



Survey of the standing remains of the Old Church of St Mary, East Stoke, Dorset.

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Bournemouth University,
School of Conservation Sciences.

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The Old Church of St Mary, East Stoke,
Dorset.

A survey of the standing remains.

Surveyed and compiled by

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for

The East Stoke Heritage and Archaeological Group
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Abbreviations and contractions

<i>ca</i>	approximate
<i>et al</i>	and others
km	kilometre(s)
m	metre(s)
mm	millimeters
NGR	National Grid Reference
RCHME	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments England

1.0 Introductory statements

1.1 Circumstances of the survey

This survey was commissioned by the East Stoke Heritage and Historical Group as a requirement of the grant provided by the Local Heritage Lottery Fund. The survey was undertaken by Iain Hewitt of Bournemouth University on 11th May 2010.

1.2 Location

East Stoke (as it now known) is a dispersed settlement that is situated towards the southwest of the Civil Parish of East Stoke in the Purbeck District of Dorset. Henceforth, in the interests of clarity, the prefix 'East' will be used only with reference to the parish. For reasons stated below, the settlement name will be given as 'Stoke'. In cases where a quoted source is ambivalent, parentheses will be applied thus: (East) Stoke.

1.3 Stoke is approximately 2.6km west of Wareham and 1.2 km east of Wool. In recent times Stoke has become synonymous with the associated settlement of Stokeford which straggles along the A352 (see Figure 3). At Stokeford, on the south side of the A352 (NGR 387250

087100), stands the early nineteenth-century Church of St Mary the Virgin, immediately beyond which a minor road crosses the Poole to Weymouth railway, and bridges the River Frome (Figure 1). It is at this point that one enters the settlement of Stoke where the site of the Old Church can be found, 300m northwest of Manor Farm.

