



Cerne
Historical
Society

MAGAZINE



THE DIG

So far...



'Ground truthing' the Abbey Hugh Willmott



A Student's Perspective of the Dig Luci Paczkowski



The Mysterious Case of the Cruck Harriet Still



Mary Anning Elizabeth Bishop



A Tale of Two Village Halls George Mortimer



The Coppice, the Countryside & the Hurdle Maker Robin Mills



Cerne Abbey: Porches, Fireplaces, Oriels & Towers Bob Foulser



Features of the Local Landscape Mike Clark

Winter
2023-4



Welcome to the Winter 2023/24 issue of the Cerne Historical Society's Magazine, the first since the excavations carried out in Beauvoir Field in July and August 2023 by Dr Hugh Willmott of Sheffield University and his team of archaeologists. At page 3 is a report by Dr Willmott of what was found and achieved last year, together with photos of a few of the major finds, and an outline of what is planned for 2024. On page 8 is an interesting and entertaining account by Luci Paczkowski, an anthropology student at Wesleyan University, Connecticut and a member of Hugh's team who helped excavate Beauvoir, of her experience here.

We are very grateful to Hugh and Luci for their fascinating articles and the very kind words they have written about Cerne, its residents and the Society. We are also grateful to everyone else who has contributed to this issue of the magazine. Those include the authors of all the other excellent articles and most importantly Andrew Popkin, our Design, Graphics and Publishing Editor, without whose brilliant work the magazine would not see the light of day.

Whilst on the subject of thanks I would like to express again my gratitude to all those who helped make the Dig last year such a success: Lord Digby for permitting the excavations to take place on his land, Hugh and his team for doing such brilliant work and making it such fun and all our members and residents of Cerne who helped to make it such a success by providing assistance in so many different ways and warmly welcoming Hugh and his team. As Luci says in her article "My experience excavating Cerne Abbey, and getting to know the villagers was an indescribable joy and pleasure. The warmth and generosity of the residents was certainly appreciated by not only me, but the whole archaeological team."

The Committee and I enjoyed the Dig enormously and we hope you all did as well. We also hope you will be willing to help again in this year's Dig which will take place between the 14th July and the 10th August. We will provide you with further information about it in due course but it is likely that we will be asked to help in a very similar way to that in which we did last year. The excavations will be in two 10m x 10m trenches and there may be a few more archaeologists and students taking part. We will be looking for volunteers to steward, wash finds, provide showers and facilities to wash clothes and probably do some digging in the trenches. Hopefully the weather will be a little kinder than last year.

We hope to publish our next issue, the Summer 2024 one, with further news about the results of last year's Dig and the plans for this year's towards the end of June. In the meantime we are planning to print an All-in-One edition containing this issue and the Summer 2023 issue, which celebrated Patricia Vale's 100th Birthday, in early February. We will circulate all members to inform them how to order one, at a price of about £9.

Gordon Bishop – Chair of the Cerne Historical Society

Gordon may easily be contacted by using the form on the website cerneabbashistory.org/contact-us





Summer 2023 saw the first season of excavation undertaken by the University of Sheffield in Beauvoir field. Many local volunteers joined students from the UK and abroad in excavating two trenches close to the north wall of the graveyard. The season's work aimed to '*ground truth*' the ground penetrating radar survey undertaken in 2022. This showed that elements of the monastic ground plan were well preserved beneath the ground despite few indications on the surface.



The larger of the two trenches, measuring 10x10m, was located over what was assumed to be the southeast corner of the cloister, incorporating part of the east range and the north aisle wall of the church's nave.

A very thick layer of rubble was encountered below the turf in places up to 1m deep, confirming the geophysical survey's suggestion that the surviving remains were deeply buried. It quickly became clear that the buildings in this area had been thoroughly robbed of almost all usable stone in two clear phases. The first occurred at, or shortly, after the Dissolution in 1539 where this section of the abbey was seemingly razed close to ground level. The second phase of robbing occurred in the 19th century when the rough stone foundations for the original walls were systematically removed, presumably to provide further building materials for the village. All that remained were the foundation trenches for the abbey walls and some surfaces that served as bedding for now missing paved floors. *Figure 1.*

Despite this, the trench provided good evidence for the layout of the abbey cloister. The covered walkway had a buttressed arcade that would have held windows or openings looking out into the cloister garth. Fragments of roofing material suggested this was topped with slates, capped by decorative glazed ridge tiles. Although no *in situ* flooring was found in the walkway, numerous small pieces of black and cream tiles suggest it originally had a standard 'chequerboard' pattern laid down. A single grave cut was found in the eastern section of the cloister walkway. Its original stone cover had been robbed, but an impression of it in the floor bedding could still be seen, and it was of typical 15th or even early 16th-century style. Scientific research is currently being carried out on the skeleton found there that will provide more details about his life and maybe even his cause of death.

The cloister walkway was bounded to the south by a massive, completely robbed wall over 1m wide, presumably belonging to the monastic church.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to investigate within the church due to its location on the edge of the excavation trench. On the east side of the trench, the completely robbed-out foundation of the east range wall was also revealed, along with an entrance leading out into the cloister walk. At this point numerous broken up, but highly decorated, floor tiles that had originally paved the east range before being disturbed were found. Amongst these were typical motifs, including three leopards and the crest of the de Lacy family.

Although no architectural pieces were found in their original location, the excavation revealed many small fragments of worked stone that had escaped the robbers' attention or were not thought worth taking. These included pieces of Purbeck columns and other mouldings, almost all of which were 13th century or slightly later in date. No stonework could be said to belong to an earlier cloister, leaving the possibility that either one did not exist (in stone at any rate) or, more likely, a programme of comprehensive rebuilding in the 13th century had removed all evidence for it.



There was one tantalising hint of the earlier history of Cerne found in the northeast corner of this trench, perhaps coincidentally in almost the exact spot blessed by the Bishop of Sherborne at the start of the excavation! Lying beneath, and partly disturbed by, the later medieval east range walls was a sequence of three pits. These must be earlier than the 13th-century rebuilding of the cloister and quite probably considerably so. They were filled with dark organic-rich soil and animal bone, suggesting they

were used for waste disposal.

However, they did not contain a single fragment of pottery, tile, or architectural stone as would normally be expected if they dated to the period of the later abbey. The suspicion is they were, in fact, Anglo-Saxon, something we hope to confirm in the next few months.

A second smaller trench measuring 3x5m was also opened to locate the church's north wall towards its east end. This trench encountered an even greater depth of demolition rubble but succeeded in finding the church's outer wall. This, too, had been robbed of all its fine-facing stones, but a small amount of its rubble core remained. To the south of the wall, and thus just inside the church, portions of flooring were encountered. This mainly took the form of a mortar bed to support a tiled floor, which had mainly been robbed. However, one roughly rectangular patch had been left behind, possibly because it was very heavily worn or obscured by something, allowing for a reconstruction of what had originally covered the whole of the church's interior in this area.

Figure 2.



Fig 2 © Sheffield University 2024



This trench also produced numerous small fragments of architectural stone left over from the church's demolition. These included further pieces of Purbeck marble and decorative 'stiff leaf' elements from column capitals that were largely 13th-century in date and bear a striking similarity to parts of the upstanding architecture that can still be seen at the east end of Sherborne Abbey.

© Gordon Bishop 2024: Sherborne Abbey

More unique were finds of several pieces of carved chalk mouldings still retaining elements of gilding along with red, orange and white paint. Given the fineness of their carving and the fact they were made from soft chalk, it seems unlikely these were structural. Instead, they must have formed part of an elaborate internal feature such as a tomb, altar or shrine. **Figure 3.**

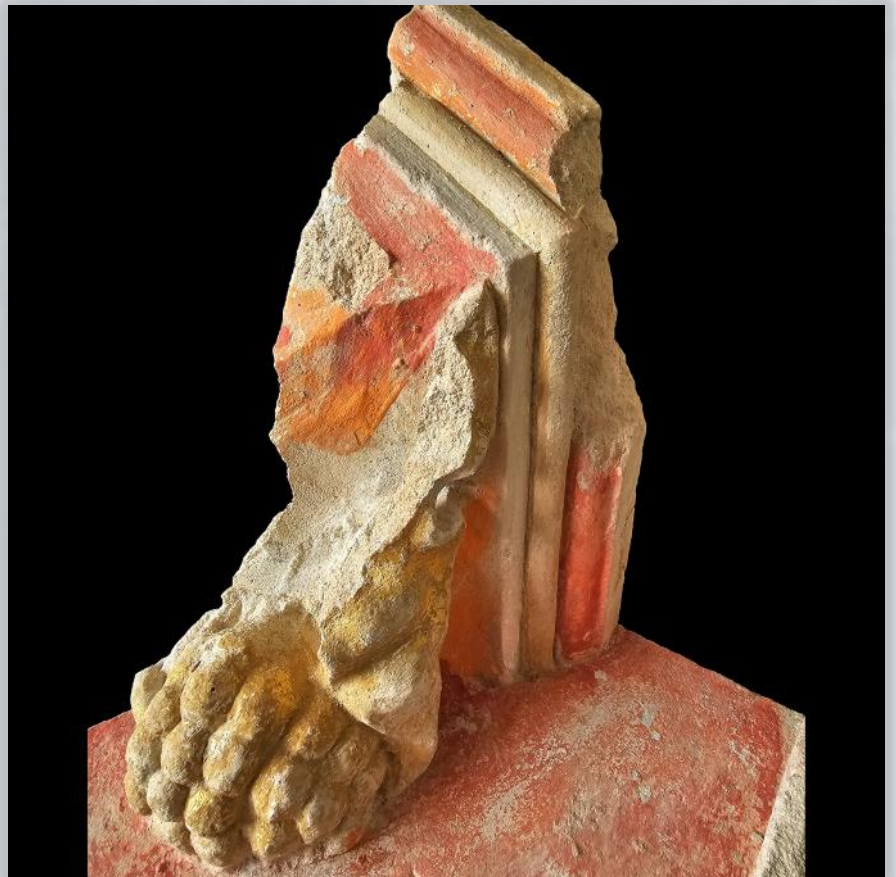


Fig 3 © Sheffield University 2024

The results from just three weeks of excavation have been informative and encouraging but still leave many unanswered questions. We have now positively identified the location of the cloister and the

church's north wall, confirming the accuracy of the geophysical survey. However, it is less sure where the other key buildings of the late medieval monastery are and what many other features identified on the ground penetrating radar might be. Although hints of earlier, possibly Anglo-Saxon, activity have been found in the form of the three pits below the later cloister, many questions remain concerning what occurred on the site before the Norman Conquest. The original ground penetrating radar survey has been extended further north to take in almost all of Beauvoir field, and this now shows that there are buildings and buried features across the whole area. **Figure 4**

