

St Mary Limington Chapel Roof Project



Heritage Evaluation October 2020

Summary

This report provides for a record of the project, the results of heritage research, and the heritage engagement enacted and planned for before and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic and associated impact on both church premises and heritage locations.

The Chantry Chapel at St Mary's Limington features a unique stone vaulted roof construction and houses within medieval stone funeral carvings internationally recognised as important examples in the development of such memorial carving from the 14th to 16th centuries.

Project aims

The five aims of the project were to:

- Restore and repair the unique stone roof of the chapel, providing for long term preservation of the architectural heritage and that of the memorial statues contained within.
- Document and present the build methodology of the roof structure to inform both wider understanding and future practice within the Architectural Heritage and Roofing Conservation world.
- To research and reveal the heritage of both the architecture, the memorial statues and significant historical figures associated with the church and the parish of Limington.
- To preserve, present and better interpret the heritage of the church site through the remnants of the medieval tiled floor associated with the chapel and pottery fragments found during recent path renovations.
- To reach out to new visitors, create heritage events and open days with the aim of creating a wider learning of the heritage of St Mary's Limington.

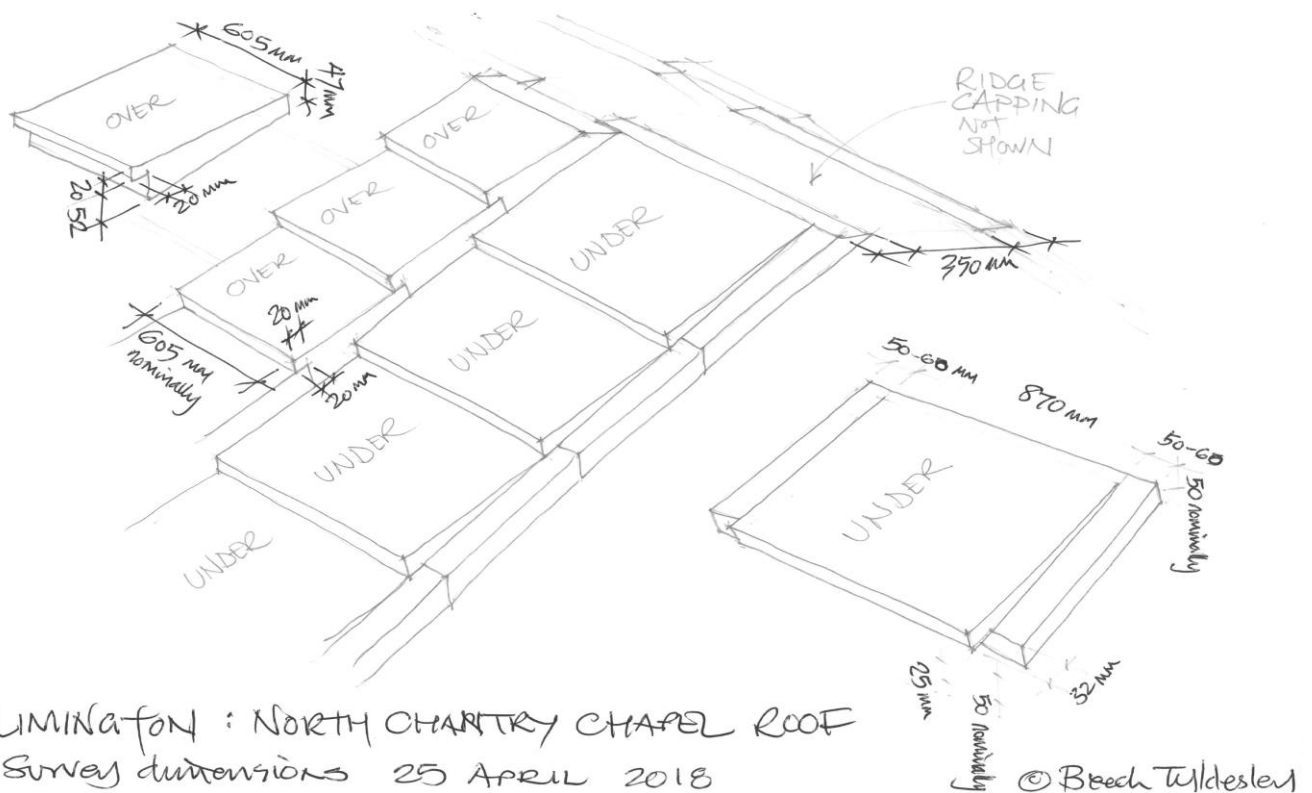
How have these aims been met?

The overall aim of the project was to see the heritage of St Mary's in better condition, identified, recorded, explained and interpreted in such a manner that it will be both accessible and available to a wider audience, now and in the future. To fulfil this desire, the project identified and sought to implement 6 core strands for the programme.

1. Preserving heritage: Repairing the Chantry Chapel roof

Research work was undertaken with a Heritage England specialist, an Architect, a Structural Engineer, a National Heritage Roofing specialist and a building conservation contractor to ascertain the nature of the roof structure and to determine the ways in which it could be repaired and preserved for future generations.

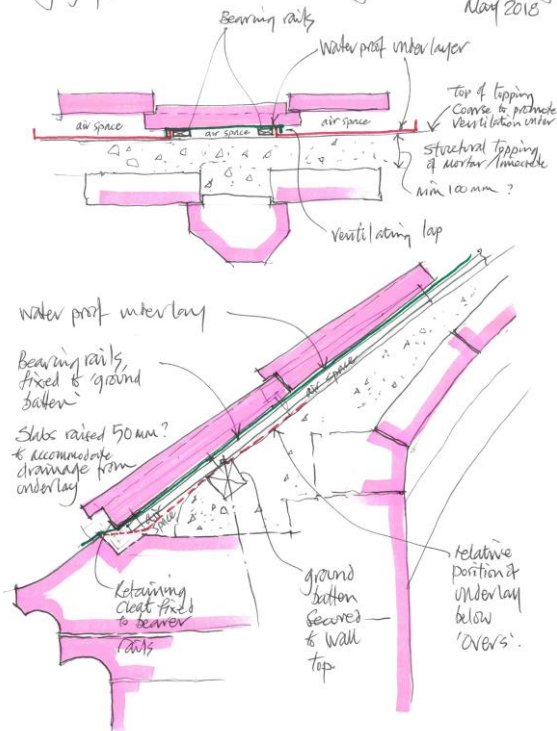
A section of the existing west slope was removed to understand better the build methodology of the roof, in particular how the stone slabs interlocked and were supported by the kneelers, and essentially how work on the roof would impact the vaulted ceiling beneath it.



The unique nature of the roof became apparent through the survey work and the efforts of the builders to generate a structure that was watertight through the use of jointing in the over and under slabs was revealed. Questions of why there had been failures over the past years were asked and researched to give an understanding of the building's heritage with this roof; was it a fundamental failure of initial design? Was this 'modern' method and materials being unsympathetic to heritage building that were at play? Was it simply a case of old age?

Little or no mention of the 'state of repair' of the church is made before 1886 when the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society made the first of 3 visits over a 50-year period. This first visit was made at the end of a 30 year works period on the church by the parish. This is noted in an entry in the Western Gazette newspaper from December 8th 1882:

LIMINGTON ST MARY: CHANTRY ROOF
 Relaying of slabs with drained underlay © Beach Tyldesley May 2018



“RE-OPENING OF LIMINGTON CHURCH

The parish church of St Mary, which holds a notable place among the many interesting churches in Somerset was re-opened yesterday (Thursday) after undergoing restoration. The building is of 14th century date, and consists of nave, chancel, chantry, square tower and south porch. The present chancel was built upon the site of an older one about 12 years ago (1870, ed) by the friends and neighbours of the late Rector, (the Rev T Brancker). The work which has just been completed was the restoration of the nave, which the churchwardens and parishioners have been anxious to see carried out ever since the re-building of the chancel.

In the report of their visit there is nothing of a negative disposition to note about the state of repair of the chapel at this stage; as there is no mention made of water ingress or such like by John Leyland (1525-1550), Edmund Rack (1780s) or Sir Stephen Glynne (1849) in their visit reports [Glynne’s report may be worth further reading to understand the reasons behind the newspaper’s description that the chancel was completely demolished and rebuilt in 1870].

The 1910 visit report by SANHS is significant for pointing to a date when the possible issues with the build structure began. It is noted that in 1905 a portion of the east roof of the chantry chapel fell en-masse to the ground. This was caused by a settlement in the north wall of the chapel, which was not ‘injured internally’. The slabs were replaced and in 1930 the chapel itself was restored with the failing organ removed and a new altar placed within, the double tomb figures removed from under the west window were moved into the chapel arch where Leyland had noted their presence, and significantly 14th century decorated floor tiles were found within the chapel (the chapel was dedicated in 1931 by the then Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells; as reported in the Western Gazette, October 31st 1931).

