

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St Peter & All Hallows, West Huntspill

In The Benefice of The Huntspills & Mark

DIOCESE OF BATH AND WELLS

Rural Deanery of Abridge Archdeaconry of Wells

The church is listed **grade I** and in the district of Sedgemoor

Grid reference ST304454

Church of England Church Heritage Record 601056

Heritage at Risk Register – entry 1060138.

Pevsner South and West Somerset: page 202 -203

Since the 18th Century the patronage has been held by Balliol College, Oxford.



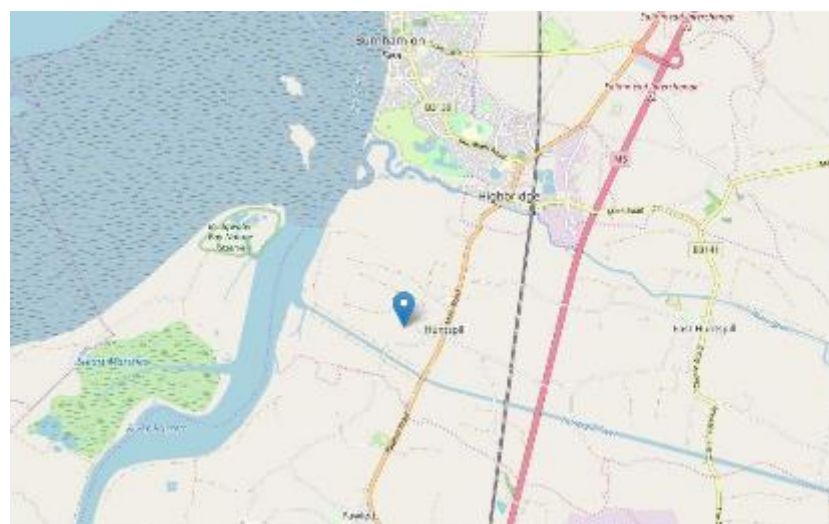
SAVING THE HERITAGE, SUSTAINING THE COMMUNITY

1. SETTING

The Parish of West Huntspill sits on the edge of the Somerset Levels and on the Parrot Estuary. The area is low lying, partly below sea level but protected by sea defences, situated between the Huntspill river on its southern boundary and the river Brue on its northern boundary, and includes the hamlet of Alstone. The Church is within 1 mile of the South West

Coastal path. Various public footpaths through the Churchyard connect the Church to both the South West Coastal path and the Huntspill River.

Within the village, the Church is the only Grade 1 listed building, confirming high national significance of the building as a whole. The presence of the Tower in the landscape is of high significance to the identity of the village. The Views from the Tower, which dominates the landscape, are spectacular: to the east and south east, the Somerset Levels to Glastonbury Tor; to the west, the Parrot Estuary, Bridgwater Bay, Steart Flats Nature Reserve, and the Quantock Hills; to the north west, the coastline at Burnham-On-Sea, the Bristol Channel and Wales in the distance. Not only are the views from the Tower spectacular but the Tower is a well-known landmark, being seen by passing traffic on the M5 motorway.



West Huntspill itself has grown through the twentieth century, due to being on the A38 and close to the north Bridgwater M5 junction. A large housing development on the northern side of the parish has just commenced, where an estimated 500 homes are to be built with a new Doctors surgery and a new Primary School. This is likely to dramatically change the village and community over the next few years.



The village has a Primary School, a Pre-School, Huntspill Projects – for people with learning disabilities, Balliol Hall, Cricket Field, Play Area, The Common, a number of Public Houses and Restaurants plus Allotments. The village shop & post office have closed and there are no cafe facilities in the village.

Adjacent to St Peter & All Hallows Church is the Balliol Hall, which is used as a Village Hall and committee run. The name Balliol Hall relates to the patronage of the Church being held by Balliol College, Oxford. The Hall was originally constructed in 1828 as a subscription School for the Parish, with a further extension in 1875. The Hall continued as a School until 1898, when a new School was built in the village on its present site, adjacent to the A38. In 1936 the Rector, Vere-Hodge, paid for an extension to the building, to be known as the Balliol Hall, for the recreation of local youth. This was gifted to the parish Church. The whole building then became the social centre for the village. After World War II the Harvest Supper committee raised funds for the upkeep of the building. This then became the Balliol Hall committee, which is responsible to the Church Wardens. Various extensions and updating of facilities have been made by these committees over the years.

On the north side of the Church is the Old Rectory, rebuilt in 1710 and extended in 1870, and outbuildings converted to living accommodation after World War II. The Old Rectory was sold in 1979 and a new Rectory built in the village, about 200 metres from the Church, where the incumbent for the Benefice lives.



View of West Huntspill Church from the Coastal Path (Tower peeping out of the trees)

1.2 THE LIVING CHURCHYARD

The Churchyard is very large for the size of the rural community and is still open for burials, whereas many local Parish Churchyards are full and closed with cemeteries now used. The main Churchyard is on the south side of the Church, with many mature trees.



The Churchyard is believed to have been extended to the south during the 19th Century, with the original boundary probably being the row of lime trees (tree preservation orders on these lime trees). A further extension took place, again to the south, in 1991. On present levels of burials, we estimate the Churchyard being open for burials for at least the next 50 years.

Whilst no headstones or monuments in the Churchyard are listed, the Grade 11 listed War Memorial (pictured on the front cover) on the northside of the Churchyard, close to the main entrance gates, is of high social and historical significance to the community. This was installed after the first world War in 1920.

The wrought iron gates at the main entrance are grade II listed, of moderate architectural significance and are an important part of the approach and setting to the Church. The gates and railings, cast by Coalbrookdale, date from early to mid-19th century gothic in style, with cast iron decorated piers and wrought iron railings and include a secondary wrought iron kissing gate to the left of the main gate.

