



Welcome to the twenty-fourth edition of our newsletter. We hope you enjoy it.

Please pass this newsletter on to others. If you are not on our mailing list and would like to receive future copies of the newsletter please let us know by contacting us at vch@swheritage.org.uk. Please let us know if you change your email as we have been getting several undeliverable messages.

County Editor's Report

There has been much progress this autumn for the Somerset VCH. The main Taunton volume has been edited, cut to size, and submitted to VCH HQ where we hope in the new year it will start its long journey to publication. Work is well under way on the second volume. Wilton is complete in draft and on the website and work has begun on the research for Trull and West Monkton. In the new year we hope to start Cheddon Fitzpaine.

It has been a busy autumn and winter for talks and events. We had an enjoyable Higher Town walk at Minehead in September despite terrible weather ten hardy souls and a dog ventured out in the teeth of the wind to explore the area. Fortunately the torrential rain held off until later.



A windy Minehead before the rain

Mary Siraut

The county editor took part in a very successful women's medieval history workshop at Chippenham in September commemorating Maud Heath, a medieval Bristol merchant's widow and her Wiltshire causeway.

The day concluded with a hilarious but scary look at generative AI and history with VCH Director Catherine Clark.

In February we will repeat our VCH local history workshop but at Chippenham courtesy of the Wiltshire Archives following two popular workshops held at the Gloucester Archives.

The county editor will also be acting as consultant editor for a volume of the Wiltshire VCH covering parishes between Salisbury and the Hampshire border.

Chippenham's Maud Heath day speakers including colleagues from Wiltshire VCH and elsewhere and VCH Director Prof. Catherine Clark [right]



Photograph by Emily Malcolm

Somerset made the national headlines in October when details of the Chew Valley Hoard were revealed. It will go on display at the British Museum before returning to Somerset.

It includes this fine Taunton penny of William I made by the moneyer Brihtric. These were the first coins minted for William after he took the throne.



SWHT

Our annual VCH was lecture given by our former chairman Tom Mayberry who displayed an unrivalled knowledge of the history and historians of Somerset from earliest times to the present day and kept the audience enthused and entertained throughout. If you were not there you missed a treat. I know some of you were disappointed not to be able to listen at home but costs prevented its being a hybrid event. We are working towards a more affordable way of giving hybrid lectures in future years. We are also planning more of our popular history walks in Taunton and West Somerset in 2025.

In this edition we have some unusual views of Taunton taken by one of our newsletter readers in *A View from the Tower*. We have an article on the West Monkton benefice and on local listing. Also we still have not been able to make the VCH Explore site available to the public again so we will be including some of our more unusual Somerset articles in the newsletter starting with a true story of smuggling, less romance and more reality. Also although Hinkley Point power station's completion may still be a long way off we have a report on the archaeology, and two new books for your bookshelf.

Report from Hinkley Point Archaeology Day, 30 November 2024

On the 30th November ninety people gathered at Stogursey Victory Hall to hear the story of the largest archaeological excavation ever undertaken in Somerset - the extensive investigation at the site of the new Hinkley Point C power station sponsored by EDF.

The excavations were carried out by Cotswold Archaeology between 2012 and 2016 in advance of the construction work associated with the development of the new power station. The detailed reports of the site and the finds have now been published in three monographs. Highlights from the reports were presented by the Cotswold Archaeology team and the event was co-hosted by Cotswold Archaeology, the South West Heritage Trust and the Somerset and Archaeological Natural History Society.

The South West Heritage Trust monitored the archaeological excavations for Somerset Council. Bob Croft, Head of Historic Environment and Estates at the South West Heritage Trust, said: "This was an opportunity for local people to hear about the results from the excavations at Hinkley Point. An expert panel of archaeologists and academics told the story of over 5,000 years of history discovered at this important site." Neil Holbrook, Chief-Executive at Cotswold Archaeology, said: "We were delighted to be able to present some of the results from the extensive investigations we undertook at Hinkley Point. The detailed research has now been published and we are pleased to be able to share this with the local community and researchers."

