duty as a panelling for the east end of the sanctuary and for a low chancel screen to the new building; they once formed the western soffit of a similar screen to those
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reputable examples at Llananno Radnor, Llanwnog Montgomery, and until the 19th century at Newtown and Llanidloes. The designs show a strong and vigorous mastery both of material and its execution, and when placed in their correct position would form an imposing coved roof beneath the loft floor. Ormerod, who might easily have given to us valuable information, was not interested, and contented himself with the remark that there were the remains of a rich screen and loft closed above. Glynne entirely fails to note it. We have however sufficient material to know exactly the type of screen Daresbury once possessed, with its niched and canopied loft parapet, many carved enrichments and the remains of the soffit which is now the chief interest in Daresbury church. We cannot but deplore the mistaken zeal which destroyed the old church and its contents, to give us just another sample of Victorian gothic.

The mother church at Runcorn suffered an even worse fate, being rebuilt in the forties of the 19th century. Of the screen Ormerod writes, “The chancel is divided from the nave by a handsome carved screen, over which is a Rood-loft.” Glynne, who saw it before its destruction, says of it, “Between nave and chancel is a fine wood screen with tracery and niches and bands of leaves and flowers.” This well describes the Welsh type of screen, notably the niches and bands of leaves and flowers. The screen vanished with the church, a small portion being saved to decorate the fronts of the new stalls. These are tracery heads, 11 1/2 inches in width, 10 inches in depth and 1 1/2 inch in thickness, and are material saved from the old screen wainscot. This was planned in four bays upon either side of a wide central doorway, the heads of the bays having elaborate tracery, and the bressummer with at least four bands of enrichment. Twenty tracery heads remain showing eight different designs. They have flattened ogee arches below with a slightly pointed arch above, one complete and two halves. The variation of patterning with a single exception is not extensive, however one head has two circles carved with intertwined triangles or parallel lines forming most intricate and ingenious designs. An old picture depicts the screen with a Georgian parapet with the Royal arms placed in the centre, the latter still within the church. The screen at Stoak was destroyed along with the main part of the building in 1828. The
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few panels remaining in the parapet of the west gallery no doubt originally formed part of the eastern parapet of the loft, which in Post-reformation times often became the front to the new western gallery as was probably the case at Stoak.

At Llanyblodwel near Oswestry is a church screen which by its form suggests a combination of English and Welsh idioms. It was restored early in the 19th century by the Rev. John Parker whose artistic pencil delineated so many examples of screenwork in Wales since destroyed. While vicar at Llanyblodwel he employed an old carver named Thomas Jones "who worked for years at the vicarage and upon the pews and chancel of the church."
The chancel screen is set out in ten compartments, four bays upon either side the central doorway, the whole measuring roughly eighteen feet, the total height being eight. The standards of the door and wall run through Welsh fashion, the intermediates dowelled into the middle rail. The tracery heads are of a uniform design with semi-circular tops and solid carved spandrels; the tracery is sub-divided, having two lower archlets to each head. The head-beam retains an enrichment upon either side, a trail composed of the vine interspersed with animals and birds, amongst which is a hare. The screen is undistinguished with no outstanding individuality, though it may once have been an excellent piece of work when complete with its loft.

At Llanfair Waterdine in the Salopian hills are the remains of a screen destroyed, portions of which are now made up into altar rails, and what is left is both odd and curious. The church was hauled down in 1854 under the specious excuse that the roof was out of repair. There was a south aisle to the old church divided from the nave by a timber arcade. The piers were of oak, the capitals designed with men's heads which appeared to bear the weight of the arcade upon the backs of their necks. The timbering from the church, including parts of the screen, is said to have been used in making the furniture and fittings of a non-existent vicarage. The altar rails in the new church measure seventeen feet in length; they are built up with short lengths of carved timber forming both a cill and a head; the mullions or uprights between are well moulded and are spaced about thirteen inches apart, the doorway twenty-eight inches in width having a head rail. The unexpected and rare thing about this work is
VIEW EAST OF THE OLD CHURCH AT RUNCORN, DESTROYED 1849

ST. MARGARET'S, HEREFORD: DETAIL OF THE COVING AND BRESSUMMER

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that the carving is cut in the solid and no carving has been planted on; further it is carved equally upon both the east and western sides. The foliage is designed as long narrow serrated leaves either twisting gradually or crossed, and interspersed with crude representations of a pomegranate of more than one type. Amidst the foliage animals are carved, dragons, deer, pigs, a hare, rabbits and dogs, with the addition of a lion. Upon one upright of the doorway is the figure of a lady in a pedimental head-dress holding a book in her hands, while below her is the head of a bearded man, the whole a bewildering huddle of material, impossible in its present state to classify. Upon the rail across the doorway opening is an inscription in Welsh using a hieroglyphical alphabet, starting with a hand with a pointing finger well portrayed. It has been interpreted by the late Sir John Rhys, a learned Celtic scholar, as follows, "Sir Matthe and Meyrick Pichgar of Clun set it [namely the screen] up for ten pounds altogether." The late Aymer Vallance informs us that the clue afforded by the name of the priest Matthew, indicates that the work was executed between the years 1485 and 1520.