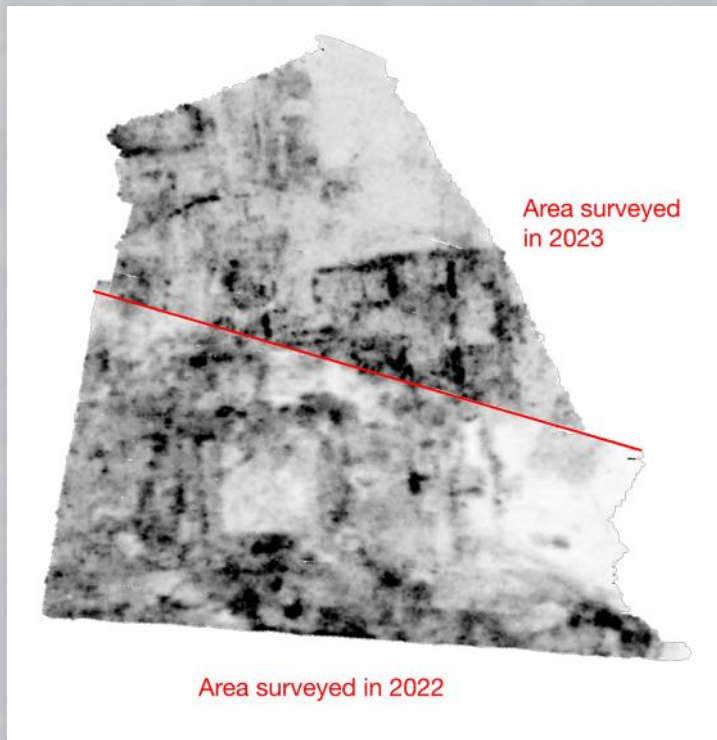


Figure 4 © Sheffield University 2023

The University of Sheffield is planning to return for further excavations this summer between 14th July and 10th of August, and it is hoped that some of these questions will be answered then.





"I think I found something!" An aureate figure, shrouded beneath hundreds of years of soil and clay, faintly glimmered under the harsh sun on a late afternoon in August. My gloved hands trembled as I carefully peeled away the caked layers of soil, revealing glints of red, and orange, and, all of a sudden, intricately molded golden leaves. Hugh sprints from the far corner of the trench and beams down at me. **"You've finally found something of worth, kid!"** he teases. I was overcome with a sense of solemnity and awe as the decorative piece from Cerne Abbey's altar laid before me. A forgotten piece of spiritual decor, one that might have been knelt beneath every day, was rediscovered within a century that its makers could have only imagined in their dreams. This ornament embodies two worlds, the old and the new.

Now I knelt before it, within a different context, not religious, yet spiritual, and felt thankful for this moment, this opportunity bestowed upon me by Cerne Abbas.

I always wanted to join an archeological dig, but never imagined I could. As a then twenty-one-year-old cultural anthropology student from America, excavating anything, especially medieval artifacts, seemed daunting. The responsibility to our histories, skill, and physical labor seemed too inaccessible, too scary. But after a sleepless night in March 2023, I blindly actualized this subconscious dream of mine through an email to Dr. Hugh Willmott pleading to let me join his excavation of Cerne Abbey. And before I could process the consequences of my email, my application for the excavation of Cerne Abbas was approved.



I spent the next few months gathering workwear, tools, and my courage. I spent hours online scanning articles discussing the best trowel to not make you look like a buffoon on site, trying my best to combat the countless faux pas I would enact during my time in the field. When my friends asked my motivations for the dig, or if I was nervous, I pushed them off, unwilling to show how anxious I really was. The dig was supposed to be fun, not the crux of my sleepless nights for the months before.



The day before I flew from my home in San Francisco to London, someone close to me wrote in a letter carefully stowed in my carryon that, although I “play the dig off as hopelessly spontaneous and silly,” he could tell this was something deeply important to me as a student, history buff, and human. At the time I was touched, but did not believe him. Turns out he was right.



My experience excavating Cerne Abbey, and getting to know the villagers was an indescribable joy and pleasure. The warmth and generosity of the residents was certainly appreciated by not only me, but the whole archeological team. From playing the fiddle with Harriet, saying hello to Doris the black-lab puppy, or enjoying the sun in Diana’s backyard, all of my interactions with the villagers were nothing short of wonderful. Thank you again to the community of Cerne for all your efforts that made us feel integrated, and welcomed into your world.

Cerne Abbas is a special place, though I am sure you all know this. The village is loaded with history. A history that is visible, yet invisible and in need of excavation. This history is enacted by and lived through people and the land; exposing a crossroads of contradictory spiritualities and historical sentiments.

And there are many figures that uphold these histories that are etched into the mythical memory and current reality of the town: The Giant, St. Augustine’s Well, Cerne Abbey, to name a few. These figures were and are inspiring enough that Cerne had historically, become a haven for romantic poets and artists who found inspiration in the land, who recognized this specialness.



When I returned home to San Francisco after the excavation, before beginning my senior year of university at Wesleyan University, I was unsure what to make of my experience in Cerne. I was overwhelmed with a love and appreciation for the place and the people in it, and wanted to study Cerne's history from an anthropological perspective. I craved Cerne, and wanted to honor the village's history, and those who made my time there so beautiful.

With the help of Gordon Bishop and the members of the Cerne Historical Society, I decided that I wanted to write my senior thesis on my time in Cerne, from an outsider's perspective. As my project took shape, Gordon patiently allowed me to sift through Cerne's digital archive and bounce premature ideas and theories off of him. My advisor and peers back at Wesleyan encouraged me to take my theoretical findings and transform them to resemble the fantastical sense of play, wit, and myth I experienced in Cerne.



By combining these two approaches, my thesis has become a collection of creative nonfiction short stories about my interactions with the land, history, spirit, and people of Cerne. I employ anthropological theories of temporality, hauntology, and spirituality to express these almost intangible aspects of Cerne's soul, and incorporate them into my short stories.

When my pieces are completed, they will tell my version of the story of Cerne, and pay homage to the histories of the village that have yet to be told. This bizarre, unique place that is loaded with history that is both hyper-visible and yet invisible, in need of excavation. A crossroads of different traditions, religions, and industries. The inspiration for artists, poets and authors who found a special relationship with the land, The Giant. The home of those with deep rooted bloodlines and those who ended up there by chance. The collection of all these factors, all these stories creates Cerne - an experience, and identity.

My thesis is just a sliver of the real thing, and one day I hope those who have never met Cerne in person will be able to do so and see for themselves how magical your village truly is. I hope I will be able to return to Cerne myself, as I am unsure of where life will take me after I graduate university in the spring.

But regardless if I receive the chance to return and continue the abbey's excavation, Cerne Abbas has changed my perspective on history, religion, and what it means to be a community forever. I am enormously grateful for my blip in Cerne and will remember this experience for the rest of my life.





Harriet Still



ABBAY STREET

The Mysterious Case of the JETTIED JOINTED CRUCK



Fig. 1 Abbey St odd numbers 3-9

These buildings would have been as familiar to the monks as the Parish and Abbey Churches, and are far less altered than the remnants of the Abbot's Porch or the South Gate (now Abbey House). My dissertation set out to examine the way that these buildings were built, who lived in them and when they date from.

Firstly, the Abbey Street buildings (nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 7a, 9, 15 and 'The Barn') all share an unusual building style. It can be seen by anyone passing that the buildings are 'jettied'. **Figs. 1 and 2.** This means that the first floor joists overhang the ground floor. This has been variously argued to increase floor space upstairs, create an aesthetic impact, increase structural stability or be due to a local lack of long timbers. No documentary evidence has yet settled this argument, and so I will leave each reader to their own speculations.

The Abbey at Cerne was almost entirely demolished in 1539. However, the abbey buildings were just a small part of the built landscape that the monastery engineered over its five centuries in the Cerne valley. A medieval abbey's wealth was often founded on its landholdings. The records list Cerne's estates in Poxwell and Worth Matravers, among many others. However, these were supplemented by the rental income from its urban tenanted properties. In Cerne Abbas, we are lucky to still have a row of these tenements, which pre-date the dissolution of the abbey by at least 50 years.



Fig. 2 Orange for primary subjects of Harriet's dissertation; green for secondary subjects; blue for medieval marketplace.

