

YCCART 2010/Y17

The Old Stone Crosses of Yatton: historical and photographic study
YATTON, CONGRESBURY, CLAVERHAM AND CLEEVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
RESEARCH TEAM (YCCART)

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Yatton church and cross 1826, from the Piggott collection, SANHS

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Abstract

The cross in the churchyard at Yatton has been recorded on many occasions by numerous antiquarians, chiefly Dr Charles Pooley in the 1860s and 1870s. New documentary research has found evidence for building accounts for the cross in 1524-6, a nationally important find. These structures have not been examined with modern archaeological techniques, however, and these may cast a new light on some of the more esoteric aspects of these structures. A few other records relating to crosses in other parts of the old parish of Yatton are also pursued, but these now all seem to be missing.

Acknowledgements

YCCCART are most grateful to Yatton Parish Council and St Mary the Virgin's church, Yatton for access to the churchyard cross – the other sites are on private and inaccessible property.

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.

The fieldwork for this report has been carried out with repeated visits by the author since 1974.

Site locations



Fig 1: Location of Yatton churchyard cross

Yatton churchyard cross is located 6m S of the south door of the parish church of St Mary the Virgin, Yatton, in North Somerset. Yatton is approximately 16km south-west of the city of Bristol, at ST43136539. It stands on the east side of the path connecting the south door of the church and the Old Rectory to the south.

Land use and geology

The site lies on the periglacial Head deposits, overlying the Mercia Mudstones. Current land use is as an active burial ground, although the part of the churchyard where the cross stands has not been used for burials for well over a century.

