

Hindringham Church Chest, Norfolk

On a trip to Norfolk we visited Hindringham Church to see an oak chest illustrated by Frederick Roe in his book *Ancient Church Chests and Chairs*, 1929, on page 92. He describes it as a '... unique coffer which may well be termed the doyen of all carved receptacles of medieval times remaining in this country'. He goes on to compare the interlaced Norman arches on the front with Romanesque stonework to date this chest as '... the earliest of our 13th-century carved coffers by some years'.

We were surprised, on seeing the chest, to note that Roe seemed to have missed out some important details. His drawing and description does not make it clear that the carved arcade on the top rail does not continue on the stiles but is painted on. He omits other painted decoration that, although faint, is quite plain to see. For example, the arches on the stiles have painted columns to match the applied wooden ones on the main body of the chest. More interesting still are the 'daisywheel' features incised and

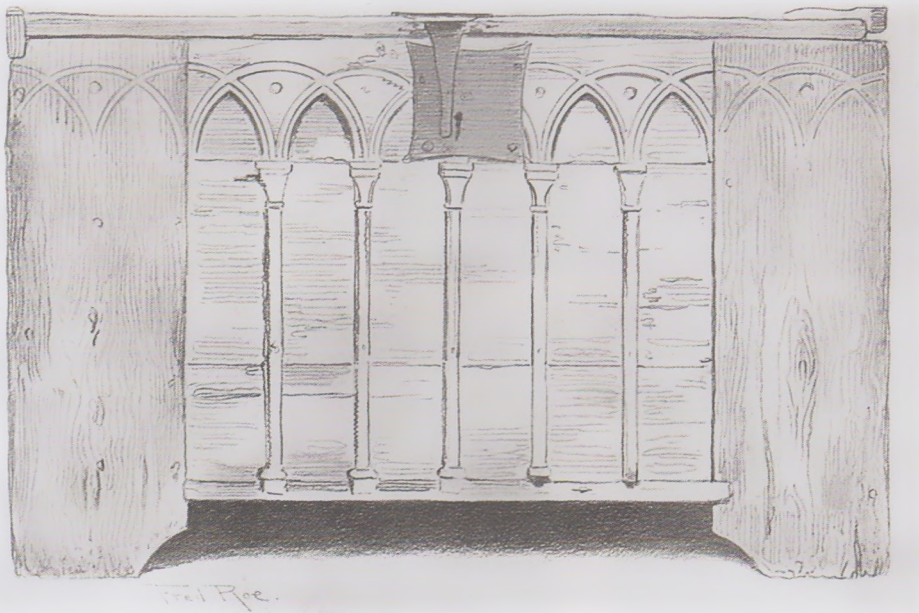


Fig. 1 Illustration from Frederick Roe's *Ancient Church Chests and Chairs*, 1929



Fig. 2 Hindringham chest, Norfolk taken in 2016



Fig. 3 (left) Side view of the Hindringham church chest in 2016

Fig. 4 (below left) Detail of incised decoration on a stile of the Hindringham chest

Fig. 5 (below right) Another detail showing the decoration on the front of the Hindringham chest



painted on the stiles. These appear to be contemporary with the other paintwork.

It is possible that Roe overlooked some of these features because the chest was dirty or in a dark corner, although a photograph in Munro Cautley's book *Norfolk Churches* published in 1949 (but not in the 1937 edition, Ed.), despite being a somewhat dark image, it does show these details.

Apparently there is, in the Norfolk Record Office, correspondence concerning restoration of the ancient chest in Hindringham Church dating from 1969/70, but whether this work was actually carried out and by whom I have not discovered. There does not appear to be any published report on the chest or its possible restoration from this period although Norfolk Records Office may have further information.

It would seem that this chest would be an ideal candidate for study using the latest techniques, i.e. dendrochronology, or tree-ring dating, paint analysis etc. to discover more precisely the date of this piece and the originality, or otherwise, of the painted decoration. More old-fashioned research methods might be required to ascertain where it originated. Could it have come from the nearby Binham Priory at the Reformation?

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