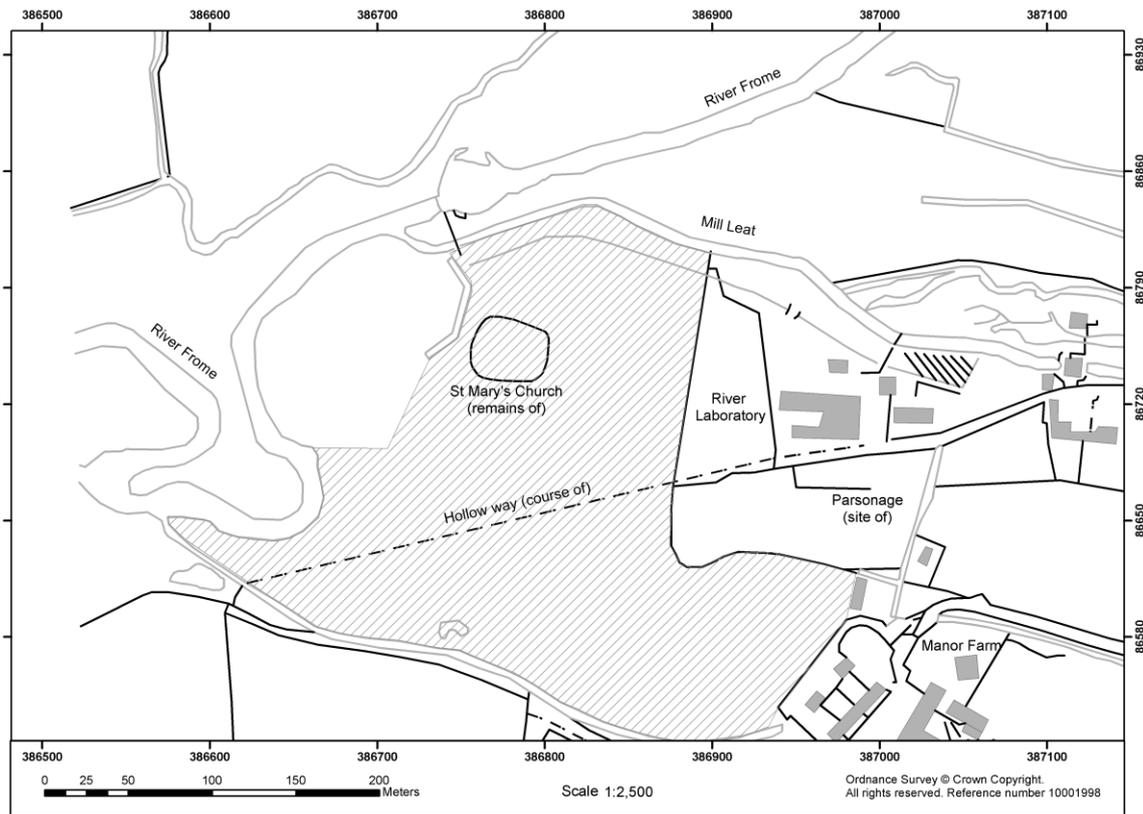


Figure 1 *The location of East Stoke Old Church relative to extant buildings.*

2.0 Aim and objectives

2.1 Brief

To undertake a survey of the standing remains of the Old Church of St Mary, East Stoke Dorset. The church was substantially demolished in 1828 with the exception of fragments of the south wall and the south porch. It is these features that are the subject of this brief. The full

extent of the building immediately prior to demolition may be inferred from the distribution of gravestones in the church yard.

2.2 At a site meeting with Barry Quinn on the 4th May 2010, it was agreed that the survey should include the following components:

2.2.1 A photographic survey of the church remains that should include measurements as appropriate. Some element of constraint was imposed by ivy cover which is now extensive (see below).

2.2.2 An indicative plan of the church based upon evidence visible on the ground together with the remaining standing structure.

2.2.3 Recommendations be made for the management of ivy cover.

2.2.4 As a result of the survey, recommendations be made for the conservation of the standing remains of the Old Church.

2.2.5 Consideration be given to the loose architectural stone fragments that formerly comprised the archway entrance to the south porch and that recommendations be made as to their conservation.

2.2.6 The churchyard includes three chest tombs that are in various states of disarray. Consideration will be given to the long term future of these features and recommendations be made as appropriate.

2.2.7 That an assessment be made of the building materials that comprise the Old Church and this would include important features that might be threatened by the present state of neglect.

2.2.8 That points i) to vii) above be the subject of a formal written report to the East Stoke Heritage and Historical Project by mid June 2010, or earlier if possible.

3.0 Method statement

3.1 Photography

The photographic survey was undertaken using a Nikon D70 digital camera fitted with a *** zoom lens. Photographs of the building fabric were taken with the lens set at *** and with the camera set at 'Auto'. The camera was mounted on a Benbo Trekker tripod throughout. Elevations were produced using the rectified photography method, the position of the tripod being determined triangulation (4.00m from each of the visible 2.00m ranging rods).

To compare the present photographic survey with earlier, dated examples wherever possible.

3.2 Measured survey

Linear measurements were undertaken using two 30.00m steel tapes.

4.0 Results

4.1 Photographic and General Survey Constraints

The photographic survey was constrained by the thick vegetation that covers much of the site (Figures 6 and 7). Much of the ground vegetation is bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) and Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and these were particularly problematical within the area of the surviving section of the south wall of the church. Additionally, a number of saplings are invading the site, notably elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and these caused obstruction to measurement (Phillips 1977).

4.1.1 The walls of the church, and particularly the conjunction between the south wall and the east wall of the south porch, have been invaded by ivy (*Hedera helix*) which has obscured and made inaccessible, a substantial area of the surviving fabric.

4.1.2 As a result of the above mentioned conditions, the details of the south wall were obscured from the photographic survey and it was not possible to determine the ground plan of the Old Church beyond the estimates made in Hewitt (*et al*) 2009, 36. Any drawn plan would have been at best conjectural but almost certainly inaccurate. Therefore, this part of the brief had to be omitted.

4.2 The fabric

4.2.1 The third edition of Hutchins' *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* (1861, 422) describes the Old Church of St Mary as being a small church with a chancel and tower. However, this description would have applied to the church as described in the first edition of Hutchins work (1774) and not to the 1861 edition by which time St Mary had been almost wholly demolished. Today, there are no above ground remains of the chancel or tower. The north, east and west walls have gone too. All that remains are sections of the south porch, and a section of the south nave wall adjacent to and east of the porch. The remaining fabric has been dated to the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments 1970, 274) but the remaining fabric of the church falls into two distinct categories and these suggest a slightly different story.