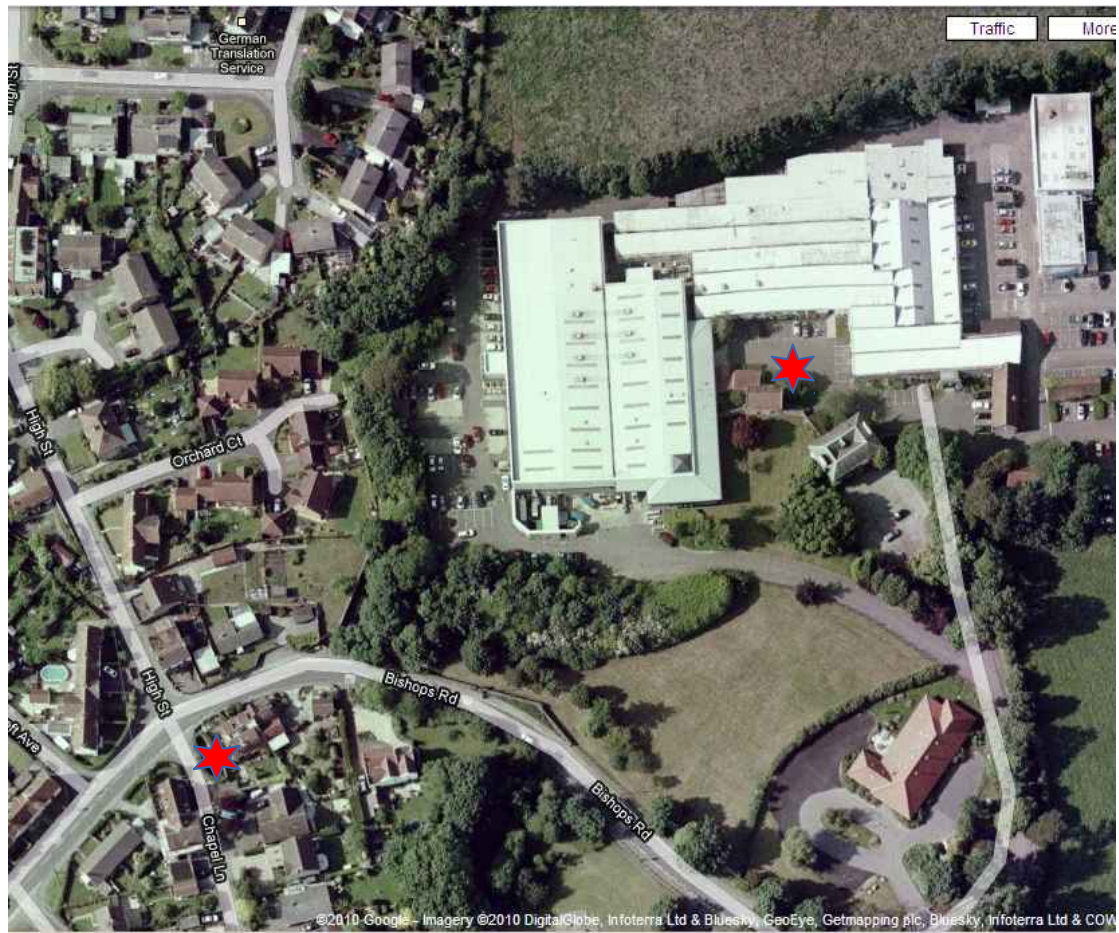


Fig 2: Sites of Court de Wyck cross and Stalling's Cross

The site of Stalling's cross is not completely clear, but Pooley described it as 'on the site of the chapel of the Primitive Methodists'. This is now a private dwelling (2 Chapel Lane) to the SE of Claverham cross-roads, in Claverham, at approximately ST44676610. It is the western site shown above.

The site of the 'cross at Court de Wyck' was in the yard of the manorial complex now largely built over with a factory. It's site is known with less precision, but was approximately at ST44856621, on the eastern side of the village of Claverham. It is the eastern site shown above.

Claverham is in the parish of Yatton in North Somerset, 14.5km south west of the city of Bristol.

Land use and geology

The sites lie on the periglacial Head deposits, overlying the Mercia Mudstones. The western site is now occupied by a chapel converted to a private dwelling. The eastern lies beneath the car park of a factory. Neither is open to the public.

Historical and 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.

Yatton 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 has featured in a number of post cards and other illustrative material (e. g. Tozer 1989).

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, but we'll come to that later).

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*)

Yatton churchyard cross

Yatton churchyard cross is a fine example of its type, and Pooley's description recognises this:

YATTON.-There are few remains of Crosses in Somersetshire that present proportions so grand as these. By the construction, and style of ornamentation, of the socket, its massiveness, and the lofty Calvary of six steps, it may well be supposed that the structure, when entire, was one of no ordinary beauty.

In plan it is octagonal. It is erected in the churchyard, opposite the south porch of the church, and covers a large area of ground. The socket is remarkable for the manner in which it is constructed. Its sides are set to correspond with the direction of the church, which is north, east and south-west. In its upper bed it is a true octagon, the alternate sides being worked, by slopes of double curves, into lesser octagons, which die away into square angle shafts by means of small broaches. On the north and west faces are oblong recesses, into which panels were evidently at one time fitted; on the south and east the panels remain in place. They measure 16 in. by 15 in., and are decorated with carved figures of angels robed, holding scrolls crosswise. A broken stump of the shaft is left in the mortise. The plinth, or top step, on which the socket rests, is effectively cut with sharp nosings, that form triangular tables similar to those of the crosses of Wraxall and Dundry. Of the six steps forming the lower stage, the basement only has an overhanging drip, and a convex set-off on the ground-line. It is no less than sixty-eight feet and eight inches in circumference.

Measurements:

	Steps Each face		Height		Width		Socket Height		Square at base	
	ft.	in.	ft.	in.	ft.	in.	ft.	in.	ft.	in.
Basement	8	7	1	8	1	5	2	9	3	5
2nd step	5	9	1	3	1	1				
3rd step	5	0	1	2½	1	0				
4th step	4	0	1	0	1	1½				
5th step	3	2	1	0	0	10½				
6th step	2	4	1	0						

Fortunately there has been preserved, in the old records of the church, the following entry, which decides not only the date of the erection of the Cross, but its cost also:-

'The New Cross was erected AD 1499, and cost eighteen pounds '-a large sum, equal to about two hundred pounds of our money [or £8800 today]. This date helps us to decide that of other Crosses of similar construction.