Details of the discovery of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman farms and a Roman villa were presented by a range of speakers. One of the highlights of the event was the description of the early medieval cemetery and the stories from the skeletal evidence that was revealed by detailed scientific analysis. In addition to the story of the main HPC site, Martyn Allen from Oxford Archaeology, presented the extensive Iron Age and Roman evidence discovered on the National Grid connection line that runs through Somerset, North Somerset and on to Avonmouth.

Bob Croft



Professor Stephen Rippon of Exeter University presenting a talk at Stogursey Victory Hall on 30th November 2024

The church living of West Monkton across seven hundred years



Left

St Augustine's church

Right

Thomas Cromwell



The parish of West Monkton on the northern edge of Taunton provides a very interesting example of a valuable church living (or benefice) that has been prized over many centuries. The living was held by the rector or parson who was entitled to receive the income from tithes, glebe lands, offerings and other income of that benefice. Throughout the Middle Ages many churches were held not by individual clerics but were appropriated to religious houses. In that circumstance the practice of cure of souls would be carried out by a vicar (i.e. a clerk who was acting vicariously on behalf of the religious house). Arrangements would be made by the religious house to divert some of the parish income to the vicar and any curates who were also required to support him. West Monkton, however, was not so appropriated.

Only in the twentieth century did stipends for the parish clergy come to be paid centrally by the Church. Until then a clerk needed to secure a parish benefice or similar source of income if he was to avoid struggling financially. That made the patron of the benefice an influential individual or institution. This right to present a living (the advowson) was treated as an item of property and could be loaned out or sold to another person or institution. Sometimes an advowson was shared between one or more patrons who would take it in turns to appoint a new clerk to the vacant benefice. In the case of West Monkton the advowson was held solely by Glastonbury Abbey right up until its dissolution in 1539. However, for the very first time in August 1535 the abbot, Richard Whiting, wrote to Thomas Cromwell to grant the advowson to him saying that this was 'the first that has ever been granted out of this monastery'. Any hopes that Abbot Whiting may have had that such an act would gain lasting favour for his abbey would soon be dashed.



In 1535 King Henry VIII ordered his great survey of church property known as the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* to be drawn up. From the entry for West Monkton we see that the rectory itself was worth £26 per annum. There was a profit from the rectory lands of 20s; from the great tithe came a sizeable income of £13 17s, with the tithes of wool and lambs providing a further 40s. The various offerings in the parish church amounted to £12 per annum.

In both 1620 and 1638 we have further detail about the possessions and value of the rectorship at West Monkton. These included almost sixty acres of glebe land, whether arable, pasture or meadow; there were ‘three yards of meadow in a common meade called Broomehay’. The holdings also comprised the parsonage house with barns, stables and other outhouses with a curtilage garden amounting to approximately two acres.

When Whiting resisted the demands of Henry VIII to surrender the abbey, he was charged with treason. He was then executed with two of his fellow Benedictine monks by being hung, drawn and quartered on Glastonbury Tor on 15 November 1535. The advowson then passed to the King before being granted to William Paulett, Marquess of Winchester. In general it passed thereafter to a series of individuals whose names are familiar to us as members of the Somerset gentry. These family names include those of Doble, Sanford, Crossman, Maddison, and Kinglake. It was only as recently as 1968 that the advowson was finally transferred by an order in council from the last lay holder (Phyllis Mary Marshall) to the Bishop of Bath and Wells. For much of the 18th and 19th centuries, the patrons appointed members of their own family to the rectorship of West Monkton.

In 1291-2 a national church valuation known as the *Taxatio* was carried out on by order of Pope Nicholas IV. This valued West Monkton at £20 per annum, the third wealthiest living within the deanery of Taunton. The possessions of the parish included lands whose income went not to the rector but to two other beneficiaries – to the Prior of Taunton Priory 10s and to the chamberer of Glastonbury Abbey £30 10s. The role of the monastic chamberer has been well defined by Ian Keil who describes him as one of the senior monks who originally had the duty of distributing clothes, shoes, knives and other personal necessities to the community from the common store.

