

YCCCART 2018/Y9

The Old Stone Crosses of Kingston Seymour

**YATTON, CONGRESBURY, CLAVERHAM AND CLEEVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
RESEARCH TEAM (YCCCART)**

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Kingston Seymour church in c1820 (SANHS collections)

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Abstract

Many village and churchyard crosses have been portrayed on many occasions by antiquarians, especially the former, being far more obvious to the passing visitor than the cross tucked away in the churchyard. It is unusual for a parish to have remains of both village and churchyard crosses surviving, especially now that work by Broomhead has cast doubt on the date of the supposed village cross at Wraxall.

Acknowledgements

This report is the result of intermittent study over a period of 40 years.

YCCCART are most grateful to Kingston Seymour Parish Council and All Saints parish church, Kingston Seymour for access to the churchyard cross – the village cross is in the public highway.

Introduction

Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team (YCCCART) is one of a number of Community Archaeology teams across northern Somerset, formerly supported by the North Somerset Council Development Management Team.

Our objective is to undertake archaeological fieldwork to enable a better understanding and management of the heritage of the area while recording and publishing the activities and locations of the research carried out.

Site location

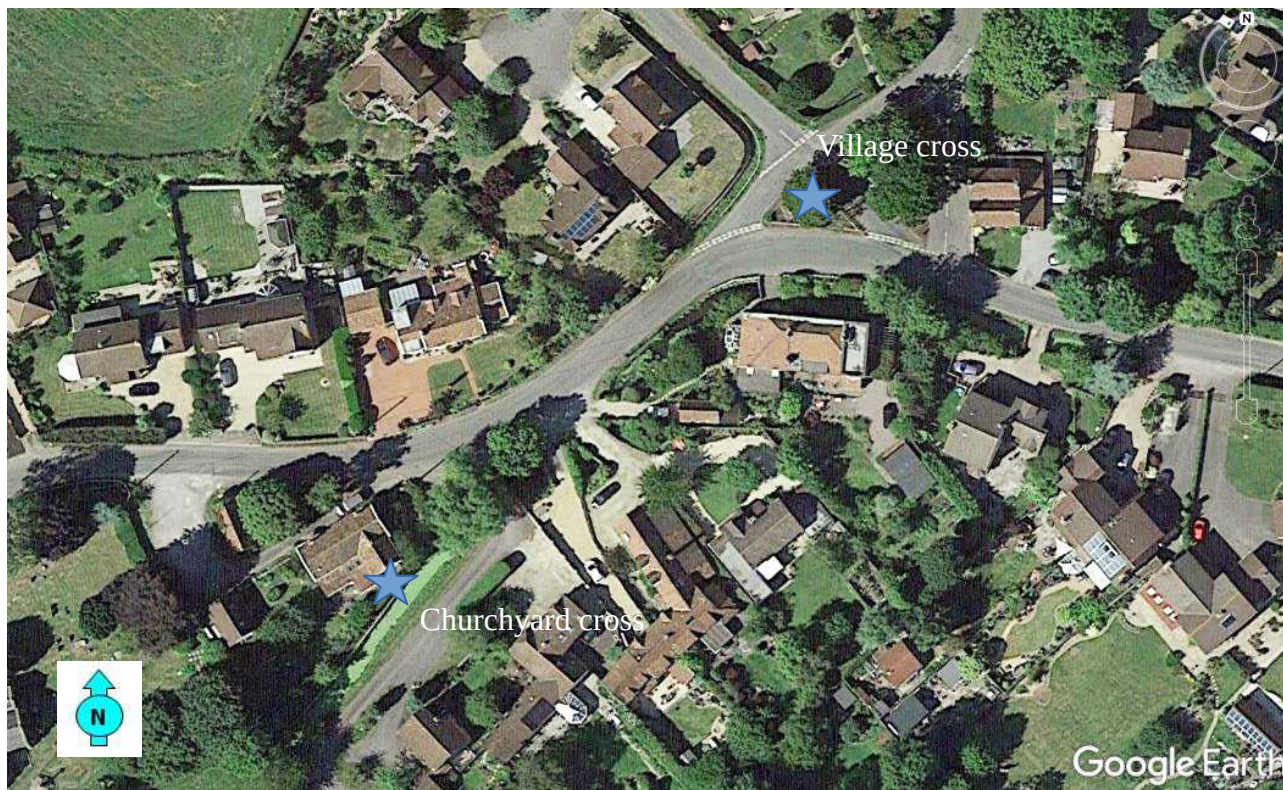


Fig 1: The location of Kingston's two crosses

Kingston Seymour is a small village in North Somerset's Northmarsh, some 18km SW of Bristol, and adjacent to (but not accessible from) the M5 motorway. All Saints parish church lies at ST4009666852. The churchyard cross is a few metres from the south door of the church; the remains of the village cross are built into the war memorial at the junction of roads in the village.

Land use and geology

Kingston Seymour village is entirely upon the alluvial clays of the Northmarsh: various archaeological evaluations have shown that there is no bedrock island (unlike, say Kenn or Wick St Lawrence villages). This requires large ditches and rhynes for drainage: Kingston Seymour church is more than 75% surrounded by what amounts to a moat.

Both crosses are in effect in the public domain: one in the churchyard (still used for burial and ritual purposes) and the second in the public highway.

Historical & archaeological context

Medieval stone crosses were a fashionable subject of antiquarian enquiry from the mid 19th century, when Pooley was studying those of Gloucestershire (Pooley 1868) and Somerset (Pooley 1877). Some of the latest work on a whole county was that of Watkins on the crosses of Herefordshire (Watkins 1930). Sequences of reports on other counties have been published, but few have recently been examined using modern archaeological techniques.