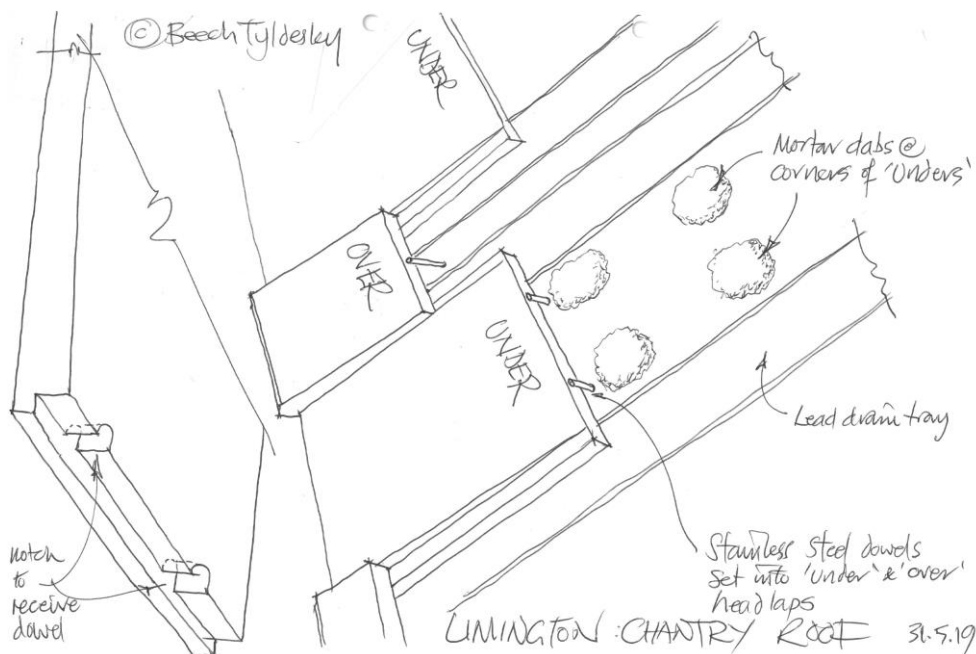
Further works to stop water ingress are evident following the initial quinquennial survey of the building in the late 1950s, and this work appeared to have been undertaken every 10 years or so, but failed to prevent the leaks.

Following the investigations into the roof space it was decided to create an under structure of steel beams to support the slabs and introduce both a waterproof membrane layer and a good air space to assist with drying of the structure following any rain.

As shown the proposed system would ensure integrity with the architectural heritage features of the stone slab construction, enable structural integrity with the walls, kneelers and ceiling structure. The aim was to anchor the frame into the walls with vertical pins. In essence a modern roofing solution would be provided in such a manner that the heritage was preserved and essentially the view from the outside and inside remained for the visitor just as was before; it would look like nothing had been undertaken at all.

Work began in the spring of 2019 with the erection of scaffold and the removal of the stone slabs from both east and west slopes. At this juncture the true nature of the work undertaken in 1905 became apparent; the finish and the materials used in the east and west slope were very different; the east slope looking professionally completed, the west like it had been built on a reduced budget. Now it was evident that the original untouched west slope, the cause of the leaking noted from the 1960s onwards, was in a much deteriorated state. The east slope, repaired after the mass slippage in 1905 revealed a better finish, resistant to leaks. Further, the nature of the kneelers and their capacity to support a new steel structure was revealed and this all gave rise to a radical re-think of the way forward.

After much consultation a new, simplified plan emerged which, ironically involved much more traditional methodology for the stone masons to follow and incorporated 'heritage' materials within the work. Further issues with movement in the walls of the chapel were stabilised through pinning of the east and west walls to the north wall of the chapel, with a desire to stabilize further cracking about the north window under which the historically important figure of Sir Richard Gyvernay sits within the chapel.



The 'concrete' foundation bed for the stone slabs was removed and stabilised on both slopes and a system of lead trays installed to act as gutters beneath the vertical joints in the slabs. These emerge through new venting drains inserted into the lowest part of the joint. The slabs were then relayed using a system of pads and stainless steel dowels to support

the horizontal joints. The largely missing lead weatherproof strip across the ridge level was re-introduced before the heavy ridge stones were replaced. Several of the damaged and cracked stone slabs were replaced with solid, rather than re-constituted stone slabs. The inside of the chapel walls and ceiling were then cleaned of mould.

The success of the repairs is to be an ongoing evaluation; inspections have been made throughout the year following completion for both water ingress and any impact of drying out, and all is good. A full inspection is anticipated in September 2020 and then again in the following quinquennial inspection of 2025. From a heritage perspective it was apparent from a visit in August by a watercolour artist wishing to paint the church that the external appearance of the property is to all intents and purposes original.

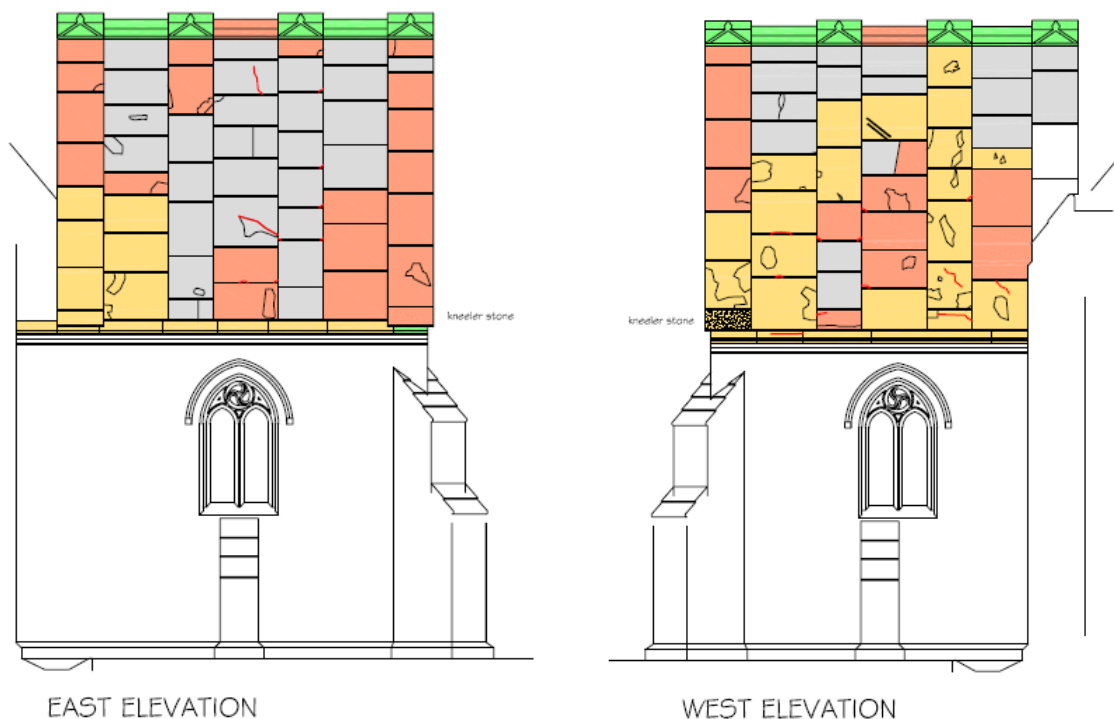
2. Understanding heritage: Documenting and widening understanding of the building construction and purposes of the chapel.

Detailed drawings and plans of the chapel structure were completed during the project and, as outlined above a fuller understanding of the 'simple yet clever' design of the roof structure was gleaned. In many ways what was thought to have been a complex structure proved to be much as any roof would have been in the early 14th century, save for the fact that it was stone rather than wood shingle or slate. During the development phase the works were recorded by the Stone and Slate Roofing Association for their archive.

Construction;

Investigation, following removal of several stone slabs from the apex and the top of the east roof slope revealed the basic form of construction of the roof – columns of Ham stone slabs alternately 'over' and 'under' and each successive slab in a column rebated one above the other. However, it was noted the side laps are formed in a straight line fully removing the head lap rebate from the 'unders' at the side abutment with the 'overs', thus exposing the ends of the horizontal abutment at every intersection.

These slabs rested on a rubble and mortar bedding directly over the ashlar vaulted ceiling. Approximate dates and ages for the stone slabs of the roof and the ridge reveal construction and repair dates from the 14th, 17th, 19th and 20th centuries.



It is widely accepted that the chapel dates from the 14th century, possible from 1328. As can be seen in the above diagrams it has a plinth, angled corner buttresses almost full height and sill height intermediates. The North window has 3-lights, East and West have 2-lights and all have C14 curvilinear tracery. Above the North window a trefoil arched statue niche, and to the right side of the arch in the wall are the shadows of a former wall plaque installation. In the East wall is a blocked 4-centre arched doorway.

On the ceiling, which in 1780 Rack talks of as 'curiously painted', no sign of paint was found during the works and Glynne made no mention of it in his report of 1849. There is a fine cinquefoil cusped arched niche in the North wall below which is set the figure of Sir Richard Gyvernay.

In 1882 the faculty dated 1 Aug reveals the major works undertaken on the building. Monuments, noted already were removed from the chantry chapel and fixed at the west end under the tower. The old plaster from the internal walls of church, chapel, porch and tower was removed (possibly along with any painting in sub levels of the plasterwork) and subsequently renewed. The entire floor of the church was taken up and the nave, chancel and porch covered with tiles and a wooden floor placed under the tower and the seats in the nave. An organ was installed in the chapel.

In 1929 the old organ which occupied the chantry chapel was removed and proved to be 'so worm-eaten and decayed' that Mr George Osmond asked leave of the Rector to leave every piece of woodwork behind for burning'. The new organ was placed 'at the east end of the choir stall in the north side of the Chancel'. At this time, it was decided to restore the chapel to its former use. The article published on October 2nd 1931 in the Western Gazette to celebrate the dedication of the new Altar with then chapel by the bishop notes:

A 14TH CENTURY CHANTRY – LIMINGTON RESTORATION COMPLETED

... The tomb of the founder, Sir Richard de Gyvernay, a knight of the Black death period is in a recess in the north wall. It has never been moved, and is in perfect condition. ... His second wife Gunnora, lies by his side, a recumbent figure clad in a wimple and flowing robe. On the opposite side of the chantry, beneath the arch, and raised on a higher pedestal of Ham hill stone is the double tomb of Sir Gilbert and Lady Mabel de Gyvernay, the parents of Sir Richard. ... The double tomb was removed by Messrs G Cox and Son from under the west window, where it lay north and south, to its original position according the Leyland, and round the founder's tomb a plinth has been revealed by a sunken course.