Church Lawns being used for a community event "Music on the Green".



The Churchyard is a large wildlife haven for many species, surrounded on 3 sides by open fields. Foxes, badgers, deer and squirrels are frequently seen, and the Churchyard is always alive with birds and bird song. Bats live in the Churchyard, with a specific bat tree having a maternity roost. The recent ecology survey identified a rare grey long eared bat living nearby visiting the Churchyard at night. Bees live under the Church, near the south entrance. There is also a heronry in the Old Rectory adjacent to the Churchyard, which can be viewed from the top of the Church Tower. The BBC's Spring Watch featured this Heronry in 2017 and used the Church Tower to film the Herons nesting. Little Egrets are frequent visitors to the Churchyard and can often be seen around the Church Tower. The south west corner of the Churchyard is a wildlife haven left to nature, where many wildflowers and insects thrive. Pictured below.

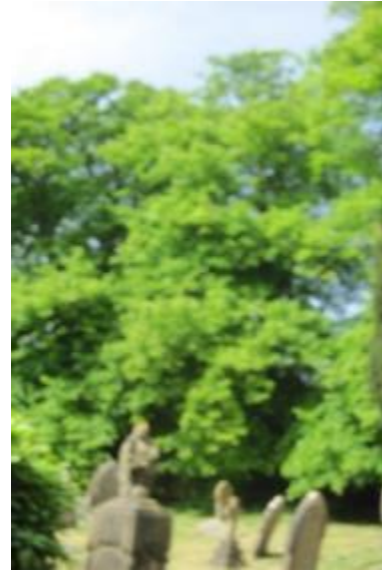


A row of 5 lime trees, to the south of the Church, have tree preservation orders on them together with 2 beech trees and a copper beech tree. These are among the wide variety of mature trees to be found in this extensive rural Churchyard. The trees are beautiful during all seasons of the year and enjoyed by many.



Copper Beech

Lime Trees



Many people enjoy walking and sitting in the Churchyard; this is highlighted by the large number of seats around the Churchyard. There are two footpaths through the Churchyard; both are used daily by walkers/ramblers going to/from the South West coastal path or the Huntspill River, or local people out for a stroll or dog walking.



The footpath around the Church Tower Fenced off due to falling masonry.



An example of signage on the South west coastal path, hopefully this will include signage to St Peter & All Hallows Church.

1.3 SOCIAL HISTORY

A Christian community is believed to have existed at Huntspill since AD796 when, during the reign of the Saxon King Offa, the Manor and land at Huntspill was given to Glastonbury Abbey. Huntspill is listed in the Domesday Book of 1086 as Honspil.

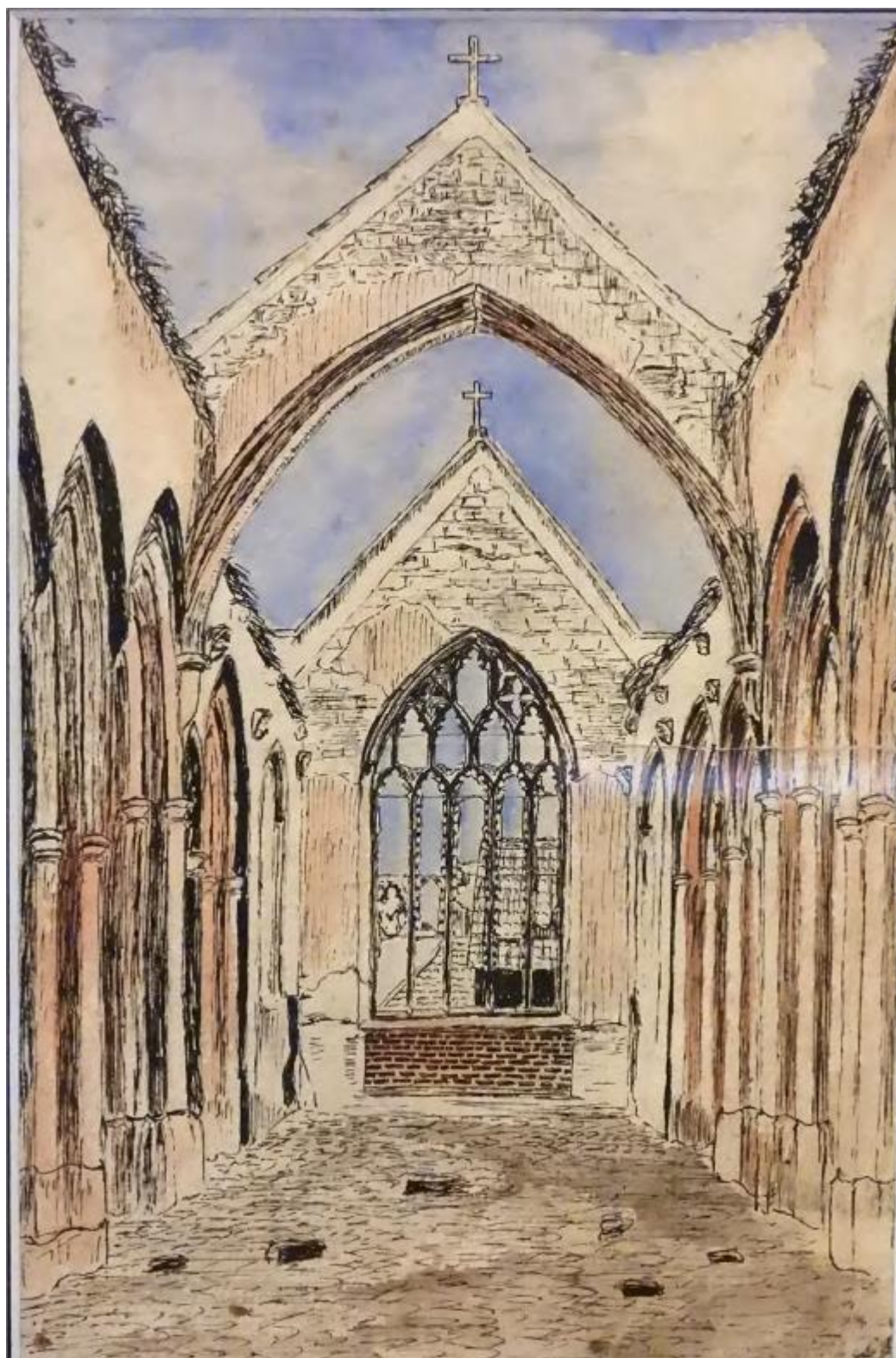
The Church of St Peter was established at Huntspill by 1194; the current building dates to around 1400 with an eastward's extension in the mid-15th century. The construction of the Church is attributed to the wealth of Somerset during the period of prosperity brought about by the wool trade. Huntspill village (now known as West Huntspill) was important then both as a port and a staging point on the shortest route from Bristol to Exeter, although the road flooded enough in Spring to be impassable, until the mid-eighteenth century.

