

Symposium on Furniture in Churches

Cirencester

Saturday 22 April

The first lecture was by Dr Charles Tracy, FSA, on **English and Welsh Rood-screens**. Apart from reviewing the physical features of rood-screens in all their variety, this was an opportunity to examine their origins in Britain at least, where they do not appear to predate the 13th century. The first element of the British late-medieval rood-screen to appear was, unsurprisingly, the rood itself, which in the 12th century was attached to the wall above the relatively low chancel arch, usually in combination with a painted scheme, normally a *Last Judgement*. Unusually, at East Shefford, Berkshire, the surviving fragments of the original painting suggest *an Adoration of the Kings*.

The rebuilding of chancels in the 13th century greatly increased the size of the arch, and the tradition of painting on the wall above it was replaced by images on a wooden tympanum, as at Penn, Buckinghamshire. The first surviving rood-screens are at Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire and Cumnor, Berkshire, both minsters. Parish church examples are at Thurcaston, Leicestershire and Gilston, Hertfordshire. A later reference to a rood-loft is at Tillingham, Essex in 1335, where a complaint recorded that this evidently new structure 'impedes the light around the altar'.

The speaker went on to flesh out the functions of the rood-loft, in particular its key role in providing a high place from which to read the Gospel, and to make certain public announcements. For such purposes a lectern was often provided. It could also serve as a parish muniment room,

or a chapel dedicated to the Holy Cross. In the later middle ages the nave altars were situated on either side of the rood-screen entranceway. The shrouding of the rood and the high altar at Eastertide, the use of the rood-loft bressumer as a candle beam, the role of the rood-loft in the provision of music, its furnishing with pews, its use as a library and as a place to keep the sacring bell were discussed.

The talk was illustrated with slides of English and Welsh rood-screens. Important examples to note, other than those already mentioned, are, in Wales, Llangwym Uchaf, Bettwys Newydd and Mamhilad in Monmouthshire, Patricio, Llanfilo and Llanelieu in Breconshire, Llananno, Llanwnog and Llanegryn in Merionethshire, Llanelilian in Anglesey; and in England, North Crawley and Oakley, Bedfordshire, Atherington and Plymtree, Devon, Attleborough, Southwold and Ranworth, Norfolk, St Margarets, Herefordshire, Avebury, Wiltshire and Cotes-by-Stow, Lincolnshire.

Recent scholarly interest in parish churches has resulted in many articles in books or journals. A full list of published churchwardens' accounts and related articles can be found on *Computatio: Bibliographie: Schlagwört churchwardens\accounts*, which can be found by asking Google for *Churchwardens' Accounts*. A comprehensive bibliography, including books and articles on the Welsh material, will be available in Charles Tracy's forthcoming article in the *British Archaeological Association Proceedings for the Cardiff Conference* (2004), to be published later this year by Maney, Leeds (tel: 0113 249 7481 to reserve a copy).

Charles Tracy and Jonathan Harris