

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St Mary Magdalene Church, Stockland Bristol



Parish of Stockland, Quantock Deanery, Archdeaconry of Taunton

Listed Grade 2, Sedgemoor District Council

Church of England Church Heritage record 601532

Heritage at Risk Register record 1059049

Grid reference ST 24013 43620

SETTING

The main part of the ecclesiastical parish of Stockland lies between Otterhampton and Stogursey, 9 km north-west of Bridgwater, with the remainder comprising several detached parts mostly to the east and north-east, including the hamlet of Steart, on the coast 4 km north-east of the village of Stockland Bristol. The south-west of the parish lies across a low ridge (30m) from which the land falls away to flat marshes in the north-east.



The village of Stockland Bristol is recorded in the Domesday Book. Known originally as Stockland Gaunt in reference to its being managed as endowment lands for Gaunts Hospital in Bristol; the 'Bristol' name was added in reference to its post-reformation ownership by the Bristol Corporation from 1541 to 1839.

Much of the ground is clay overlying Blue Lias with pockets of limestone. Blue Lias is the primary building material for most of the older structures in the village, including the Church.

The village has a population of 172 with very few amenities beyond the church. Within the village has a care home for the elderly (in the former Vicarage) and a private social club, sited within the old village school. Much of the eastern part of the parish lie within Steart Marshes, an Environment Agency nature reserve managed by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust [WWT].

DESCRIPTION AND HISTORICAL SUMMARY

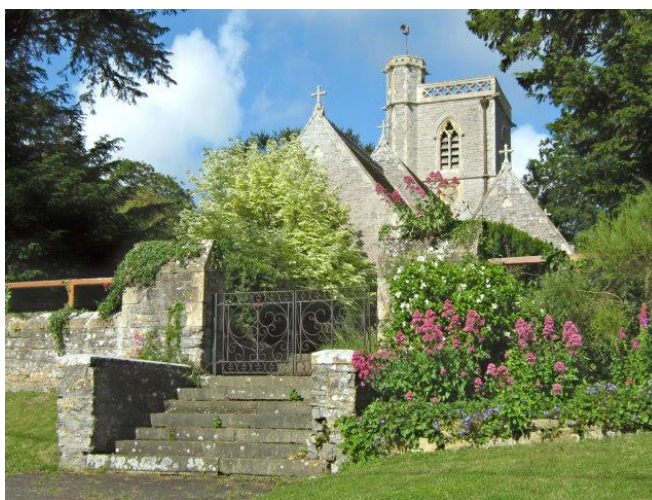
The earlier parish church, dedicated to All Saints in 1316, was demolished and rebuilt in 1865 by Thomas Daniel (1799–1872), then lay rector and patron, at his own expense. The Daniel family were bankers, sugar merchants and slave owners from Bristol, who, when slavery was abolished, received one of the largest compensation payments from the British Government. The monies his company received in 1834, in regard to 4424 enslaved people on 29 plantations throughout the West Indies, would be the equivalent today of nearly £11 million. In 1839, Thomas Daniel junior bought the estate of Stockland Bristol (as a second estate) and advowson from the Bristol Corporation, which had owned it since 1541.

Thomas Daniel installed his son, the Revd Henry Arthur Daniel (1829–1912) as vicar in 1857; Henry seemingly inheriting the rectory and manorial title on his father's death in 1872. He served as 'Squireson' until his retirement in 1883, when he built a new Vicarage and renamed his house as the Manor. The estate remained in family ownership for a further two generations until it was sold in the mid-1950s. There are no descendants of the Daniel family living in the local area.

We believe that the 1980s listing attribution of the church to the architect Arthur of Plymouth is incorrect as contemporary accounts attribute it to TS Hack of Bristol and, following his death, to Godwin and Crisp. The detailing of fittings is more akin to the work of E.W. Goodwin than Arthur of Plymouth and the church is firmly attributed to Goodwin in Soros, Susan Weber, (ed.) *E. W. Godwin: Aesthetic Movement Architect and Designer*, (Yale University Press) New Haven, 1999.

It was constructed in 1865 of local blue lias, backed (largely) by bricks, with Bath stone dressing¹.

The building is in the English Decorated style. It comprises a chancel with south transept (containing a key/barrel organ) and north vestry, a nave with north aisle and south porch, and a west tower. The tower is in three stages, with diagonal buttresses to the first and second stages, a parapet pierced with quatrefoil, and a stair turret. There is a clock dial on the east side. The church has tile roofs with bracketed eaves and copings with cruciform finials.



¹ The exact construction is to be verified by investigations currently underway

Although described as the old church having been razed to the ground in the 1860s, there is evidence that suggests that quite a lot of the old church remains to sill level.

