

Guidance note

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CARE OF ROOD SCREENS



Rood screens were made in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries and are of international significance.

Screens were constructed of oak, decorated in oil paint, and embellished with decorative techniques and gilding. Although they have survived for many centuries, they are fragile and vulnerable to irreversible damage.

Screens are especially at risk from fluctuations in relative humidity and temperature in church buildings. Death watch beetle infestations flourish in damp conditions. Also, as temperature and relative humidity fluctuate, the wood, paint and ground layers of the screen shrink and swell, but to differing extents. This can lead to delamination and flaking paint.

Good building and drainage maintenance is essential to minimise the risk to screens, as well as measures to ensure a stable environment within the church. There are also further simple steps that can be taken to ensure that screens survive in as good a condition as possible for the enjoyment of future generations.

Many screens are also painted on the reverse and on the sill, so these guidelines apply to both front and back.

General points

- Historical paint layers are vulnerable to touching, which can cause loose paint to be lost and leave grease on the surface of the painting. Efforts should be made to avoid touching the screen.

Cleaning

- Do not dust or clean a painted screen. Loose or raised paint might be invisible and even a light touch from a feather duster will cause it to be lost.
- Do not apply wax, polish, oil, varnish or paint to a screen. These can cause irreversible damage to original paint.
- Be careful when vacuum-cleaning near a screen, as they are vulnerable to knocks and scrapes, even from trailing wires.

Flowers and furniture

- Try to minimise the amount of extra furniture in front of the screen. It is very easy for this furniture to be knocked into the painted surface and cause damage. It also prevents the screen from being seen.



- Do not attach flowers or decorations to the screen. Also do not spray flowers when they are in front of the screen as this may cause damage to the paint and varnish. Attachments, such as nails, also cause damage.
- Avoid using Christmas spray paint near the screen.
- Do not store or lean items against the back of screens.

Heating

- Heating units should not be situated close to the screen as this can cause timber movement and flaking of the paint layer. In particular, portable Calor gas heaters should be avoided as these also create a lot of moisture, and can cause severe flaking paint.

Exposure to sunlight

- In churches with plain glass, screens can receive a lot of sunlight. This can lead to localised heating, and therefore problems with flaking paint. It can also cause certain pigments to fade. It is recommended that blinds, curtains and/or UV filtering is considered in this situation.

Fixtures and fittings

- Fixtures and fittings should not be attached to medieval screens. This includes plug

sockets, wires, fire extinguishers, notice boards and electrical wiring.

- Where already attached fixtures and fittings need to be removed, this should be done in consultation with a conservator.

Damage

- If you notice flaking or other damage, contact a suitably qualified conservator via the Church Buildings Council
www.ChurchCare.co.uk

January 2014

