

Locating the Segrym screen panels in St John Maddermarket

Victoria and Albert Museum Accession numbers 23.1894 and 24.4 1894 (shown below) are two painted wooden panels with pairs of standing figures which are individualised by fictive frames and set against a stencilled background imitating brocade fabric. Each oak panel measures approximately 1.02m in height by 0.79m in width. The figures stand in part-profile, turned towards each other in pairs, away from the viewer. The emphasis of artistic attention appears to be on fabric, the detailed treatment of garment layers, drapery folds, the nuanced changes in colour palette, and the range of visibly tangible textures. The painting style of the panels is comparable with the angel screen at Barton Turf (Lasko and Morgan 1973), and the slightly later panels from St Michael at Plea. Similar artistic concerns are seen on all three examples; they are closely related in terms of the expression and rendering of the feel and weight of fabric and drapery, and a shared interest in subtle surface modulation. Given these similarities painting of the Segrym panels is likely to date to the mid-15th century, probably in the late 1440s or early 1450s.



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The four figures plausibly depict saints Leonard, Faith, Apollonia and William of Norwich. Above them are shield-shaped devices on which are drawn 'R' and 'S' and a cipher, twice. 'RS' are the initials of Ralf Segrym, the cipher his 'merchant mark', a quasi-heraldic device adopted by members of the rich and politically influential caste and in general use from c.1300. Ralf Segrym served as a city chamberlain from 1437-39, as Sherriff for Norwich in 1442 and 1447, MP for the city in 1449 and Mayor of Norwich in 1451 (Ewing, 1850, 31; Le Strange 1890, 101).

Segrym died in 1456, the City Assembly actioning his gift for cleansing the river on 6th August 1456 and in the next year his executors offered 200 marks towards repairing the walls (Cozens Hardy and Kent 1938). His will is not known to have survived but as Ewing stated 'He [Segrym] was buried in St Mary's Chapel, in the south aisle of the church, with his wife, Agnes' (Ewing 1850, 31) Implicitly the screen was Ralf Segrym's gift to a chapel dedicated to the Virgin located at the eastern end of the south aisle in the Norwich parish church of St John Maddermarket. This was to be the location of his grave, and that of his wife. However, the screen carries only Ralf's initials and cipher, not those of his wife, which suggests it and the associated chapel were gifts to the church specifically associated with him; examples of good works required of someone in his position.

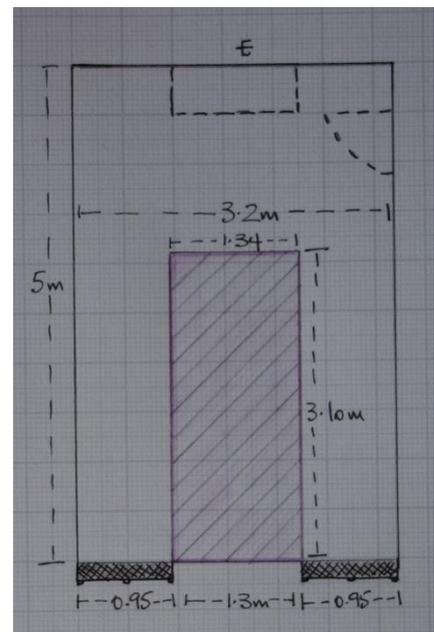


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Both Ralf and his wife Agnes are memorialised on a brass-inlaid stone floorslab now located at the east end of the nave (left). In 1934 Basil Cozens Hardy could write that Segrym's 'memorial brass and that of his wife have been found, and are fastened to a board along with others for preservation' (Mayors of Norwich). The date at which the brass was laid back into its stone is currently unknown, but it presumably happened after the slab was moved to its current location in the centre of the nave - and which must pre-date the pews as they overlie the northern edge of the slab by approx. 30-40mm.

The Segrym grave marker is one of the largest such objects in Norwich, measuring 3.10m x 1.34m; the brass figures measure 0.95m (Ralf Segrym) and 0.875m (Agnes Segrym) in height. It would have laid immediately to the east of the screen in the south chancel chapel and a comparable in situ arrangement can be seen at St George Colegate where a marble slab with inlaid brass commemorates William Norwich and his wife Anne. In this case the slab measures 2.10m x 1.43m and the figures 0.84m and 0.835m respectively.

The chapel, screen and grave slab were clearly designed with close consideration of each other - the architecture dictating the measurements of the screen, the screen the dimensions of the slab. The chapel measures approx. 5m (east/west) by 3.2m (north/south) or 16 sq mtrs, thus more than a quarter of the chapel floor area would have been covered by the slab.



Reconstruction of the south chancel chapel showing the location and size of the grave slab and screen.

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Bibliography

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