Originally Huntspill not only included the Hamlet of Alstone but also comprised of all the land over 3 miles to the east, now known as the village of East Huntspill and the hamlets of Bason Bridge and Cote. In 1839 a Chapel of Ease (now known as All Saints Church, East Huntspill) was built in East Huntspill to save the residents of East Huntspill, Cote & Bason Bridge having to walk over 3 miles every Sunday to worship in Huntspill Church. The Parish of Huntspill then became the Parish of West Huntspill.

Up until 1976 West Huntspill had its own Rector, when it became a joint Benefice with East Huntspill (back to where we were in 1800's but now with two Church buildings). In 2013 the Parish of Mark joined to form the Benefice of The Huntspills and Mark. The Rector for the three parishes lives in the Rectory, built in 1979, in West Huntspill.

The Church is built on slightly higher ground originally at the centre of the community, however, after a number of breaches of the sea wall over the centuries causing flooding to properties (no record of the Church flooding), the village has relocated to the east of the Church, leaving the Church on the western edge of the community rather than being in the centre. The most notable being the Somerset tsunami on 30th January 1607 which is believed to have wiped out the village and led to it being rebuilt to the east of the Church. The Church is a survivor of this great flood which is believed to have killed 2,000 people in the area and is historically especially important to the evolution of the village. An estimated 200 square miles of farmland was inundated with flood water and livestock destroyed wrecking the local economy along the Somerset coast. Further flooding occurred in 1703 (to a depth of 4 feet) and 1798. The Huntspill River to the south of the Parish was constructed in 1940. Despite this the sea wall was breached again as recently as 1981 when some areas and properties in the village were once again flooded. Major sea wall defences have been carried out since and to date no further breaches have occurred.

A major fire in 1878 gutted the Church, leaving only stonework still standing. Over the following two years extensive Victorian restoration took place. The stonework survives today, in an unusual red colour as a direct result of the fire. The painting below shows the devastation caused by the fire



DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH

The Church in Huntspill was dedicated to: -

- All Saints from 1434 until after 1866
- St Peter from 1872 until 1953
- St Peter & All Hallows from 1955, its present dedication.

1.4 THE CHURCH BUILDING IN GENERAL

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH BUILDING

A Church stood on or near the present site before the end of the 12th century, thought to be of a stone structure. The Christian Church was established at Huntspill by 1194 and rebuilt around 1400. There is documentation detailing a Roodloft and Battlements being built between 1380 – 1406.

The earliest parts of the Church still standing is the south porch and the nave with its 13th century windows and ham stone pillars. A fragment of floor tile has been found dating from the late 13th or early 14th century.

During the 15th century the Church was rebuilt to include the Lady Chapel, the Chapel of St Nicholas (now the vestry and organ well) and the rebuilding of the Tower.

The Church is built of local lias limestone with Ham Hill stone dressings. The building's exterior shows various stages of development during the 14th and 15th centuries, using locally sourced traditional materials and methods. Distinctive architectural details include cinque-foil cusped perpendicular windows, stone carved gargoyles and embattlements.

During the 18th century there was a loft in the tower.

1726 – 27 An altarpiece built by Thomas Willis was introduced. Edmund Rack records: -

'The altar piece is of Irish oak in three compartments divided by two handsome fluted columns supporting a rich arched pediment and entablature, the whole in the Corinthian order' On the top are three gilded urns and in the right and left compartments are the commandments, creed and Lord's Prayer. In the centre is a tolerable painting of St Peter causing the lame man to walk.'

This altar piece was removed from the Chancel in 1860 -61

1737 -8 Records of the singing loft being removed, and a new screen built.

It is believed that during the 1700's and 1800's, either the whole Church, or at least the Tower, was whitewashed or white with roughcast. The following descriptions have been discovered: -

- In Edmund Rack's description of Huntspill Church in the 1780's:- "The church is a substantial and handsome edifice, consisting of a nave, chancel, north and south aisles, belfry, porch and vestry room, all except the chancel covered with lead. At the west end is a square tower, whitewashed and embattled, 82 ft high and containing a clock and five bells".
- In 1852 Sir Stephen Glynne visited and wrote: - "the whole of the exterior was white with roughcast".