4.2.2 The remaining south wall stands at ca 3.0m maximum height though precision of measurement was prevented by ivy cover. The wall is of rubble construction, a material that was probably accessed locally from the Bagshott Beds and which certainly includes fragments of Carstone (Heathstone). Examination of the interior suggests that this was finished with a lime plaster (Figures 3 and 8). However the porch

abuts this wall and consists of rough-finished limestone blocks (Figure 2) and differences between the materials used and the construction techniques employed, suggests that there is a chronological divide between the two surviving components of the church. No architectural features remain in the south wall of the nave and so the time lapse between nave and porch can only be guessed at (see Hewitt *et al* 2009, 36-7).

4.2.3 The survey did demonstrate a curious feature of the porch: the south elevation, east of the entry arch, betrays signs of reconstruction (Figure 4). Close to the ground is visible a slab-like stone that seems to be out of place in this vertical position. Furthermore, it is a limestone of a slightly different hue to other component stones of the porch. It is out of place, and this, together with apparent re-cutting lines of the blocks immediately above it, suggests that the porch had been re-assembled having formerly graced a previous site. A date after the Dissolution of the monastic houses of nearby Bindon Abbey and east Holme Priory (1539) would make sense.



Figure 2 *The south-east corner of the porch showing the anomalous slab stone close to the ground and the dog-leg cutting of the three stones immediately above.*

4.3 The church plan

The site of the nave, chancel and tower of the demolished church are represented by a low 'scoop' (Hewitt *et al* 2009, 36-7). From this, no more than approximation of the total size of the church could be derived. This is a Scheduled site and intrusive work would require Scheduled Monument Consent. The conditions are not ideal for geophysical survey at present, likewise excavation which would be costly if it could be justified. **However, measurements were** taken of those sections of wall that stand above ground level.



Figure 3 *The interior of the south wall showing the surviving traces of the lime plaster that conceal the rubble wall.*

4.3 Features

The photographic survey did encapsulate the present extent of the Old Church fabric and recorded a number of features that are of particular significance and worthy of preservation. These are listed and illustrated below.

4.3.1 *Scratch dial (mass dial)*

The south face of the east porch wall has an unpublished scratch, or mass dial upon its surface. Mass dials are pre-Reformation features and so this example is likely to be contemporary with the erection of the porch in the 15th or 16th centuries (see Friar 1996, 437-8). If the porch was imported from another site then this scratch dial is a fairly late example because it is perfectly positioned and would have served its purpose well. There is no indication that the scratch dial itself is a re-used feature.

4.3.2 The scratch dial is incised into a single limestone block (see Figure 4). In common with many dials of its type, the East Stoke example comprises an incised horizontal line (220mm) that passes through a central hole (*ca* 25mm diameter) that also served as the location point for the gnomon. The gnomon point acts as the starting point for 6 (possibly 8) radiates arranged in protractor fashion and spaced at approximately 15 degree intervals. Each radiate is of *ca* 110mm length. At a point roughly midway between the fourth and fifth radiates from the left, and *ca* 600mm beneath them, a peg hole has been impressed into the mortar between two stone blocks. Clearly, this peg hole is part of the dial and probably indicates the time at which mass was to be performed.

4.3.3 Carved into the stone block immediately below the scratch dial are the letters ED, the largest of the letters being 75mm in height. The incisions are of both letters are approximately 15mm in width. One block further down, has been incised with two further sets of letters: TH and (immediately beneath) RH. The style and size of engraving is much the same as the ED above which suggests that all three may be contemporary. However, the letter R is by far the most pronounced at 120mm in length. A date cannot be indicated with certainty but all of the letters are indicative of an amateur style that would not be out of place from the late 19th through to the late twentieth centuries.