Some of the larger and more 'romantick' (i.e. ruinous) were recorded from the late 18th century by antiquarians, and it is by their fortunate attention to the structures that we know of the appearance of (say) Taunton, Axbridge or Bridgwater market crosses, but illustrations of churchyard crosses were much rarer.

Kingston Seymour churchyard cross has featured on several occasions in county-wide recordings, such as those in the Braikenridge collection in the archives of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, and the village cross has featured in a number of post cards and other illustrative material.

The lack of recent academic study of these structures means that most of the ideas surrounding their construction and use (such as the strange persistence of belief in their being earlier than the church which they serve, which they almost never are) are 19th century in origin, and reflect the academic standards and ideas of that period.

The 'Old Stone Crosses of Somerset' was written and published in the late 19th century (officially in 1877, although his research seems to have been carried out during the previous decade) by Dr Charles Pooley.

Pooley was a doctor at the Weston Sanatorium (now the 'Royal Sands' on Weston-super-Mare sea front) and lived in Raglan Crescent in Weston. He spent much of the 1860s and '70s travelling the lanes and byways of Somerset seeking out these fascinating monuments in churchyards, by waysides, over springs: he chatted with the local vicars and rectors, many of whom studied antiquities in their often remote parishes, where often they might be the only well-educated person in the place.

His documentary study seems, by today's standards, very slight, although to be fair his book was never intended as anything but 'notes', and he did achieve his plan, which was to make people far more aware of these structures, and to make certain they were better conserved, and in this, he largely succeeded.

Pooley retired to Cheltenham not long after the publication of his book, and a saddening letter now bound into the copy of the Old Stone Crosses in Nailsea library reveals that at the end of his life, he was completely blind.

The name 'stone cross' covers a multitude of sins (if you'll pardon the phrase): it can mean anything from a crude cross cut into a natural boulder (there is one on the border of the parishes of Culbone and Porlock, in far Exmoor) to a large complex building erected

for a market shelter (such as that in the market place at Shepton Mallet).

The medieval form of cross, which broadly speaking consists of a set of steps, a socket and a shaft (all broadly, but not strictly, radially symmetric), supporting and displaying a small carved head with crucifixion and other scenes, is universal throughout the surviving Somerset crosses (with the exception of the special category of market crosses, which also incorporate a shelter over the steps - still radially symmetric, however).

The heads usually depicted a crucifixion scene on one side, and a second scene, often of the BVM holding the child Christ, on the other. The more ornate often also included figures on each side of the head as well, often figures of a knight and / or bishop.