The elaborately carved south porch of the church was built about 1486, and the Newton Chapel in 1498, (one year before the 'New Cross' was erected), by Isabel de Chedder, wife of Sir John Newton, with a tomb to the memory of Judge Newton. This lady might also have built the Cross, the dates agreeing. (Pooley 1877: 41)

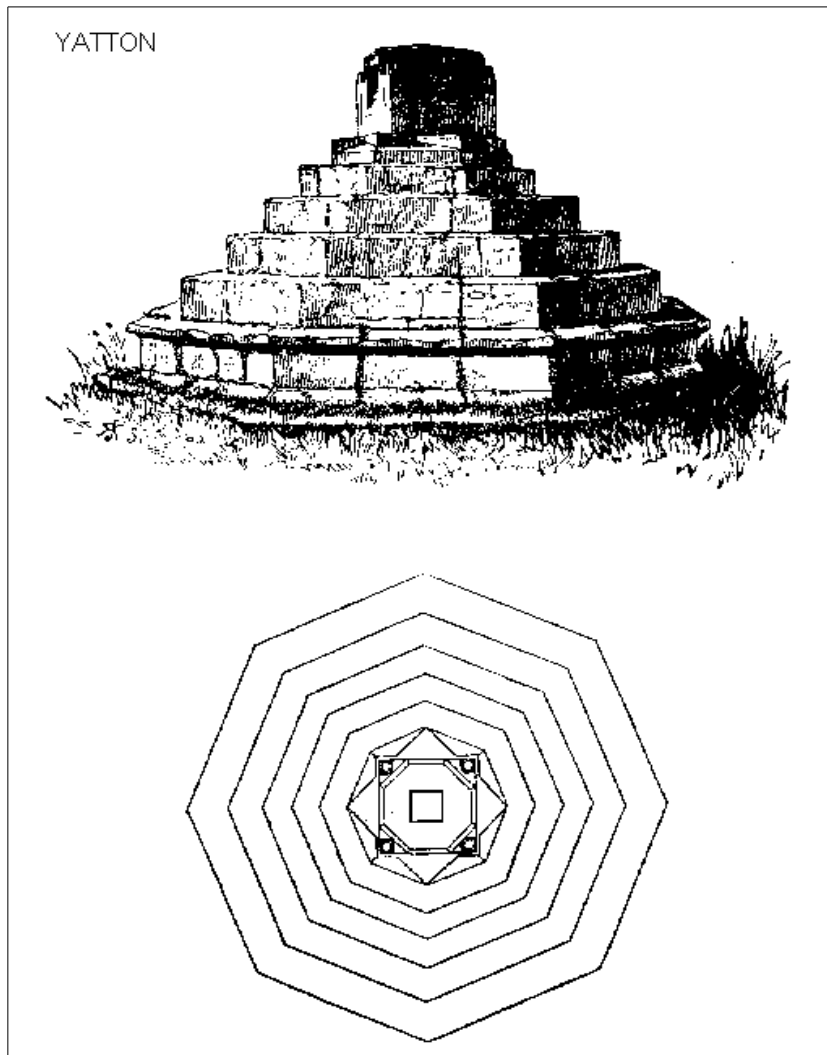


Fig 3: Depiction of the cross and plan in Pooley 1877

The cross, which is a Scheduled Monument, was restored and a new shaft and head added, in 1919, with the benefit of a faculty (SHC D\D/cf/1919/172).

The missing two plaques in the socket, representing angels holding scrolls, were replaced with new at the same time.

This was intended for a war memorial, and is commemorated by a rectangular stone plaque, set into the ground below the cross on the side facing the church, bearing the incuse inscription:

'THIS CHVRCHYARD CROSS / ERECTED AD 1499 WAS RESTORED / AD 1919 TO THE GLORY OF GOD / AND IN MEMORY OF YATTON MEN / WHO DIED FOR THEIR COVNTY / IN THE WAR OF 1914 - 1918 / THEIR NAMES ARE ENGRAVED / WITHIN THE CHVRCH'.