The evidence suggest that the whitewash was a temporary measure. Towers/Churches that are whitewashed or rendered tend to be built of poor-quality stone or rubble and then rendered whitewashed as the plan was always to cover up the poor-quality stone/rubble. However, this is not the case at West Huntspill where the Church is built of good quality lias stone. This is evidenced in the very large/heavy stones at the top of the Tower, if the plan had always been to cover up the stonework with render/whitewash they would not have gone to all the hard work of lifting these very heavy stones to the top of the Tower. If stonework is designed to be covered then the windows tend to sit proud of the stone so that when the render is applied the windows are in the correct place. This is also not the case at West Huntspill Church. The conclusion is therefore that the Tower/Church was not designed to be rendered/whitewash even if this happened for a short while in 1700 & 1800's.

THE FIRE 1878

The fire of 1878 destroyed the roof, stalls and pews. There appears to have been sufficient time to rescue the painting of St Peter and the Royal coat of Arms. The evidence of the fabric suggests that the fire was largely contained. Only the east window in the Chancel and the east and south-east windows of the Lady Chapel show any sign of exterior reddening of the window heads or of extensive stone-renewal in these areas. Elsewhere it seems likely that the glazing held, and that in all probability so did the heavy wooden doors, confining the damage to the interior.

Julian Orbach summarised the fittings which were provided following the fire, and which form the current furnishings:

Lavish restoration after the fire by *Price & Wooler* of Weston-Super-Mare -

complicated roofs, rich tiles floors (by *Minton*), carved stalls, frothy stone reredos. - Pulpit from Stogursey via the Dowry Square Chapel, Bristol. An exceptionally rich example of the typical Jacobean pulpit. Top tier of the usual blank arches, but with a flower in each panel, long feathers on the piers, and encrusted arches. Scrolled frieze with fleurs-de-lys, cornice with small demi-figures at the angles. Square lower panels with Gothic-letter texts, e.g. 'How beautiful are the feet of they that preach the Gospel of peace.' - Font. Lozenge-patterned large bowl, 1878, reputedly designed and given by Sir Edward Beckett (Later Lord Grimthorpe). Steep Jacobean octagonal cover. - Royal Arms. Charles II. - Stained Glass. Splendid E window by Clayton & Bell, 1880, the colours particularly subtle. S window, late Arts and Crafts, by William Aikman, 1933.

In 1887 – 1888 The chancel was enlarged to include a new vestry. Furnishings rearranged to enlarge the chancel, the gallery at the west end was removed and the organ placed in the north chancel aisle.

Mr John Lamb, a parishioner who lives close to the Church has been collecting information about the village of West Huntspill for many years and has very interesting scrapbooks. One of the most fascinating facts in Mr Lamb's collection about the Church relates to the building referred to as the Coalhouse but in fact should be called the "Gas House" Mr Lamb writes: -

The pipework behind one of the pews and the two small circular holes on the hymn book 'shelf' are relics of the old Church lighting and heating system. An acetylene flame, produced by igniting calcium carbide pellets having drops of water sprayed on them, had been discovered in the late 1890's. (the greater the spray of water the greater the flame and the greater the heat and light). Mr Sellick refined this system to heat and light the Church in the early 1900's by having equipment in the 'gas house' whereby a weight would press down in a circular container on a mixture of carbide and water and this forced the flame through the pipework laid into and around the Church. It was laid underground and up behind each pew then through these holes and along the backs of the pews. The system was superseded in the 1930's when the church was supplied with electricity. It was not so warm as the lighting and heating was installed around the walls.

When electricity was installed in the Church it was markedly cooler for the congregation as they no longer had heat right by them along the individual pews - only along the side walls. (Mr Sellick who oversaw all the original heating and lighting arrangements was also an early pioneer in the development of the petrol engine.

This may be unique to West Huntspill meaning that we were possibly at the cutting edge of technology at the time!

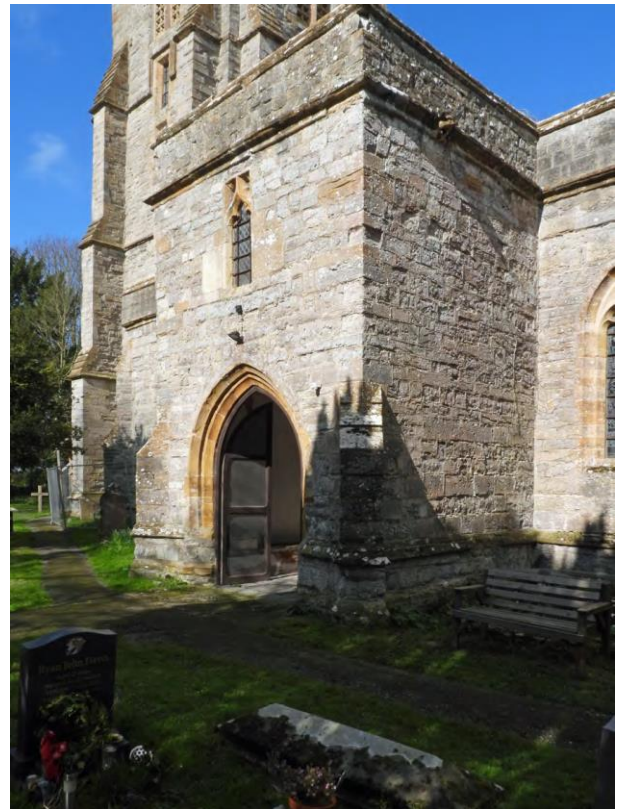
The Lady Chapel (south Chapel) was restored in 1946 as a memorial to those who died in World War II. In 2012 the Lady Chapel was enhanced with glass doors, glazing in the arches and new wooden flooring thanks to a Legacy. New seating for the Lady Chapel was kindly given by Mr David Holley in memory of his late wife Violet. The Lady Chapel is used for mid-week worship, bible study groups and a meeting room within the Church.