Mention here of the double tomb being that of Sir Gilbert and Lady Mabel is a revelation as recent writing has strongly directed thought to this being the tomb of Henry and Matilda Power, Sir Richard's sister and husband who it is said inherited the manor after Sir Richard died without surviving issue. The tomb being 'under the West' window facing 'north south' does sit with contemporary understandings that these were within the tower base at one stage and moved to today's location under the arch of the nave/chapel. However, if placed north/south the tomb would have blocked passage from the West Door in the tower and an east/west alignment as now would have been thought correct. Looking to the carving of the figures it would suggest that at some time they had resided against a wall, possibly in another niche now long gone. The lack of weathering would further suggest any such niche was indoors, rather than outside. Might it be that they have been moved about within St Mary's or possibly from another location? Research has revealed that the Gyvernay estate in Somerset included lands and a manor at Stockland Bristol, in the west

of the county and was at one time held by Sir Richard and his brother John. Might it be that these carvings are of Sir Richard's brother and wife, rather than father and mother, or sister and husband, and have they been moved from the church at Stockland Bristol; where today no physical evidence of the Gyvernay's is extant?

3. Revealing heritage: Researching and Revealing 'architectural' heritage

From a heritage perspective greater understanding has been gained of the building's architectural archaeology through a survey assessment conducted by Mr Jerry Sampson (Buildings archaeology specialist involved in the Wells Cathedral West Front conservation programme in 1980-87, with similar work carried out for Salisbury Cathedral and Bath Abbey. Currently Cathedral Archaeologist for St David's and Wells Cathedrals. President of Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society 2013-14 and currently vice-president). He notes in his report that the various accounts available from historic sources offer many disparate conclusions regarding the dating of the church fabric and the sepulchral effigies of the north chantry chapel. Further refinements are to be made he suggests to enable an understanding of both the timeline of the building's fabric and repair and with it an understanding of the anticipated intention of those changes. He continues:

The north wall of the nave incorporates a round-headed, probably mid-twelfth century blocked doorway, probably indicating that much, if not all, of the north side of the nave is of this date. The series of putlog holes in the north nave wall (used to locate the horizontal members of the original construction scaffolding) are at different heights to those in the west wall of the Gyvernay chapel, indicating that these two parts of the building belong to different campaigns of construction. The south nave door may also be twelfth century in date. The fabric of the north nave wall changes towards the junction with the west tower, indicating that the latter is additional.

The establishment of the Gyvernay chantry (the instruments for which seem typical of a fourteenth or fifteenth century foundation) is dated in the Bishop's Register of Bishop Drovensford (1309-29) to May 1329, and requires that the chaplain '...shall celebrate daily mass at the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary constructed in the nave of the same church with the Office of the Dead and also "the Commendation" with "the Placebo" and "the Dirige," said for the souls of the aforementioned [Lord Richard and Matilda, his wife; Gilbert Gyvernay and Matilda, father and mother of that same Richard; Lord Philip de Columbar and Aleanora, his wife; Gunnora, former wife of the said Lord Richard; and Margaret, former wife of the same; Henry Power and Matilda, his wife...]

The administrators of the chantry (initially Lord Richard, and after his death Henry Power) were to provide vestments, altar ornaments, a missal and chalice, as well as 'other things which are deemed necessary for the willing performance of the divine office or other seasonable offices'. Other celebrations additional to the daily mass are also itemised, including that of the 'anniversary', 'Likewise, we establish that each year the said Chaplain and the Rector shall both say "the Placebo" and "the Dirige" on the eve of the Feast of the Ascension between Vespers and Compline. And on the Feast of the Ascension itself, they shall say a mass for the dead. And, at another time, they shall celebrate a Mass of Saint Mary in the said Church, and the aforementioned Chaplain shall keep 6d. for the Rector, if the Rector shall have attended and shall have observed. And for the Clerk of the said Church, 2d. for ringing the bell, and for help at Mass, presiding at

funerals, and praying for the souls of the parishioners in public, which shall be as the occasion demands, said Church shall be obligated to pay 1d. in recompense for their labour each year on the aforementioned Feast.'

The anniversary obit effectively re-enacted the services of the burial itself, including the giving of alms and other ancillary activities. The funeral itself would have begun '...on the afternoon of the day preceding interment with the Vespers of the Dead (known as the Placebo, after the word with which the service commenced). Early next morning, after the Matins and Lauds of the Dead (known as the Dirige), it was the custom in some circles to celebrate the Mass of the Trinity and the Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After breakfast, a solemn high Mass of Requiem was celebrated, after which the burial service would be said and the body interred. The anniversary, while spreading over two days, saw the performance of both the Vespers and the Matins and Lauds - usually referred to in Bristol as the exequies - on the afternoon or evening of the first day. On the following morning a Requiem Mass was celebrated. Anniversaries, however, consisted of considerably more than exequies and a Mass. For the other practices which regularly accompanied funerals, like bell-ringing, candle-burning and alms-giving were part and parcel of the observance.'

In the case of the foundation of the Gyvernay chantry the almsgiving took the form of a donation of bread for the poor, 'Likewise, the said Chaplain, from the aforementioned possessions, each year, on the Feast of the Ascension, shall distribute 10s. worth of bread to the poor in the cemetery of the said Church in perpetuity for the souls of the aforementioned...'

Furthermore, the church itself benefited from the presence of the chantry priest, since he was charged to 'personally take part in celebrating Vespers, Matins, Mass, and all other canonical hours in said Church every Sunday and on double feasts unless he shall be occupied with his patrons' - thus allowing for the greater elaboration and dignity of the parish's own liturgical performance.

We see then that the chapel was indeed built with longevity of purpose in mind and whilst other parts of the church, namely the chancel, may have been of lesser quality, the chapel was, for its day, an expensive item. The question arises of how a 'County knight' such as Gyvernay could come to the wealth required from what appears locally as such a small land holding as Limington? Research into the decorated floor tiles found within the chapel during the renovations of the early twentieth century, and detailed later in this report, would suggest that the Gyvernays' held substantial lands within Somerset and were well connected in society. That we see mentioned in documents that stone roofed chapels are rare in England but more popular in Spain and, of note for us, Ireland is also given a nod to through the emblazonment of the tiles. Of course, whilst Dressler suggests there are no records indicating Sir Richard took up sword for battle it does not mean that he was not travelled, and possibly to the likes of Ireland in support of members of the Clare family.

What's in a Name?

Whilst research into the architectural heritage of the church was being undertaken it has emerged that the name the church bears today may not be the original dedication. Today we know the church as St Mary's, but it doesn't seem to always have had that name. The petition made to the Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1324 to build the Chantry Chapel talks of a request to build a chantry chapel at the church of St Leonard, Limington. Leonard was a Frankish monk from the 6th and many churches across Europe were dedicated to the saint. Why here? Richard the Lionheart was a keen follower of the saint and the king had a close connection with nearby Ilchester and purportedly sojourned in this area. Might it be that the church, being

built in the mid to late 1100s took as its patron saint one of the Kings favourites? By whatever means the church became St Leonard's, we know that today it bears the patronage of its chantry chapel; The Blessed Virgin Mary, or simply St Mary's.

We can only speculate as to why the name changed. It is to be noted that following the Reformation many an English church, once dedicated to Mary, lost this dedication in favour of the likes of All Saint's or Holy Trinity. Many of these churches will have a chapel that today is dedicated to St Mary; a reversal of what seems to have occurred at Limington.

However, might it be that with a Rood Screen in place, separating the folks of the village from the altar dedicated to St Leonard held within the chancel, led to these folks using Sir Richard's altar in view in the chantry? As time went by the altar became theirs and with it the sense that their church was St Mary's. We will probably never know the truth.

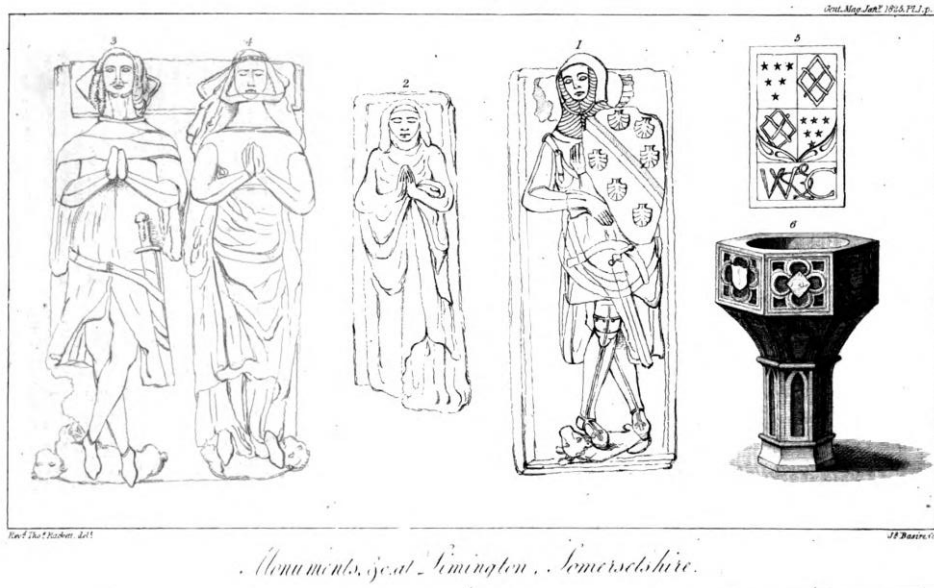
4. Revealing heritage: Revealing 'people' heritage of St Mary's

Notable historians from antiquity have visited and recorded their thoughts on the architecture of St Mary's. They have also made comment on the memorial statues of Sir Richard Gyvernay and family members, today held within the chantry chapel, and even sought to tell us something about some of the people associated with the church; mostly that of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey.

Sir Richard Gyvernay and family

Local knowledge of Sir Richard Gyvernay and his family has largely been gleaned from the visits of notable historians of antiquity, however in recent years the work of Dr Rachel Dressler, Associate Professor in Medieval Art at Albany State University, New York has provided further information and much thought for discussion.

