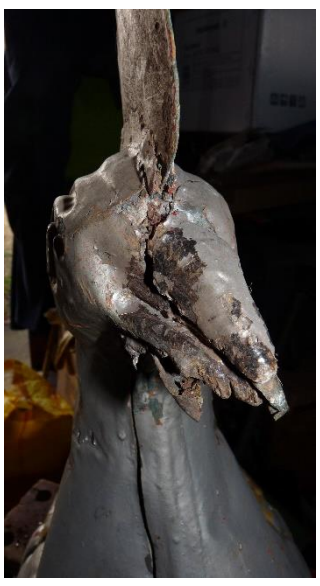
Lydeard St Lawrence Church -cockerel weathervane -December 2020

The cockerel blew down from the church tower in December 2018, hitting the roof and landing on the ground near the south porch. The supporting pole also came down and pierced the slates, coming to rest halfway through the roof, during the school good work assembly.



The PCC was unsure whether to put the weathervane back or to keep it in the church as an object of historic interest. Popular opinion in the village was that it should be re-instated.

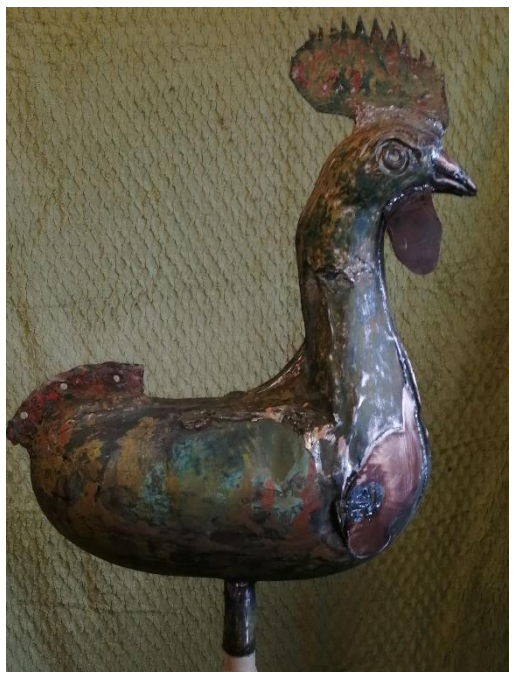
We discovered that the bird was constructed from copper sheet, soldered together, with a solid lead counterweight in the head. There was evidence of previous repairs suggesting that this is not the first time it has tumbled, and that the joint with the tail may have failed before. There were several layers of paint on it, suggesting that it has been gold, yellow, orange and silver at different times in its life. The construction suggests that it dates from Victorian times or earlier.

The damage was considerable and deciding how to repair it was not easy. It is made from copper, which hardens when it is bent so is liable to crack when bent back. Before attempting to bend it back it is best to anneal the copper, but this entails heating it to 700 degrees centigrade and letting it cool, at which temperature all the solder and lead would have melted and run away.

The first exercise was to remove the wings and tail, strip off the paint and review the damage. The neck had been pushed back towards the tail, several joints had split and there were numerous dents.

The agreed aim was to restore the general shape and functionality without losing all the evidence of its chequered history.

First the badly bent sections of the tail and wings were annealed so that they could be bent back into shape. Then a car jack was used to push the neck forward as far as it would without cracking the copper body. A home-made puller reshaped the dent in the chest, as far as necessary to realign the central joint, using an existing hole from a previous repair that had been covered with filler.



The cracked joints were re-soldered, and several copper patches were then soldered over the worst of the dents. The tail joint was reinforced with some new copper plates.

The cockerel was then sprayed with a new paint finish and the tail joined to the body with stainless steel bolts. The

plan is to put it back on the tower with a new supporting pole, but in the meantime, it is temporarily in the church for visitors to have a close-up view of it.