1.5 THE CHURCH BUILDING



In the South Porch is the one item believed to have been from the original Church of the 12th century: a defaced stoup. It is on the north east angle of the porch and would have been used by Parishioners entering the Church in the later Middle Ages. Beneath the bowl is a corbel stone which is relatively well preserved, probably carved from Dundry stone.

The South Porch



The south nave doorway shows early English architecture. This part of the building consists of an ostensibly 14th or early 15th Century doorway with continuous roll-mouldings and a mixed geology. The leadwork on the south porch roof includes graffiti which predates the 1878 fire and the south porch appears to have been entirely unaffected by the fire.

The VCH documents "the Church was said in 1613 to have been "new built" 160 years earlier". The Will of 1467 Nicholas Carent, Dean of Wells Cathedral, left a considerable bequest of 40 shillings to "the reparation of the Nave of the Parish Church of Honespyll". If this bequest represents a donation to the reconstruction of Huntspill Nave, then a date in the third quarter of the 15th century could be accepted as a rebuild date.

The elaborate tracery of the west window can be paralleled in the east window of the chancel and is characteristic of the period around 1500.



THE TOWER

Whilst the west tower is not one of the great Somerset towers for which Somerset is famous, its height and stature is significant, and the tower is considered to be of moderate to high significance.

The tower of St Peter and All Hallows is described in the Heritage England listing as: -

Tall and sturdy tower, embattled, 4-stages, set-back buttresses with offsets which ascend only as far as the top stage; stair turret between the buttresses at south west corner; ringing chamber stage with simple oblong windows; 2-light bell-chamber windows with Somerset tracery; richly treated west end, pointed arch door opening in a moulded surround, the spandrels with, blank shields, flanking shafts and foiled niches outside these, large 5-light window overall, plank doors with ornamental strap hinges

The Tower is believed to have been built in the 15th Century when the Church was rebuilt. Please see Jerry Sampson's Archaeological Assessment on the difficulties of the exact dating the Tower. The Tower and the Church share a lias and hamstone ashlar construction.

The Tower holds a peel of six bells, cast by Taylors in 1879. There was original 5 bells, the oldest of which was of 1693 by Thomas Purdue. In 1953 the bells were rehung including new headstocks and anchoring bell frame beams into tower walls. The bells have always been well maintained, rung regularly for Sunday Services and special occasions. We have an excellent band of ringers, with the ringing master being on the Parochial Church Council.



West entrance of the Tower

The following works have been carried out on the Tower: -

- 1954 The north west angle of Tower Parapet was rebuilt.
- 1959 Treatment of timber in the Tower.
- 1972 Repairs to the tower steps
- 1975 Repairs to tower embattled parapet, to south elevation and north-west buttress west elevation.
- 1975 Pointing the lower stages of the tower.
- 1983 Repair Work on Tower part funded by English Heritage. The work was undertaken by Stansells of Taunton under the direction of Geoffrey Beech of Beech Tyldesley. Tender Price: £9,628 and Final Account: £10,980.03 (excl VAT). Grant of £5089 from English Heritage. No photos of before or after. Faculty probably dated 11 Jan 1980.

The works comprised:

- Scaffold to upper stage and lower-level windows.
- The repointing of all four parapets (internal and external faces).
- Masonry repairs to the north bell chamber window. Replacement of fractured central mullion in Guiting Stone. 20% replacement of pierced Ham panel with Guiting Stone. Repoint window.
- Repoint open joints in east, south, and west belfry windows.
- Remove all exposed cramps from inner face of belfry windows.
- Repointing of interior of bell chamber walls and windows.
- Re-open blocked weep holes in the concrete cills of all belfry windows.
- Treat roof timbers with Wykamol Plus.
- Repoint walls to the deadening chamber.
- Repoint window splays only in the ringing chamber and limewash.
- Window repairs to the vice turret.

The specification includes the following:

- Gauged mortar for pointing to ashlar and freestone – 4 parts stone dust or sand, one-part lime and a sprinkling of cement (OPC) in the order of one-part cement to 20 parts lime.
- Pointing mortar for rubble stonework is to be 1:2:9 (cement: lime: aggregate). The aggregate is to be a blend of sand and stone dust.
- Lime is to be a white or grey hydrated lime.

'Additional' works comprised:

- The defrassing of all 4 faces of the tower and making good with mortar the very large holes to prevent ponding (£1,376).
- 4No replacement steel windows on the north and south sides of the tower (£578).
- Part mullion replacement to the south belfry window including resin repairs and plastic repairs to frame and louvres. (£249.15).

- Renewal of mullion section to east window and piecing-in mould string course on east face damaged by rusting ironwork and for grouting and repointing 3no fractures. (£761.08).
 - Cover metre survey of the parapet stonework (£80).
 - A notable 'Omission' during the contract was £750 allocated for structural repairs to the parapets.
-
- 1990 Repairs to the tower roof
 - 1994 Stonework repairs to the tower - £47,543 with 40% funding from English Heritage

1.6 CONTENTS OF THE CHURCH

The oldest artefact in St Peter & All Hallows Church is to be found on the eastern side of the south aisle of the nave and is a plinth which houses a monument dated 1345, which dates this part of the wall. The person represented could be Thomas, a member of the Cogan family, who were in possession of the Manor House at that date. The female effigy is believed to be that of Isabel Cogan, wife of Sir William Cogan, who died 1383. The fire of 1878 has left its mark on both of these monuments. The stone in the Church was from Ham Hill and the two effigies were carved from blocks of the same material. They would have been able to transport the Ham Hill effigies by water to Huntspill.