Because of the religious symbolism of the carved heads, these were ruthlessly destroyed in the iconoclastic times of the Reformation and 17th century civil war. This was carried out so thoroughly that only four survive on their shafts in Somerset – Stringston and Spaxton near Bridgwater, Wedmore and Chewton Mendip. Pooley identified several heads or fragments of heads surviving elsewhere, and my research has raised this total to about 20 (including potentially one at Yatton).

Churchyards crosses are built for complex, inter-related reasons, but briefly, these seem to be

- 1 As a common memorial to all the dead of the churchyard
- 2 As a gathering point for the spreading of news and proclamations
- 3 As the last site of common celebration on the procession around the parish on Palm Sunday (Russett, in prep).

The crosses in churchyards are certainly always connected in the public mind with preaching: at Craswell and Llanveynoe in Herefordshire, Watkins (1930) recorded seats constructed outside the church, apparently for the use of congregations listening to preaching at crosses. Such seats exist at Spaxton and Glastonbury. This seems to have been unusual, and presumably other congregations stood (or maybe just sat on the grass). This was clearly the case with other crosses, such as that in Iron Acton churchyard in South Gloucestershire, where a small railed space is provided for the accommodation of the preacher.

One main function of the churchyard cross, however, seems to have been as the final station on the Palm Sunday procession before re-entering the church (see Watkins 1930, for a discussion of this). The result of such use is that many of the crosses have (and others presumably once had) affixes or drill holes or other features facing the church path, and which would have been used to hold decorations and possibly the pyx on Palm Sunday. Such a use is remembered in the name Yew Cross at Wookey. Unfortunately, since that cross was 'restored' in 1905 (Brass tablet in Wookey church) the socket is the only pre-20th century stone surviving. This also implies that the cross was very likely to have originally been sited beside the path to the church door in use in the medieval period, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the south door. Fieldwork indicates that it is almost always sited (when in its original position) to the right of the path as the door is

approached. This may imply that churchyard crosses not in this position have been moved at some time - this is certainly the case with Orchard Portman, where contemporary drawings during the 1840s document the move. In other cases, the path may have moved away from the cross, although this seems to be less likely to happen often.

During the period of the Reformation, a practice known as 'Creeping to the cross' was at first supported by King Henry VIII in 1539, then in 1546, Archbishop Cranmer drafted an edict (which the King never signed) for the banning of the practice along with other major religious festivals. After Lord Protector Somerset's edict for the destruction of all shrines and pictures of saints in July 1547, the blessing of foliage on Palm Sunday and 'Creeping to the Cross' were both banned in February 1548.

The 1643 'Ordinance for the utter demolishing, removing and taking away of all Monuments of Superstition or Idolatry' marked the beginning of a systematic attack on the remaining crosses that had survived the Reformation (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp425-426>) (recovered 13 January 2017).

A few crosses, of course, have been moved into churchyards to protect them from destruction (such as Bishops Lydeard): others have made the opposite journey (Evercreech, for example), while some have dodged about the village (such as Meare), and in these cases, their original function cannot be readily assumed. Further discussion of origins and meanings of crosses are in (Russett *in prep*)

Results

Churchyard cross



Fig 2: The churchyard cross at Kingston Seymour (1976)

Kingston's churchyard cross, with its octagonal steps, and unusual octagonal socket (most sockets in Somerset, even if on octagonal steps) are square topped with corner broaches to an octagon, like the ones at Yatton and Congresbury.

The closest parallel to this is probably the one on the market cross at Cheddar: both have the offset lower section, and protruding drip at the top, although the fillet under the drip at Kingston is very unusual, and probably means it is late medieval in date.

The first known depiction of this cross is in the water colour on the cover, dating to about 1820. It shows the cross much as today, with its five octagonal steps and socket, but with a block at the top of the shaft rather than the present cross, which is later in date.

The Scheduling description (see Appendix 1) describes a stone basement beneath the lowest step, almost certainly necessary (as at Congresbury) in this alluvial area to avoid the cross sinking.

The position of the cross (to the left of the path approaching the door into the church) is most unusual, and often means the cross has been moved, since liturgically, it should be on the right. In this case, and it having a stone base, it may have been necessary to place it on the left for reasons of space - this is a very small churchyard!