The socket holding the shaft has unusual broaches. They begin as traditional rounded fittings, but each becomes a cylindrical feature at the top, with a recognisable shallow dowel hole in the top face of all four. These may therefore once have held figures. There are no dowels or other metal fittings in the cross. Two stones of the first step on the side closest the church have the scars of former iron cramps, although these have been removed, and their sites backfilled with cement.

Since the first edition of this report was written in 2010, important new evidence, formerly 'hidden in plain sight' has come to light, indicating that this cross was built in 1524-6. This was realised at least as long ago as 1991 (Barraclough 1991:13), but the incorrect date of 1499 is still quoted in church literature and on the North Somerset HER.

The confusion has arisen from the reading (or misreading!) of the Yatton Churchwardens accounts for the years 1445 – 1539 (SHC D\P\yatt/4/1/1-2). Bishop Hobhouse transcribed these for the Somerset Record Society (Hobhouse 1890). Unfortunately, his transcription does not really live up to modern standards, and might best be described as 'sampling'. Thus his entry for 1499 reads '*for new Crosse....£xviii*'. This has always been taken to mean that the churchyard cross was built at this date, but there is none of the detail that is found later in the accounts, indicating clearly when the cross was constructed.

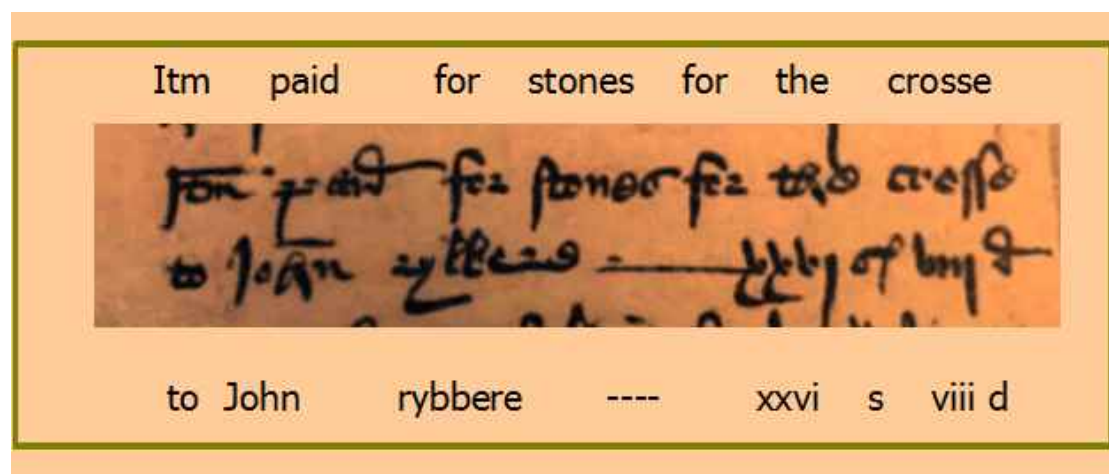


Fig 4: Item from Yatton churchwardens accounts 1525-6

The example above shows a typical entry in the accounts for 'stones for the crosse'

Further on in the accounts, much more detail is encountered for the years 1524-6.

During the years 1524-5 and 1525-6, entries referring to the erection of the cross are scattered through the text. Entries are not individually dated.