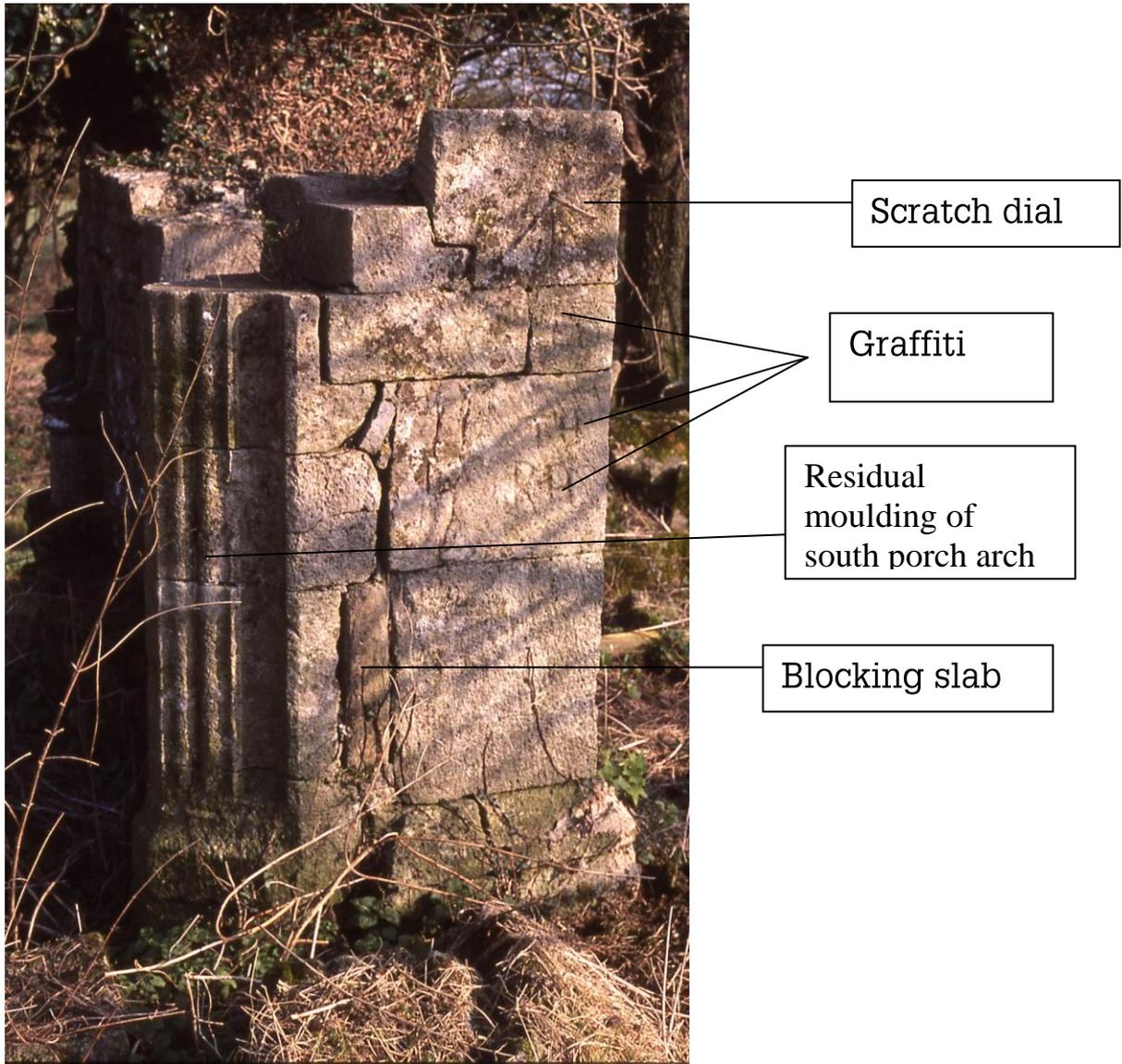


Figure 4 *Southeast wall of south porch showing features as described. The porch sits on a plinth finished in a single sunken chamfer (Child 2008: 39).*

4.3.4 Stoop

In common with other church porches of the 15th or 16th centuries, the south-east interior of the porch contains a Holy Water stoup at the point where the latch of the nave door would have been. This example is constructed from three limestone blocks, of the same geological origin as the porch. It has a chamfered arched head with an octagonal base underneath which a flat stone has been removed. The central pillar is

cylindrical and has annulets at either end. The bowl is incomplete, about 50% of it having been broken away. However, sufficient of the bowl remains as to suggest that originally it was circular and of ca 250mm depth.



Figure 5 *The stoop in the south porch at the point where it abbotts the ivy-clad remains of the south wall of the nave.*

4.3.5 Bench-seating

The porch also contains stone bench-seating. On the east wall this feature remains almost complete but there are traces of it on the west side too. This seating would have been for the use of the Church Wardens and other parochial worthies. Figure 6 shows this feature adjacent to the stoup (left). Above and centre, the remaining wall dips downwards. This was the position of a quatrefoil window that has vanished since it was recorded by the Royal Commission (1970, 274-5). The creeping incursion ivy is self-evident.