In the Sanctuary the large east window illustrates the chief events in the life of Jesus; this window was restored after the fire in 1878, by Clayton and Bell, who were perhaps the leading maker of stained-glass windows in the Country. This window is of moderate to high significance. The window was re-leaded in 2012. The makers of the other Victorian stained-glass windows have yet to be identified but there are two mid-twentieth century windows, one of which is by William Aikman – Dr Wall 1933 and the other in 1948 – Limber Memorial stained-glass window.



The Piscina near the Altar rail is thought to be near the eastward end of the original sanctuary before the 14th century alterations.

The front part of the Altar dates from the reign of Charles I.

There is a small brass plaque on the north side, dated 21st April 1687; a memorial to Elizabeth, wife of Samuel Wooddeson Clarke, Rector, pictured here.

THE ROOD-SCREEN AND ITS LOFT

In St Peter & All Hallows the stairway giving access to the rood-loft was on the north side of the east nave bay (as the picture below shows). There does not appear to be any fire-reddening of the ashlar surrounding the upper doorway, suggesting that this may have been blocked and plastered over at the time of the fire. On the exterior there is a projecting demi-hexagonal turret which partly incorporates the diagonal buttress at the north-west corner of the chancel aisle, rising to terminate in its own parapet (as the picture below shows).

It is believed that there was also a singer's gallery at the west end, created either in the late 16th or early 17th Century.



The blocked-up entrance to the Rood-Screen



Demi-hexagonal turret, this would have been the stairway to the Rood-Screen

THE CHURCH ROOF

By 1852 Glynne recorded that 'the chancel has a new open roof', and that 'the nave has a modern ceiling'. However, 'in the aisles are the original flat roofs with ribs, bosses and brackets'. All this, however, would survive only a further 26 years before the fire of 1878 swept them all away.

The watercolour sketch of the church interior subsequent to the fire shows only the chancel being provided with head-stops and corbels for ashlar posts supporting the roof, the nave wall-heads being plain surfaces.



Today both the Chancel and Nave have head-stops and corbels for ashlar posts supporting the roof as the picture above shows. This collection of head-stops, some medieval, combined with Victorian roof and the medieval open arcades are considered to be the most important architectural elements in defining the character of the interior of the Church.

A quote from a visitor: -

The ceiling was restored after the fire in the style of the one destroyed, the stone heads and angels replaced. Upon entering the interior, the high ceilings with ornate carvings of angels, the impressive stonework, the beautiful stained-glass windows, and many other hand made elements provide sensory stimulation.

PICTURE OF CHURCH BEFORE THE FIRE

Below is a photograph of the interior of the Church before the 1878 fire, taken from the west end, there are no other records of the contents of the Church that were lost in the fire.



During the fire of 1878 there appears to have been sufficient time to rescue the painting of St Peter and the Royal Coat of Arms of Charles II. The items that survived the fire now hold greater significance to the history of the Church.

The iron bound Parish chest dates from the 14th Century and a further chest dates from 17th Century. These appear to have either survived the fire or been rescued:

The Royal Coat of Arms of Charles II

Painting of St Peter Healing The Cripple; early 18th Century. As a central part of the 18th century altarpiece, its significance to the Church is high. Records show that the altarpiece with the painting was installed in 1726-1727. The altarpiece was then removed from the Chancel in 1860-61. The painting was then removed from the tower in 1989 and hung in its present position at the west end of the north aisle.

The pulpit which stands at the head of the nave is believed to be Jacobean; carved with texts, figures and flowers. Originally from Stogursey Church, the pulpit is understood to have come via the Dowry Square Chapel in Bristol in the 1880's.

The Eagle Lectern was given to the Church in the 1800's.

The Chandelier – records show that a large three-tiered chandelier was bought from Thomas Blinman of Bridgwater in 1821. The Chandelier was adapted to be electric in 1973.

THE FONT

The font is of moderate significance, Victorian, dating from 1880. Lozenge-patterned large bowl reputedly designed and given by Sir Edward Beckett (later Lord Grimthorpe) after the 1878 fire. The tester is 17th Century of a steep Jacobean octagonal design, this is of moderate significance.

The font is known to have been moved from the base of the tower to its current position at the west end of the Nave in the central aisle in 1989. The font originally had a stepped plinth but when it was moved from the base of the tower it was simply placed on the tiled floor and the plinth disposed of. A concrete patch in the tiled floor of the base of the tower confirms the former position. It is believed that the font was moved to this position when the oak screen was inserted across the tower arc.

PEWS

1839-1840 records 290 additional seats including stalls in the chancel being put into the Church, it is thought that the west gallery may have been removed at this time.

All the original pews were subsequently lost in the 1878 fire, the Church was then re-furnished throughout with pews. Various re-orderings during the late 20th and early 21st Century have seen the removal of pews.

- 1979 - A children's corner was created in the north west of the nave.
- 1989 - Three pews were removed from the north west of the nave.
- 1998 - Reordering - To remove a single half pew in the north cross aisle for the purpose of replacing it with a display table. To allow for a flexibility in worship, to remove the front three pews from both sides of the nave, resiting the pew frontages behind the first columns at the east end of the nave. (All the displaced pews are retained within the church, carefully restored and put in order so that they may

function as freestanding units and (when appropriate) may be placed for congregational use at the east end of the nave) (Faculty dated 26 June 1998).

- 2005 – Relocation of Pews.
- 2011 - Redundant pews disposed of.

At present the pews occupy the nave and the north & south aisles, being separated by an east-west centre gangway and the cross-aisle gangway between the north and south nave doorway.

