

‘Rediscovering our Parish Churches’ English Heritage and the Diocese of Salisbury Partnership Project

Part One: Historical, Architectural and Archaeological Review

Bourton, St George

- 1.1 *Deanery:* Heytesbury 1.2 *Civil parish:* Bourton
- 1.3 *Church address:* Church Track, Bourton, SP8 5BW, Dorset
- 1.4 *Grid reference:* ST7683430311
- 1.5 *Listing grade:* Grade II 1.6 *Scheduled ancient monument:*
(Listing descriptions appended in section 7)
- 1.7 *Is the church in a conservation area?* No
- 1.8 *Does the church stand in a churchyard?* Yes
- 1.9 *Date of visit:* 6 October 2008 1.10 *Report by:* Martin Cherry
- 1.11 *Contact made on site:* Caroline Worthington
- 1.12 *Sources consulted:* Incorporated Church Building Society, Lambeth Palace Library, file 2106; John Newman & Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Dorset* (Harmondsworth, 1972) p. 105. Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of Dorset, vol. 4, p. 3, no. 1. F.P. Pitfield, *Dorset Parish Churches A-D* (1981), pp. 87-9.

2. A STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of St George’s is twofold. It is an interesting example of how churches were transformed in the 19th century to meet changing fashions in worship and liturgy. It started life in 1810-12 as a simple ‘preaching box’, almost symmetrical in plan with a central south porch. It quickly proved inadequate to meet the needs of a growing industrial parish. A substantial extension took place in 1837 adding both space and pretensions – it gained a large new room to the south and a little tower at the west end. But the remodelled church was still a ‘preaching box’ with no chancel. By 1877-8 such an arrangement was no longer considered acceptable and a nationally major architect was commissioned to turn the ‘preaching box’ into a liturgically more ‘correct’ church, with a fully developed and architecturally impressive chancel and a noble chancel arch to help distinguish between the nave and the area where ceremonial was focussed – the choir and sanctuary.

The second reason why Bourton church is of more than local interest lies in its architects. The early-19th-century work was carried out by local

men: the later work in the century is by an architect of national importance. Ewan Christian (1814-95) – best known as the architect of the National Portrait Gallery – had a busy practice with over 2,000 completed works to his name; many of these were new churches and church restorations often carried out in his capacity as architect for the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, one of the most influential positions in the architectural world at the time. His importance was reflected in his election as president of the Royal Institute of British Architects (in 1884). He received the Institute's Gold Medal in 1887. Christian was at the height of his powers in the 1870s when he produced some of his masterpieces such as St Mark, Leicester and St Matthew, Cheltenham. The polygonal east end of St George's is a fine piece of High Victorian design and deserves to be better known: the authoritative *Buildings of England* volume calls it 'remarkable for 1878'.

Also distinguished is the west tower of 1903-5 by C.E.Ponting. Although less well known than Christian, Ponting was a highly accomplished architect who did a lot of work in Dorset and Wiltshire largely by virtue of his position as diocesan surveyor for the Wiltshire region of the Diocese of Salisbury 1883-1928, of the Bristol region 1887-1915, and the Dorset region 1892-1928. His obituary in *The Builder* (93 (1932), p. 272) says 'Some 225 churches benefited by his sympathetic work, either in the way of restoration, repair or additions, or in the provision of furniture or fittings, always of a harmonious character'. But he was much more than a local architect for he also designed buildings in Wales, and Ireland, Staffordshire and Lincolnshire and abroad with churches in Australia, Bucharest and Oporto. He carried out major repairs at Salisbury Cathedral, underpinning the foundations and repairing the spire. In all, he designed fifteen new churches and chapels. His tower at Bourton, despite being built on a tight budget, has great dignity and well managed proportions, and looks to local medieval models for inspiration.

Fittings and furnishings The fitting and furnishings of 1877-8 are unexceptional but decent examples of their period. The 1905 choir stalls are unusual and of good quality in terms of design and workmanship.

3. THE BUILDING: ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, SETTING AND CONTENTS

Listing and Sites & Monuments descriptions appended?

Listing: Yes SAM: N/A

3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This is covered in 2 (above) and the following sections.