These jetties are not unusual building features in themselves, but it is very unusual to pair them with a roof type called a 'jointed cruck'. 'Crucks' are a style particular to the West Country and Wales. They are a series of pairs of long, curved timbers. Each pair is joined together at the apex of the roof. The curve allows the cruck blades to form both the walls and the pitch of the roof. **Fig. 3**

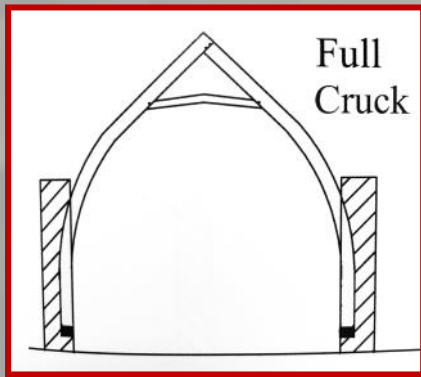
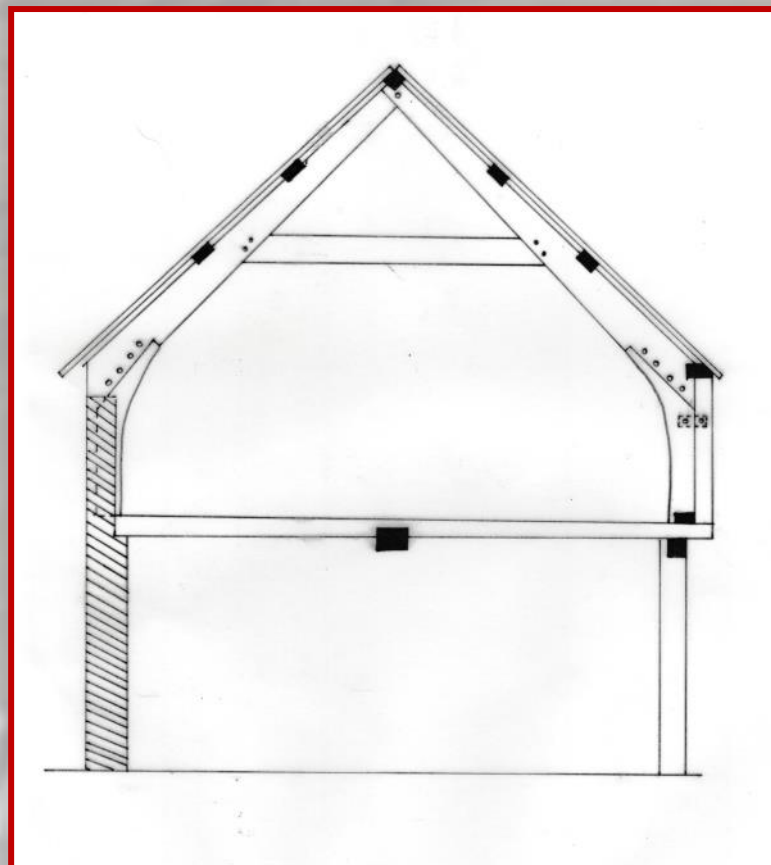


Fig. 3 Alcock, *Cruck Survey*, p. 3.

Lastly, the houses are not entirely timber framed. Nos. 3, 5 and 8 have obvious back and side walls of masonry. The rear jointed cruck blades rest on these walls at first floor level, but the party walls are largely independent of the timber frames. This style of hybrid material buildings is also found in south Wales and Taunton, where the building historian Robert Taylor coined the term 'three-quarter houses'.



More particular to south Somerset, Dorset and east Devon **Fig. 4** is the form known as the 'jointed cruck'. Whereas a traditional cruck blade is a single curved timber, each jointed cruck blade is constructed from two timbers. **Fig. 5.** These are joined together at eaves level with a long tenon joint. Cerne Abbas is unusual in that the houses on Abbey Street are both jettied and use jointed crucks. Although there seems to be no structural reason to avoid the combination, the cruck specialists I talked to in the forming of my thesis had not come across it elsewhere.

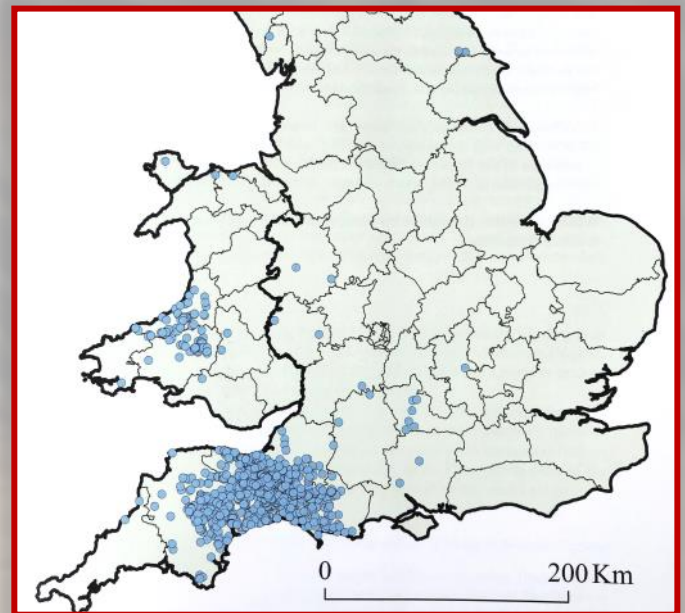


Fig. 4 Distribution of jointed crucks - Alcock

At first these were seen to be anomalies, or houses where faulty framing had been replaced with longer lasting masonry, but my study allowed me to identify this style (or the remnants of it) along the whole of Abbey Street.

Fig. 5 Cross section of no. 5, showing the jointed cruck blades, back masonry wall (hatched) and jetty (right) (H Still 2024)



Fig 6 Nos. 36-38 on the west side of Cheap Street, Sherborne (Dorset). (H Still).

Once this style had been identified in Cerne Abbas, it became apparent that the neighbouring Benedictine town of Sherborne also used the unusual combination of jettied, jointed crucks and 'three-quarter houses'.

Fig. 6 In Cerne Abbas these buildings lead up to the abbey precinct and in Sherborne they line the road between Cheap Street and the abbey precinct. This raises the possibility that these masonry walls were some form of self-defensive fire breaks, to protect the core of the monastery from the inevitable fires that would often occur in medieval towns. Cerne Abbey's unusual layout - a north cloister - is found in both Cerne and Sherborne. This raises the possibility that the two Benedictine monasteries shared building techniques (and possibly even builders) in both their religious and secular building programmes.

Having looked at the similarities along the row of buildings, the task was to try to identify their individual functions. Several well-known monastic tenements are essentially a repeated pattern of identical buildings, with shops below and tenements above.

Fig. 7 Although this has often been assumed, this is not the case in Abbey Street. The most obvious differing stylistic features is the carriageway at no. 9. This form is typical of inns of the late medieval period. Written records show that no. 9 (previously the Nag's Head) was a licensed pub since at least 1690, although there is an apocryphal story that it was here that Sir Walter Raleigh was tried in 1585.

The especially narrow width of the carriageway and the two masonry walls either side of it imply a plot division that dates from the original layout of the street. It was also common for monasteries to support the building of inns to cater for the pilgrims who were not wealthy enough to stay in the monastery's guest house. This all makes it highly likely that no. 9 was originally built as an inn, before 1539.



Fig 7 Lawn Cottages, Church Street, Tewkesbury (1405-08) believed to have been built by the Abbey (Meeson and Alcock, p. 12)

Another more subtle difference is the width of the door of no. 3. This is known as a ‘coffin door’ and is stylistically identified as being tall and narrow. They seem to be particularly common in medieval shops, and it has been speculated that the narrowness is to hamper would-be thieves. This is combined with the round-headed windows at the front of the building. These are also typical of medieval shops. This would also align with the location of no. 3, on the edge of the medieval marketplace. However, its neighbour at no. 5 appears to have been a much higher status house, with its moulded beams and larger rooms **Fig. 8**. It is unlikely that this was a shop in the medieval sense of a small workshop on the street front, with separate living space behind. It may instead have been that of a high-status merchant, who wanted proximity to the marketplace to negotiate deals, but whose business was more about entertaining clients in his marketside residence to secure these rather than producing goods from raw materials there. The differing widths and plan forms of the street imply that the abbey were liaising directly with their prospective tenants as they built them.

Previously, the medieval buildings on Abbey Street had been looked at by Nicholas Keeble, who lived in

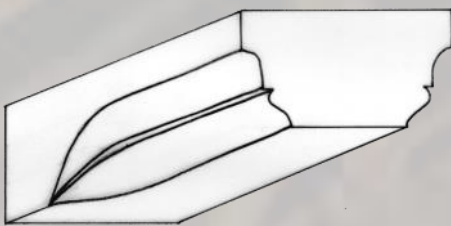


Fig 8 Drawing of the moulded beam in No 5 Abbey St. (H Still 2024)

Dairy House in the 1970s, for his degree in Architecture. His thesis put forward some theories for the dating of the buildings based on the work of Cecil Hewett on the joints of the joists. Hewett attempted to create a dating system for the different types of joints in medieval carpentry, using

known dated examples. This has subsequently been validated by some but also seen to be of limited use by others. With Hewett’s input, Keeble dated the Abbey Street houses to c.1400. This conflicted with the only other date given to them. This was from the Royal Commission in 1939, and attributed c.1500. One of the key questions of my dissertation became the age of the buildings.

With the help of the Cerne Historical Society, Oxford University and Isabelle Coghill, we were able to date the timbers in the roof of no. 5. The date is determined by taking a sample across the growth rings of the timber. The patterns of growth vary from year to year, and so the dendrochronologist (tree-ring dater) is able to match the specific pattern of the sample with other samples from buildings with a known build date. The results came back that the main roof structure dated to c.1485. Not only did we find a date, but we were also able to discover that no. 5’s trees were very similar in growth patterns to other monastically constructed buildings. Correlation here further supports that theory that the houses on Abbey Street were constructed by the abbey from timber grown in woodlands managed by the abbey.

The dissertation has been very interesting in shedding light on the uses, age and building method of these fascinating buildings. It also revealed a previously unrecorded style of building, using jointed crucks with jettied frontages. We hope that in future we may be able to dendrochronologically date more of the buildings, to further highlight the order in which they were built and explain some of the anomalies in style. However, for now, it has shed light on these familiar and yet enigmatic buildings.

The Mysterious Case of the JETTIED JOINTED CRUCK





Living in Dorset not far from Lyme Regis most of us know of Mary Anning (1799-1847), an amateur palaeontologist who made a huge contribution to the study and understanding of fossils. However, many will not have heard details of her extraordinary life nor the support that her family and friends, locally and in the scientific world, gave her.

Mary was one of ten children but, tragically, only Mary and her older brother Joseph survived beyond infancy. In those days many small children died but the death of an earlier Mary a few months before 'our' Mary was born was truly shocking. **The Bath Chronicle** reported on 27th December 1798:

"A child, four years of age of Mr. R. Anning, a cabinetmaker of Lyme, was left by the mother for about five minutes in a room where there were some shavings The girl's clothes caught fire and she was so dreadfully burnt as to cause her death."

'Our' Mary had, herself, several lucky escapes from untimely death. The first of these when she was only 15 months old. She was, it is told, being held by a neighbour who was standing with two other women under an elm tree watching an equestrian show. The tree was struck by lightning killing all three women. Little Mary was rushed home where she was revived in a bath of hot water, a local doctor declaring that her survival was miraculous. Years later locals ascribed her curiosity, lively personality and intelligence to this event!