Jerry Sampson, Buildings Archaeologist, surveyed the pews March 2020: -

Their ends have a single standard design: a plain central ground with a moulded edge running out at just above floor level (west) and just above the seat (east) with a foliate triangle. In typical Victorian fashion several ends are made up from two blocks joined vertically. Their backs are panelled, the rectangular sunk panels being framed with vertical muntins and moulded top rails. No assembly or location marks were identified, and accessories, such as hat-pegs, umbrella holders etc. appear to be absent. There are traces of what appear to be a lighting system in the form of holes drilled through the bookrests, these would appear to relate to the heating and lighting system identified by Mr John Lamb (details on page 11) No other elements such as place-holders, seat numbering or designated free-seats were not identified in the survey.



The back of the pews at the eastern side of the cross aisle

The Chancel pews (choir stalls) are fine examples of late Victorian/Edwardian wood carvings, with poppy head ends. These pews are of much higher quality and therefore their contribution and significance to the Church is higher.

OAK COMMUNION TABLE

Records show that a new oak communion table was installed in 1928.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE FOR MISSION

This wonderful large historic building is very significant to the community of West Huntspill. This was shown in the questionnaire when 94% said that they “would mind if the Church closed”, 6% didn’t answer the question.

With a declining number of people attending the traditional Sunday Service, the loyal congregation acknowledge that other ways have to be found to encourage people through the Church door. By offering mission through café facilities and other activities in the Church, encouraging more people to come into the building, this will eventually result in more people attending Church Services and more people being involved in the life of the Church, resulting in more people willing to help maintain the wonderful historic building for future generations to enjoy.



The Pop-up Café held at the back of Church, every Monday.

Welcoming “non-Church” people into the building.

At the beginning of the 21st Century pews at the front of the Church were removed (2 rows on the right and 3 rows on the left) to give space for a Nave Altar, for children to sit on the carpet to listen and interact with the Rector during Family Services and Baptisms, to turn a

coffin during a funeral and “just space” for the Rector, Readers, Leader of Prayers to move around. This has proved incredibly successful; there were some members of the congregation who did not want the change but, once the improvements were seen, everyone was happy.

Since the improvements to the Lady Chapel in 2012, this area is now used for the Tuesday Morning Worship and small group meetings including the Bible Study Group.

The acoustics in St Peter & All Hallows are wonderful but, although concerts are held in Church, they are limited by the lack of toilet facilities and not being able to provide good quality refreshments. Somerset Organists Association, Coast Line Singers and the local community Choir have all expressed an interest in holding concerts in the Church when the appropriate facilities are available.

Placing toilets inside Church and opening up the west of the Church by removing pews will enhance mission by creating a community area to bring more people into St Peter & All Hallows. The traditional Pews will remain on the east side of the entrance doors for Church Services, being ample for normal Services, and chairs could be set out on the west side of the entrance doors when we have larger Services – Christmas, Weddings, funerals etc.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AREAS AFFECTED BY THE PROPOSALS

2.1 THE PARTS OF CHURCH THAT WILL BE AFFECTED BY THE PROPOSALS

BASE OF THE TOWER (INTERNAL)

At present in the base of the Tower (behind the oak screen) is a not-fit-for-purpose kitchen, whilst the rest of the area is used for storage, which is not well organised. Putting toilets and purpose-built facilities for cleaning materials & the flower arrangers will enhance this area. Access to the west door will still be maintained. The entrance to the belfry, ringing chamber and top of the Tower are all from an external staircase.



OAK SCREEN

An oak screen divides the base of the Tower from the main body of the Church. We have explored different screen positions and we now propose to adapt the existing oak screen by retaining and bringing forward the doors thus giving enough space for the toilets and storage in the base of the Tower.



NORTH WEST CORNER OF THE NAVE

At present the north west corner of the Nave is only used for tables and chairs at the pop-up café once a week. Placing the kitchen and servery in this area will not affect any workings of the Church or Church life. The painting of St Peter that hangs on the west wall in the corner will be relocated to a more significant position on the south wall of the south aisle. (Please see plans)

FONT (shown in the picture for the Oak Screen)

Relocate the font from the more secular end of the church to the centre of the Church, where it will be a natural part of a Service as well as being liturgically close to the north and south doors which are the primary entrances into the church. Baptisms are held during Sunday Services and at the moment everyone has to move to the west end of the Church during the Service for the Baptism. This will be a far more prominent and fitting place for the font. The font's precise position will be determined by the floor tiling pattern. Please see architect's drawings o605.sk.033 for how this will be possible.

PEWS Remove the 4 rows of pews on the west side of the central cross aisle and replace with good quality chairs that can be moved and stacked. In 1989 pews were removed from the rear of the Church and in 1998 pews were also removed from the front of the Church.



2.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AFFECTED AREAS OF THE CHURCH



BASE OF THE TOWER (INTERNAL)

This area is of low significance. The west door will not be affected by the proposed changes.

At present this area is used for storage and becomes a bit of a "dumping ground" due to the lack of order.

OAK SCREEN

The oak screen is of low significance to the Church, being put in when the font was moved from the base of the tower to its present position at the west end of the nave in 1989.

NORTH WEST CORNER OF THE NAVE

This area is of low significance to the Church. The painting of St Peter will be re-located to a more prominent position on the south wall of the south aisle.

FONT

The font is Victorian and dates from 1880, when the Church was re-opened after the fire of 1878. Lozenge-patterned large bowl reputedly designed and given by Sir Edward Beckett (later Lord Grimthorpe). The tester is 17th century of a steep Jacobean octagonal design. The font is known to have been moved from the base of the tower to its current position in 1989.