Leland first makes mention of the statues in the chantry in 1540 and Collinson likewise in 1791. The Gentleman's Magazine of 1825 provided text, largely repeating Leland and Collinson, and sketches of the effigies. WW Whealtes attended the church at the time of the rebuilding of the chancel in 1845 and sketched a quite plain chapel space (held within the Brakenridge Collection). Pevsner followed them all in 1958 when he included the church in his notes.



Each have noted the four effigies contained within the church of St Mary relating to Sir Richard Gyvernay, a knight reclining on a ledge within the arch. He tilts his head towards the viewer and lies with his legs crossed, while his right arm reaches across his body to grasp the hilt of the sword within the scabbard hanging on his left side. His head rests on a great helm. He wears the costume of a knight from near the end of the first third of the 14th century. Beside him on the floor of the chapel is a statue of his wife Gunnora and under the arch between the chapel and nave are the statues of Henry Power and his wife Matilda, sister in law to Sir Richard.

Dr Rachel Dressler's recent research and interpretation of these figures has been significant in the understanding of medieval funeral carving in the English tradition. The effigies feature in several papers within compilation books [the most recent being 'sculptural representation and spacial appropriation in a medieval chantry chapel' *Thresholds of Medieval Visual Culture: Liminal Spaces*, 2012 Boydell Press] and most notably in Dressler's book 'Of Armor and Men in Medieval England: the Chivalric Rhetoric of Three English Knights' Effigies' [Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004] which uses Sir Richard as one of its 3 study pieces].

However, heritage research by the project's volunteers have unearthed many new threads of evidence which build a picture of Sir Richard, and which leave many more questions seeking answers.

Delving into the world of 13th and 14th century England reveals a fluidity of land holdings, royal court judgments, favours granted and taken, and of taxes levelled through land to provide the nation, namely the king, through the knightly classes, or men at arms ready for war with Europe; mainly France. Limington and the Manor therein was very much part of the system.

Beginning in the late 1200's we find Limington held by the church, by the Prior of Bradenstoke – today a small village just south of Royal Wooton Bassett.

Priory of Bradenstoke, Wilshire (Augustinian) The most valuable manor belonging to Braden-stoke in Somerset was in Limington, granted by Godfrey St. Martin, and confirmed by royal charter in 1232. It was worth £5 10s. in 1291. The prior was allowed in 1232 to erect a gallows here. Cal. Close, 1231-4, 115. In 1280 the prior defended the withdrawal of a third of a tithing in Limington from the hundred of Stone by producing

the royal charter of 1232: Plac. de Quo Warr. (Rec. Com.), 689. Part of the Limington manor formed a moiety of a knight's fee held of the Beauchamps of Hatch, and another part in 1287 was $\frac{1}{8}$ of a knight's fee and rendered no service: Cal. inq. p.m. viii, p. 323; Som. Rec. Soc. xxxv, 31, 67. (<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol3/pp275-288>)

This 'holding', for want of a better term, appears to have continued through to at least the middle of the 14th century for the court rolls of Edward III (1345) talk of the Prior holding Limington as part of a knight's fee. Our interest ends before this date in 1329 when we note that Sir Richard was granted permission for the chapel's construction by the then Bishop of Bath and Wells.

However, the long term 'holding' of the manor by the Priors suggest that Limington was occupied by Sir Richard, in effect, a tenant in order to provide an income for the knight and his family. We do see, however that the manor was not sufficient to give the full income, it being but a 'moiety' or portion. Other property would then be required to make up his 'living', but where?

Research suggests the land holding required were located in Somerset. Records relating to the manor of STOCKLAND Bristol, actually on the coast at Bridgwater, its Bristol derivation comes from its ownership for many years by the mediaeval Bristol Corporation, suggest a possible joint holding to give the knight his fee, his living.

An estate called JUVENIS, Jouverney, or Juffnies, may have belonged to the Iuvernay or Gyverney family in the 13th century. Richard and William Gyverney were recorded in the area in 1286 and 1297, and in 1338 an estate in Otterhampton and Stockland was settled on Richard Gyverney and his third wife Margaret. Richard was succeeded by Maud, said to be his sister, and her husband Henry Power (d. 1361). Their daughter Joan married William Shareshull, who is said to have sold his Somerset estates to William Bonville. In 1408 Juvenis belonged to William Bonville and descended with the manor of Idstock in Chilton Trinity. Edmund Bowyer sold Juvenis with Idstock to Edward Colston in 1707 and it formed part of the estate of Colston's hospital, Bristol, until 1919. (<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/som/vol6/pp126-127>)

Interestingly what we have here are the same succession details as recorded for Limington, with the 'Powers' taking on the manor as Sir Richard died without surviving issue, from any of his 3 wives! The settlement of Otterhampton and Stockland on Sir Richard is almost a decade after the chapel at Limington was granted 'planning permission'. Is it that there are no physical memorials to Sir Richard in Otterhampton or Stockland because he held the lands for a short period before his death, or might it be that his focus was the chapel at Limington; it had been and would remain his home?

It is noted that these 2 manors, forming the Juvenis estate were recorded sold to William Bonville. Almost certainly this would have been to William Bonville, member of parliament for Somerset and Devon rather than his grandson and namesake, William first Baron Bonville who would have been just 11 and ward of his grandfather following his father John's death when he was aged 4. Such an assumption is made noting the link between the manors through our Sir Richard and the Patronage of St Mary's This notes a William Bonville – Knight as patron 1403. Whilst it might have been the first Baron it is highly unlikely he would have been knighted by the age of 6. However, it is highly likely that we find Baron Bonville as Patron at St Mary's, but in 1423; the patronage is held by Edward Duke of York in 1411 (held it is noted on behalf of Thomas Bonville, knight), in 1412 it is held by Edmund Wynter before, in 1423 William Bonville - Knight.

The Juvenis Estate is noted as the Gyvernay's and included Otterhampton, Stockland and Limington. It appears a manor house of that name existed in Stockland for many years and was later sold, along with Idstock (located not far from Otterhampton and Stockland). However, might the inclusion of the memorial statues at Limington to both Sir Richard, one of his wives, his sister and her husband (the Powers to whom the estate passed) point to Limington as both the primary residence of the family, and the main stay of the Juvenis, Jouverney, or Juffnies Estate? It is feasible that the manor house in Stockland was inhabited by the Gyvernay's tenant farmer unless they were of course, as it were, 'in town visiting'. Or did Sir Richard's brother William dwell there and Sir Richard at Limington?

Whilst the kingdom appears stable during the 13th and 14th centuries with long reigning kings (Henry III - 1216-1272; Edward I - 1272-1307; Edward II - 1307-1327; Edward III - 1327 - 1377) the same cannot be said about the counties of England and the holdings therein by Earls and Lords and ladies. And, it seems Sir Richard is in the thick of things.

Research suggest that the family were tenant holders of the manor at Hacche (Hatch Beauchamp) for a period of time in the 13th century. We find in the manuscripts of the dean and chapter of Wells (vol1 begun in 1254) the Sir Richard mentioned as 'son of Ralph, son of Bernard' in a dispute over the 'manor of Hacche, which his father held'. This 'holding' is as tenant for the estate itself had been in the hands of the De Beauchamp family by royal charter since 1092 when it was 'escheated', seized, by King William from his half-brother and rebel, Robert Count of Mortain.

Robert IV de Beauchamp was but 8 years old when his father died in 1199 and was made a ward of the King. He took the full title of de Beauchamp on reaching his majority (21 years). In the ensuing years he and his son would spend much time in the King's campaigns in Scotland, Ireland and in supressing the rebellions of the Welsh. It is perfectly feasible for Richard's father, Ralph to have been the tenant of the manor during these years, managing the land for the Lord.

However, the most interesting thing to note in the record is that the petition is made by Richard against his brother William. The record reads:

*"Charter of Richard son of Ralph son of Bernard war-ranting to the dean and chapter of Wells the manor of Hacche, which his father held, against William his brother, and all others claiming under his father, his mother, himself, or the said William, and on failure of this warranty conceding 'our land of Limington' in exchange, with indemnity for all pleas and expenses. Witnesses: Hugh de Well' archdeacon of Wells, Joscelin his brother, *Simon de Pateshyll, Master Eustace de Facunberg, James de Poterna, Richard de Mulcegos (sic) justices of the king, Master Roger de Sanford, Hugh Nichol canons of Wells." (vol 1, 1254)*

Is this where the manor at Limington becomes the sole holding of Richard, rather than shared with William, on the failure of the warrant? Is it that Sir Richard builds the chapel and places the memorial statues within to show the world that he alone is Lord of the manor?

Prior to this time, it seems that, although the references suggest his father would have been in Somerset, Richard was himself in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire for we note:

“Richard of Juveny, steward of Richard de la Bere, came before the king at Merton' on Friday in the week of Easter, and asked for ground stacked Richard de la Bere, of his lord, he repleged, which is captured in the hand of the lord king for a default which he made before the king versus William of Ebroic' of the plea warranty.” (Close rolls Henry iii april 1248)

It would seem that Richard had been given land by the Lord de la Bere but this had been caught up in all the lands taken from de la Bere by the King, and Richard wished his lands returned. This also suggests that Richard already held the estate of Juveny in 1248, albeit in part with William his brother. Further it suggests that the Richard who petitioned for the building of the chapel in 1324, a widower 3 times and who died in 1329, was an old man of at least 81 years. But could this be the case? May it instead be this chapel builder Richard is the son of Richard the petitioner above? We will most likely never know!

What we do know is that petitioning for funds owed and recompense for actions taken was prevalent in this time and that in 1313 a Richard Gyvernay is petitioned at Windsor on January 25th citing that *'he owes to Richard de Borland 60 shillings'*. This petition is acknowledged by Richard and *'levied, in default of payment, of his lands and chattels in County Somerset'* – was it taken from Limington, Otterhampton, Stockland Bristol, Hacche; again we will never know!

Thomas Wolsey, John Conant and Daniel Dumaresq – 3 clerics

Thomas Wolsey

In 1499 the then Patron of St Mary's, Thomas Grey Marquis of Dorset, met Thomas Wolsey, master to the Marquis's three sons at Magdalene College in Oxford. He was so impressed with this young priest that he offered Wolsey the benefice of Limington.