Figure 6 *The interior east wall of the south porch showing the relative locations of the stoup (left) and the stone bench. The dip in wall above indicates the former position of the quatrefoil window.*

4.3.6 The south porch arch

Only the lowest levels of the south porch arch survive in position (Figure 4 and 7). Other component stones lie scattered around the site of the arch with no indication that any are missing.



Figure 7 *The in situ stones of the south porch arch. Former component stones lie scattered as they fell.*

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Ivy cover

Consideration has been given to the matter of ivy cover that is particularly prevalent on the south wall of the church. This seems to be well established and the roots of this vegetation are firmly established within the upper regions of the fabric rather than in the ground (Figure 8). The surviving fragment of south wall is of rubble construction and any attempt at the removal of the ivy roots would constitute a serious threat to the fabric. It is therefore recommended that the ivy be left in place where it may act as a bonding agent for a potentially fragile wall.

To the left of Figure 8 ivy cover can be seen to have spread to the much lower surviving window sill of the south wall. Here the situation is different for the ivy is ground rooted and removal might be considered. If this option is preferred, then a sacrificial cap of locally cut turf is recommended.



Figure 8 The internal elevation of the surviving south wall showing ivy (*Hedera helix*) firmly rooted into the top of the rubble fabric.

5.2 Conservation of the standing building remains

The conservation of the building remains at East Stoke Old Church takes two forms:

- a) The standing remains;
- b) The architectural stone fragments, principally the moulded architrave of the south porch arch.

5.2.1 *The standing remains*

Recommendations for the standing remains are as recommended

in 5.1 above. It is advisable that the remaining structure should be inspected on a regular basis as part of an ongoing conservation plan. Any perceived need for re-pointing should take into account that lime mortar should be used in accord with the original construction materials. Re-pointing in the vicinity of the scratch dial would need to be applied with great sensitivity and must avoid concealment of the 'mass peg' location at the base of the dial (see 4.3.1).

5.2.2 *Architectural stone fragments*

The architectural stone fragments include the sections of the fallen arch Of the south porch, and the decorated end slabs of the chest tomb that was formerly sited close to the south porch. Re-erection of the south porch arch would require a major constructional project that would have to include new structural elements such as buttressing. Foundations for such a feature would in turn require considerable disturbance to the site and produce a finish that would be out of keeping with the monument as stands.

5.2.3 An alternative approach to the problem would be to consider removal of the worked elements of the former arch from the site where they might be included as a feature in the proposed new village hall. Here they would be secure and available for public access. Scheduled Monument Consent would be required for such a venture.

5.2.4 More contentious are the feature stones of the Old Church that remain within the surviving fabric. The comparatively recent loss of the quatrefoil window from the east wall of the porch indicates that feature stones of this type are attractive and therefore vulnerable to theft. The scratch dial is particularly vulnerable to a fate of this kind but its save removal to any proposed village hall site would rob it of its very specific astronomical context and is not advocated here. It is therefore suggested that the best course of action in the case of the scratch dial

and the stoup is that they remain where they are but are subject to regular inspection.

5.3 Chest tombs

Three chest tombs are known to have formerly stood within the churchyard of the Old Church. The remains of two of these are to the north-east of the church where they must have been either very close to the nave or the chancel. A third chest tomb formerly stood at a point close to the south porch where two end slabs are the only identifiable remains. These end slabs are of limestone and each one has a single decorated side. One panel has a cartouche within which is the image of a cherub in relief. The other has a similar cartouche also with an image in relief but this time of a skull within a wreath.

5.3.1 Of the three tombs, the brick-built example to the north of the church has the potential to be reconstructed provided that the dedicatory top-slab and the (probably plain) end slabs can be identified (Figure 9). However, some of the bricks might be missing and these would have to be replaced by modern substitutes. A similar case might be made for the adjacent limestone specimen. The problem of matching the parts to the whole could prove to be intractable. Identity may remain uncertain or impossible to ascertain. In the case of these two monuments, the expense of reconstruction could be justified only if the appropriate components can be located.

5.3.2 The two cartouche of the southern chest tomb are of some significance and are worthy of preservation. The best option would be removal from site to a place of safekeeping but at present there is nowhere in East Stoke where public access can be guaranteed (see 5.2.3 above).



Figure 9 *The remains of two chest tombs to the north of the church. To the left is the brick-built example, to the right, limestone blocks. In both cases the dedicatory upper slabs have been displaced.*

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