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Rood Screen fragment

Date: 15th century

A HISTORY OF ST ANDREW'S IN 100 OBJECTS

For at least 400 years the chancel was separated from the nave by a wooden screen, called the 'rood screen' because above it was the beam upon which the giant rood (or cross) was mounted. The point of such screens was to mark out a separate space while allowing those outside to look in. At eye level there would have been effectively a row of glassless windows through which worshippers in the nave could see the 'performance' of the mass in the chancel. The bottom level (the dado) would have been solid and decorated with pictures of the saints, so that those coming forward to receive communion would come to the central arch under/via the cross (rood) and would be alongside the whole company of Heaven in the communion of saints. In pre-Reformation times, the chancel was where the clergy held their daily 'offices' or prayers and where they celebrated mass; its upkeep was the responsibility of the senior priest, the rector (which means 'the one in charge'). The nave was where the people sat (or, originally, stood) and they were responsible for its upkeep. It was used not just for the purposes of prayer and worship, and could sometimes resemble a marketplace—hence screens were erected to protect the chancel and smaller chapels and to preserve their sense of sanctity.

The rood screen was removed for restoration in the late 1870s but was never reinstalled and was subsequently lost. Only one fragment remains. Its colouring—gold and red—is a reminder of how colourful the church once was (far from today's limewashed finish). Its tracery resembles that of the church windows that were (mostly) inserted in the 15th century, and is of the same period. The screen was erected some two hundred years after the rood and beam which were above it.