

# Church of St Lawrence

## Lydeard St Lawrence

### Statement of Significance



Church of St Lawrence from the South West



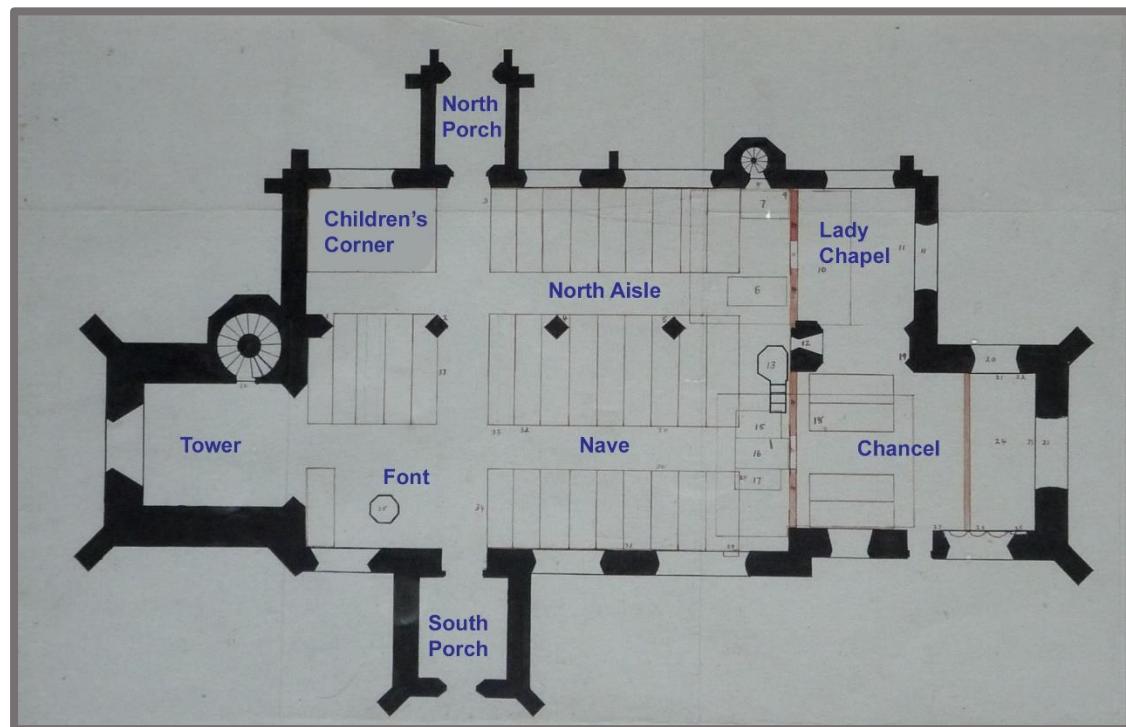
Church of St Lawrence from the North East

## Introduction

The Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2013 define a Statement of Significance as “a document which describes the significance of the church or other building in terms of its special architectural and historic interest (including any contribution made by its setting) and any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest that the church or other building has so as to enable the potential impact of the proposals (*for change*) on its significance, and on any such features, to be understood”.

This statement for the Church of St Lawrence has been developed following the guidance on faculty applications issued by the Diocese of Bath and Wells and the Church Buildings Council. It is intended to be a live document owned by the Parochial Church Council and used to help everyone understand the significance of the church building and its fabric and fittings. It will be updated to reflect changes as they happen and to inform those involved in any planned changes.

## Plan of the church



## Name, dedication and listing

The church is dedicated to St Lawrence the Martyr. It is a Grade 1 listed building with several individually listed Grade 2 features in the churchyard. The church and churchyard are included in the Lydeard St Lawrence conservation area.

## **Location, setting and role in the community**

The church stands in a prominent position at the south end of the village, on the opposite side of the road to the village school, with open fields to the south and the main part of the village to the north. A public right of way passes from the main gate to the south of the church and on the south west corner of the churchyard.

The church provides an important focus for the village community and whilst regular services have limited attendance, key events and services are well attended. There is a well-supported volunteer rota for cleaning and provision of flowers. The biannual church clean and churchyard tidy attracts wide support from the community, and the annual church fete is well attended and successful.

There are strong links with the village school although it is not a church school. Parents and children fill the church for the school's Christmas, Easter and Harvest services, the Christingle service and end of term assemblies.

There is an enthusiastic team of bell-ringers, ringing the church bells before every service and at weekly practice sessions. The bells are popular with visiting bell ringers and are used regularly to ring peals and quarter peals to celebrate various occasions.

