

THE PULPITUM or SCREEN and a Gallery of History  
By Richard Beaumont, November 1997

An accurate description of the screen is given in the book on the Minster published by Grevile Mairis Livett B.A. in 1883 and since that time there have been descriptions and references to it in the various Minster Guide Books. Nothing much has been written about its creators until Mr Robert Petch, who had made extensive studies of medieval architecture and decoration of that particular style which is displayed on its Eastern side, noticed not only the remarkable similarity to work found on the well-known Percy Monument in Beverley Minster, but found a Mason's Mark with which he was familiar. This mark belonged to Ivo de Raghton (or Raughton) and he had discovered not only the mark but the signature also of Iva in the Priests Room at St Mary's Church, Beverley. At a later date Mr Petch found Iva's stylised initials scratched on the woodwork supporting the Percy Monument. But it was in 1971 when Mr Petch found the mark at Southwell and showed it to Provost Pratt. It is very difficult to see but it is near the floor on the North-East respond of the entrance to the quire at the foot of the stairs.

The Raghton family came from Cumberland and this Iva is well known for having worked extensively in the North of England and in Lincolnshire. He worked at York and is recorded as a Freeman of the city but died in 1328/9. He had a son of the same name, and, as was the custom among masons, he took his father's mark making only a slight difference which in the Southwell Screen is not really visible; though for reasons which follow it seems certain that the work was designed and started by the father but completed by Ivo II.

At this point it becomes necessary to look back in time to the period in our history when the screen would have been built. The Archbishop of York from 1317 to 1340 was William of Melton, and it seems certain that he must have been responsible for ordering the work. No-one else could have borne the cost. Moreover, he must have known Southwell well since he had been Prebendary of Oxton and Cropwell in 1308 and had also held livings in Lincolnshire. Unfortunately the Chapter records for that date are missing. The King was of course Edward III who came to the throne at the age of 14 in 1327 when the reins of power were effectively in the hands of his deeply unpopular mother, Queen Isabella, the "She Wolf of France" and her lover Roger Mortimer, Earl of March. The King, then aged 17, attended a kind of Privy Council meeting held at Nottingham in the autumn of 1330, and needed little inducement to join a plot to seize the Queen and her lover. Under the King's orders the Deputy Constable of the Castle led the King with William de Montacute and 23 others up a secret passage through the Castle Rock into the courtyard, and from there into the hall. The Queen's steward and one of her other supporters were slain, and the Queen and Mortimer were seized without difficulty. It is perhaps this incident, so well known locally, that helps to date the screen. For the heads of the Queen and Mortimer adorn it, facing one another on the northwest side.

The King, too, must have become well known locally. He was in Southwell on the 14th and 15th July 1331, and probably also in August 1333 on his way back from recovering Berwick from the Scots.

In 1340 the King suffered a political reverse when his Chancellor, Archbishop Stratford of Canterbury, defied him over his taxation demands and made him agree that these must have prior approval of Parliament, to popular acclaim. But when the King had managed to finance his Wars, and in 1346 won the famous Battle of Crecy and later captured Calais, English pride soared.

By 1348 the Black Death struck England and it is likely that by 1349 building work would have stopped here, as it is known to have done in other places. The death rate was enormous and in some areas labour was so scarce that crops could not be harvested but rotted in the autumn fields.

This then is an outline of the background of the years when the work on the screen must have begun.

Extracts from the Acts Book of Archbishop of Melton for Nottinghamshire have recently been published by the Canterbury and York Society and it is possible to discover from this the frequency of his visits to Southwell and their probable duration. For example he made his primary visitation of those Nottinghamshire parishes which could easily be reached on horseback from Southwell in June 1320, and much of the winter in 1323 and also between October 1326 and April 1327. He seems to have spent winters at Southwell. But in 1329 he was there on 31st May and 19th July and 4th August and much of November and December. Surely too he must have hosted the King's visit in July 1331. He died in 1340.

From these facts it might well be assumed that the building of the first part of the screen on the north side was done under the fairly frequent inspections of the Archbishop between 1330 and 1340. The next Archbishop was William le Zouche who was not appointed until 1342 and presumably he would take a little time before considering affairs at Southwell, by which time the Black Death had taken effect. In 1352 he was succeeded by John of Thoresby and it is this writer's guess that the Eastern side of the screen was finished during his tenure. And his presence in Southwell is known from mention in later documents.

Quite independently of Mr Petch, Miss Debbie Parker, who had been at school in Southwell, spent several years before 1990 studying the screen most intently and eventually produced a thesis on it which gained her a degree at the University of East Anglia. Miss Parker concludes that the East side of the screen was designed and constructed by Lincolnshire craftsmen, having compared the technique with the Easter Sepulchre at Hawton and other work elsewhere which is believed to have been done by Lincolnshire craftsmen.

A possible solution to the puzzle might be that the West side of the screen was designed and built by Ivo de Raghton I, since it is certainly earlier, and the mark on the N.E. respond might be his. His son's mark was, in accordance with tradition, slightly differentiated. But that on the screen is so worn and faint that it is not possible to tell the difference. We know little about the son except that he was working on the Great West Window of York Minster in 1338.

This somewhat detailed summary of events is a necessary mental background of knowledge to help in identifying some of the original carved heads remaining on it today. For it is certain that the skilled craftsman carving stone heads, where he was able to do so, made full use of features of real people (as he does today) - some might be caricatures, though Kings, Queens and Archbishops, when known to the mason, would surely be as faithful a representation of the subject as he could make it.

I am advised that craftsmen who carved stone normally worked from drawings of their subjects. This would no doubt have been the case of well-known personages, though in others the heads could have been done from life. But a skilled and experienced craftsman could do a caricature "out of his head".

A separate sheet will be supplied with a list of personages whose heads are believed to be on each side of the Screen. If these are anything like correct, it would seem that the carvings might not always be contemporary with the date of construction of the side which they adorn.

Note: The writer introduced Miss Parker to Mr Petch, and the two had a fascinating discussion in the Chapter House at which it would be fair to say that the contestants were content to disagree!

Principal References: "England in the later Middle Ages". Kenneth H. Vickers "The Black Prince". M. Coryn, "The Register of William Melton". Canterbury and York Society "English Medieval Architects". John Harvey (Revised Ed) "Building in England down to 1540"- Salzman

(As far as I know Mr Richard Beaumont never did supply us with his list of personages whose heads adorn the screen).

#### **EXTRACT FROM PROVOST HUGH HEYWOOD'S GUIDE BOOK**

*"...it is in the eighty smallest heads on the lower part of the east side of the screen that there is most to be enjoyed. Caricature and jokes, lust and laughter, all the ordinary rough and tumble of everyday life of ordinary people like ourselves are there displayed; and in that display is uttered a stern contradiction of the division of the world into sacred and secular. These lively heads mouth their reminder that only an integrated world makes sense, and it may be that is the last and wisest word that any building such as this can offer today".*

#### **EXTRACT FROM PEVSNER'S "NOTTINGHAMSHIRE"**

Pevsner says of the school of carvers who made our screen: *Its genius is unquestioned, even if one cannot fail to realise how licentious 1320 was as compared with the nobler and more disciplined thirteenth century".*