

A close-up photograph of a terracotta sculpture of a young man with curly hair, looking upwards. The sculpture is set against a background of ornate, colorful decorations, including a large, golden, textured object on the left and various floral and geometric patterns in the background. The text "British Art Studies" is overlaid in white, serif font, centered horizontally and slightly above the vertical center. Below it, the text "April 2017" is also overlaid in white, serif font, centered horizontally.

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Cover image: Francis Alexander Skidmore and Sir George Gilbert Scott, Hereford Screen (detail), 1862, painted wrought and cast iron, brass, copper, timber, mosaics, and hardstones. Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, Given by Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry (M.251:1 to 316-1984).. Digital image courtesy of Justin Underhill

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Resurrection, Re-Imagination, Reconstruction: New Viewpoints on the Hereford Screen

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The Hereford Screen is one of the most complex and intricate choir screens of the Victorian era. Positioned in the gallery of the Victoria and Albert Museum's main entrance, its glistening metalwork, brass, and terracotta effect surfaces, incrustations of wrought floral forms, Gothic Revival lettering, and semi-precious stones combine with delicate slivers of glinting glass that wink at each of the museum's visitors, whether they journey up the stairs to gaze at this monument up close or regard it from afar on their way to the galleries beyond. The Hereford Screen is one of a family of screens produced by the architect George Gilbert Scott and the metalwork firm of Francis Skidmore for British cathedrals in the mid- to late nineteenth century. The Hereford Screen was perceived by many to be the pinnacle of Victorian Gothic Revival metalwork. Before its installation in Hereford Cathedral it was shown at the 1862 International Exhibition in London. It is a sign of changing beliefs and practices in the Church of England in the nineteenth century. Its metalwork figures and framework recalled the medieval screens within medieval churches and cathedrals throughout Britain, many of which had long since been removed by the mid-nineteenth century. With the rise of High Anglicanism and its interest in Pre-Reformation art and architecture within religious contexts, an enthusiasm for and expertise in Gothic screens returned to the British architectural and theological imagination. The Hereford Screen is a complex and innovative outcome of this cultural shift. Its place within Hereford Cathedral was part of a wider complex of material relationships instigated through Victorian alterations and additions to the cathedral's fabric, including floor tiles, gates, textiles, high altar sculpture, and the organ. The Hereford Screen was removed from the cathedral in 1967, a victim of anti-Victorian changes in taste as well as a consequence of shifts in understanding of liturgy and worship, and it languished in pieces in Coventry until it was acquired by the V&A in 1983. Its restoration is one of the largest projects the museum has ever undertaken, and it garnered public support at the close of the twentieth century in a manner that suggested a shift in taste regarding Victorian art and architecture had taken place once again.



Figure 1.

Francis Alexander Skidmore and Sir George Gilbert Scott, The Hereford Screen, 1862, painted wrought and cast iron, brass, copper, timber, mosaics, and hardstones. Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, Given by Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry (M.251:1 to 316-1984). Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum

In a sense, the story of the Hereford Screen in its many layers and contexts tells of the reception of a series of receptions. In other words, the Gothic Revival's distinctively selective engagement with the Middle Ages produced innovative Victorian responses to the medieval world for modern settings and needs. These objects and buildings were prone to substantial criticism and what might even be considered severe iconoclasm in the early and mid-twentieth century, as the revivalist impulses of the Victorians were scrutinized and found wanting. This attitude to Victorian uses (indeed, perceived abuses) of history has transformed again in recent decades, led in part by the concerted efforts of amenity society campaigning, developments in scholarship, and increased opportunities for exhibitions and public education.



Figure 2.

Sir George Gilbert Scott and Francis Skidmore, Hereford Screen (detail), 1862. painted wrought and cast iron, brass, copper, timber, mosaics and hardstones. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (M.251:1 to 316-1984). Digital image courtesy of Justin Underhill

Within the groundbreaking online environment of *British Art Studies*, this One Object project picks up the strands of Gothic Revival historians' interactions with the Hereford Screen in the context of George Gilbert Scott, Francis Skidmore, and Victorian exhibitions, and offers new perspectives on the Hereford Screen's unique story of revival, resurrection, restoration, and reconstruction. This *British Art Studies* feature has provided an invaluable opportunity for an international collaboration to explore the Hereford Screen from new angles. It brings together musicology, the digital humanities, conservation, archaeology, and theology. The online platform of *BAS* has allowed authors to bring digital humanities to bear on their thinking and scholarship. This feature includes digital models, films, and high-resolution zoomable imagery. The project draws heavily on archival material, which has been digitized and made available for the first time. Collectively, we hope that this feature will not only shed new light on this particular screen, but also encourage further study of rood and choir screens in modern and medieval Britain, and exploration of the intersection of religion and art as a key area for development in British art history.