The churchyard is well maintained and contains several family graves regularly visited by local relatives. There are six graves of soldiers who died in the first world war that are maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Each year there is a Remembrance Day service and a wreath is laid at the War Memorial.



## Brief description of the exterior and interior

The church is mainly 15<sup>th</sup> century, with a restored 14<sup>th</sup> century chancel. It is constructed to a traditional design in local red sandstone with Doultong stone and some sandstone to the windows. The roofs are slate. The tower is a four stage Quantock design.

The churchyard extends to about 1.3 acres and is bounded to the south and east by a wall in local red sandstone. Graves occupy most of the churchyard, including some grade 2 listed chest tombs. There are the remains of a 14<sup>th</sup> century sandstone cross. The village war memorial is in front of you as you enter the main gate.



Inside the church, the walls are plastered and painted except for the tower and the exposed window tracery. The chancel has an altar and choir, the 30ft high nave has a four-bayed arcade to the north aisle. There is a lady chapel at the east end of the north aisle, the organ is located between this chapel and the chancel.



There are large north and south porches. The north porch is used as the main entrance, the south porch is used as a general store and flower room. The base of the tower is used as the vestry, and houses the parish clock. There are 9 bells in the tower.

The nave and north aisle have Victorian benches, most of those in the nave are fitted with 16<sup>th</sup> century bench ends. Some of the benches have been removed at the west end of the north aisle to provide a children's area and at the west end of the south aisle to accommodate the font.



## How the building has developed over the years

The first indication of there being a church in the parish was in 854 when the parish was given to the Bishop of Winchester by Aethwulf, King of the West Saxons. In 1127, William Gifford, Bishop of Winchester and founder of Taunton Priory, gave the church to the Priory. By 1151 the church was a fully-fledged benefice with tithes.

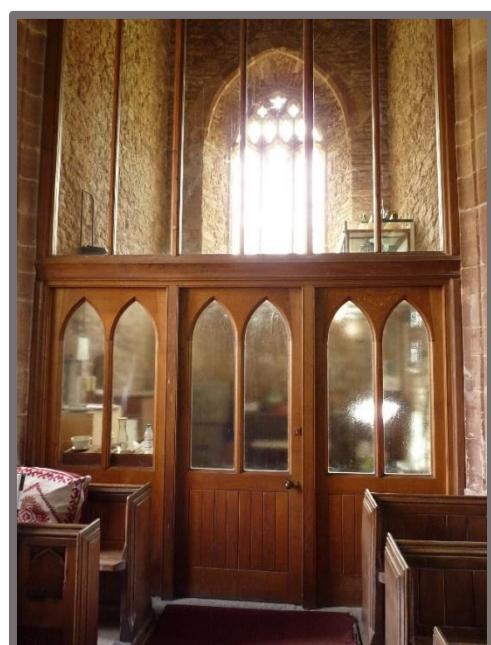
The present church building is believed to be the third on the site, the first being a Saxon church which later gave way to a 14<sup>th</sup> century one which, in turn, gave way to the present mainly 15<sup>th</sup> century building.

During Cromwellian times, it is recorded that the roundheads used the church as billets for soldiers and horses. It was then that much damage was done to the church and stone figures were destroyed and defaced.

The church was subject to a major restoration in 1869/70 when the roof was replaced, and the walls were plastered internally. The stone tracery of the windows in the north aisle was renewed in identical form. The west gallery was removed. All the pews were removed including the box pews and the floor was replaced. Pine benches were installed, re-using many of the 16<sup>th</sup> century carved bench ends.

More recently in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century the font was re-located from within the tower to its present position and a timber and glass screen was installed between the nave and the tower.

The first clock was installed in the tower in about 1700. A replacement was purchased in 1790. This in turn was replaced by the current parish clock, installed in the ringing chamber in the tower in 1919. This clock was re-sited to its present position and fitted with electric winding in 2004.



The first two bells were installed in the tower in 1524, and a third in 1548. In 1783 a new tenor bell was purchased and, in 1785, a fifth bell was installed. Two bells were recast and all 5 were re-hung in 1880. A new frame was installed in 1982, the bells were re-tuned and a new treble added. In 2004 the bells were re-tuned again and augmented to 8. A 9<sup>th</sup> bell was added in 2006 to provide a lighter middle 6.

In 2003 pews were removed from the west corner of the north aisle to create a children's corner.