The interior of the church is plain, whitewashed plaster, with an arcade between the nave and north aisle on octagonal piers. The floor is tiled and there are wagon roofs in the nave and chancel, with a scissor braced roof to the north aisle. (cf Existing Floor Plan and photos of interior).

Original fittings from the earlier church include the 15th century font and fragments of the screen. The screen was restored and considerably enlarged in 1920 by F Bligh Bond. The remainder of the fittings are c1865, including catalogue pews. The east window of 1867 and two other stained-glass windows are by Clayton and Bell. The stone pulpit (altered to accommodate the screen in the 1920s) is constructed with 10 detached Purbeck shafts, and the reredos follows a similar design.

There are six bells only one of which, dated 1827, pre-dates the rebuilding of the church, the others reportedly recast at the time of the rebuild. Two are dated 1866, two 1903 and the Treble was installed in 1960.

Two war memorials on timber boards are fixed to the wall in the east end of the north aisle. These are notable in that they include the names of those who served, but returned. In the post 2nd-war faculty papers is a note from the Archdeacon describing this as 'highly dangerous'. There are also two early 19th-Century prayer boards located at the base of the tower.

The church is situated in an open churchyard, which is accessed by 2 steps at the south west corner, and a steep flight of 8 steps at the east end. To the west of the churchyard is a dense spinney which is also part of the church grounds. The churchyard is surrounded by fields on two sides, leading down to the South West Coast path, 1 mile (by public footpath) to the north. The village street curves round the east and north ends.

MISSION AND MINISTRY



The current regular Sunday congregation (steady even post-Covid 19) is 11, with greater local engagement and attendance at Christmas and Easter. The churchyard is open and used for burials and interment of ashes. Consultation exercises during the early development stages of the project and discussions at the Parish Meeting² have revealed that the church is much valued as a place of peace and contemplation by villagers and visitors, including those using the South West Coast path and those visiting the WWT Steart Marshes reserve.

An indication of the value placed upon the church by the secular community is that non-church-goers maintain the churchyard, open the church daily and wind the clock - and every year the Parish Meeting votes to service, repair and

² And continuing to be stated in response to the on-going touchscreen survey in the church

maintain the clock and allocates £500 (one quarter of the precept) for maintenance of the churchyard and building.

The church is leading the way in acknowledging and wrestling with its history, and the history of the village, in relation to colonialism the transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of Africans.

The churchyard is managed by volunteers with a view to encouraging wildlife and a diverse ecology (including greater horse-shoe bats, cowslips and orchids) whilst ministering to the needs of mourners. Ecology and bat surveys are underway.

Currently, the PCC is in the system to seek a £2m grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We are at the stage of being in receipt of £210,000 to bring our plans to a full project delivery application in August 2025. Up to now, the project has been developed in stages thanks to two grants from the HPC Community Fund, which is minded to make a significant contribution to the final project.

Whilst developing the project, we have been in contact with the Diocese and DAC to secure staged levels of 'in principle' agreement regarding our reordering plans.

The reordering was subject to a full options appraisal based around significance vs need – gleaned through extensive consultation. The scheme proposed addresses significance as well as sustainability and practicalities – and is calculated as being of an appropriate size for a community of this size.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AREAS AFFECTED BY THE PROPOSALS

- *Extensive building repairs*

Meticulous surveys across the building have given us a detailed and spec'd schedule of remedial works covering blue lias, pointing, windows and all aspects from the boiler house to the tower. None of the repairs will involve change to the building other than its structural integrity and life expectancy. The most radical proposal is to take down the top of the turret staircase and tower balustrades to roof level and rebuild. This is a structural necessity and the intention is to re-use the badly weathered hunkey-punks and as much of the existing stone as practically possible.

- *Sequestration of the north aisle through installation of a timber and glass screen.*

The PCC has been through options appraisal to arrive at the scheme currently being proposed. The north aisle has always been virtually unused as neither the altar nor the occupant of the pulpit can be seen from any of the pews. Separation will enable the north aisle to be heated and used flexibly without compromising the historic feel of the nave.

- *Removal of 2 pews on the north rank in the nave (front and back pews).*

To enable better 'flow' between the north aisle and the main body of the church – and give better fire escape. This is necessary to allow emergency egress from the north aisle at the east end and to retain the funeral bier at the west.

- *New floor surface in the north aisle.*

Once the pew platforms have been removed, there is a need to consolidate the floors and unify the surface. Our intention is to insulate the floor of the north aisle and install the pipe work for a possible future installation of underfloor heating. To this end, the tiles will be lifted and reused in the kitchenette area, allowing the main area of the north aisle to enjoy a unified oak timber floor. Spare tiles will first be used to replace broken tiles in the porch and

nave and then to floor the accessible w.c. The tiles are a common Victorian quarry, without encaustic decoration.