There is some good evidence that Wolsey did live in Limington for at least two of the nine years he held this his first post. That said, Wolsey had other parishes after, and at the same time; he asked the Pope for dispensation on two occasions to be absent from Limington whilst he visited the other parishes. Another convincing piece of evidence in support of Wolsey having worked and lived in Limington is the recording of an incident involving Sir Amyas Paulet, a sheriff in Somerset, who had Wolsey put in the stocks for drunken and lewd behaviour after the Merriott fair.

In 1509 Wolsey began his career working for the new King Henry VIII as almoner. Wolsey's affairs prospered, and by 1514 he had become the controlling figure in virtually all matters of state and extremely powerful within the Church, as Archbishop of York. His appointment in 1515 as a cardinal by Pope Leo X gave him precedence over all other English clerics. The highest political position Wolsey attained was Lord Chancellor, the King's chief adviser. In that position he began the work, continued by his protégé Thomas Cromwell, of the Reformation in England and Wales. A work ultimately rounded off, in part, by another Limington cleric 100 years later, John Conant.

Wolsey enjoyed great freedom in his work but after failing to negotiate an annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Wolsey fell out of favour and was stripped of his government titles. He retreated to York but was recalled to London to answer to charges of treason —a common charge used by Henry against ministers who fell out of favour—but died on the way from natural causes.

John Conant

On the 30th December 1619 John Conant was appointed the vicar of Limington. He was a prominent figure for no less a reason than his strong puritan views and his appointment during the Commonwealth as a member of the Assembly of Divines.

There has been some confusion over his involvement with the Assembly as his nephew, also called John Conant and also once vicar of Limington, and was also believed to be a member of the Assembly. However, research indicates that it was Conant the elder who held this prestigious appointment and not his nephew. As a strong supporter of the Parliamentary cause he became very unpopular in Somerset. He took himself to London and on 26th July 1643 preached to the House of Commons calling on it to reform the church. As a result of this he was appointed as a founding member of the Assembly of Divines. John Conant was Rector during the Commonwealth and research has shown he became a member of the Westminster Divines, working on the reformation of the Church of England. Following the Restoration of the Monarchy much of the work undertaken became the foundation of the Presbyterian church, however the work completed provided for the adoption of the single Book of Common Prayer and the provision of the first Authorized bible in England, the King James.

The Westminster Assembly of Divines was a council of theologians and members of the English Parliament appointed from 1643 to 1653 to restructure the Church of England. Several Scots also attended, and the Assembly's work was adopted by the Church of Scotland. It produced a new Form of Church Governance, a Confession of Faith, Catechisms for religious instruction, a liturgical manual, the Directory for Public Worship, for the Churches of England and Scotland. Much of their work was adopted by the Church of Scotland and other Presbyterian churches, where they remain normative. Amended versions of the Confession were also adopted in Congregational and Baptist churches in England. However, in the Church of England almost everything was revoked after the Restoration of 1660.

When we talk of the heritage of the English nations it is clear that these 2 clerics, based in Limington for their ministries have played a significant role. Wolsey is the man who begins the work of reforming the church in England that would after his death become the Church of England. A church which faced further reform after the revolution of the English Civil wars when John Conant and his fellow 'Divines' set to work. Anyone sitting within the church or its chapel today would do well to listen carefully to the whispers coming from its walls of these most notable persons from the nation's heritage; as the slogan emblazoned over the nave door says to all exiting the building 'take heed how ye hear'.

Daniel Dumaresq

Daniel Dumaresq was born in Jersey in 1712 and educated at Oxford University where he stayed until 1746 when he took up the first of several interesting challenges. He travelled to St Petersburg in Russia as Chaplain to the 'English Factory'. In his 17 years in Russia he became a fluent Russian speaker and Chaplain to the British Ambassador for two years where he made friends with many of the leading men and women in the Court.

Dumaresq met Catherine, the future Empress of Russia, whilst at the Russian Court. When she became Empress she requested help from him in setting up schools throughout the country. He gave some time to this project and when it was completed he was asked by the King of Poland for help in developing education in Poland. He moved back to England in 1762 and was appointed Rector of Yeovilton in 1762.

He became the Vicar of Limington when John Clothier died in 1790 but immediately leased the property and the post. The practice of holding several livings at once and renting them out was common in this age. Dumaresq died in 1805 aged 93 having relinquished his post in Limington in 1802!

For the visitor to St Mary's the project has sought to provide accessible and memorable presentations on all aspects of the heritage physical and human. This has been achieved through the production of permanent display panels carefully placed about the west end of the nave and along the west wall of the chapel, so as to welcome but not to hamper the outlook and ambience of the building. A free visitors' short guide book has also been produced.

St Mary's Church Limington

Where does it all begin? Well, we know that people were here in the 3rd century and it would be possible, with the nearby well, that the site once had a Pagan Temple. In all probability the Monks of Glastonbury established a Christian church here in the Saxon period; but was it wood or stone? The basis of the church today is seen in the North Wall, the Tower base and the South Door arch which all contain stone work (lighter in colour) from the 1150's. If there was a Saxon church here it was substantially replaced at this time.

A Tower may have been added, or building begun close to the end of the 1200s, with the Arch dating from 1280. The main construction of the tower dates to the C14th. The South Porch seems to have been added in the 1300s as was our rather unique Chantry Chapel (1329). The Chancel Arch is dated to 1380 whilst the Chancel itself is from the 1400s. It may well be the case that Limington saw decades of building work to actually achieve the results we see today; certainly things were not thrown up overnight back in history!

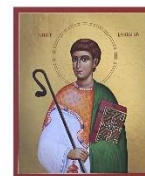
To the right of the Chancel Arch, near the Jacobean Pulpit, is the blocked up door where there were once stairs leading to a roof-loft. The Linenfold Paneling within the Chancel Arch was once thought to be remains of the roof screen but is probably of Victorian origin. The niches either side of the Chancel Arch were formally altars, that on the right side being dedicated to St Lawrence and that on the left to The Blessed Virgin Mary. Set into the niche on the left side are very finely carved remnants of Grave Covers, thought to date from the late C13th found beneath the floor during Victorian alterations in 1882.



So, just what is the name of this Church?

Well it is St Mary's today but it doesn't seem to always have been so. The petition made to the Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1324 to build the Chantry Chapel tells that this was originally St Leonard's church. Leonard was a Frankish monk from the sixth century associated with many miracles and healings. Many churches across Europe are dedicated to him but we do not know for sure why this church was. Richard the Lionheart is known to have visited Leonard's shrine and held a close connection with the saint. Richard also had a close connection with nearby Ilchester and purportedly sojourned in this area. Might it be that the church being built in the mid to late 1100s took as its patron saint one of the Kings favourites?

How then might it be that it became St Mary's? When he built the Chantry Chapel in 1329, Sir Richard Gvernay requested that an altar dedicated to Blessed Virgin Mary be built in the Nave of the church. At this time a Rood Screen separated Nave and Chancel in which the altar dedicated to St Leonard was located; the Chancel was known as the priest's area in a church and the laity were kept out. In the Nave, the people's space, was an altar dedicated to St Mary. Might it be that the people saw this altar as theirs over the centuries and so came the sense that their church was that of St Mary rather than St Leonard? One question remains, how is it that a church associated with important figures of the English Reformation retained the dedication to Mary?



LOTTERY FUNDED

Panel detailing the architectural history of the church for the visitor to ponder on.

From the Chantry Chapel founder to Bishops, and even naughty graffiti artists, people have left their marks on the church fabric. It is hard to miss the carved statues of Sir Richard, or those of his wife, sister and brother-in-law, however there are other features you might not see if you walk about too fast.

Look to the ends of the choir stall and you will see initials and flowers and coats of arms. There has been some debate over the years as to whose initials these are. Today it is widely thought to be celebrating the marriage of William Bonville Lord Harrington and Catherine daughter of Sir Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury. The Neville family became known as the King Makers during the War of the Roses. William and Catherine had one child, Cecily who married Thomas Grey, Marquis of Dorset and their son Thomas presented the church living to Thomas Wolsey in 1500.



Two marks that were certainly placed with intention and purpose are to be found on either side of the South Door Arch. To the right, highlighted today in pencil is the remains of an old 'Mass Dial'. Most often pre-14th Century these are thought to be primitive sun dials for showing the time of services and are mostly found on the south side of a church.



On the left side of the doorway you will see at least one 'Consecration cross'. These marks show the dedication of the church, most often by a bishop; more than one might show different building phases blessed and celebrated.



Coincidence? Highlighted today in pencil on the arch of the South Doorway is what looks to be the carved initials 'WC'. Might these be from the same date as the pew ends, might they in fact be 'WG', might it be nothing at all? As with all graffiti we would be certain if there had been CCTV in operation.

A Story to tell in Stone and Glass



The Chancel Windows (North)

Left Jesus with Mary and Martha

Right St Peter with mourmers and Dorcas/Tabitha whom he bought back to life

Dedication: In memory of Frances Sophia Routh died Jan 4 1871 (She is thought to have been related to the Williams family at the manor)

This church has a particularly interesting set of windows. They were all put in following the major refurbishment of the chancel in 1870. It seems that wealthy families having a connection with, but not necessarily living in, Limington were invited to give windows. They are thought to have been designed and made by Clayton & Bell of London the most prestigious firm of stained glass manufacturers at the time.



The East Window

Final episodes in the life of Christ - Palm Sunday to Easter

Dedication: In memory of Sir Thomas Brantley, Knight and Dame Eliza Jane his wife this window is dedicated by their daughters Hannah and Elizabeth.