A drawing from the Pigott collection in the SANHS archives also depicts the cross this way.



Fig 3: Kingston churchyard cross in 1843

The drawing could even be an attempt to represent the remains of the original head of the cross, now sadly missing. By the time Charles Pooley arrived in the 1870s, the current cross was in place.



Fig 4: Charles Pooley's illustration of the cross, c 1870

Pooley's drawing clearly shows the cross much as today, and also shows its basement, as referred to above.

He described the churchyard cross thus:

'...KINGSTON SEYMOUR.-A restored churchyard Cross of remarkably good proportions, and standing a little to the east of the south porch of the church, nearly opposite the priest's door. Five rows of octagonal steps form the Calvary on which the socket is set. The shaft and stone cross with which it is surmounted, were put up at the instance and after the design of Mr. James Flack,

at the expense of the rector, the Rev. G. Smyth Pigott, in 1863, at which time the Calvary, then much dilapidated, was repaired. The socket is eight-sided, with its upper edge chamfered obliquely, forming a drip, beneath which runs a fillet. Its lower bed is worked with a cant, which gives the appearance of stability. The effect of the high tier of steps and the lofty cross is imposing. The basement is well benched with a drip and a set-off at foot. Fifteenth century...'

Measurements.

| | Steps | | Socket | | Shaft | |
|----------|-----------|---------|---------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| | Each face | Height | Height | Transverse diameter | Height | Transom |
| | ft. in. | ft. in. | ft. in. | ft. in. | ft. in. | ft. in. |
| Basement | 4 6½ | 1 8½ | 1 9½ | 2 6 | 8 5 | 3 6½ |
| 2nd step | 3 9½ | 1 0 | | | | |
| 3rd step | 3 1½ | 0 10½ | | | | |
| 4th step | 2 3¼ | 0 9 | | | | |
| 5th step | 1 7¼ | 0 7¾ | | | | |

If the Calvary (steps) were repaired, then this was a remarkably good and conservative repair for Victorian times.



Fig 5: Photograph of the cross in c1900 (Frederick Wood collection in WsM library)

By 1900 (Fig 5), when the Chew Magna solicitor Frederick Wood was carrying out his photographic record all around Somerset (including many crosses), and more importantly, labelling them and keeping them altogether (although he did label Luccombe cross 'Lullington' which nearly had me haring off to the latter to check, before I checked my photos and realised his mistake!).

His photo clearly shows that any scars from the restoration of 40 years before had healed by then.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a mysterious individual

only identified by the initials 'CND' (ludicrous 'privacy' legislation prevents the Somerset Heritage Centre from telling me his/her identity), took many thousands of photographs of heritage in Somerset, and this cross was one of them.



Fig 6: Kingston churchyard cross in c1960

This shows the cross in very much the same condition as today.

Village cross

The village cross, which presumably stood more or less on the site of the modern War Memorial, was noted by Pooley, but merely as an addendum to his notes on the churchyard cross:

'...Close to the church, and lying neglected under some trees, is a socket which, from its dimensions, must have belonged to a Cross of considerable size-probably the village Cross...'

The socket is first recorded by the Ordnance Survey as a 'Stone' (had none of them read Pooley?).