By the late C18th Lyme had become a popular seaside resort attracting wealthy visitors interested in acquiring knowledge at the same time as enjoying the benefits of health-giving sea air. As the children grew older, Richard Anning took Joseph and Mary out fossil collecting despite the very real dangers presented by unstable Blue Lias cliffs of limestone and shale. These cliffs were especially dangerous after winter storms, just when fossils were most likely to be exposed. The family sold their finds from tables in front of their house to augment Richard's modest earnings.



However, unfortunately, they lived so close to the sea that their house on the town's bridge sometimes flooded and, on one occasion, they were forced to crawl out of an upstairs window to avoid drowning.

Sadly, Richard died aged only 44 in 1810 from a combination of TB and injuries from a fall off a cliff. He left his family with debts, forcing his wife, Molly, to apply for poor relief. The family continued to collect fossils, selling them to try and make a living. Fortuitously, Joseph and Mary made their first highly significant find in 1811, only a year after their father's death. Joseph dug up a four-foot-long ichthyosaur skull directing young Mary, only 11 or 12 years old, where to dig to find the rest of the skeleton. This she achieved over several months of arduous and dangerous work. The local press 'identified' the fossil as a crocodile Henry Hoste Henley of Sandringham House, Norfolk bought the skeleton for £23. The discovery of this ichthyosaur skull and subsequent finds must have been truly amazing as these new species were unknown to science at the time.

The family's best customer was **Lieutenant-Colonel James Birch**, a wealthy collector from Lincolnshire. In 1820 he was so disturbed by the Anning family's poverty, they having made no major discoveries for a year and on the point of selling their furniture to pay their rent, that he generously auctioned the fossils that he had bought from them. He wrote that the sale was

"for the benefit of the poor woman and her son and daughter of Lyme, who have in truth found almost all the fine things which have been submitted to scientific investigation I may never again possess what I am about to part with, yet in doing it I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that the money will be well applied."

The auction raised £400, drawing buyers from Paris and Vienna.

Mary continued to collect fossils, mainly ammonites and belemnite 'bones', but it was the vertebrate fossils that were worth much more and were much rarer.

The Bristol Mirror wrote of her:

"This persevering female has for years gone daily in search of fossil remains of importance at every tide, for many miles under the hanging cliffs at Lyme, whose fallen masses are her immediate object, as they alone contain these valuable relics of a former world, which must be snatched at the moment of their fall, at the risk of being crushed by the half suspended fragments they leave behind, or be left to be destroyed by the returning tide:-to her exertions we owe nearly all the fine specimens of Ichthyosauri of the great collections...."



Mary's reputation grew. In 1823 she found the first complete Plesiosaurus skeleton and in 1828 the first British example of a pterosaur (called a flying dragon when first displayed at the British Museum).



Plesiosaurus Skeleton

Her increasing success enabled Mary to buy, in 1826 aged 27, a home with a glass window for her shop. Encouraged by her friend Elizabeth Philpot, Mary read as much scientific literature as she could, made detailed technical drawings and dissected modern animals including fish and cuttlefish to better understand the anatomy of the creatures she was finding.

By this time many geologists and fossil collectors from Europe and America were visiting Mary.

Despite the respect for Mary that many eminent scientists held she was, none the less, often not acknowledged in scientific papers and resented this.

Anna Pinney, who sometimes accompanied Mary on her expeditions wrote:

"She says the world has used her ill ... these men of learning have sucked her brains, and made a great deal of published works, of which she furnished the contents, while she derived none of the advantages."

Mary herself wrote:

"The world has used me so unkindly, I fear it has made me suspicious of everyone."

Unfortunately, it was common at that time for scientists to fail to acknowledge working-class people and their contributions. Mary had received a very limited education at a Congregationalist Sunday school but never had the further education available to wealthy young men. In those days women were not generally educated to a high standard, able to attend university or permitted to join the Geological Society of London. It was only through Mary's own enthusiasm, intelligence and hard work, encouraged by friends and family, that she had become an expert amateur palaeontologist.

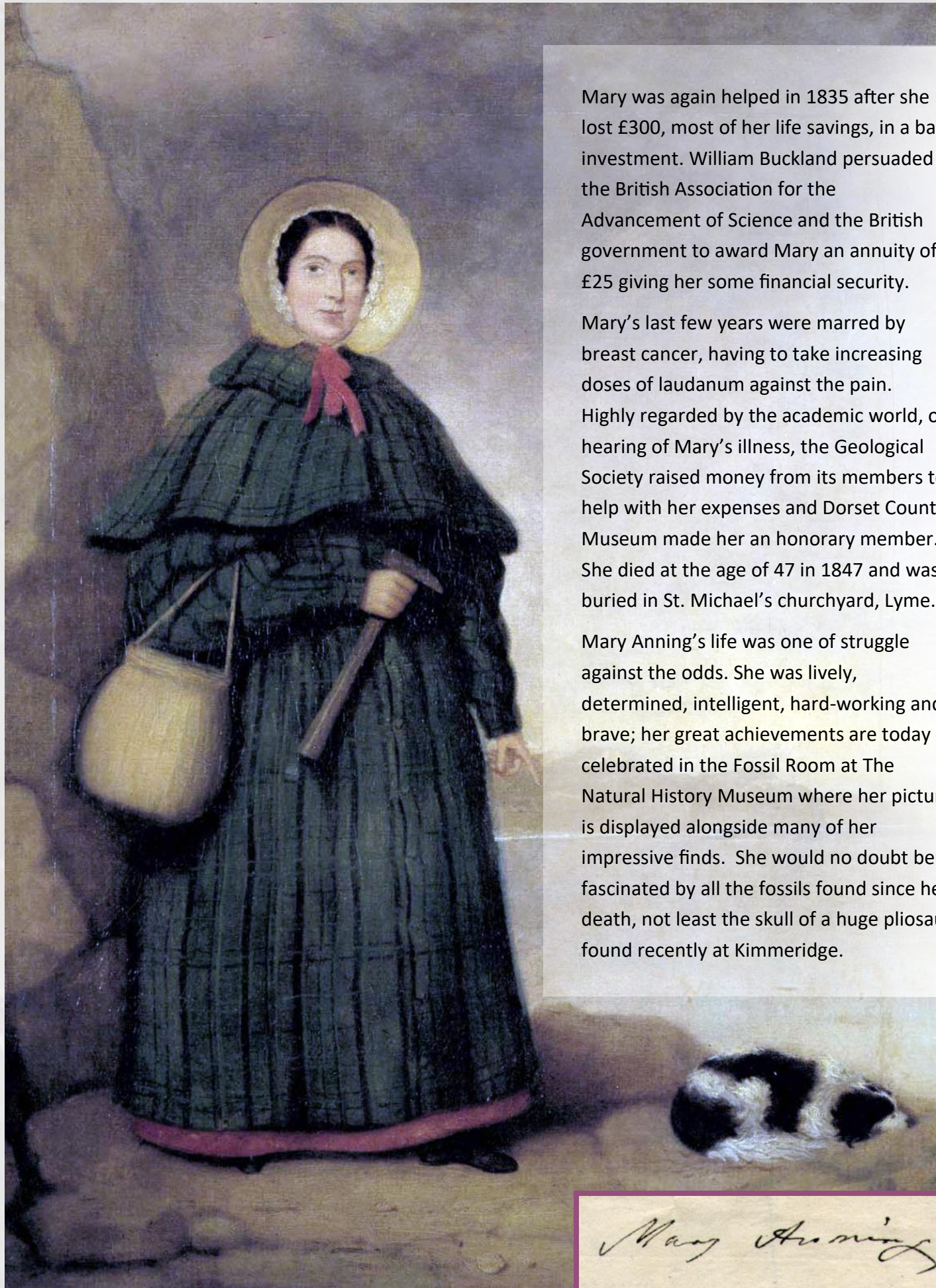
However, Mary had loyal supporters in the academic world. Henry De la Beche (later president of the Geological Society) had been a friend of Mary and Joseph from their youth. Henry and Mary kept in touch as his career developed and in 1830 he supported Mary financially by painting 'Duria Antiquior', a representation of prehistoric life based largely on fossils found by Mary, selling prints of it for her benefit. William Buckland, a geology lecturer at Oxford University, often visited Lyme with his wife and went fossil collecting with Mary. Mary made the important suggestion to William that conical fossils known as bezoar stones were in fact fossilized faeces of ichthyosaurs or plesiosaurs. They were renamed coprolites. Mary also took amongst others, leading geologists William Conybeare, Richard Owen (who coined the word 'Dinosaur', a founder of the Natural History Museum and opponent of Charles Darwin) and Roderick and Charlotte Murchison on fossil collecting trips.



Mary's third near-fatal escape came in October 1833 when she just avoided being killed by a landslide that buried her beloved black and white terrier, Tray. Mary wrote to her friend, Charlotte Murchison,

"Perhaps you will laugh when I say that the death of my old faithful dog has quite upset me, the cliff that fell upon him and killed him in a moment before my eyes, and close to my feet it was but a moment between me and the same fate."

Her fourth close shave occurred soon after. Elizabeth Philpot wrote to William Buckland in December 1833: "Yesterday she had one of her miraculous escapes in going to the beach before sunrise and was nearly killed in passing over the bridge by the wheel of a cart which threw her down and crushed her against the wall. Fortunately, the cart was stopped in time to allow her to be extricated from her most perilous situation, and happily, she is not prevented from pursuing her daily employment."



Mary was again helped in 1835 after she lost £300, most of her life savings, in a bad investment. William Buckland persuaded the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the British government to award Mary an annuity of £25 giving her some financial security.

Mary's last few years were marred by breast cancer, having to take increasing doses of laudanum against the pain. Highly regarded by the academic world, on hearing of Mary's illness, the Geological Society raised money from its members to help with her expenses and Dorset County Museum made her an honorary member. She died at the age of 47 in 1847 and was buried in St. Michael's churchyard, Lyme.

Mary Anning's life was one of struggle against the odds. She was lively, determined, intelligent, hard-working and brave; her great achievements are today celebrated in the Fossil Room at The Natural History Museum where her picture is displayed alongside many of her impressive finds. She would no doubt be fascinated by all the fossils found since her death, not least the skull of a huge pliosaurus found recently at Kimmeridge.