The Chancel Windows (South)

Left: The wedding feast at Cana

Right: The loaves and fishes

Dedication: To the Glory of God and in memory of James Mills of Limington died Feb. 1854 (The Mills family were the Limington brewers and lived at what is now High Barn)

This panel asks visitors to think of the heritage story of the church that the various different styles of construction, the windows, and even what looks at first glance today as graffiti tell us of people's hopes and aspirations through the ages.

The Chantry Chapel Of Blessed Virgin Mary, Limington

The register of John of Drokenesford, Bishop of Bath and Wells, records the foundation of a chantry in the parish church of Limington, Somerset, by Lord Richard Gyvernay in 1329. In the text, Lord Richard directs prayers to be said for himself, his wife Matilda, Richard's parents; Lord Philip de Columbar and his wife Eleanor; Gunnora and Margaret, former wives; and Henry Power and his wife Matilda.

The stonework is largely of Hamstone with a unique roof made up of overlapping heavy stone slabs. The inside of the ceiling is made up of a series of stone carved vaulted ribs. Construction would have taken many years and during the works of 2019 to repair and restore the roof which had, for over 50 years, leaked time and again, it was evident that one slope had been finished to a far higher standard than the other. Was this due to cash flow or maybe one side was completed by a different mason to the other? One thing is certain, the whole structure is crooked and it seems to be almost tacked to the side of the Nave. This, suggests that at one time there was a plan to upgrade the entire Nave with the possibility of adding another chapel or small isle to the south side creating a 'crossing' in the church.

Like much of the church the chapel has had various additions and works over the centuries. At one time it housed the church organ and in 1935 permission was given to place the statues you see to your left under the arch in position and also to move that of Sir Richard's wife, Matilda to be alongside his statue. With this work the floor was raised to its present level and broken pieces of decorated floor tiles from the 14th century were discovered. These we have sought to preserve.



The Effigies

The medieval tomb provided a threshold where heaven and earth converged its liminal character enabling multiple tasks: solicitation of prayers from the living on behalf of the dead; the display of elite status; and the reinforcement of social and gender hierarchies. The figures in the chantry of Limington perform all of these functions.

The main figure is that of a knight reclining on a ledge within the arch. He tilts his head towards the viewer and lies with his legs crossed, while his right arm reaches across his body to grasp the hilt of the sword within the scabbard hanging on his left side. His head rests on a great helm. The figure wears the costume of a knight from near the end of the first third of the 14th century. The figure must have been quite spectacular, being just over 2 metres in length and is clearly meant to dominate the chapel. This military figure is a perfect example of the chain mail wearing, sword pulling, cross-legged knight, commonly carved in England from the late 13th to mid 14th centuries.

While the knight's figure dominates the chapel the same cannot be said of the smaller female figure lying on a low plinth below him. She is depicted with hands folded in prayer with her whole figure concealed by a heavy robe. A close fitting wimple and loose veil cover her head indicating her married status.

"It is quite rare in an English parish church that, as here at Limington, we can gaze upon the stone face of an ancient effigy and be sure that we are looking at an identifiable person, Sir Richard Gyvernay, who lived in this village a stone's throw from the spot on which we are standing."

In the chapel as short summary of the research undertaken and discoveries about the chapel and its memorial statues is provided for visitors.



St Mary's Church
Limington



The Main Door

On the south side of the nave is a massive Norman arch oak door of seven diagonal boards hung on two heavy iron hinges set directly into the stone work there being no timber door frame. The surface of the door is decorated by several rows of clinched nails. There is a large wooden box lock on the interior. Externally four vertical boards are divided by three muntins (spacers) fitted over the strap hinges. Rows of hand made nails are positioned over vertical reeded strips. There is evidence of a socket for a Sanctuary knocker. Over the years there has been some conjecture that the door was transferred from the notorious Ilchester jail but this is probably apocryphal.



Medieval Bench Ends

Four bench ends which have been repurposed on the later choir stalls. These are 16th century finely carved with various symbols - poppy heads, leaves and flowers and seed pods and a pomegranate. Take a careful look and you will see carved shields containing the arms of Bonville (Patrons in the 1400s) and Harrington families. Below the shields are the carved initials W C and roses; roses of York and Tudor roses showing a link between the houses of York and Lancaster. They may symbolize the Bonville loyalty to the Yorkist cause and the acceptance of the situation under Henry VII.

Stained Glass

The church has a very fine set of windows installed in the 1870s. They were funded by wealthy families as memorials to their relatives. Each reminds us of the significant people of the faith and the large east window shows us the final episodes in the life of Christ in 14 pictures. Others show Jesus with Mary and Martha and St Peter with mourners and Dorcas who he brought back to life. Look out also for wedding feast at Cana and the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

Come In, There is a Lot to See!

Churches are more than just another building. This church is filled with memories and meaning, built and modified by the people of Limington for worship and for the community.

Never to be rushed, take time to wander and see the many interesting features left for us today if you listen carefully you may just hear the whispers of our ancestors telling of all that St Mary's and Limington meant for them.

We have designed this booklet with the advice of heritage experts and have included some of the latest research undertaken during the Chapel restoration project of 2019. Especially we are thankful for the heritage wisdom of Rachel Dressler and Jerry Sampson.

We give thanks for covering the costs of production to both The Unincorporated Friends of St Mary's and to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Three Famous Rectors

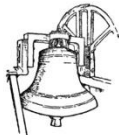
For a small parish Limington has benefited from three influential rectors. In 1499 Thomas Grey Marquis of Dorset met Thomas Wolsey who taught his three sons at Magdalen College Oxford. Thomas Grey was so impressed by Wolsey that he offered him the benefice of Limington. There is convincing evidence that although Wolsey held the living from 1500 to 1509 he worked in Limington for at least the first two years before starting work for Henry VIII. First as almoner then Archbishop of York, Cardinal of St Cecilia and Lord Chancellor.



John Conant was Rector in 1619. He held strong puritan views, not popular in the West Country and he took refuge in London in 1643. After preaching in the House of Commons he was appointed as a founding member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Their purpose was to reform the Church of England but after the Restoration in 1660 they ceased work leaving us today the BCP and the King James Bible.

The Bells

There are six bells rehung in a steel frame in 1983 after the wooden frame was found to be rotten and unsafe. The oldest bell was first cast in the early 1400s and would have been heard by Wolsey. It is dedicated to Santa Anna. However, it has been recast on several occasions most recently in 1893. Additional bells were donated over time but most were recast by Mears & Stainbank at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London in 1893 when two further bells were added to complete the peal of six. One of the early bells, cast in 1690, survived without being recast until 1909 when it too was recast by Llewellyn & James of Bristol.



What's In a Name?

Today we know the church as St Mary's, but it doesn't seem to always have been had that name. The petition made to the Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1324 to build the Chantry Chapel tells that this was originally St Leonard's church. Leonard was a Frankish monk from the 6th and many churches across Europe were dedicated to the saint. Why here? Richard the Lionheart was a keen follower of the saint and the king had had a close connection with nearby Ilchester and purportedly sojourned in this area. Might it be that the church being built in the mid to late 1100s took as its patron saint one of the Kings favourites?

How then did it become St Mary's? Well when he built the Chantry Chapel in 1328, Sir Richard Gynernay requested that an altar to Blessed Virgin Mary be built in the Nave of the church. At this time a Rood Screen separated Nave and Chancel in which the altar dedicated to St Leonard was located. The Nave, the people's space, now had an altar dedicated to St Mary. Might it be that the people saw this altar as theirs and with it the sense that their church was that of St Mary rather than St Leonard?

Saxon Beginnings

The church site may have had a pagan temple associated with the 4th century Roman officer's residence thought to be located where today's Limington House stands. However, by Saxon times the Monks at Glastonbury Abbey had most likely built the first church on the site.

Today's church was begun in the 1150's and progressive ages saw the various parts built, adjusted and 'modernized' through the centuries. The arch at the tower end of the Nave is from 1280 whilst the arch at the other end of the Nave, the arch to the Chancel, is from 100 years later. It may be that the space in between, the Nave itself, remained largely wooden built on to low stone wall foundations. This would have helped as other stone structures were added; the Porch in the early 1300s and the Chantry Chapel which was begun in 1328. The Chancel dates for the beginning of the 1400s.



In 1746 at the age of 34 Daniel Dumaresq travelled to St Petersburg as Chaplain to the English Factory and later Chaplain to the British Ambassador where he met Catherine the future Empress of Russia. Catherine charged him with setting up schools throughout the country and when it was completed he was asked by the King of Poland for help in developing education in Poland. He moved back to England in 1762 and became Vicar of Limington in 1790 although he held several other livings at the same time. He died in 1805 at the age of 93 having only relinquished his post in Limington in 1802.



Pulpit and Font

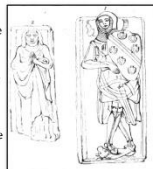
The pulpit, constructed of oak, is dated to the 17th century. It is in the form of an octagonal drum from which three panels have been removed to form an entrance of five stone steps. There is an adjustable brass reading desk and also a decorated adjustable brass candle sconce. As with many pulpits it was most likely situated half way down the Nave on the North side and has been moved to its present location after the Rood Screen was removed from above the Chancel Arch.



The octagonal font is carved from Portland stone and originates from the 1200s. The bowl is lead lined with a drain to ensure the water, once blessed remains within the bounds of the consecrated land of the church. The octagonal sides are carved with alternate quatrefoil and lozenge or shield shaped panels. The oak font cover was donated in 1914 in memory of William Francis and Eliza Rawlins.

Chapel Statues

The pair of effigies located under the chapel arch probably date to the 1340s. Sir Richard died without a direct heir and the land passed to Mathilda the wife of Henry Power and thought to have been Sir Richard's sister. The figure next to her is likely to be her husband Henry Power. These figures were returned to this location having been moved, probably in the 1800s, to the tower base.



In addition to the statues there are six fragments of grave covers now built into the recess on the north side of the Chancel Arch. They originate from the 13th century. These fragments were discovered under the floor in 1882. They are extremely rare as the blue lias stone they are made from is fragile and breaks easily. Similar grave covers can be seen in Wells Cathedral.