1525-6

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Item paid for stones for the crosse to John rybbere	xxvi s viii d
Itm paid at feltyn ¹ for vi Waynes in expens	xi d
Itm paid to thome tooker for vi waynes moe In expens	xviii d
Itm paid to Willyam Hort fre mason	xxvi s viii d
Itm paid In expens when we went to ex ² the said stones for the cros	xii d
Itm paid In exp at feltyn when the piche ³ lodyd ther stones	iiii d
Itm paid in mete and drinke for vi Waynes to feltyn	ii s vi d
Itm paid William hort fre mason In yernes ⁴	i d
Itm paid William hort fre mason	xx s
Itm paid In expens for iii wayns thir	xi d
Itm paid for ryddyng ⁵ the ground to the crosse and shrydyng ⁶ the trees	xvi d

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Itm paid for stone to ye hede of the Crosse	iii s vi d
Itm paid to thomas Crew for bryngyg home the hede of the Crosse	x s iii d

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Itm payd to Ryc hort the fre mason for rydyng to Bath to see ye stonys ⁷	vi d
Itm paid In expens at the setting uppe of the schafold ⁸ & of the Crosse hed	ii s viii d
Item paid to John fysshare for makying the said schaffold	ii s viii d

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Itm paid to John tooze for bryngyng of iii corydes ⁹ of tymber to the said schaffold	vii d
Itm paid to Robart Row & to Robart [?lowy] for setting up the said tymber & for thacchyng ¹⁰ the crosse	iii s vi d

Item paid for repyng of the rede to robert [Charbar]	
& for bryngyng home	iiii d
Item paid to John Slych for halfe a hundreth of brymbylls ¹¹	iid

Notes

- 1 Felton in Winford, where there appears to have been a considerable medieval freestone industry, but which is very poorly known.
- 2 I assume this is a contraction of 'examine' or something very similar
- 3 'parish', presumably referring to Yatton men who went to Felton for stone
- 4 probably 'irons': presumably some hardware provided which cost the wardens one penny
- 5 'Ryddyng' is perhaps 'clearing, preparing for' (OE *ryding) or perhaps 'readying'. This would presumably entail turf and subsoil clearance and construction of a basement to support the cross.
- 6 'Shrouding', a now obsolete method of producing wood by cutting off side branches of (living) trees. It may in this case simply mean 'cutting back the trees to make room', or even, possibly, the method of obtaining timber for the scaffold (although this seems less likely).
- 7 Bishop Hobhouse assumes this means the head of the cross was of Bath stone, but this cannot be guaranteed: Thomas Crew was paid 10/4 (a lot of money), but the accounts do not say that he brought the cross head from Bath. He could have brought it from elsewhere, perhaps Wells mason's yard, or even Felton.
- 8 Scaffolding
- 9 Presumably 'cords', a traditional method of measuring timber, with logs 4 feet long stacked eight feet long and four feet high. 3 cords would be a lot of timber.
- 10 'thatching' the cross, presumably to protect the fresh-cut stone from frost until the stone had 'ripened'. Freestones are fairly soft when quarried and carved, but develop a harder crust on long exposure to air. Exposure to frost before this develops would damage the stone.
- 11 Brambles. These and the 'rede' (water-reed) could be used to make a good close thatch. Exactly how this worked is unclear: did they simply thatch the scaffolding once the cross was up?

So the sequence here is clear. Many loads of stone were obtained from Felton quarry. The site was prepared, possibly with trees being cut back and the ground cleared for a basement. Scaffolding was erected, and the cross built and its head attached. The scaffold was then thatched with briars and reed to protect the stone from frost while still green.

There is no indication in the churchwardens accounts of whatever religious ceremonial surrounded the building or dedication of the cross, since these are strictly book-keeping accounts.

The date of 1524-6 is a slight surprise, as the Reformation was only 8 years away, but it may be (and this is confirmed by other accounts elsewhere) that

the political eruption of the Reformation was a surprise to many rural communities. It should also be noted that Dr Pooley's text quoted from the Accounts is incorrect, the correct version being given above.

Unfortunately, it also means that the dedication stone for the war memorial displays (and will continue to do so) the wrong date to the public. No doubt this date was taken from Dr Pooley's book.

Dr Pooley also surmised that the dating of this cross would help to date similar at Congresbury, Dundry and elsewhere, but great caution should be used in making such analogies based on design.