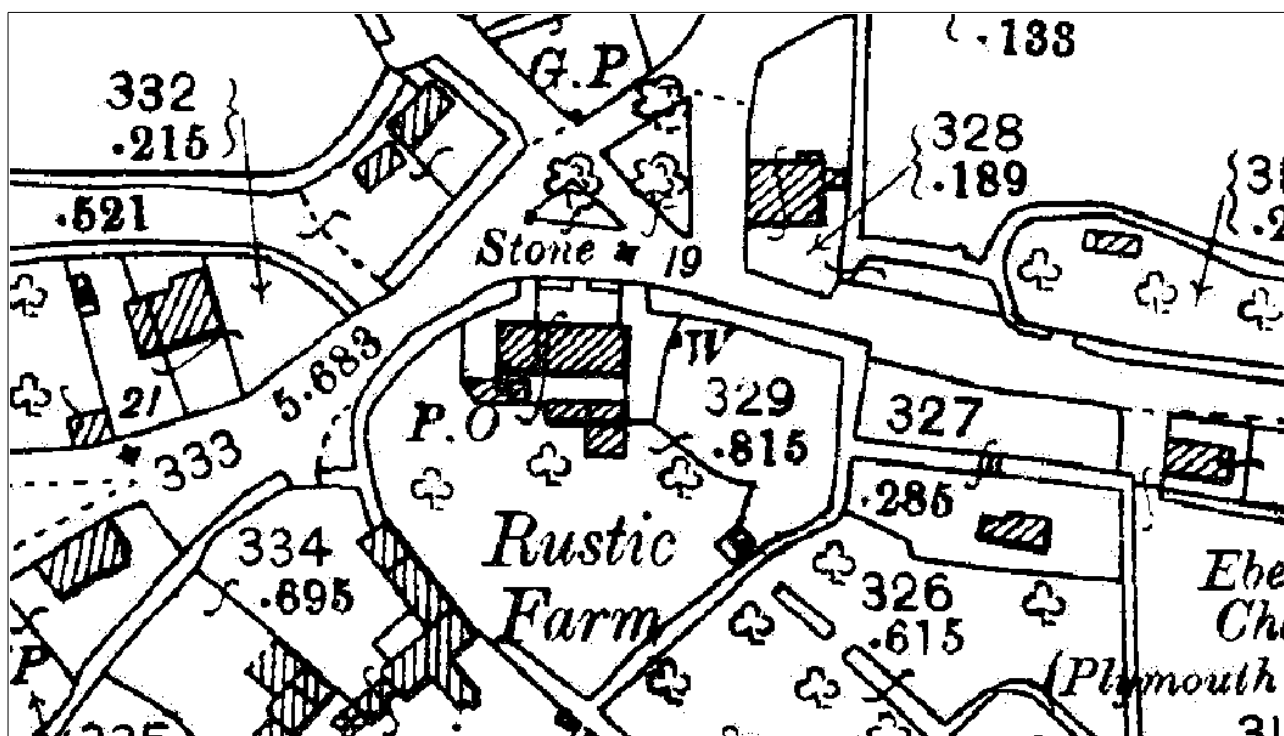


Fig 7: 'Stone' recorded by OS at Kingston village.

Astonishingly, the socket was photographed and printed as a post card showing the Post Office at Kingston as it was at that time (Fig 8).

This appears to show the cross where depicted on the OS map above, but it seems to be sitting on some rubble, which might be the remains of the base of the original cross, which no longer survive. If so, then the original position of the village cross may have been a little to the SW of the current position of the War Memorial, but clearly, reconstructing it at this point would have meant a traffic hazard (even in the early 1920s), and a space around the Memorial would be required for the Armistice Day ceremonies.

The Memorial was in place by 1921, and the railings around it by 1922 (Tozer 1989).



Fig 8: The old cross socket before re-use in the War memorial (pre-1921). I am grateful to Dave Long for finding this image.



Fig 9: Enlargement of above

The War Memorial, in its railed enclosure, incorporated the socket of the village cross. Seen close up, the socket has long triangular stops, of which all have a square socket

around 2.5cm across in them. The purpose of these is unclear, but they appear to be ancient on origin, and perhaps have held affixes to the cross. While this is not uncommon in churchyard crosses, it is very rare indeed in village crosses.



Fig 10: The square socket replacing the missing stop-chamfered

The War Memorial (Fig 11) has four square steps below the re-used socket, a square to octagon shaft with pyramidal stops, and a canopied head with warrior figures in each face, probably depicting the four archangels.

The second step of the cross, facing the main road, bears the lines on its upright face 'IN GLORIOUS MEMORY OF THOSE FROM THIS PARISH WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY / AND IN HONOUR OF THOSE WHO FOUGHT AND SUFFERED WITH THEM IN THE GREAT WAR 1914-1919.'

Although Historic England's List description (see Appendix 1) describes the monument as 'Late medieval and late nineteenth century/twentieth century' this should clearly be 'late medieval and c1920': how the late 19th century comes into it is unclear. This is not the only war memorial in Somerset accommodating a medieval cross socket: that at Butleigh Hill, near Glastonbury, also does so.