Chantry Chapel Statues

There are four effigies lying in the Chantry Chapel. A single figure of a lady on a low plinth believed to be Gunnora the second wife of Sir Richard Gynernay. She inherited the manor of Limington later held by her husband. Her costume details suggest that it is c.1300.

The figure of a knight is unusual as he is lying on his side with his face turned upwards and his eyes wide open. The detail of his armour and costume is superb and the carving is recognized internationally as a perfect example of a 'County Knight' in the English style from around 1320.

This is believed to be Sir Richard Gynernay, who held the manor of Limington. In 1329 he petitioned the Bishop of Bath and Wells to establish a Chantry Chapel with a priest to say daily mass for the deceased members of the family. With this came an altar dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary which may have been in the niche located just inside the Nave where today the coffin covers are now housed.

The visitor leaflet seeks to lead anyone on an exploration of the building to discover the heritage. Printed both sides it folds neatly into a pocket sized guide and opens out with each panel giving more and more information (see over the page).

The Chantry Chapel and its Unique Roof

The Chapel was founded in 1329 after the Bishop of Bath and Wells was petitioned to gain permission for its construction. It occupies the favoured position for a fourteenth century chantry chapel, to the north or to the right hand of the high altar. The founder, Sir Richard Gyverney's memorial statue occupies the arched recess in the north wall below a window.

For those interested in the history of English parish churches the chapel seems to have been of interest for a very long time. The earliest note published is from the 1540s and the pen of John Leland (the father of English local history). He introduces us to Sir Richard as one time owner of the parish and talks of the fine carving of his statue talking of him as 'richly buried yn a fair chapelle'. He also notes the statues of a woman lying at the feet of Sir Richard and of two statues in the archway of the chapel; just as you see today. On Leyland's visit there still seems to be a chantry or 'Cantuarie' priest active at the church. He also tells of how the parish lands passed from the Gyverneys, first to Baron William Boneville via the Harrington family and then to Thomas Lord Marquise of Dorset.

Later historians are rightly taken by the structure of the chapel itself; the roof and ceiling specifically. In 1780 Edmund Rack talks of the ribbed ceiling being 'curiously painted'. By 1847 it seems that the paint is long gone, faded perhaps rather than removed, when

Sir Stephen Glynne visits and is taken by the 'steep pitched roof of stone covered externally with flags'. It is this stone structure that makes the chapel unique.

Recent attention has moved inside and back to the figures contained within the chapel, especially that of Sir Richard. Rachel Dressler, in her work on the specific nature of English medieval funeral carved statues, in comparing the fashions in Europe at the same period of time finds Sir Richard the perfect example of a County Knight; below the Royal nobility of the land, but more important than the 'jobbing' knights of the manors and parishes of the land. Today's commentators seem concerned more with wondering about the message of the building than the method and style of its making that earlier historians seemed to note.

As a visitor today what strikes you about the building, is it the unique use of stone with no wood at all for support of the heavy stone slabs, or the fine statues? Maybe it is the sense of prayer said in this place for over 900 years? All are part of the heritage!

The Restoration Project 2019

The Chapel roof is a unique affair made up each side of seven rows of heavy stone 'Hamstone' slabs laid in series, one row over and one row under each other. It is capped with stone and there is no wooden support structure at all; the stones rest on a bed of infill directly atop the ribbed and vaulted ceiling. Newly discovered records say that in the early years of the 20th century the East slope slid off completely after a small ground movement affected the chapel. From the 1960's onwards there had been regular water ingress with buckets often put to action and green mould growing on the once painted ceiling. For the sake of both the chapel structure and the statues contained within something needed to be done. Following a successful bid for grant aid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the support of local fund raises a project was begun to restore the roof and make it watertight for generations to come.

In the spring of 2019 the scaffold went up both outside and inside; to brace the ceiling as the immense weight of stone was removed from outside. Removal began cautiously and for good reason as it soon became apparent that the roof was not as symmetrical as 21st century builders would wish and the repaired East slope was in much better condition than the West slope. This led to much head scratching by the Architect, Structural Engineer and Heritage Advisor from Historic England as the initial ideas for the work had to be changed. It had been intended to support the slabs on a new steel structure secured to the walls but this was just not possible; was this the reason the original stone masons had not included a support structure before, was such a method simply not the way for this type of stone roof? Maybe it explains why it is unique!

A key problem was the movement, often very small, of the roof structure as the ground naturally moves through the seasons and the ability of the joints to open up and let the water in. In centuries gone by it is probable that someone came and filled the joints every year to keep things dry, but what would we do today? The solution was to introduce a series of lead trays under the stones which would catch any water that did come in through the joints and carry it away harmlessly through new channels cut into the bottom 'over' slabs on each row. To help with movement issues the North wall of the chapel was also to be 'pinned' by drilling from east to west.

The work was slow indeed as each slab had to be located sympathetically with others rather than fitted in straight lines but after almost 6 months the scaffold was taken down to reveal the restored roof and the cleaned ceiling.

Thanks to the generosity of local folks and the Heritage Lottery Fund this unique part of England's heritage is good to go for centuries to come.

Pottery Fragments and Medieval Floor Tiles

Recent finds of pottery in the churchyard tell a compelling story of the sites heritage. The finds stretch over 1700 years with the earliest being a piece of Dorset Black Burnished Ware from 150-300AD. Limington House built just behind the church has an old well deep in a cellar and suggestions are that the site once housed the officers from Ilchester Roman fort. Could the pottery be associated with domestic arrangements or might the site once have been a Roman religious site often placed at a well. The other pottery shards talk to us of the wealth of Limington and phases of building work at the church itself. There are fragments of 12th Century pots very much in keeping with the Chapel's building work. There are bits of late medieval/early Tudor glazed ware; could it be that Father Wolsey himself renowned for a drink or three have supped on one such vessel? And there are 17th and 18th century fragments of everyday domestic wares; during this time it is believed 3 cottages stood by the roadside at the front of today's Churchyard. As nice as these are and the possible tales their owners might have to tell us of life in years gone by the most significant pottery remains have come from within the church chapel itself.



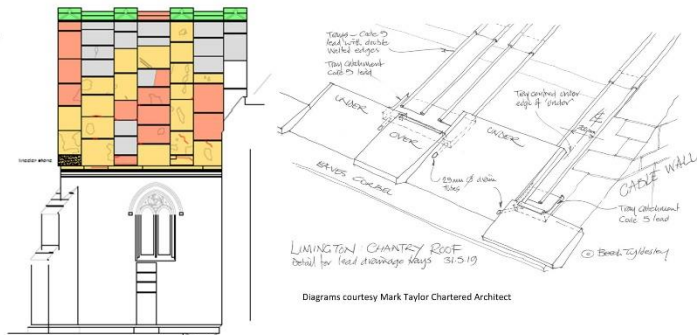
At the start of the 20th century the inside of the church building was renovated and new flooring laid throughout. In the chapel it was decided to lay new stone flags and remove what flooring there was; and what there was included mainly broken, with a few whole, clay baked medieval floor tiles each decorated and glazed.

Church and chapel floors initially had beaten earthen floors, perhaps with a carpet laid before the altar. Stone or plaster floors were reserved for important buildings, like those of abbeys and cathedrals. Progressively simple two tone flooring was introduced, again across large areas of important buildings but not it seems in smaller areas of buildings associated with the very wealthy; possibly just in place of the altar carpet. The fashion continued in England from the 13th to 16th century, however their use and the size of tiles greatly diminishes after the Black Death in 1348/9.

The floor tiles at Limington are far from plain, each bears different coats of arms associated with the important knights of England and Somerset especially and all date from the first half of the 14th century; so before the plague and importantly exactly at the time that Sir Richard Gyverney and his family built the chapel and began to have Mass said on a daily basis for them. There are tiles

with the Arms of England (the 3 Lions) carried by Edward III until 1340 and also those of Edward the Black Prince made Prince of Wales in 1343. The Arms of Clare, a family with estates in Dorset they became the Earls of Gloucester. The Arms of Brian, Sir Guy de Brian was king's standard bearer at Crecy in 1346. The Arms of Cheney who had estates in South West Wiltshire and following the Black Death operated as 'Escheater' for Somerset and Dorset, ensuring that lands of those deceased during the plague were held by the Crown until returned to surviving family members. The Arms of Montacute. William de Montacute was 1st Earl of Salisbury and his son took a notable part in the battle of Poitiers in 1356.

What can we surmise from these tile's presence? Firstly it is safe to suggest that Sir Richard was a man of wealth who wished not only for the best built chapel but also the best decorated. The inclusion of tiles with coats of arms emblazoned would be fitting for a 'County Knight', as Rachel Dressler calls Sir Richard. Not a member of the direct nobility of the land but also not small town jobbing knight Sir Richard would have wanted to show he had associations with the great of the land, and if they should visit for them to see the honour he bestowed on them in his chapel. In life and in death Sir Richard appears to have been proud of his knightly class and the 'band of brothers' he associated and possibly fought alongside and any who visited his chapel in the years to come would know this with both the decorated floor tiles and his suite of armour on his funeral statue.



5. Revealing heritage: Researching, Preserving and Revealing the chapel's medieval flooring

A 'vegetable box' of broken 13th century floor tiles was 'rediscovered' in the study of Colonel Anderson of Limington house as the family began to clear and move house in the early part of the second decade of the 21st century following the owners' death. These broken pieces matched 4 tiles fixed to the chantry chapel floor and had been researched by Colonel Anderson, at one-time Church warden to St Mary's.

The question of how and why and what these tiles were about has required further heritage research in the project. Reference is made to the '4 tiles' in an article from the Western Gazette Newspaper, Friday October 2nd 1931. It reads:

*A 14th century Chantry
Limington Restoration Completed.
Dedication by Lord Bishop*

The restored 14th century chantry chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Limington Parish Church, of which Cardinal Wolsey was Rector 1500 to 1509, was dedicated on Sunday evening by the Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells.... Restoration work has revealed four very valuable 14th century tiles. One bears the coat of the Bonville family. William Bonville, Lord Harrington was Lord of the Manor in the 15th century... Another bears the coat of arms of the Montacute family, and another the Royal coat of the period of Edward II.