Above left
Glastonbury Tor

Right
Interior of West Monkton church



West Monkton would clearly provide a comfortable living for the clergyman fortunate enough to obtain it. It is not surprising that the list of rectors includes some very interesting names, extending back to the first known rector, William de Salton, who was appointed in 1324. The key source material for this list are the registers of the bishops of Bath & Wells, many of which have been published in printed form thanks to the work of the Somerset Record Society. De Salton may be the same man recorded as being a graduate of the University of Oxford who held numerous benefices across the diocese of Bath and Wells during his lifetime. He was the first of many highly educated clerks who came to hold West Monkton in the period up to the Reformation. Several of these may not have been resident in the parish at all but supported themselves from its income and made arrangements for vicars or curates to perform the daily cure of souls in West Monkton. That must certainly have been the case with Master Richard Nykke (or Nix) who held his position briefly between September and October 1499. He was already enjoying a stellar career within the Church, having obtained several canonries and prebendaries, archdeaconries and the deanery of the Chapel Royal. He was also Registrar of the Order of the Garter. His closeness to King Henry VII led to his greatest preferment when he was appointed Bishop of Norwich in February 1501. In 1534 when blind and in his late eighties he was prosecuted in the Court of King's Bench on a charge of *praemunire* and was briefly imprisoned before paying an immense fine of £10,000 for his release. The statutes of *praemunire* had been passed in the 14th century to restrict the scope of papal authority in England.

There were several other notable rectors in the pre-Reformation period. Henry Abingdon (who held West Monkton between August 1436 and his death in 1437) had been a delegate of the University of Oxford at the Council of Constance which ran from 1414 to 1418. That meeting marked the end of the papal schism that had seen competing popes claiming full papal authority though only having the support of one faction within the Church. Abingdon as a Doctor of Theology was well-qualified for his role at Constance. A longer rectorship was that of Thomas Overey (another Oxford graduate) who held West Monkton from March 1472 until his death in 1493. Overey held several benefices concurrently for which he had been granted papal dispensation. In 1472 he was also appointed to the post of precentor at Wells where he had previously been chancellor.



Brass in West Monkton church possibly of Henry Abingdon

The sixteenth century was a challenging period for any clerk who could not bend with the winds of the changing times. Thomas Payne, the last to be instituted in the pre-Reformation period, held on to his position up until 1542. He resigned and was granted a useful if rather modest annual pension. We have interesting detail about the process of Payne's resignation in the register of Bishop William Knight:

13 September 1542. In a certain low parlour in the residence of John Heth, notary public and registrar of William, bp of B&W, at the village of Mylton, in the parish of St Cuthbert, Wells, before Master John Dawes, bachelor in laws, deputy of Master Walter Cretyng, doctor of laws, vicar general in spirituals of the said bishop, there appeared Master Edward Bere, one of the yeoman of the King's guard, and exhibited his substitution for Sir Robert Reade, the original proctor of Master Thomas Payne, rector of the church of West Monkton. He then exhibited the resignation of said Master Thomas Payne ... at his request, the presiding officer declared the church to be void. There then appeared Master John Moore, the King's chaplain, and exhibited a presentation thereto, made by the said King under the great seal. The presiding officer thereupon instituted him in person, and received his oath of obedience. At the request of the said Edward Bere, and with the consent of the new rector, Master John Dawes, the deputy, then assigned a pension of £4 6s 8d to the rector who had resigned.

[The term 'institution' is used where the bishop or his official deputy admits a clerk to a benefice. In cases where the bishop is himself the patron then the process is known as 'collation'.]

Another survivor was John Dangar who became rector in July 1554 during the reign of Mary Tudor. He retained his position into the reign of Elizabeth Tudor and subsequently also held the position of canon and prebendary in the arch-diocese of York.