The photographic survey

This was carried out in 1994 and 2016. The cross was recorded using Kodachrome 25 transparency film stock and subsequently scanned to disc at 2400 dpi using Epson Twain 5 and Photoshop 7. The records have been archived with the Russett collection but copies will be deposited in the YCCCART archive.

Broadly speaking, the survey confirmed most of the details of previous describers of the cross, but the 'modern' 1919 features were also recorded. A selection of the photographs are published here.

A photograph showing the cross in relation to the church is on the next page. Details recorded included:



Fig 5: Inset carvings on W (1919) and S (medieval) sides of socket

These carvings of angels may well have been painted, and may even have had lettering on the scrolls: similar figures on the broadly contemporary Refectory at Congresbury bear the Latin tag 'LAUS DEO' (Praise God). It is noticeable that a 'gyltar' (applier of gold leaf) was paid 20 shillings at the time of the erection of the cross, but it is not specified for what he was paid. A further medieval inset and 1919 example survive on the E and N sides of the socket.

Demi-angels seem to more commonly form a motif on carved crosses: four feature, for example, on the surviving abacus (collar supporting the carved head) on the market cross at Cheddar, and on the abacus of the churchyard cross at West Pennard, near Glastonbury.

The dowel on the socket may once have held a carved figure. These dowels are known on other Somerset crosses, but no original figures survive. A restored example at Charlton Mackerell show this results in an over-cluttered monument, to 21st century eyes.



Fig 6: Dowelled feature on socket and cramp socket on step



Fig 7: Churchyard cross and church from south 1994

The dowel on the socket may once have held a carved figure. These dowels are known on other Somerset crosses, but no original figures survive. A restored example at Charlton Mackerell shows this results in an over-cluttered monument, to 21st century eyes.

Features from 1919 restoration



Fig 8: Head of 1919 from below

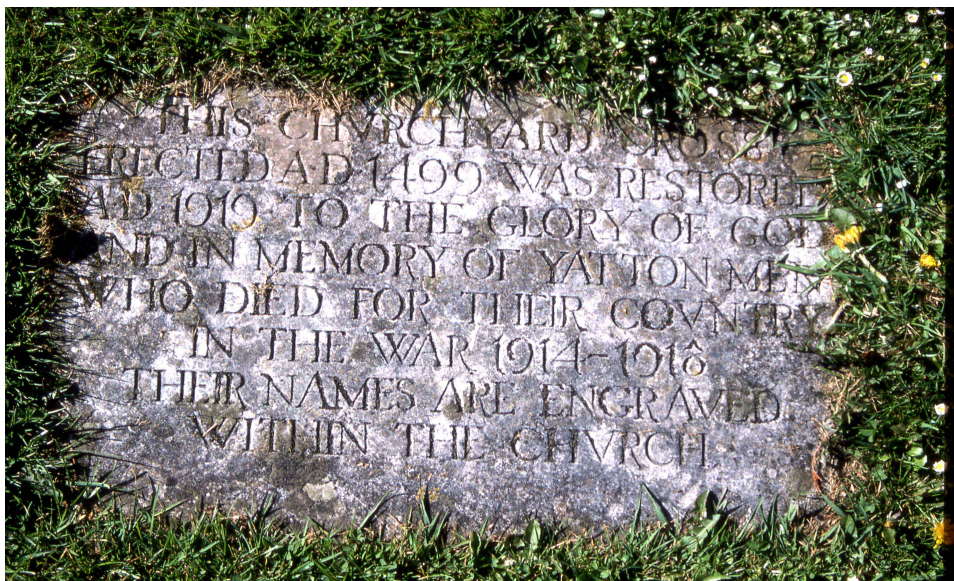


Fig 9: Plaque of 1919, set in the turf to N of the cross

Yatton's other crosses

There are records of potentially three other crosses in Yatton. Pooley states that one stood in the courtyard at Court de Wyck:

COURT DE WYCK.-The remains of the ancient Cross which formerly stood in the courtyard close to the old chapel, now tenanted by cider casks, have entirely disappeared (Pooley 1877: 172)

This cross is not depicted on the Yatton map of c1800 (in private hands, but copied by YCCART). Pooley's description seems to acknowledge Collinson (1791) ('In this court are the foundations of an old cross'). I personally made an extensive search of the site in 1991, during an archaeological watching brief, and certainly nothing of a cross survived then.