Mary Anning



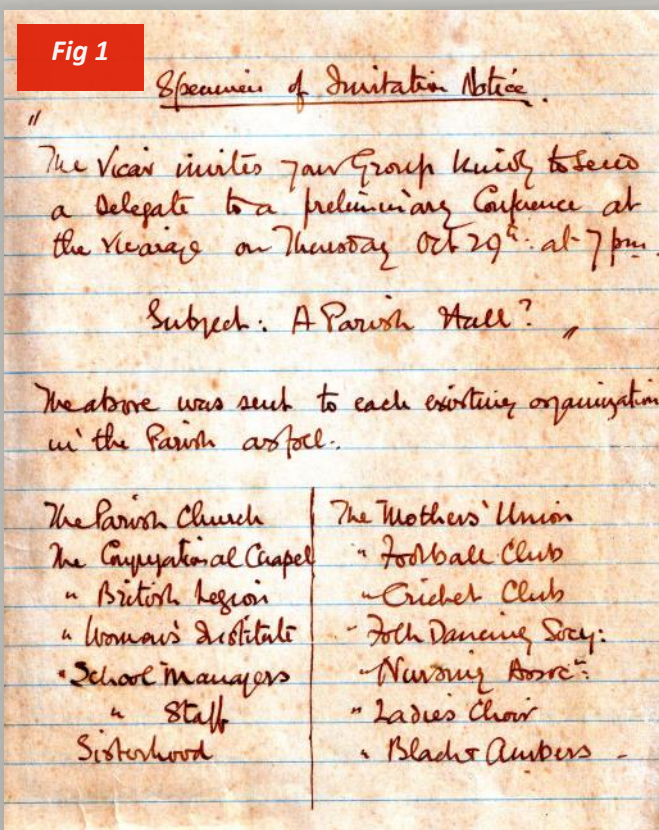


A History of the Two Cerne Abbas Village Halls

PART 1

We are fortunate in retaining the Minutes of the Hall Committees for the two Cerne Abbey Village Halls from 1936 to the present day. From them a history emerges of the twists and turns of conceiving, building and commissioning two Cerne Abbas Village Halls. These Halls have been and remain priceless assets in the life of our community over the last nearly 90 years and their history is all the more worth recording. This first article covers the period from 1936 to 1938 when the first Village Hall was planned, built and opened in Wills Lane.

On 29th October 1936, a 'Preliminary Conference' was called by the Vicar, its subject '*to consider the question of a Public Hall for the Parish of Cerne Abbas*'. The Vicar was the Revd Arthur Sinclair Burton, the incumbent of St Mary's from 1935 to 1938. Those invited to attend were representatives of each of the 'existing organisations' in the Parish.



As **Figure 1** shows, these organisations were very much of their time. A number of sites for the Hall were discussed, but seemingly resolved by a Major Colville who '*very generously offered a good site in Wills Lane, approx. 80ft x 60ft which was equivalent to a donation of upwards of £25 as he was obliged to buy it before presenting it to the Parish*'. A Sub-Committee was formed, chaired by the Vicar and which included three retired Army officers with one, a Captain Jensen, as Hon Architect. Other members were the Revd G Whittock of the Congregational Church; the school

Headmaster, Mr Strawbridge; and a Mrs House of the 'Black & Ambers'. What the 'Black & Ambers' were is not known, but possibly an amateur dramatic group.



The last known photo of the 1937 Hall



By 30 December 1936 the Sub-Committee was ready to present its initial proposals to the General Committee. Apart from Major Colville's offer of the site, the funds stood at about £10. Having in mind '*the smallness of the community and of its financial condition*' (a telling observation of Cerne Abbas at that time), it was decided to aim at the provision of a Hall at an expenditure of about £400. Grants and/or loans were sought from the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), the Jubilee Trust (presumably that of King George V) and the Pilgrim Trust (set up in 1930 by Edward Harkness, an American philanthropist). In the event, only the approach to the NCSS was to be successful.



Fig 2

With £400 as the guiding figure, Captain Jensen produced a sketch plan for the Hall, alongside '*type Institute buildings shown in Messrs Pratten's catalogue below £400*'.

Figure 2. F Pratten and Co Ltd, known as Pratten's, was a business based in Midsomer Norton that manufactured prefabricated

wooden buildings. The Sub-Committee also '*thought it desirable that the main room in the Hall should be long enough and wide enough for badminton and that in addition it should have a stage*'. Based on initial sketches, Pratten's estimate came in at £315 for timber, erection at £50.

By the end of 1936, it was already apparent that '*much additional cost*' would be necessary and the estimate was now provisionally set at £480. **Figure 3** shows the raw figures (no Excel spreadsheets in those days!). The provisional design and estimate were agreed by the General Committee on 7 January 1937. The foundations would be provided by local labour, as would the electrics and internal decoration. However, the decision for this 'semi-permanent building' to be of timber rather than of more expensive brick had the obvious implication: that the Hall's life was limited, if not known by how much.

The name for the Hall was discussed by the General Committee. Was it to be the Parish Hall, Village Hall or to commemorate the forthcoming Coronation of King George VI on 12th May 1937? It was decided that it would be called the **Village Hall**, which endures.

On the other side, the funds to meet the £480. As follows:-

Estimated Cost.		Funds	
	£. s. d.		£.
Messrs Pratten's estimate:		1/4 Land	10
for supply of materials.	315	Mr. Sheel's donation	50
Extra for roof of asbestos tiles or cedar shingles	30	Anticipated Contributions from N.C.S.S.:-	
Extra height of 1 foot to suit badminton and stage.	15	(a) Grant (1/2 total cost)	80
	360.	(b) Loans (1/2 total cost)	160
Foundations	20	Value of anticipated voluntary labour	30
Labour (voluntary)	30	Loan from Bank, 100	
Lighting, heating	20	To be received from 20 £100s. of parishioners.	50
Internal decoration	5		
Joists	5		
Erection	35		
Provision for extras	5		
	£ 480		£ 480

8. The Sub-committee decided to put the

Fig 3

At a meeting on 10 March 1937 a letter from a Colonel Bald, a member of both committees, was minuted. In summary, he stated that he had not been consulted about the site offered by Major Colville and he now recorded his strong opposition to it. Not stated anywhere in the minutes, but obviously known to everyone present, was that he was the owner of the adjacent Barton Lodge. Colonel Bald stated that he proposed to offer a portion of the field opposite the school, then in partial use as allotments.



Figure 4. He had sounded out officials at the County Council and they appeared favourable to the purchase.

Matters were resolved at a meeting on 21 April 1937 when it was confirmed that the Hall would now be positioned parallel to Wills Lane and not at right angles to it as originally conceived. This was acceptable to Colonel Bald and he was warmly praised for his support for this compromise. Unfortunately, no plans or



sketches survive from this time, but a 1962 OS map shows its final position (as indicated). **Figure 5.** (The new houses built in 2005, as Nos 9, 10 and 11 Wills Lane, now occupy part of the site). The Vicar also read out a letter from the Surveyor to the Dorchester Rural District Council (DRDC): that the site in Wills Lane as proposed was not large enough to meet the requirements of the drainage bye-laws for a cesspool. (Main drainage only arrived in the village in the early 1950s and prior to this effluent from buildings drained into cesspools or the river.) The problem was resolved by excavating a cesspool to the south of the site. This was timely because Pratten's had written to say that the estimates would hold good only if the order was confirmed before the end of April. If not, the prices would have to be raised in conformity with the general rise in prices being experienced. The Chairman confirmed that he had sent a letter to Pratten's accepting their estimate.

The General Committee Meeting on 21 June 1937 was a defining one. The Chairman said that he had received verbal agreement from the DRDC for the Hall and agreed to consult their Surveyor to discuss their requirements and those of the Country Planning Act of 1936. Any outstanding issues would be settled with the Surveyor '*on the spot*'. (This was a refreshing contrast to the saga with planning that was to be encountered later for the present Hall). The NCSS favoured the vesting of the Hall with the 'Official Trustee for Charity Lands'. (This is now the 'Official Custodian' for the Charity Commission, to which the present Hall is also vested). This was agreed by the General Committee.

By 16 July 1937 the NCSS had confirmed that it would offer an interest-free loan of £180 and a grant of £135, the loan being subject to a 'quota' of £220 being raised from the local community. Members from the General Committee volunteered to undertake house to house visits in the village to raise this amount. At the same time Pratten's had confirmed that their final price for delivery and erection of the Hall would now be £423. The erection would take 4 weeks. For the Hall to be ready by 30 September, as the Committee planned, Pratten's would need to be authorised to start by 30 August and arrangements were immediately made to lay the foundations. Pratten's also required a 50% down payment for delivery, but the funds were not yet in place for this. To meet this shortfall the meeting accepted a loan from Lord Digby of £50, offered as a 'gentleman's agreement'. Lord Digby's loan, however, came with one stipulation: that he desired to be ex-officio on the Committee of Management to be set up for the Hall. It was decided that Lord Digby would be offered the post of 'President for Life', to which he agreed. The 'Committee of Management' for the Hall was subsequently agreed for the draft Deed of Conveyance. *'In addition to the President, there would be a total of 18, of which 12 would be nominated annually by the organisations of the village, 4 are for election by the village and 2 co-opted by the Committee'*. This template survives to this day.

The Hall official opening day was set for 18 November 1937. This was just over twelve months since the Vicar's 'Preliminary Conference' which had set the ball rolling; a triumph by any reckoning and a tribute to all concerned. The opening event was a dance organised by the WI. Their contribution from the dance was just under £15, but other donations were made, from a few £s to a few shillings. A list of these donations, as distinct from loans, survives. The General Committee, however, resolved that individual donations should not be publicised, a policy that continues to this day. There was, however, a single exception to this policy, a tablet in wood recording Major Colville's gift, mounted in the entrance to the Hall. **Figure 6.**



Fig 6



Fig 7

With the Hall complete **Figure 7** and being used by a grateful village, the minutes enter 1938. These reflect unfinished business and settling down to the management of the Hall. However, there were also the shadows of the approaching war with Air Raid Precaution (ARP) meetings already being held in the Hall.

The next article will follow the fortunes of the first Hall during the war and post-war years, to the point where the decision was made that a replacement Hall had to be built.





Robin Mills The Coppice, the Countryside, & the Hurdle Maker.