Referring today to the immense piece of work undertaken by Barbara J. Lowe, 'Decorated Medieval Floor Tiles of Somerset' shows this entry to be slightly inaccurate in its reporting. The 4 complete tiles are replicated within the broken pieces and whilst they indeed depict the coat of Montacute there is not the coat of arms of Bonville and the royal coat is that of Edward III, not Edward II.

Overall we see that these tiles reflect those used in several monastic and high status medieval buildings in Somerset. But what do they say about the Limington chapel and Sir Richard? What do they tell us of fashion or expectations within society? Do they speak of piety or give a nod to social climbing?

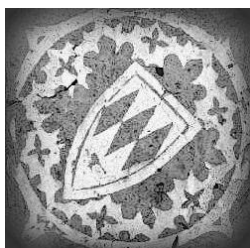
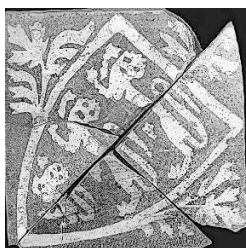
It was noted through the heritage research above that Sir Richard was a man of some wealth with an estate in Somerset comprising of several manors. It also can be suggested that Limington may have been the primary residence of Sir Richard; the chapel being established as evidence of this. The inclusion of tiles with coats of arms emblazoned would be fitting for a 'County Knight' like Sir Richard. Not a member of the direct nobility of the land but also not a small town jobbing knight, a tenant landlord for a wealthier Lord or for the King. Sir Richard would have wanted to show he had associations with the great of the land. In life and in death Sir Richard appears to have been proud of his knightly class and the 'band of brothers' he associated and, possibly, fought alongside. Those who visited, and more importantly prayed in his chapel, in the years to come would be left in little doubt of this.

Early mediaeval church floors were made of compacted earth, perhaps with a carpet laid before an altar. Stone or plaster floors were reserved for important buildings, like those of abbeys and cathedrals. Progressively simple two tone flooring was introduced across large areas with smaller, significant areas, like that in front of an altar covered with decorated tiles; at times depicting the 'arms' of wealthy benefactors. The fashion continued in England from the 13th to 16th century, however their use and the size of tiles

greatly diminishes after the Black Death in 1348/9. The floor tiles that once adorned the chapel floor are typical of both the age and also of Somerset with both general patterning and the ‘arms’ of the local gentry, and the King. These were either given in ‘patronage’ or installed to show allegiance; or possibly a bit of both.

All would point then to a tiled boarder demarking the place where the alter was to stand in the chapel and to either the tiles breaking themselves over centuries of use or, during the works to the church and chapel of the mid-1800s or to some calamitous result of lifting to replace the whole floor; with just 4 tiles left unbroken. The boarder then held tiles depicting the coat of King Edward III, king at the time of the chapel’s construction. Those of Edward’s son, Edward prince of Wales known at the time as The Black Prince. Alongside these are the Arms of Clare, the Earls of Gloucester; research shows Sir Richard is one-time Steward of the de la Bere family of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. There is the coat of Montacute, William of Montacute (Montague) became 1st Earl of Salisbury and was an original Garter Knight. One of William’s daughters married Sir Guy de Brian, the King’s standard bearer at Crecy and his coat appears on tiles from the chapel. Lastly we have the coat of the Cheney family, local Lords and in the 14th century ‘escheater’ for Somerset and Dorset. In an age when petitioning for refunds, money owed and such seems to have been rife amongst the landed class, and which research shows Sir Richard was engaged, even petitioning his own brother, giving some prominence to the King’s ‘escheater’ may have been a wise move.

The tiles have much to say about Sir Richard, the associations that mattered to him because of his past and also that mattered for his continuing prosperity as a knight of the County of Somerset. Dressler, in her research about the nature of the armour and carving of Sir Richard’s memorial suggests he may never have borne arms; the associations, especially with the Welsh boarder Lords would suggest this is doubtful. However, Dressler suggests the nature of the armour is ‘over doing it’, perhaps she is correct for the tiles suggest that Sir Richard was keen to show his status and his friends to the world at large, and maybe to benefit in some way from their prominence and even piety.



Broken fragments reassembled reveal the coat of arms of England (Edward III), Montacute, and Clare



For the visitor to the chapel reassembled tiles have been mounted in presentation cases with narrative explanations applied.

6. Revealing heritage: Reaching a wider audience

The Chapel project at St Mary's always had the aim to both restore and preserve the chapel and its carved memorial statues and at the same time to promote and present the heritage of the church to as many people as would be possible with the resources to hand.

The first aim was to find out who was visiting the church and crucially what they knew of the heritage, both before visiting and afterwards. In 2018, prior to the works beginning volunteers undertook a survey of visitor numbers and as many face to face interviews with those visitors as was possible, and from this a baseline score emerged to which comparisons could be made with data gathered following the project work. In the usual run of matters the church is assessable all day every day to any casual visitors but we began to welcome more organised groups in large part to promote and fundraise for the project.

In 2018 the following data was provided for the baseline.

1. Open Days: 1 (the first specifically organised open day to coincide with the village open garden festival)
2. Festivals: 1 (an established annual St Mary's festival in September)
3. Guided Tours: 2 (a new advent)
4. School/college visits: 0
5. Outreach visits: 0
6. Visitor numbers - Individuals noted in visitor book: 28 (casual visitors)
 Guided tours involving 36 people
 Extra visitors during village open garden festival weekend 140
7. Volunteers trained to guide: 0
8. Volunteer hours in talking with visitors: 20

The physical project work began in late spring of 2019 and was completed for September the same year. In June the contractors were prepared for us to hold a 'heritage works site open day' and all the necessary safety precautions were enacted. The afternoon was primarily aimed at those working in the architectural heritage sphere and as such Heritage England, Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, Ilchester Museum, Heritage Architects practices in Somerset, and Weymouth Stonemasonry College students and Staff were invited to come along. Sadly, the Stonemasonry College students and staff could not make it because of exam timetables but several representatives from the other bodies were able to attend.

Following the work an open weekend was arranged for 7th and 8th September 2019. This weekend was particularly well attended with some 80 people coming for the formal talks and planned celebrations for the work's completion. This included members of local history societies based in Somerton and Ilchester. Two presentations were made over the weekend. The first by Mr Ken Brown, the structural engineer for the project talked of the physical heritage discoveries made during the works; and the realisation that some old approaches and materials used would provide a better outcome for the restoration than the 'modern' materials proposed. A particular draw was the presentation by Jerry Sampson on the architectural heritage of the building; what the decades of alterations and work can tell us of people's expectations and hopes in life and death.

In October 2019 a heritage evening was put on with a presentation by local history buff, Mr Steve George, into the life and death of Thomas Wolsey. This was again well attended with some 40 people from across South Somerset area present.

The promotion of the project through various mediums through the summer attracted the attention of Dr Sam Wills and Professor James Daybell who came and presented their 'Histories of the Unexpected –Live' show in the church on 8th November 2019. Following the success of this they arranged to return in May 2020 to present their 'Tudors' show, particularly because of the St Mary's heritage connection with Thomas Wolsey.

2020 was also set to hold further open days at the church to coincide with the region wide open Garden Festival, Limington being participants; with the local fete and dog show in June; and with the festival weekend in September. However, these and any other events and visits planned had to be cancelled and the building shut to visitors when the Covid-19 pandemic struck in March 2020. However, following the easing of restrictions over the summer of 2020 it has been possible to open to visitors on Wednesday afternoons and several ramblers on the 'Monarch's Way' path, a section of which comes through the churchyard, and other casual visitors have ventured in to see the delights. One delightful request was from a water colour painter who had heard of the importance of the building and asked to come and paint the chapel one afternoon.

Whilst all the aims and ambitions for the year of 2020 have been thwarted by the pandemic, nevertheless during the autumn of 2019 data on visitors, open events and responses to the visitor survey and face to face interviews was possible.

In 2019/20 the following data was recorded. Baseline figures from 2018 in brackets

1. Open Days: 4 (1)
2. Festivals: 1 (1)
3. Guided Tours: 4 (2)
4. School/college visits: 0
5. Outreach visits: 0
6. Visitor numbers - Individuals noted in visitor book: 45 (28)
 Guided tours involving 92 people (36)
 Extra visitors to site above casual visitors 280 (140)
7. Volunteers trained to guide: 2 (0)
8. Volunteer hours in talking with visitors: 60 (20)

Most notable from this is the increase in overall numbers visiting the site. These have been for the open days and guided tours associated with them.

Visitor survey forms (below) completed and returned reveal that most come from Somerset, in contrast to those entering something into the Visitor's book who by and large come from outside of the County, with many visiting from abroad. Whilst 90% of respondents indicated they had visited the church within the previous 12 months, the reason for visiting again was either 'as part of an organised visit' or 'to see the architectural heritage associated with the church.

In response to questions asking if the Heritage displays and Visitor leaflets were informative, 100% responded 'Very'. In response to the question 'would you say that your awareness of the heritage at St Mary's has increased following the visit', 100% agreed 'yes, indeed'.

When asked about 'one thing they had learnt about the heritage of St Mary's' through their visit people commented;

'That the roof of the Chapel is unique in England'; 'I learnt more about the Chapel'; the effigies'; 'local links to Cardinal Wolsey'; and 'the beauty of the church'.

The Visitor Leaflets have been a particular success with replenishment a constant requirement when the building is open for the public. Covid-19 may have dented plans for Heritage Promotion during 2020, however the local volunteers have the bug for talking and telling about the church and its heritage to all and sundry and plans will be in place for open days, talks and guided visits as soon as it is possible in 2021.