

WAS THERE A MEDIEVAL SCREEN ACROSS QUEX CHAPEL ENTRANCE?

There is no written evidence for a screen across the entrance into Quex Chapel and I have been wondering what might have been there. On a recent visit to the church at Ash-next-Sandwich, I took a photograph of a medieval screen across their Lady Chapel. When I returned to All Saints, I looked more closely at the entrance and was struck by the heavy wear on just the right hand side of the step into the chapel, but covering the whole of the space. If there had been unlimited access through this archway prior to the Reformation, the wear would have been more in the centre and over a much wider area.

The present screen was inserted in about 1863, when Beazley organised the restoration of the church, (although the glass panels were inserted about ten years later.) Prior to this, there had been a curved staircase at this point, giving access to the Quex family pew, which was raised up some considerable height and overlooked the chancel. We know this staircase and pew were already in place by 1830 and were almost certainly there some time before this date, possibly as early as 1600-1650. Since the Victorian screen was inserted, the chapel was only used by the family from Quex and it has not been used as a public chapel until after 1966, when Christopher Powell-Cotton kindly converted it back into a place for parishioners to worship again. The family hardly ever used it once Christopher's father, old Major Powell-Cotton, and his wife died.

This means that the heavy wear on that step has to have taken place in the Medieval and Tudor periods. There must therefore have been a limited section of the step for access to the chapel, suggesting very strongly that there was a screen across its opening, similar to the one that stood at the chancel steps. The panels for the base of this particular one were rediscovered in 1905, in a barn at the foot of the churchyard and reinstalled in the church soon afterwards.

I have been wondering why there was no mention of repairs to this screen in the Churchwardens' accounts. The rood screen across the chancel entrance is mentioned again and again from the start of the accounts in 1531 until its final removal in c. 1540. I have just realised, however, that Quex Chapel belonged to (and still does) the owners of Quex Park, so any costs incurred in repairs, replacements or repainting would have come into their accounts and not the church's accounts. Unfortunately these accounts have not survived.