The font is of moderate significance to the Church. It is being retained and re-located to a more prominent position in the centre of the Church and will be set into the ceramic floor tiles – please see architect’s drawings o605.sk.033

PEWS

Jerry Sampson carried out an Archaeological Assessment of St Peter & All Hallows Church in March 2020 and this is his survey on the pews: -



Clearly the existing benches do not pre-date the 1878 fire (though one possibly introduced bench may have been added to the corpus). The benches occupy the eastern section of the aisles and nave, being separated by the east-west gangways and the cross-aisle gangway between the nave doorways. Their ends have a single standard design: a plain central ground with a moulded edge running out at just above floor level (west) and just above the seat (east) with a foliate triangle. In typical Victorian fashion several ends are made up from two blocks joined vertically. Their backs are panelled, the rectangular sunk panels being framed with vertical muntins and moulded top rails. No assembly or

location marks were identified, and accessories, such as hat-pegs, umbrella holders etc. appear to be absent. There are traces of what appear to be a lighting system in the form of holes drilled through the book-rests, these would appear to relate to the heating and

lighting system identified by Mr John Lamb (details on page 11) No other elements such as place-holders, seat numbering or designated free-seats were not identified in the survey. Pews have been removed from the Church before. The pews to the east of the cross aisle will be retained.

IN SUMMARY

The primary significance of St Peter & All Hallows Church comes from its place within the community, their use of it and its purpose as a place of worship, hence its evidential and communal value. There is some heritage and aesthetic value associated with it because of the use of local, traditional materials in its construction.

3 ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSALS

3.1. THE IMPACT

REPAIRS TO THE TOWER – High impact

- Stage 1, Tower restoration, and Stage 2, roof repairs, will preserve the architectural heritage of the building for many years to come for future generations to enjoy.
- The completion of the Tower restoration and the roof repairs will remove this Grade I Listed Building from the Heritage at Risk Register.
- Open the Tower up for tours, so that people can view the Somerset Levels to Glastonbury Tor, the Parrot Estuary, Burnham On Sea coastline and the Heronry in the grounds of the Old Rectory.
- The base of the Tower will no longer need to be fenced off. The risk of masonry falling on to somebody using the footpath through the Churchyard will be removed.

BASE OF THE TOWER (INTERNAL) – Low impact

The access to the west door will be retained. In the base of the Tower the toilets will be convenient for people whilst being discrete. With purpose-built cupboards the area will be improved and far tidier than it is at present.

OAK SCREEN – Low impact

The impact on the Church of the screen being moved forward will be very low, however the extra space that it gives in the base of the Tower for the toilets will be very significant to the project.

NORTH WEST CORNER OF THE NAVE – Low impact

As this area of the Church is not used at present the impact of placing the kitchen/servery here will therefore be low. Being in the north west corner of the Nave, the kitchen/servery will be as far away as possible from the Chancel in order not to destroy the atmosphere of the building. The kitchen/servery will be sympathetic to the fabric of the building. The painting of St Peter will be relocated within St Peter & All Hallows Church.

FONT – Low impact

Moving the font will have a moderate impact on the Church. Relocating the Font to the centre of the Church will ensure that Baptisms become a more natural part of a Sunday Service. At present everyone has to move from the front of the Church during the Service to the rear of the Church for the Baptism and then back again.

At present the font is in the middle of the pop-up café and is not always treated with the respect it deserves; it is just something that gets in the way!

The font being properly set into the pattern of the ceramic floor tiles will be an improvement, as at present it is just plonked on them. The font on the south side and the welcome station on the north side will preserve the cross aisle in the Church.

PEWS – Low/Moderate impact

With the extent of the nave pewing being significantly reduced over the years, the nave pews make a low to moderate contribution to the character of the interior of the Church. The Chancel pews, with their poppy head ends are a much higher quality and their contribution and significance is higher.

There have been many discussions regarding the removal of some pews at PCC, Church congregation and within the wider community and generally (84% in the questionnaire) people were in favour of removing some pews from the Church. Replacing the pews with chairs will ensure that St Peter & All Hallows has a flexible space for a variety of uses. This in turn will increase the church's communal and evidential value and see it used more often, by more people, for a wider variety of events. Our aim is to reconnect with the wider community, for the Church to be at the centre of village life and a true community hub open to all; removing the pews will enable this to happen.

The impact of the loss of pews has been seriously considered by all and the conclusion is that the benefits of removing the pews outweighs the loss. Furthermore, good quality wooden chairs have been selected so that these make a positive contribution to the interior of the church.

The pews are being retained in the eastern side of the cross-aisle.

3.2 MITIGATING THE IMPACT

WATER & SEWERAGE

By putting the toilets in the base of the tower and the Kitchen/Servery in the north west corner of the Nave, the existing water supply to the base of the tower will be utilised, with minimal extra piping.

The mains sewerage system in the village runs past the main Church gate. We plan to connect into the sewer at that point, coming straight across the Church lawns from the base of the tower on the north side of the Church. By using this route, we will not be disturbing graves in the Churchyard on the south side of the Church.

PEWS

Photographic evidence of the pews that are to be removed will be kept. The new chairs will seek to sit comfortably within and enhance the character of the interior of the Church.

FONT

The relocation of the font away from the more secular west end of Church into the crossing will place the font in a liturgically more appropriate position close to the north and south doors, which are the main entrances into the Church. The font on the south side and the welcome desk on the north side will help to retain the cross aisle in the centre of the Church.

OAK SCREEN

We are mitigating the impact by retaining the oak screen and moving it forward rather than replacing it with a new screen. (Following consultation with the Church Buildings Council and the SPAB, the proposal is now to replace the screen)

PAINTING

The painting of St Peter is being relocated within the Church and a more significant position in the south aisle.

IN SUMMARY

We have, wherever possible, tried to retain and relocate pieces within the Church. With regard to the water & drainage, we are minimizing the impact by using the existing water supply into the Church. With the high-water table in the Churchyard there is no alternative but to connect into the main sewerage system; we anticipate using the shortest possible route to do this.