- *Removal of pews to open up the space in the north aisle.*
Useless to worshipers since their installation in 1866, the pews are not considered to be of significant architectural value – see pew report below.
- *Installation of toilet within vestry area at east end of north aisle.*
Will require knocking through plastered a white-painted interior wall of no particular historical significance³. The w.c. will also necessitate subdivision of the vestry which will be reordered to fulfil its parish needs and serve as a fire escape route.
- *Relocation of timber war memorials.*
Will be comfortably accommodated on the empty south walls of the nave. Currently the boards are quite awkwardly placed at the east end of the north aisle, above pews which crash into the wall.
- *Provision of kitchenette.*
Keeping the kitchenette, toilets and free seating area all with the north aisle will preserve the atmosphere of the nave and chancel and ensure that regular worship and occasional services are unaffected, and, indeed, enhanced with the possibility of refreshments afterwards and the provision of a toilet. The kitchenette has been designed to be fit for purpose, and detailed to be 'en-suite' with the oak screen. As the 'resting' position of the north aisle will be set up for an honesty café, we do not intend to screen off the kitchenette.
- *Creation of step-free access from the road to all public parts of the building.*
Having studied all the viable options, the PCC wants to re-profile the current path from the road to the south (only) door. The gradient will be very gentle (well within legal requirements) and the principal alterations will be to the churchyard steps and wall to the south, subject to secular planning consents. The profile will be changed at the entrance to the porch to remove a 3" step. The plan is to lift the current concrete slabs, reprofile and relay. There will also be a handrail installed to the steep flight of eight steps to the east. The newly raised area just outside the porch will be laid in stone to give a sense of arrival and recognises that we would not be able to replicate the concrete slabs.
- *Boiler house steps.*
The plan is to remove the (failing) timber barrier and install iron railings with a lockable gate. Once the drainage works are complete, the remaining half of the boiler house will be set up to give ideal accommodation for our bats, especially the very rare grey long-eared bat, which is present on the site.

IMPACT OF THE PROPOSALS

- The reordering proposals sit alongside a £2.3m+ programme of conservation repairs to repair the tower and windows, reroof the south section of the nave, secure the leaning gables and repoint the building, which was repaired using cementitious mortars in the 1980s. This programme will also secure the long-silenced bells to allow them to ring again.
- The porch, nave and chancel will be untouched by the proposals, save for the floor tiles being secured, the windows conserved and the whole space redecorated. The font will

³ Currently being verified by the architect and structural engineer

remain in-situ as will the pews and the pipe/barrel organ, which has been recently repaired, exposing its great rarity.

- The plaque commemorating the 1860's patron will be re-enamelled to make it legible and placed alongside a plaque in memory of the many enslaved people who passed through the ownership of the Daniel family, especially the 4424 who were in their 'possession' at the time of the compensation payout.
- Stockland Bristol has no public amenities beyond the church and the reordering proposals will provide the local community with an invaluable resource, hosting a monthly CCS Talking Café and community-led events, crafting and socials. Consultation for our project development and Heritage Fund activity plan have identified additional use of the space by the WWT (as an educational base) and local schools, using the church as a venue for history, RE and science/environment (spinney area) field trips.
- We have current and potential links with professional mental health services, the local care home, CCS and Hinkley Point C chaplaincy and health centre and will seek to become a venue for wellbeing services within community and for neighbouring organisations.
- The provision of a toilet in the church will be a great asset, ensuring the building can be used for a variety of events and by everyone, as well as benefitting/enabling worshippers to use the church, particularly at services.
- The kitchenette will mean that we can offer refreshments after worship and provide groups with the opportunity to serve refreshments at events/meetings. We also intend to operate an honesty café to service casual visitors' needs and raise a small income. This has recently been boosted by the announcement that the SW coast path is to be relocated to within half a mile from the church across public footpaths
- There is a keen interest in the local community with the reinstatement of the bells and a team of ringers will be a focus in village life and a blessing to the church.
- Engagement with global majority communities to show our acknowledgement, and ownership, not just of the church's history with the transatlantic slave economy, but that of the whole village's being able to demonstrate the reach of colonialism into the remotest corners of England.
- On-site and on-line educational resources to enable the slavery economy to be examined in the rural context – as a Key Stage curriculum module.
- On-site and on-line interpretation of our local history and the impact of the reformation, local government developments and the physical and social history of the settlement. This interpretation will be shared via a touchscreen in the church and QR access elsewhere.