Hurdles at Dorchester, Fairfield

Throughout the woodland, coppice and hedgerow around Cerne, the hazel species can readily be found among the other common native trees such as ash, hawthorn, and field maple. It is common in the old hedgerows, but in woodland one can still find small areas growing little else. In September it's a source of delicious nuts, which has something to do with the healthy squirrel population hereabouts, but has the species proliferated on its own, or was it encouraged by planting and management? The answer is undoubtedly the latter, because if managed by coppicing, hazel's productivity is remarkable, as is its versatility. Although many species lend themselves to coppicing, no other tree species has been used so widely in English rural life.



When coppiced, the clumps, or stools, of hazel are cut rotationally every 7 years or so, to a short stump. They then form multiple shoots, whose regrowth is rapid. The mature root system of the stool channels all its energy into prodigious rates of growth, 5 feet or so in its first summer alone after cutting. In 6 years, the shoots, straight rods an inch or so in diameter and up to 12ft long, can be used for wattle hurdles and many other light uses; at 15+ years, for firewood or charcoal.

Old hedgerow hazel



Billhook



Coppiced hazel

Over centuries, coppiced woodland provided material central to the life of every rural community, and nothing was wasted. It was fuel for the hearth, for cooking and baking, for the lime kilns, and before coal and coke became available, for charcoal for smelting and forging metals. Small wood (basically unsawn roundwood) formed, and still does, the support under many thatched roofs. Hazel is still the traditional wood for thatching spars, and still makes the best bean poles and pea sticks for the garden. In every rural community were woodmen whose work was coppicing the plantations, producing faggots of firewood, roundwood for building, fences and gates, and hurdles for penning livestock.

Supporting structures interwoven with thin, sometimes cleft sticks have been useful to man since the Neolithic, as has been discovered at the Avalon Marshes in Somerset where walkways from 4000BC, thus constructed, connecting islands in the marshes have been discovered preserved in the peat. The wattle walls of Iron Age huts were made by weaving slender rods horizontally between vertical posts, then covered and sealed against the weather with a mix of mud, straw and cow manure. Many internal walls of houses around this village are of wattle and daub (lime-based plaster), a technique used from the medieval until relatively recently.

From the Middle Ages onwards, wattle hurdles, made on age-old principles, in this area mainly using hazel, were used in huge numbers for penning sheep. Flocks had proliferated, particularly on the chalk hills of the south of England, with the burgeoning wool trade. A saying of the day, protesting the effects of Enclosures which favoured sheep production over arable, is recorded as:

*"Sheep have eaten up our meadows and downs,
Our corn, our wood, whole villages and towns."*

In 1535 Cerne Abbey's estates were recorded as home to a total of 5985 sheep, some 2100 being based on land around the village itself. As a former sheep farmer, the problem of how to keep flocks in the right fields, without wire netting or electric fences, seems daunting.



Splitting (riving) hazel rod



Pressing down the rods

To a sheep the grass, as all shepherds know, is inevitably greener on the other side of every hedge. To this challenge is added the practice of sheep farming not seen today (unless electric fencing is used) which involved folding sheep, i.e. confining them to a small area which is moved daily, over arable land between crops to increase its fertility, or over root crops which also fed them through winter. The traditional hazel wattle sheep hurdle is 6ft long by about 3ft high; a one-acre fold possibly holding 200 sheep required 15 dozen hurdles (which are traditionally counted by the dozen =180) to pen the sheep in overnight. Every morning three quarters of them would have to be moved and pitched out to form the next night's fold. Hurdles were made with a gap about 6" from the top called the "twilly hole", which enables the shepherd to put a stick, or "shore", through the hole and carry 3 or 4 hurdles at a time on his back. To describe shepherding as hard work and labour intensive is an understatement, but such was the demand for hurdles for these farming systems, it provided employment to many hurdle makers in every village, which probably peaked towards the end of the 19thC. Alan Brown, a sixth-generation hurdle maker from Wool in Dorset, and since his passing sadly one fewer, told me there were 11 recorded in Wool alone in 1885. Hurdle making, like the rather more primitive thatching of the day, was also a skill learned by many farm workers and practiced at quieter times of the year. Quoting Alan Brown from my interview in 2017, he describes his craft:

"I start with the flake, usually a nice bit of ash pole, cut in half lengthways, with 9 holes in it for a garden hurdle, into which the uprights or zales are fitted. The flake has a slight bend in it so that when the new hurdles are stacked they'll tighten up as they dry out and straighten. The two end zales are round, and the seven through the middle are split. Then I'll start weaving in the twillies, the smaller round rods at the bottom, which are bound in so the hurdle doesn't fall to bits. The larger rods through the middle of the hurdle, or rixon, are all split, and we'll cleave enough to make the hurdle. That's done using a hook that's never been sharpened, which, once started into the rod, can be worked all the way along its length by a combination of pulling and twisting the hook, splitting the wood as it goes. It looks a bit dangerous, as you're working towards the hand you're holding the rod with, but I don't push it. It's easy when you've done one before. Once upon a time you'd reckon to make 8 sheep hurdles a day, but that's going some, and hurdles didn't need to be as tidy as they do today.



Twisting round the end zale

These days if I make 2 or 3 six-foot hurdles that's a good day's work, and it's a lot of wood to shift. In the summer, when the sun's out it does get very warm, but the wood works nicely. In the winter, if the wood's frozen I'll light a fire and lean the rods on a frame over it just to take the frost out of it."

Sheep Fairs and markets, normally held in late summer and autumn, required large numbers of hurdles to pen the animals before and after they were sold. The image shows the Sheep Fair at Dorchester's Fairfield in the 1920's. In my early sheep farming days in the late 1970's, Wilton, near Salisbury, held large annual sheep sales from the months of August to October, which I sometimes attended to buy replacement ewes. At the main sale in September up to 30,000 sheep were auctioned, mostly penned up behind wattle hurdles.

Remains of hazel coppice can still be found in many places around the village, for example along the lower slopes of Black Hill. In the woods on the western bank of the river Cerne north of the village, (the northwest corner of Northmead), identifiable hazel and ash coppice remains, which possibly supplied fuel for the brick kilns sited nearby. And along the lower edges of Giant Hill, occasional hazel can be found amongst sycamore and ash which now predominate – both species which have colonised quite aggressively – convenient perhaps for the lime kilns, the remains of which can still be found. But the largest areas of old hazel coppice can be found in Cerne Park, the Abbey's provider of venison, where coppicing and hurdle-making may have gone on for centuries.

Once more, for his eloquent and detailed observations of life in Cerne, we are indebted to artist Joseph Benwell Clark, who lived in the village as a young man until 1881, returning to live at Barnwells, Abbey St, in later life. In his diaries he vividly recollects woodman, keeper and hurdle maker Stevey House, who lived in an old cottage with his family in Cerne Park in the 1880's. I have yet to find traces of Stevey's house, but live in hope.



Old coppice - Cerne Park



Hurdle under construction

"When I was young a house stood in Park, probably 14th century where the monks of Cerne Abbey raised venison and preserved other game for their table. Many years ago the building was burnt down. In the early '80's Park was one of my sketching haunts, in the cottage lived Stevey House, his wife and family of comely daughters and sons. The ground floor was one large living room, outside a lean-to, which was a stable for the donkey, wood house and tool house. On wet days I painted in the living room one end of which was taken up by the large open fire-place on which Stevey placed ash poles which crackled and gave off such an amount of heat that one could not sit near it. The walls of the room were whitewashed against which the old dark oak furniture, the eight day clock, tables, dresser and chairs look still darker than they would have otherwise have done. The windows were recessed in thick walls and were diamond paned leaded glass, some panes green some clear. Polished brass candlesticks shone on the mantelpiece, high up over the coloured cotton valance. Stevey was woodman, keeper and hurdle maker. Shooting rabbits a year or two ago in the woods, I made search for the site of the building which is on high ground, in the direction of the far corner from Cerne near Wheam Hill, after a long search I found the place indicated by a few squared stones and covered by grass and trees, the home of fox and rabbit, the trees a building place for the gay, chattering jay. The well, some quarter of a mile from the house, in the valley, is still there. As Children we dropped pebbles down to hear the splash after a long interval when it reached the surface of the water. To the ponds on the downs at the top come wild duck, in the woods are rabbits by the hundreds, foxes in plenty, pheasants and sometimes a woodcock or two, occasionally a badger and perhaps a fallow deer. No other place afforded such nutting in the warm days of autumn when we had an annual outing, getting lost in the undergrowth of hazel, cultivated and preserved for hurdle making. Well Copse, Hare Copse, Seat Copse, "Zunny Brow" and other plantations of odd shapes reminded me of a large scale map of a new world with the sea coloured green and the earth copse colour, changing as the seasons came and went, emerald in the spring and varying in the autumn and winter with all the subtle shades of woodland colours yellows, reds and the purple haze of twigs and catkins when winter merges into spring."

Coppicing woodland is well-known to encourage biodiversity, which has declined alarmingly from Benwell Clark's day. In Cerne Park there are deer in profusion, which would have pleased My Lord Abbot, but today it is chiefly home to that most precious of species to many estate owners, the pheasant. *"Nutting in the warm days of autumn"*, among *"all the subtle shades of woodland colours"*, conjures an image which one imagines Benwell Clark capturing to perfection.





Background History

By the time of the Norman Conquest wealthier abbeys such as Cerne would regularly receive gifts of land and with them the feudal manual workforce that was needed for the land to be productive. However, the arrival of the Black Death in 1348 and the waves of plague which followed in subsequent decades decimated that workforce. It is estimated that between 1348 and 1350, the disease killed between 30 and 40% of the British population. One result of this was to accelerate the collapse of feudalism as the reduction of the number of tenanted farmers left those that remained able to claim higher wages.

