



12.

Communion rail panel

Date: late 17th
century

A HISTORY OF ST ANDREW'S IN 100 OBJECTS

This flamboyant piece of woodwork dates from the time of the Restoration when the austere days of the Puritan Commonwealth had been cast off and the Church of England returned to a pattern of worship and ritual based on the Book of Common Prayer (1662). The altar or Communion table was returned to its prominent position at the east end of the chancel and it was railed off from the rest of the church. William Laud (Archbishop of Canterbury, 1633-1645), before the interruption of the civil war, had insisted on the eastward position of the altar and on the need for rails to protect it from irreverence. So Bishop Wren of Norwich instructed that 'the rayle be made before the communion table reaching crosse from the north wall to the south wall, neere one yarde in height, so thick with pillars that dogs may not get in' (this last point was a real issue at the time).

Probably in the early 19th century the rail—carved with cherubs' heads amid festoons—was removed to something like its present position.