He added:

..so also has every vestige of the more noble Cross, called 'Stallings Cross,' which stood a little to the west, [at ST44906615] close by a stream in the high road, where now stands a chapel of the Primitive Methodists. The name has been corrupted to 'Stream's Cross,' by which the site is now generally known. (Pooley 1877: 172)

Collinson described it as 'westward of [Court de Wyck] stands an old massive cross, called Stalling's cross' (Collinson 1791: 618), but by the time of John Rutter (1829), both of these crosses were referred to in the past tense.

According to a letter of 13 November 1926, in the Somerset County Herald, a Mr B Crossman possessed 'an ancient map of the parish' showing Claverham Cross about opposite the post office, where the stream runs. This is similar to Pooley's location.

The map, which has been recorded by YCCART, shows a cross-roads named 'Claverham Cross', which is probably the name of the cross-roads itself, and does not indicate the former existence of a cross in itself.

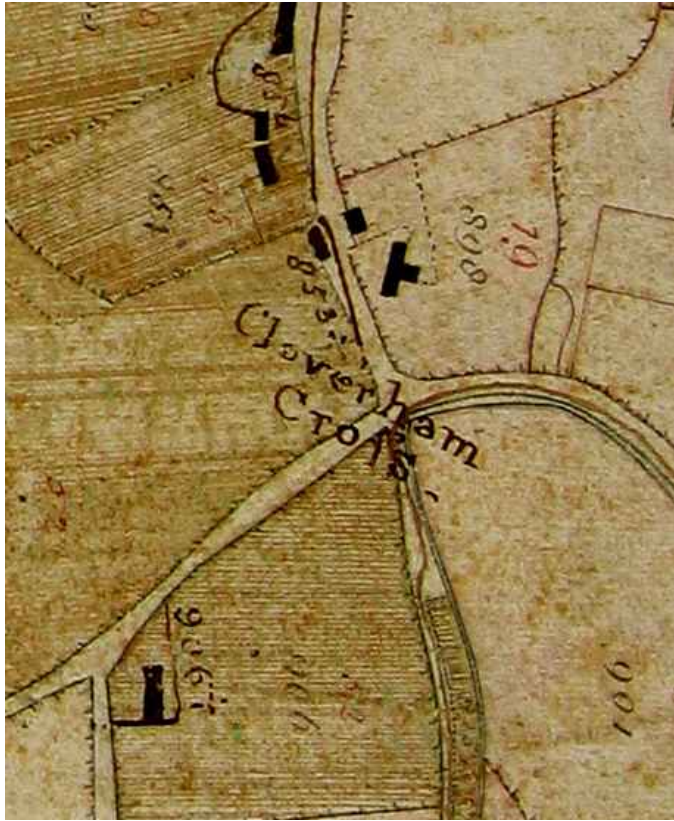


Fig 10: The depiction of Claverham Cross on the 1800 map

A local story had it that stones from this cross had been built into the gable wall of 6-8 High Street at Claverham (the building in enclosure 18 / 898 in Figure 10 above), but I personally saw this building undergo very extensive rebuilding in 1997, and saw no evidence of such.

Finally, an intriguing note concerning Yatton church and a potential cross-head.

A undated hand-written note in the margin of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society's library's copy of Pooley, listing cross finds since his publication, includes the note '*Yatton - St Margaret from a cross head (now in church)*'.

It is not known if this item survives, or even if it was correctly identified at the time. If so, it could be part of the missing head of the churchyard cross, but in the absence of better evidence is listed separately here.

She is usually depicted in association with a dragon, so if the stone survives it should be identifiable.

References

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