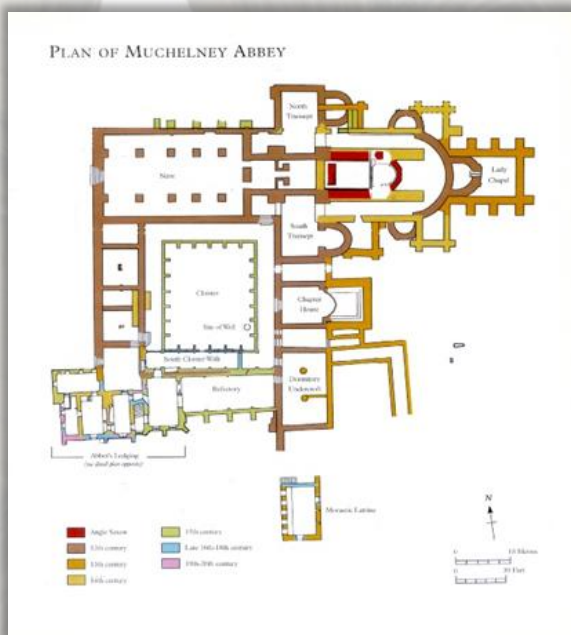
For the monasteries the plague made their land assets much less productive and, consequently, their income fell. In addition, the number of resident monks and nuns declined through death and falling recruitment. The situation was sufficiently desperate for some of the smaller of these establishments to disappear altogether. Revival was slow, and even by the late fifteenth century the abbeys were offering long-term leases to tenant farmers with low rents. However, the economy was beginning to recover and some monastic houses, especially those which had preserved their lands, were well-placed to profit from an improving situation which continued into the sixteenth century.

Many abbots funnelled their re-emerging financial surpluses into building projects to enhance their monasteries. These projects included building church towers and improving gatehouses, guest lodgings and the Superior's quarters. Each of these improvements can be seen at Cerne Abbey, but comparable building developments are to be seen at other of its contemporary monasteries.

Porches

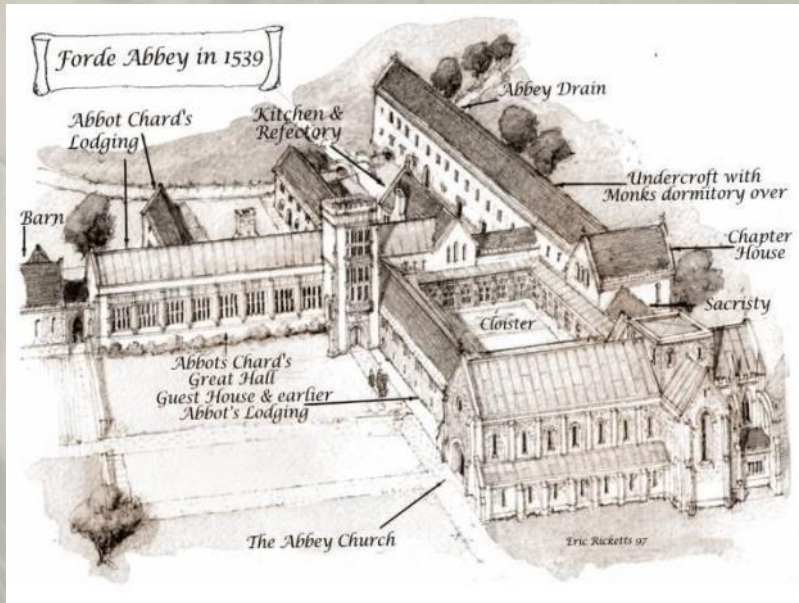
Cerne Abbey's porch was built by Abbot Thomas Sam (1497-1509), the date tying in with the scenario outlined above. It is assumed that the abbot's hall was built at the same time but the discussion of fireplaces below suggests this is not the case. In Benedictine monasteries the abbot's and guest quarters initially occupied the first floor of the western range of the cloister with storage facilities on the ground floor. Improvements in the abbot's

accommodation in Benedictine monasteries usually took the form of attachments to the west range. At Muchelney the addition was at the south-west corner where a (now blocked off) door led from the abbot's lodging into the range (now demolished).



Muchelney Abbots accommodation (to the left)

At Forde Abbey the improvement made by Abbot Chard (1521-1539) was more spectacular and this time attached to the North West corner of the cloister.



Forde Abbey. Abbot Chard's Great Hall is the second façade from left.

Forde Abbey Reconstruction, the church, east cloister range and west cloister range south of the chapter house now completely disappeared.

Note the porch entrance which is strikingly similar to the one at Cerne.



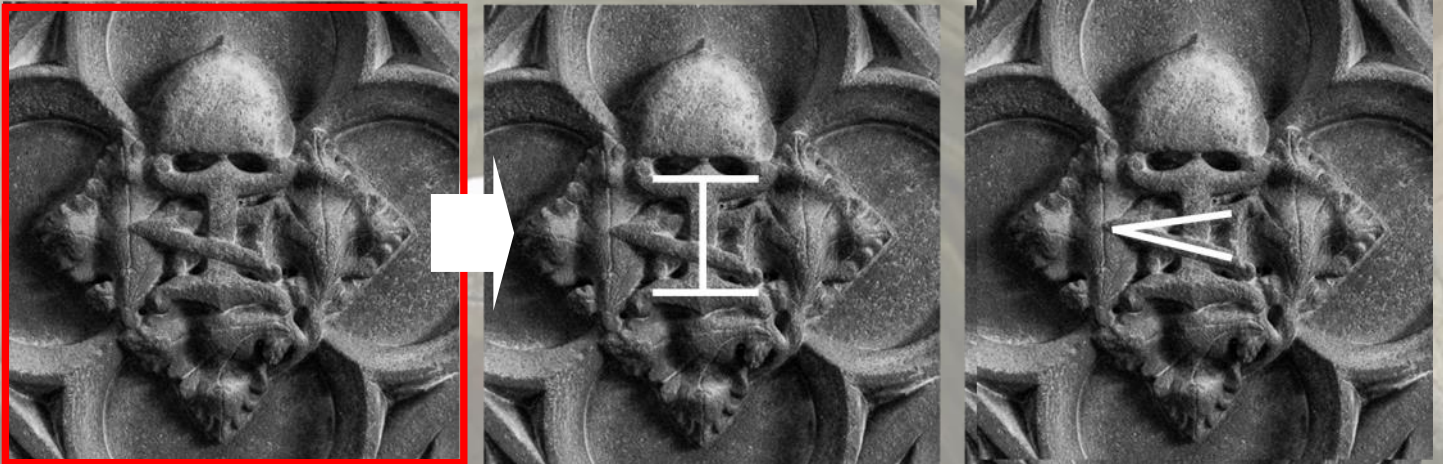
Forde Abbey Porch 1521-1539



Cerne Abbas Porch 1497-1509

Fireplaces

The “Guest House” in Cerne has been attributed to Abbot John Vanne (1458-1470) because the fireplace which has his initials on it is said to have been moved from there into the gatehouse, now known as “Cerne Abbey”.



Initials (I.V.) of Abbot John Vanne

A similar fireplace is located within the abbot’s lodging at Mulcheney.



The Muchelney fireplace



Abbot John Vanne’s fireplace 1458-1470

High ranking guests would have been accommodated in the abbot’s lodging, lesser guests in a building managed by the cellarer, known as a guest house, while the poor, pilgrims and wayfarers were accepted into a hospice or almonry sometimes located outside the abbey precinct.

Given the sophistication of Abbot John Vanne’s fireplace and its comparison with the one in Muchelney’s abbot’s lodging it seems very likely that it was similarly installed in the abbot’s accommodation rather than in a lesser building. Because Abbot John Vanne (1458-1470) preceded Abbot Sam (1497-1509) the implication is that the abbot’s accommodation was improved by several abbots not just by Abbot Thomas Sam.

Oriel Window

The “Guest House” also has a 15th century Oriel window located in its northern wall. The support wall below and its awkward proportions relative to the building clearly suggest that it has been reset from elsewhere.



*Setting of Cerne Abbas
Guest House Oriel
window*

An oriel of very similar design was used by Prior Bolton (1506-1532) in the interior of St Bartholomew's church in Smithfield, London.



Prior Bolton's oriel 1506-1526



Cerne's C15 oriel

Additionally, oriel windows are often associated with porches as in the Cerne Abbas porch or with gatehouses as in the picture of the 14th century Thornton Abbey Gatehouse.

*Thornton Abbey
Gatehouse*



It thus seems likely that the oriel originated from the Abbey church/Abbots Hall complex or a gatehouse.

In conclusion it seems likely that the two main features of the “Guest House”, oriel window and fireplace, were very probably from other buildings, casting doubt on its construction by Abbot John Vanne and its attributed purpose.

Church

Abbots seem to have had a desire during the period to improve their churches by adding towers at their western end. For example, Abbot Marmaduke Huby (1495-1526), abbot of the Cistercian Fountains Abbey, added a great tower. In Cerne the Abbey is said to have built the medieval houses in Abbey Street (c 1500) and the church tower which is of the late 15th or early 16th century.

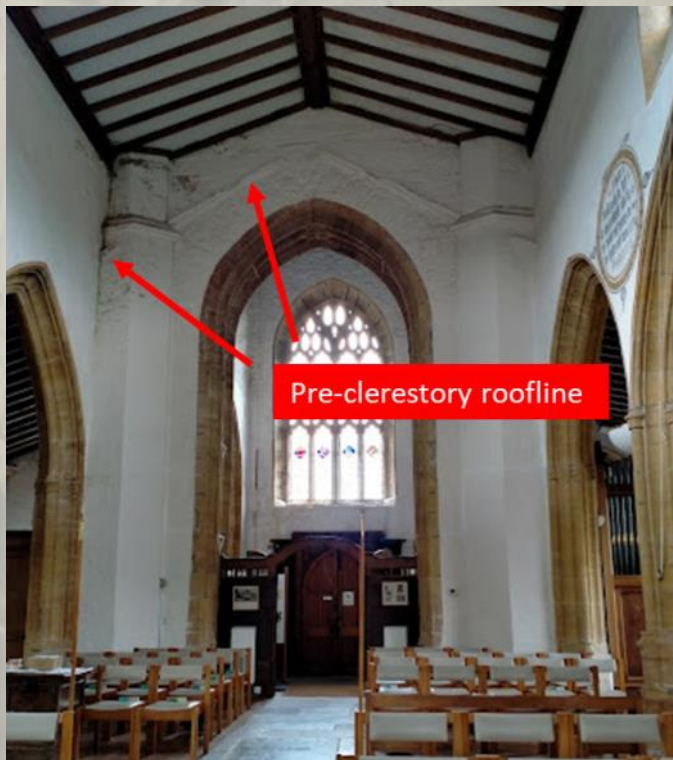


Fountains Abbey West Tower 1495-1526



St Mary's West Tower c 1500

The attribution of the church tower to the abbey is probable as evidenced by the inscription on a clerestory window which suggests that it was added by Abbot Thomas Corton (1524-1539) the last abbot of Cerne. A roof line inside the church suggests that the clerestory was added after the tower.