3.2 THE CHURCH AND ITS PRINCIPAL FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

3.2.1 *Building materials.* Coursed, squared rubble with ashlar dressings. Slate roofs, gabled to nave and hipped, apsidal to chancel. Stone copings.

3.2.2 *Name(s) of architect(s), builder(s), patron(s) where known.*

The earliest fabric is of 1810-12: a plaque in the church records the laying of the foundation stone in 1810, the opening in 1812 and its consecration in 1813.

It was enlarged in 1837 to accommodate an additional 150 free seats with grants from the Incorporated Church Building Society and the Salisbury Diocesan Church Building Society. The estimated cost was £470. The 'honorary architect' was Richard G. Festing from neighbouring Stourton. This church was in turn substantially enlarged and remodelled by Ewan Christian in 1877-8. C.E. Ponting rebuilt the west tower in 1903-5.

3.2.3 Plan form, principal construction phases and architectural features.

Nave, chancel, west tower, south organ chamber and south porch. Some of the fabric of the nave dates from 1810-12; this was reworked and the south porch and the south transept added in 1837. Christian added the striking chancel with its imposing chancel arch and boarded ceiling; the nave with its hammer-beam roof may also be by him.

3.2.4 Principal furnishings, fittings and decorations. Christian's chancel fittings do not survive. In their place are some unusual and good-quality choir stalls (installed in memory of Eleanor Sidney, who died in 1905), distinguished by their exceptionally tall seat backs. The nave benches look stylistically to be c. late 1870s and may also be by Christian. A number of other, generally late-19th- or early-20th-century fittings, minor monuments and glass are itemised in the list description.

3.2.5 Suggested corrections or additions to an existing listing description. The list description is adequate.

3.3 LISTED STATUS

3.3.1 *Is it judged to be appropriate?* Yes 3.3.2 *If not, suggestion.*

3.4 SETTING, CHURCHYARD, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND GREENSPACE/WILDLIFE POTENTIAL

3.4.1 *Setting.* The church stands proudly on a hill above the main road and is an attractive landmark from a distance. The churchyard itself is tightly constrained to the south with a more expansive area of mown grass to the north and some mature trees to the west. The immediate environment outside the perimeter wall to the south has been degraded by a poorly landscaped car park. More sensitive management of the public realm to this side of the church would greatly enhance its setting.

3.4.2 *Burials in the churchyard?* Yes, but the churchyard was cleared of monuments some years ago. 3.4.3 *Still open for burials?* No.

3.4.4 *Archaeological significance/potential?* There are 19th- and 20th-century burials. Consequently, the church and its environs have some limited archaeological value.

3.4.5 *Green space/refuge for wildlife?* None.

3.4.6 *War memorial?* No.

4. CURRENT USE AND FUTURE MANAGEMENT

4.1 CONDITION

4.1.1 *Is the church in poor/fair/good condition?* Good.

4.1.2 *Date of last Quinquennial Inspection Report.* September 2007.

4.1.3 *What significant works did it propose?* There are no immediate major works required. The QIR recommends repairs to the ironwork of the windows and some re-pointing.

4.1.4 *Work carried out since last QIR?* Minor repairs and maintenance only.

4.1.5 *Work planned during the present quinquennium.* Slipping tiles and leaks in the chancel roof remain a constant irritant and, although the QIR did not specifically recommend it, the church proposes to renew the chancel roof and has applied for a faculty to do this. The main conservation issue here is whether to source the replacement slates from Wales or Spain.

4.1.6 *Summary of what works identified in the last QIR not carried out not carried out (and if possible explain why).* N/A.

4.2 AMENITIES, ACCESSIBILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

4.2.1 *Does the congregation have access to all amenities that they require?*
No.

Are these available in the church itself or in another nearby building? There are no facilities in the church or close by.

4.2.2 *If not, plans to introduce them?* The introduction of facilities is bound up with discussions about the future siting of the village hall, which is coming to the end of its life. Space to the north of the church could accommodate a new hall and, if carefully designed, might complement rather than detract from the north elevation of the church. If this option is not adopted, the church proposes to provide toilet and tea/coffee-making facilities in a new extension placed between the porch and the south transept.

Impact on the church fabric? The south elevation of the church is its 'show front': most people approach the church from this direction and it is from here that the best views of the building are had. The larger of the two proposals (a new village hall) places the new build to the north; the smaller (toilets etc.) places the new build to the south. There is some architectural logic in this because the south elevation is already the most varied (with its porch and transept) and arguably could tolerate a new addition.