Apart from screens imported into Wales we find the only English evidence upon Welsh work is in a corner of Radnorshire at Bugeildy and the adjoining churches of Heyhop and Cascob. Llangurig in Montgomery (now destroyed) partook of the same characteristics. The Bugeildy screen has a series of narrow uniform lights, the bressummer supported upon strong posts forming an outer screen of three bays. Under the floor of the loft is a cove steeply curved now placed upon both sides, the western one new; it has furthermore the solid wainscoting below. These constructional features are found at Burghill, Eyett and Kenderchurch in Hereford, and are consistent both as to style and type. At Michaelchurch on the Radnorshire border is a church and screen harshly restored, the latter having every appearance of being a direct importation from Hereford, that is if we are to judge by its tracery and mouldings, the former reproducing the well known narrow ogee central cusped arched head, with lesser arches divided from it upon either side, accompanied by grid tracery. The head-beam of the screen is new and entirely wrong; in spite however of mutilation and falsification, the screen bears the stamp of English work. It would seem that the mountainous
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Brereton Chantry Screen

Reconstructed. F.H. Crossley 1916

Cheadle, Cheshire
border county of Radnor differs from most of Wales in its early toleration of English ways, for it shows a distinct leaning to English methods and speech, and its church services have from early times been conducted in the English tongue, which under no circumstances was to be found in other parts of the Principality.

We have now to examine the output of what we have termed the Ludlow centre, a workshop of major importance when we consider the extent of their labours still scattered through four English counties and three Welsh ones; work distinguished for its freshness of outlook, dexterity in design as well as its capacity in execution, covering a wide range of material in stall and screenwork both conventual and parochial, in which often a touch of Welsh genius is to be found wedded to the more sober and solid achievements of the English craftsmen, a fascinating alembic of thought and artifice used to excellent purpose, which has left an unmistakable mark upon its products.

It is in the methods employed in the cutting of the details and in their setting out, as well as in the grouping of particular mouldings, which give a clue as to how we should classify the source of much pre-Reformation woodwork; some small twist of thought, or turn of wrist in using of gouge and chisel, which is peculiar to certain screens and stallwork found in different districts, denotes a common origin; it is in the tracing and analysing of these small tell-tales that it is possible to realise their close relationship. However it must first be stated how Ludlow came to be associated with the idea of its importance as a centre of shop furnishing. When the first-born son of Henry VII, Prince Arthur, was fifteen years of age and about to be married to Katherine of Aragon, his father presented him with Ludlow castle as a residence and made him lord of the Marches. He was married in 1501, unhappily living but four months after that event, dying at Ludlow and thereby changing the course of English history. His friend, Sir Richard Pole, had earlier been the Constable of Ludlow castle and was later transferred to Aber Conwy, where he remained until his death. The screen in Aber Conwy church, despite much ill-usage, is as entertaining as it is important, for it tells us by its symbolism that it was erected by Sir Richard Pole and was intended to commemorate the marriage of his friend Prince Arthur. Upon its western side the carved trails are those found in the Borderland of England and Wales. 79
of the Rose and the Pomegranate, the badges respectively of the Prince and his Consort; interpersed amongst these trails are the badges of the Prince; the Prince of Wales feathers, the dragon of Cadwaladr, the greyhound current and gorged; also the Royal badges of the falcon and fetterlock, the Tudor rose and the port-cullis. In addition to these badges is an eagle’s claw holding a silver fish, the badge of Sir Richard Pole, and this is several times repeated; further the pendants to the hanging tester of the screen are carved as barbicans with bartizans, the first tricked out with crenelles or loops of varying pattern, an allusion to Pole’s authority as Constable of Conwy castle. The screen being closely allied to both Sir Richard Pole, Prince Arthur and Ludlow, it is proper to examine the ecclesiastical woodwork as it stands in Aber Conwy church. There is for instance a peculiarity in the design of certain stall-ends; upon their outside of the poupee head, placed low between the wings, is a shallow rounded niche which once contained a minute figure, possibly of metal. The one other place where this peculiarity is to be found is in the stallwork in Ludlow church. As a precedent for the unusual design of the screen we may refer to that in front of the Lady chapel at Ludlow but a little earlier in date.