This project began with a series of informal conversations around the subject of screens—not only choir screens specifically, but also the conceptual idea of screens as partitions or framings, which have the ability to produce alluringly fragmented viewpoints, translations, and transportations, as well as links between religious and cultural institutions. From these conversations an idea began to grow, and the interconnectivity of a international range of academics with the potential to create a new set of research questions regarding the Gothic Revival, religion, and the arts, with the Hereford Screen at its epicentre, resulted in a team of contributors keen to work collaboratively and offer new insights into the histories of the screen in its various locations. It became clear that much was to be gained from enabling scholars working on the Middle Ages, modern Britain, materials and conservation, and other aspects of the cultural resonances of choir screens, to learn from one another over an extended period. To that end we convened multiple meetings and placed direct interaction with the Hereford Screen at the heart of our discussions as plans for the project evolved. It was important, too, to focus as much on the screen's past in exhibition and cathedral settings as on its more recent restoration campaign, as well as its contemporary and historical meanings. A gathering at the V&A, a study trip to Hereford Cathedral, and a workshop at the Paul Mellon Centre with visits to the V&A's metalwork archive, the screen itself, and a comparison of the screen in situ at St Cyprian's Church near Baker Street, enriched the contributors' views on the Hereford Screen in an organic way and led to the multi-dimensional, multi-media series presented within this issue of *British Art Studies*.

Jacqueline Jung has attended to the Hereford Screen by relating it to a wide variety of medieval precedents; her film considers why and how the medieval screen was an essential liturgical element of Christian sacred interiors, and how the experiences of clergy and worshippers are formed and framed by these diverse elements of architectural sculpture. Her work demonstrates the status of screens as thresholds *par excellence*, delivering nothing less than the prospect of a glimpse of heaven and an encounter with God in the sacramental moments in which Christians believe heaven and earth meet. Tessa Murdoch's focus on the musical history of the Hereford Screen roots this 1860s object firmly within its Hereford Cathedral context, by drawing deeply on the cathedral's rich archival collections. The screen as a presence through unique choral histories offers new ways of exploring how musicology and art history may be productively entwined, and how the effect of the screen in its colour and symbolism was a perpetual harmony, a rich and elegant chord resounding at the heart of the cathedral until its removal in the 1960s.

The Hereford Screen is a significant element within a wider, well-established discourse on the Gothic Revival in Victorian Britain and Scott's major contribution to this artistic and architectural strand of history. Alicia Robinson

fleshes out the full narrative of the Hereford Screen's arrival and departure, and the controversies and complex debates surrounding these circumstances. Social history, materiality, art-historical insight, and shifts in religious sensibility are all at stake in her account of the screen's reception. In a second essay, she describes the nature of the collaboration between Scott and Skidmore, which produced not only the Hereford Screen, but also ironwork Gothic Revival choir screens at Lichfield and Salisbury Cathedrals. My own contribution locates the Hereford Screen in a theological debate regarding the differing meanings of rood and choir screens in Victorian and Edwardian Britain, and contains a trio of short films produced in London and Cambridge. Diana Heath takes up the next phase of the Hereford Screen's history following Robinson's contribution, exploring the major undertaking of restoring and conserving thousands of Victorian fragments. Bringing the V&A's extensive metalwork archive to life, she re-animates recent conservation practices with an eye informed by direct experience of the screen's painstaking reconstruction. Prior to its erection at Hereford Cathedral, the screen had what might be considered a past life, which echoes forward into its Victorian installation and its present state at the V&A. Matthew Reeve, also a medievalist, charts the archaeological screen history of cathedrals in which Scott worked, placing Hereford's medieval history in the frame to illuminate the project as a whole. Justin Underhill, an expert on the latest tools available at the frontier territory of the digital humanities, has created digital models of Hereford Cathedral and the Scott and Skidmore screen within it, allowing the monumental object to be imaginatively re-inserted into this holy space, and opening up exciting new avenues for understanding the impacts of its physical presence upon acoustics and architectural effects. It is hoped that this unique and multi-faceted One Object project within *British Art Studies* will create springboards for further exploration of the distinctive histories of religious architectural sculpture, the status and shifting circumstances of cathedrals and their interiors in modern Britain, and the capacity for new online methods of scholarship to produce stimulating modes of engagement for multi-disciplinary approaches to Gothic Revival studies.

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