Fig 11: Kingston Seymour War Memorial, incorporating the medieval village cross socket

Kingston Seymour, Old stone crosses, Photographic and documentary study, 2018, Y9, v1

References

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Collinson, J. 1791 | <i>The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset</i> Collinson, Bath |
| Pooley, C. 1877 | <i>An historical and descriptive account of the Old Stone Crosses of Somerset</i> Longmans, Green and Co, London |
| Russett, V. in prep | <i>The Old Stone Crosses of Somerset</i> Russett, Weston-super-Mare |
| Rutter, J. 1829 | <i>Delineations of the north-western division of the County of Somerset (etc)</i> Rutter, Shaftesbury |
| Tozer, M. 1989 | <i>Around Nailsea, Long Ashton and Yatton in Old photographs</i> Alan Sutton, Gloucester |
| Watkins, A. 1930 | <i>The ancient stone crosses of Herefordshire</i> Watkins, Hereford |

Author Vince Russett

Date 2018-09-04

Appendix 1: Listing and Scheduling documents

(Recovered 2018-09-03)

Scheduling document

Churchyard cross in All Saints churchyard

List Entry Summary

This monument is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as amended as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance. This entry is a copy, the original is held by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Name: Churchyard cross in All Saints churchyard

List entry Number: 1015509

Location

The monument may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County:

District: North Somerset

District Type: Unitary Authority

Parish: Kingston Seymour

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: Not applicable to this List entry.

Date first scheduled: 02-Jan-1997

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: RSM

UID: 28829

Asset Groupings

This list entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information. List entry Description

Summary of Monument

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

A standing cross is a free standing upright structure, usually of stone, mostly erected during the medieval period (mid 10th to mid 16th centuries AD). Standing crosses served a variety of functions. In churchyards they served as stations for outdoor processions, particularly in the observance of Palm Sunday. Elsewhere, standing crosses were used within settlements as places for preaching, public proclamation and penance, as well as defining rights of sanctuary. Standing crosses were also employed to mark boundaries between parishes, property, or settlements. A few crosses were erected to commemorate battles. Some crosses were linked to particular saints, whose support and protection their presence would have helped to invoke. Crosses in market places may have helped to validate transactions. After the Reformation, some crosses continued in use as foci for municipal or borough ceremonies, for example as places for official proclamations and announcements; some were the scenes of games or recreational activity. Standing crosses were distributed throughout England and are thought to have numbered in excess of 12,000. However, their survival since the Reformation has been variable, being much affected by local conditions, attitudes and religious sentiment. In particular, many cross-heads were destroyed by iconoclasts during the 16th and 17th centuries. Less than 2,000 medieval standing crosses, with or without cross-heads, are now thought to exist. The oldest and most basic form of standing cross is the monolith, a stone shaft often set directly in the ground without a base. The most common form is the stepped cross, in which the shaft is set in a socket stone and raised upon a flight of steps; this type of cross remained current from the 11th to 12th centuries until after the Reformation. Where the cross-head survives it may take a variety of forms, from a lantern-like structure to a crucifix; the more elaborate examples date from the 15th century. Much less common than stepped crosses are spire-shaped crosses, often composed of three or four receding stages with elaborate architectural decoration and/or sculptured figures; the most famous of these include the Eleanor crosses, erected by Edward I at the stopping places of the funeral cortege of his wife, who died in 1290. Also uncommon are the preaching crosses which were built in public places from the 13th century, typically in the cemeteries of religious communities and cathedrals, market places and wide thoroughfares; they include a stepped base, buttresses supporting a vaulted canopy, in turn carrying either a shaft and head or a pinnacled spire. Standing crosses contribute significantly to our understanding of medieval customs, both secular and religious, and to our knowledge of medieval parishes and settlement patterns. All crosses which survive as standing monuments, especially those which stand in or near their original location, are considered worthy of protection.

