



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, WINCHESTER.
The Rood-loft screen, showing Elevation squints.

[To face p. 169]

THE ROOD-LOFT SCREEN IN THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, WINCHESTER.¹

IN this church there is no chancel arch, but a prominent feature is the tall fifteenth century oak screen marking the division between the chancel and the nave and being continued across the north and south chapels. There was formerly a rood-loft above the screen, and a passage for this can still be seen cut through the walls of the arcades.

The position of the rood above the screen is shown in the roof, where mortices for its attachment are still present.

The central part of the screen has a cinquefoiled arch in the middle, with open tracery in the spandrels, and five narrow bays on each side. There is a cornice above and the screen is solid below the rail. The continuation of the screen before the chapels is very similar, but there are six bays on each side and the tracery is somewhat different.

There are peculiar features about the screen and the former rood-loft which are worthy of notice.

Access to rood-lofts was almost invariably from the nave or nave aisle, but in this church there is a notable exception to this rule. The entrance here was from outside the church, through a turret containing stairs, which is still to be seen on the south of the church. This is a rare but not unique feature, for there are external doors giving access to rood stairs from outside the church at St. Anthony in Kirrier, Cornwall, and Honiton, Devon.

Another peculiar feature in connection with the screen is the occurrence of what are now generally known as Elevation Squints.

In the solid part of the screen below the rail, in the portion between the nave and north chapel, there are three small quatrefoiled openings. These openings are, it is believed, unique in Hampshire, but in various parts of England there are instances (about thirty all told) where the lower panels of screens are pierced by openings such as can be observed here. These apertures are generally irregular in number, size, shape and position, and appear generally to be after thoughts, subsequent to the erection of the screen.

The idea, once widely held, that they were for the convenience of the penitent confessing to the priest, seated within the screen, must now be discarded, notwithstanding the fact that the chancel screen was the usual place for hearing confessions in the pre-Reformation Church in England. These openings are observed to be, in many instances, both too low down and too close together to be practical for the hearing of confessions.

1. These notes are taken from a paper read to the Society when it visited the church in 1941.

Mr. Aymer Vallance has shown in his recent book, *English Church Screens*, that he has come to a different conclusion about the purpose of these openings. It is to be found in another requirement of Catholic practice. He points out that it was the custom of our forefathers, indeed a touchstone of orthodoxy, at the Elevation during Mass to raise the head and look upon the uplifted Host. He gives numerous examples to prove how firmly implanted amongst our ancestors was the custom of looking up at the Elevation, and points out that although adults would easily see over the top of the middle rail of the screen, with young children this was difficult if not impossible.

The openings, which may quite well and correctly be called Elevation squints, were therefore made for the purpose of allowing the smallest as well as the biggest child to see the Elevation, and they appear to have been made one by one as required and quite without order or system. They may even in some instances have been made by the children themselves.

There is a danger from their inconspicuousness and apparent uselessness that during some "restoration" or repairs a tidily-minded parson or churchwarden might, with the idea of improving the church, fill up the holes or replace the panels containing the squints with new ones. Such an "improvement" would destroy valuable historical evidence, for they are a part of the long history of our Church and direct evidence of a custom at one time of considerable importance.

ARTHUR R. GREEN.

A COBBLER'S ACCOUNT OF 1709.

THE following bill, the items of which date from November 1708 to December 1709, was made out to S. Mumford, Esq., Winchfield (N.E. of Odiham), Hants :—

	s	d
Clogging up Miss	-	10
Toe capped, Master	-	2
Turned up, dogged up and mended maid	1	6
Lined, turned up and put a piece in Madam	4	6
Soleing and covering the Maid	-	6
Tapping Madam	-	6
Putting a piece in Madam	-	6
Stretching and easing little Master	-	7
Welting and stitching (<i>sic</i>) the Maid	-	10
Mending and patching the Cook	-	6
	10	5

S. E. WINBOLT.