St Mary's Cerne. Roofline after tower but before the clerestory was built.



St Mary's Cerne: Inscription in clerestory window (Thomas Abbot)

Conclusions

The period of economic recovery after the collapse resulting from the Black Death (that is the later part of 15th century onwards) saw the richer monasteries, including Cerne, launch into building programmes. Activity in Cerne is marked by the construction of the abbot's hall porch, the building of a tower for the St Mary's church and the medieval houses in Abbey Street.

The abbot's hall was probably an extension of the west wing of the cloister where it would have been integrated with the original accommodation for the abbot and guests. There is reason to believe that the abbot's hall was built/improved over the tenure of several abbots not just Abbot Thomas Sam.

Significant "Guest House" architectural fragments, the Abbot Vanne fireplace and the oriel window, probably originated from the abbey church/abbot's hall complex or a gatehouse and were reset after the dissolution. Without the association of the fireplace with the "Guest House" its construction cannot be attributed to Abbot John Vanne as heretofore presumed.





At last year's talk to the Historical Society on the 'Princess and the Slave,' Martin Smith reminded us how richly endowed Dorset is with evidence of habitation by our ancestors. The county is best known for its hillforts and assortment of barrows and burial chambers which are located to make maximum impact. Often less well known and frequently hidden amongst later buildings or vegetation are the many stone crosses, standing stones and field systems.

There are examples of these locally and this article will feature two of them.


Cross and Hand: Ordnance Survey (OS) Grid Reference: ST 632038



This pillar can be found along the Batcombe Road, about 350 metres west of the steep hill leading down to Hilfield Friary. Located on the north side of the road where it overlooks the sweep of the Blackmore Vale, it will be missed as you drive by. Although within a small enclosure, it is below the height of the hedge which almost screens it from the road. Now much eroded it is probably the most important stone cross in Dorset. In Alfred Pope's book 'The Old Stone Crosses of Dorset,' first published in 1906, there is a photograph showing it before the hedge was planted. The stone stands in glorious and desolate isolation, visible from many miles across the vale and with the Batcombe Road behind it little more than a track.

The writer FJ Harvey Darton who lived for some years in Cerne Abbas until his death in 1936 described the monument in his book English Fabric, published in 1935:

"There is, at almost the highest point of this backbone of Dorset, a strange pillar about 3 feet 8 inches high. It is called Cross-and-Hand; and when I first saw it, ignorant of names and legends, I thought it was a forearm ending in a clenched fist that had once held some weapon or emblem. I found later that no one knows for certain anything but that name, and that name is itself a riddle for there is no cross."



The Cross and Hand has been listed as a Grade II historic monument since July 1951. Less romantically, The Royal Commission for Historic Monuments (RCHM) describes it as follows:

Batcombe Cross and Hand on the North side of the road 1,430 yards east of the church, is a monolithic crudely tapered oval shaft with a necking and capital of cushion form; it stands 3½ ft. out of the ground and the capital is 11 in. square. It is possible that this shaft belongs to the group of pre-conquest shafts of which the pillar of Eliseg is the best known; if so the capital must have been cut down. The hand said to have been carved on one face is not traceable.

The Pillar of Eliseg stands on an Early Bronze Age burial cairn prominently located at the end of a ridge in the valley of the Nant Eliseg, near the abbey of Valle Crucis, Llangollen, Denbighshire. It is a fragmentary cross on which there was once a lengthy Latin inscription which was recorded in 1696 by the Welsh antiquarian, Edward Lhuyd. The inscription shows that the cross was erected by Concenn, ruler of Powys (d AD 854) to honour his great grandfather, Eliseg, who had expelled the Anglo-Saxons from this part of Powys.

A recent article by Thomas Morcom and Helen Gittos, ‘**The Cerne Giant in its Early Medieval Context**’ supports a medieval date for the Cross and Hand. They suggest that it could have been a meeting point for the Hundred of Modbury and Totcombe, of which Cerne was a part. A hundred was an administrative division of the shire which emerged in the tenth century.

As there has been hitherto no explanation as to the age and purpose of the Cross, it’s prominent position has inevitably given rise to myth, legend and folktales. One legend, immortalised in Thomas Hardy’s poem ‘**The Lost Pyx,**’ has it that back in the middle ages, one dark and stormy winter’s night, the Batcombe priest was called out to administer holy communion to a man close to death. Taking the pyx (a small metal receptacle used to carry the Eucharist to the sick) and his service book the priest set off travelling through the storm across the desolate and isolated Batcombe Down to the sick man’s house. On arriving, he found that he had dropped the pyx on the way so he ventured back into the storm with the almost impossible task of finding it. Back on Batcombe Down he saw a pillar of fire reaching from heaven to earth and shining in the night. He could make out in a circle around the pyx a steady beam of light. Hardy writes: “**Common beasts and rare, all kneeling at gaze and in pause profound attend on an object there.**” According to the legend the stone we see today is all that remains of a cross which was set up here by the grateful priest.

Also from Hardy, Tess, the doomed heroine from Tess of the D’Urbervilles passed by the Cross and Hand where she was confronted by the father of her bastard child, Alec D’Urberville, who made Tess place her hand on the Cross and Hand which he tells her was a holy cross and swear never to tempt him again with her charms. Later she meets a local shepherd and asks the meaning of the stone. The shepherd replies: “**Cross-no: ‘twere not a cross! Tis a thing of ill omen, Miss. It was put up in ould times by the relations of a malefactor who was tortured there by nailing his hand to a post and afterwards hung. The bones lie underneath. They say he sold his soul to the Devil and that he walks at times.**”

Less well known and today much more remote as it is only accessible on foot is Jackman's Cross. The nearest parking place is at Godmanstone from where it can be reached after a bracing walk up onto the ridge between the Cerne Valley and Sydling Water and then turning south along the ridge with its spectacular views to left and right.



Coronation Plantation
Jackman's Coppice
Lawyer's Plantation
Stratton Plantation

Forston

The best description is in **Alfred Pope's** book:

On Grimstone Down which is in the parish of Stratton although part of the ancient manor of Grimstone.....known as Jackman's Cross is the socket of Portland and Ridgway stone two feet two inches square by twelve deep, with a mortise eleven inches by eight inches, into which formerly fitted a cross of wood.....there is a tradition that a man named Jackman was hanged on this cross early in the eighteenth century for sheep stealing.

There is no evidence for this claim.

The present day Cross was commissioned by Christopher Pope, great-grandson of Alfred Pope. It was created by Grassby Stonemasons of Grimstone from a piece of Jurassic limestone. The Cross was made using techniques from an earlier era. Bronze chisels were struck with a small boulder covered in leather to shape the monument.

Grassby's also made a seat alongside the cross with the words '**Nothing is Distant from God.**' Below is an inscription which reads:

This Wayside Cross is offered in celebration of the SECOND MILLENNIUM of JESUS CHRIST our Lord on this ancient path from Abbotsbury to Cerne Abbas. It replaced an earlier Cross of which only the foundation remains and was dedicated at millennium midnight 1999-2000 by the Rt Revd John Kirkham Bishop of Sherborne – The seat commemorates the family of Alfred Pope of the Old Stone Crosses of Dorset which has cared for this land through six generations.

The millennium dedication was a private event followed by a firework celebration.





Letters

Edited by George Mortimer

David Kirkpatrick writes:

Please thank Robin Mills for his wonderful article about Patricia Vale. Her stories will live forever as a special part of village life. Jan and I consider Patricia and Vivian our first friends in the village. We met them at Open Gardens during a tour of the Vales' garden. The experience impressed us so that we wanted a Dorset cottage to be our UK home in Cerne Abbas. It is the people of the village that makes Cerne Abbas a magical place. We are so fortunate to know Patricia who has devoted so much time and energy to remind us that the past is always present.

By the Editor

We are only too happy to pass on your kind words to Robin and this has been done.

Alan Lake writes:

The Winter 2022/2023 CHS magazine states that the Glove factory, also known as Hollybank, was a corn mill because that is what it says on 'Millsarchive'. 'Millsarchive' has now deleted it because it was incorrect. They copied it from English Heritage who have or are in the process of deleting it as well for the same reason.

By the Editor

This was passed to Robin Mills who wrote the article. He responded as follows:

Dear Alan,

I am grateful to Alan Lake correcting some misinformation in my article on Mills of the Cerne Valley in the CHS Magazine for winter 22/23. As he says, I took what was written on the Mills Archive Trust's website at face value, describing the Gloving Premises at Hollybank as a former corn mill, which was never the case.

Kind regards,

Robin Mills

Alan Lake writes:

Your comments on street names in the Summer 2023 Magazine prompts me to say that Knapp is definitely a small hill or hump. If one looks on a local map you will find a few Knapps in place names.

For Blackwater Lane, this was the colour of the water from the Tan Yard because of all the Oak shavings used to cure the hides. When the Glove factory closed, the Tan Yard lost its work and also closed. The water ran clear again, thus the name change.

Contd.



Letters

Kettle Bridge: 'Keetle', in old English says 'a place where water collects' a good place perhaps for a bridge. If one Googles 'keetle' the word is still used for a kettle, another good place for water to collect.

As for the comments about Rouncibal, Roland of Roncesvalles was considered a giant long before the English started using rouncibal in a descriptive way. Roland was involved with the Charlemagne Court which, by chance, was where our future king, Egbert, was exiled for 20 years before returning with French armies to reclaim his crown in 802AD and also the ground at the North end of Rouncibal is called the campground, you don't have to go back many years before the only people who camped were armies. It's a possibility to be considered and disproved, not just forgotten.

By the Editor

Our thanks to Alan for his speculations on the origins of some village road names. It still leaves a puzzle or two, for example why 'The Folly' or 'Folley' to replace 'Blackwater Lane' and who changed it and why? We may never know.



The Letters Page Editor will be pleased to hear from you on any subject that will increase a mutual understanding of our shared history.

gcmortimer@btinternet.com or put a note through the door at 3 Abbey Court, if you prefer.

We reserve the right to publish if no objection is expressed in your email or letter.



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