Having transferred our attention to Ludlow through its stall-ends, and continuing our examination of its woodwork, we find that in spite of excessive restoration the panelling placed behind the stalls is in its design closely connected with that of Chirbury priory now at Montgomery and at Leintwardine originally from Wigmore abbey; neither of these two sets however being as ornate, they are simpler in their treatment, though embodying the same lay-out, and are in fact more beautiful in their comparatively chaste design and delightful unity. We have no direct evidence that the stalls at Ludlow were made within the town, except for a statement that in the year 1447 men sent from Ludlow to Bristol were commissioned to purchase a hundred planks to make the stalls of the church, which were paid for by the Gild of St. John belonging to the town, which certainly suggests an origin for the work. The poupee heads at Leintwardine and the misericords from both sets have in their design a relationship with other woodwork emanating from this workshop. This is manifest in the stallwork at Tong, Salop. There is a difference, but it is the
difference between a conventual and a parochial design. At Tong the poupee heads have figures as at Leintwardine, some of the "baberies" echoing the ones from Montgomery, Leintwardine, and Ludlow. Another essential point is in the treatment of the stall elbows, which are modelled as standing angels, the wings laid back to form the upper part of the elbow rest, the feet placed upon the lower capping; they depict several orders of the heavenly hierarchy. In only four instances are full length angels employed as elbow rests, and those at Beverley St. Mary by their format obviously belong to a different school. There remain therefore Tong in Shropshire, Gresford in Denbighshire, and Halsall in Lancashire, the last two being interchangeable. When we survey the mouldings we find the main cappings on the top of the seating are likable, and to these we may add the parochial stalls at Astbury, Cheshire, which though quite simple are unmistakably from the same shop. The brackets of the misericords at Gresford, Halsall and Tong have an unusual heavy group of mouldings round the top rim, and the same convention is used for joining up the side subjects, together with the employment of a curious frilled bell flower with a hanging clapper. Finally at Gresford and Tong the stall-ends not only have poupee heads with figure-work, but the carved designs cut upon the face sides of those placed upon either side of the entrance to the chancel are the same in both sets, and the eastern ends also conform. Unhappily the stall-ends at Halsall have been dismembered and are no longer evidence. We may then state with authority that the four sets of stalls came from one workshop and are allied to others; having gained this point we are enabled to transfer our attention to the screenwork, comprising four screens showing the same type of vaulting, with possibly a fifth in the mutilated screen at North Lydbury. The four, Astbury in Cheshire, Gresford in Denbighshire, Hughley in Shropshire and Aymestrey in Herefordshire although widely distributed are all sister screens.

They partake of the same English constructive lay-out, in which each division becomes a standard running through from cill to head, the wainscot subdivided into two or three panels. With the exception of Gresford the middle rail is a solid member carved, upon its western side with quatrefoils. The Gresford middle rail matches the one at Aber Conwy in being double, with an open
carved frieze between. The doorways above have a cross-bar on to which the intermediate standard rests, that is with the exception of Aymestrey, which shows a peculiar lateness in design, the standards being thin, the wainscot enriched with linen-fold carving and the front with a drop tester below the bressummer as at Aber Conwy. The wainscot and the head tracery at Astbury and Hughley match; the head tracery at Aymestrey, Gresford and Middleton Salop, are alike; the important evidence however is found beneath the floor of the loft. Upon the eastern side is a cove or soffit, but upon the west is a vault, or rather a combination of cove with lierne vaulting, a unique design, based upon a stellar ornament which is placed in the centre of each bay of the vaulting, and from which twelve ribs either radiate or meet. The stellar ornament is composed of two parallel ribs placed both horizontally and vertically, crossing each other and forming a large quatrefoil, having five compartments. These are enriched with cusps producing small quatrefoils or trefoils, each set treated a little differently. Aymestrey and Gresford are almost identical, as are Astbury and Hughley. In all these screens the standards have a boutell placed before them, completed above by an elaborate octagonal capping from which seven ribs spring. This innovation in lierne vaulting is not found elsewhere in England, and though the four screens having this peculiarity are placed in four different counties, there is no doubt whatever that they emanate from the same shop centre. The various memoranda here marshalled together concerning the stallwork and the screens of Aber Conwy in Caernarvon, Gresford in Denbigh, Chirbury in Montgomery, Halsall in Lancashire, Astbury in Cheshire, Wigmore and Aymestrey in Hereford, and Hughley, Ludlow and Tong in Shropshire form a corpus delecti worthy of our serious consideration, offering as it does from a craftsman’s view conclusive evidence of a single shop tradition; this may perhaps be further elucidated when the time comes for an examination of documents preserved at Ludlow and elsewhere.

It is with no little difficulty that we are able to divorce our minds from present day methods while studying the work of the mediaeval carvers; we have grown accustomed to the present ease of mass production which is all too often the death knell to the work of dexterous and nimble fingers, and through which is
Concerning certain designs in Screens and Stallwork

lost the nearness to the workman's hand and brain, and which is in fact an exchange of freshness, vitality and liveliness for a dull robot mechanism. Machinery is incapable of expending time except upon repetition, exact and deadly, and we imperceptibly grow more like the machinery which we first invented, and which later has become our master, for good or ill, principally the latter.

The mediæval craftsman, to judge him by his work, carved his patterns to delight the eye and interest the intelligence of those who looked upon it, in fact his work was the more important part of himself and into it he put the best that was in him. We must by now realize that before the so-called Reformation our forefathers were more alive to the beauty and fitness of furniture relating to the church than those who have followed them, and work done today is too often a parody of things forgotten in craftsmanship, for the very genesis has eluded our grasp; we continue to copy the old form without understanding its meaning either by its shape or former comeliness.
GRESFORD, DENBIGHSHIRE: WESTERN VAULT OF ROOD SCREEN

AYMESTREY, HEREFORDSHIRE: WESTERN VAULT OF ROOD SCREEN

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