## Notable features of the Church

Starting inside at the front of the church, the east end, the oldest part of the present building is the chancel, where there is an early 14<sup>th</sup> century sedilia and a piscina in the sanctuary. The small two-light window in the south wall contains some fragments of 15<sup>th</sup> century glass. There is a ham stone tablet monument to Doctor Godwin died 1628, with scrolls, swan neck pediment with skull and cross bones and decorated apron. There is a similar 20<sup>th</sup> century version to another incumbent in the nave.



The arch between the chancel and the lady chapel (now containing the organ) is of fine form. The demi angels holding scrolls on the capitals are defaced.



An important feature of the church is the early 16<sup>th</sup> century screen, 2x5 bays, restored in 1903, with 16<sup>th</sup> century painted decoration on the rear of the aisle screen with inscription in frieze and later painted decoration with coats of arms on the facade of the nave screen.

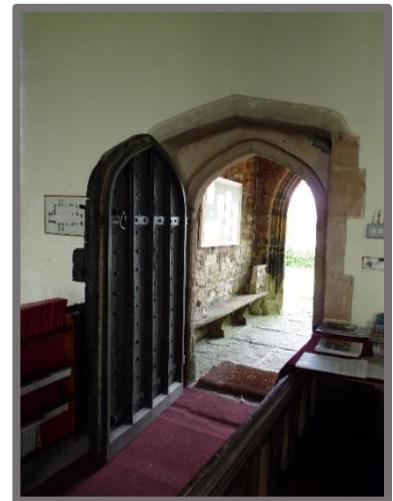
The top of the rood loft stair is closed and the rood loft has been removed, probably shortly after the Order in Council injunctions of 1561 for the 'transposing' (alteration) of rood-lofts under Elizabeth.

The pulpit is a 2-storey arcaded Jacobean pulpit, 7-sided, cut down, and standing on a 19<sup>th</sup> century stone plinth with a flight of 5 steps. Notice the squint through the chancel arch, to allow the congregation in the north aisle to see the sacrament.



The finely carved early 16th century bench ends in the nave are described in detail by Jerry Sampson in 2016. See Reference (iv)

Just west of the south door is the circular font with an octagonal base, inverted. It is believed to have been inverted in the 17<sup>th</sup> century because John Venn, a puritan politician and one of the signatories of the death warrant of Charles I was christened here and was regarded as evil by the local community at the time.



The 4-bay arcade between the nave and the north aisle has pillars decorated with carved capitals; from the west end depicting fox and goose, angels, vine leaves and plaited decoration.

An early 20<sup>th</sup> century bier has been restored by the bell ringers and is on display near the children's corner.

Moving outside, both north and south porches have original 15<sup>th</sup> century doors.

The red sandstone tower has diagonal buttresses, battlements and pinnacles and a polygonal stair turret. The battlements on the north aisle have quatrefoil pierced merlons. The polygonal rood stair turret has battlements and pinnacles.

The south porch has quatrefoil pierced gables and battlements and a sun dial dated 1653.

Further along the south side of the church there is an earlier “scratch” sundial to the east of the priest’s door to the chancel.

The churchyard contains some notable features. The elements listed by Historic England are shown in the first table. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists 6 graves in the churchyard.

Historic England list ref no	Grade	Description
1176126	1	Church of St Lawrence
1142673	2	Lydeard St Lawrence War Memorial
1060608	2	Remains of cross in churchyard, Church of St Lawrence to south east of south porch
1176139	2	John North chest tomb, 4 metres south west of south porch
1344460	2	Unidentified chest tomb, 8 metres west of south porch
1060609	2	Robert Hancock chest tomb, 6 metres south-west of south porch
1176154	2	Pair of unidentified chest tombs, 17-19 metres south west of south porch

## Approval

This Statement of Significance was approved by the Parochial Church Council on 11 July 2017.

## References

- i. History of the Church of St Lawrence the Martyr  
Major CA Vearncombe 3rd edition 1990.
- ii. Pevsner, N Buildings of Britain 1958.
- iii. Lydeard St Lawrence Quinquennial Survey 2014  
RJ Chambers DipArch RIBA
- iv. Lydeard St Lawrence the Congregational Seating Archaeological Assessment J Sampson 2016
- v. Lydeard St Lawrence the Congregational Seating Archaeological Assessment - Codicil on the 1868 faculty and associated drawings J Sampson 2016
- vi. Church website  
<https://bishopslydeardbenefice.org/lydeard-st-lawrence-st-lawrence/>
- vii. Historic England website  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/results?q=Lydeard+St+Lawrence&searchtype=nhl>
- viii. Commonwealth War Graves Commission website  
<http://www.cwgc.org/>