But there is also a danger that any new works here would detract from the finer points of the architecture of the church, making it too busy and crowded. The north elevation of the nave comprises an unbroken suite of traceried windows. Consideration should perhaps be given to placing new facilities within the tower.

4.2.3 *Is the church accessible?* Yes.

4.2.4 *Has a disability audit been carried out?* Yes.

4.2.5 *have any measures been taken to provide facilities for the disabled and are any planned?* Level access is available via the west door (but there are steps to the south). Lighting is good and there is a good public address system.

4.2.6 *Environmental footprint. Has an audit been carried out?* No. *Measures implemented?* The lighting is modern and considered to be reasonably economical. *Measures planned?* Nothing major.

5. THE IMPACT OF CHANGE

The church is important primarily for its architecture rather than its fixtures and fittings. As indicated above, the chancel (by Ewan Christian) is a fine design, imposing both inside and out: although major re-orderings are not currently envisaged, any future plans to alter the interior should consider their impact on this lofty space and the relationship between it and the nave which is very carefully managed by the architect. Externally, any additions should be respectful of this part of the church and ideally be attached or placed adjacent to the nave.

Inside, the choir stalls, whilst not forming part of Christian's original scheme, are distinctive and good examples of their date (c.1905). Their removal (not currently envisaged) would be regrettable. The nave seating is of good, solid workmanship and typical of its date: some rows have already been removed from the west end. There are no proposals to carry out further re-orderings, but were such plans to emerge, it is unlikely that they would be seen as a major conservation issue. The guiding principle in any internal works should be to respect the spatial volume and the relationship between the nave and Christian's fine chancel.

6. CATEGORISATION OF ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE 3

- **Category 1:** Churches of outstanding significance and limited adaptability for uses other than worship, with fabric and/or furnishings that should be protected from all but the most modest changes.
- **Category 2:** Churches of high significance that could nonetheless tolerate adaptive change if carefully and sympathetically managed.
- **Category 3:** Churches of significance, but with scope for more extensive alteration or adaptation in the interests of securing a sustainable future.
- **Category 4:** Churches of little architectural or historical significance. Many of these buildings serve their parishes very well and to describe them as being of little architectural or historic interest does not deny the contribution they might make in pastoral terms.

7. LISTING DESCRIPTION

Parish Church, largely 1877/8, though probably incorporating work of 1812. Tower 1903-5. 1877/8 work by E Christian (Newman and Pevsner). Tower by C E Ponting. Coursed, squared rubble with ashlar dressings. Slate roofs, gabled to nave and hipped, apsidal to chancel. Stone copings. Generally in the 'perpendicular' style. Plan: nave, chancel, west tower, south organ chamber and south porch. Tower: 2 stages with embattled parapet and corner crocketed pinnacles rising entire second stage: 2-centred west door with moulded, returned label; 2-light, 2-centred, west-window with returned label; ogee-headed bell openings with finials and louvres, paired to the east and west. Nave and organ chamber windows of 2-lights with 2-centred heads and returned labels. North and south chancel windows similar to nave, apse windows have single lights and flowing tracery. Nave and organ chamber have diagonal buttresses at angles and square set buttresses between windows. Gabled porch with ashlar south face and 2-centred doorway with returned label. Interior features: 2-centred, moulded chancel arch with semi-octagonal responds with capitals and bases, label with foliage carved stops over; 2-centred, tower arch with semi-octagonal responds having capitals and bases; Organ chamber arch is 2-centred springing from corbels; Arch-braced hammer-beam nave roof with arch braced collars and king-posts; ribbed and boarded chancel roof; C19/C20 traceried pulpit, C19/C20 octagonal font with carved panels on panelled octagonal pier; number of reset early C19 monuments; C19 and early C20 glass; C19 encaustic tiles in chancel; other fittings largely C19/C20. (. Newman J and Pevsner N, *The Buildings of England: Dorset*. Penguin, 1972, p 105. RCHM Dorset, vol IV, p 3, no 1 Pitfield F P Dorset Parish Churches A-D, Dorset Publishing Company, 1981 , pp 87-9.