Although the shaft and cross head has been replaced, the standing cross in the churchyard at Kingston Seymour survives well as a visually impressive monument of the medieval period in what is likely to be its original location. The medieval cross relates to the 13th century Church of All Saints.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

The monument includes a restored cross situated in the churchyard at Kingston Seymour c.4m south east of the church. The cross, which is Listed Grade II, has a five step octagonal calvary, socket stone, shaft and simple Latin cross head. The first step of the calvary is 0.4m high, and the second, third, fourth and fifth steps are 0.33m, 0.28m, 0.25m and 0.2m high. The first step is 3.8m in diameter with mortared flagstones on its upper surface forming an overhanging drip, each side of its octagon being 1.5m long. The width of the octagonal sides of the second, third, fourth and fifth steps are 1.17m, 1m, 0.72m and 0.5m respectively. Above the fifth step of the calvary is the octagonal socket stone. The socket stone has a deep drip on its upper surface which is chamfered obliquely and below this is a fillet decoration. The lower surface of the socket stone is bevelled outwards. It is 0.8m wide and 0.55m high with each side of its octagon being 0.32m long. The central socket 0.3m square in which sits the square base of the shaft. The shaft is c.1.5m high; its square base is stopped and the shaft continues in octagonal form as it tapers to a simple Latin cross head. The calvary is constructed from stone blocks and mortared flagstones, and the socket stone is hewn from one piece of stone. Investigation by probing around the base of the cross at the time of the field visit showed that there appears to be a platform of stones around the cross and beneath the surface of the grass at a depth of c.0.1m and to a width of 0.8m from the edges of the calvary, except on the north west side where a path abuts the cross. The shaft and cross head were erected in 1863 by Mr James Flack who also designed the restored cross head. At the same time the calvary, which was in a dilapidated condition, was repaired. The cross is dated to the 15th century. There is the socket stone of another cross in the village c.150m to the north east of the churchyard cross. This has now become incorporated into a war memorial. It is thought to have been part of the village cross, but there is no indication of its original location. The surface of the churchyard path is excluded from the scheduling where this falls within the area in which buried stone has been recorded, although the ground beneath is included.

MAP EXTRACT The site of the monument is shown on the attached map extract.

Selected Sources

Books and journals

Pooley, C, *Old Stone Crosses of Somerset*, (1877), 30-31

National Grid Reference: ST 40098 66846

CHURCHYARD CROSS, 6 METRES SOUTH OF CHANCEL OF CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS CHURCH

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: CHURCHYARD CROSS, 6 METRES SOUTH OF CHANCEL OF CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS CHURCH

List entry Number: 1129074

Location

CHURCHYARD CROSS, 6 METRES SOUTH OF CHANCEL OF CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS CHURCH, HAM LANE

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County:

District: North Somerset

District Type: Unitary Authority

Parish: Kingston Seymour

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 16-May-1984

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 33638

Asset Groupings

This list entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List entry Description

Summary of Building

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

ST 46 NW KINGSTON SEYMOUR C.P. HAM LANE (south side)

2/29 Churchyard Cross, 6 metres south of chancel of All Saints Church G.V. II

Churchyard Cross. C15/C16. Freestone. An octagonal calvary of 5 steps, the lowest of which has a heavy nosing, is surmounted by an octagonal socket with plinth; the shaft which is square at the base becomes octagonal and is topped by a very heavy restored cross.

Listing NGR: ST4010066848

Selected Sources

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details

National Grid Reference: ST 40101 66846

VILLAGE CROSS

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: VILLAGE CROSS

List entry Number: 1320994

Location

VILLAGE CROSS, HAM LANE

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County:

District: North Somerset

District Type: Unitary Authority

Parish: Kingston Seymour

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 16-May-1984

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 33633

Asset Groupings

This list entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List entry Description

Summary of Building

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

ST 46 NW KINGSTON SEYMOUR C.P. HAM LANE (north side)

2/24 Village Cross

- II

Village cross. Late mediaeval and late C19/C20. Freestone. On 4 C20 square steps stands the late mediaeval socket, square at the base it is chamfered to an octagon above; on that stands a restored, tapering, octagonal shaft; there is a floral decorated cornice below a crocketed lantern with four ogee headed cusped panels containing allegorical figures.

Listing NGR: ST4022366941

Selected Sources

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details

National Grid Reference: ST 40223 66941

Note to Listing of village cross (VR)

'the late C19' section of the description is just wrong. The shaft is not 'restored' - it was clearly new in c1920 (see above).