Further religious upheavals came in the mid 17th century during the Commonwealth period. Several men vied for the rectorship at this time. William Lockett, a graduate of Merton and Lincoln Colleges at Oxford had been appointed in April 1644. By this time he was probably in his fifties as his M.A. degree dates from 1614. However in February 1653



*West Monkton stocks
in the churchyard*

a Thomas Elford was petitioning the Lords Commissioners of the Privy Seal (the episcopate having been abolished in 1646). He claimed that the rectory of West Monkton was void by lapse and sought to be presented as the new rector. His request appears to have been granted in March of that year. By May 1655 his position was being contested. William Doble petitioned both the Lords Commissioners and the Lord Protector himself to say that Lockett had not resigned, was still alive and had been sequestered. He stated that Elford had gone off to another church living. Doble was proposing that a Thomas Bowring be granted the living, a man of both 'godliness and ability'. There is confusion about who then held the rectorship with a Robert Drake also being mentioned. With the appointment of James Douch in August 1662 stability was restored with Douch holding his position until 1698.

Through the 18th and 19th centuries a succession of graduate clergy became rectors of the parish. John and James Sanford were rectors between May 1743 and January 1782. In the 19th century the Kinglakes (William Chapman Kinglake and Frederic Charles Kinglake) were rectors from December 1838 to November 1900. William Chapman Kinglake was a graduate of the University of Cambridge and had twice been awarded the Chancellor's Gold Medal for English Poetry. The Kinglake family continued as patrons of the living until the presentation by E.S. Marshall of George Temple Miller to the rectorship in November 1919. Marshall had been rector of West Monkton since July 1904 until his resignation in favour of Miller. The advowson continued to be held by the Marshall family until 1968.

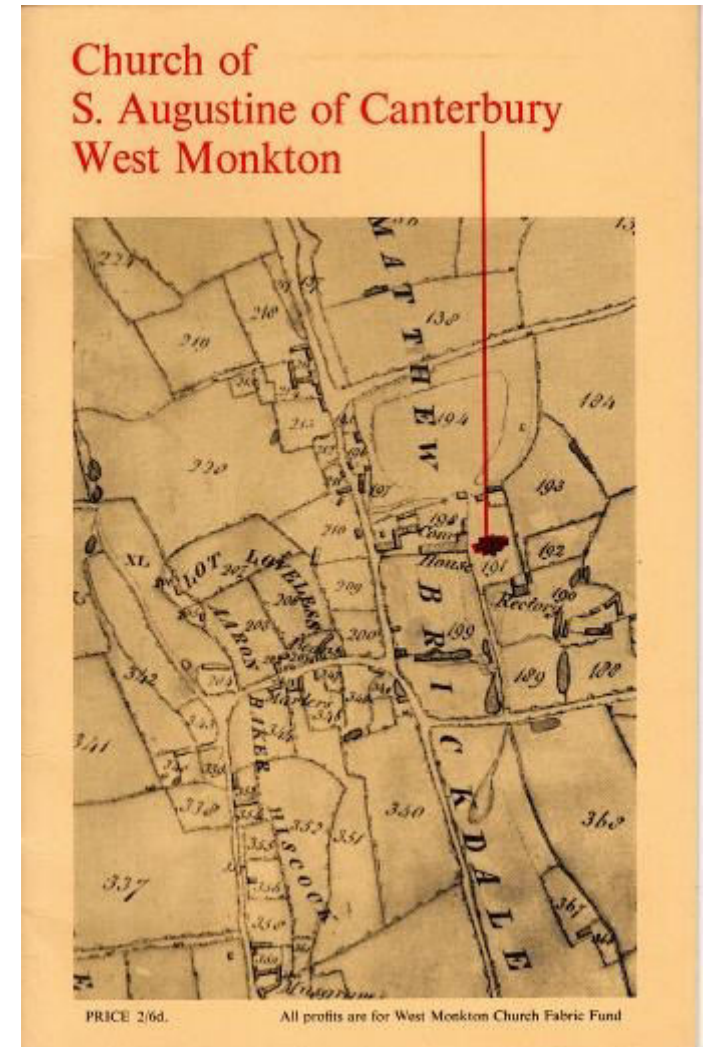


Left

Berlin, the Brandenburg Gate in the Nazi era

Below

Revd Roynon's 1968 church guide



George Temple Miller is of particular interest. A graduate of Cambridge, he was chaplain to the British Army in France during World War I. He was rector at West Monkton until June 1922 when he moved on to be rector of Tisbury in Wiltshire. However from 1932 to 1938 he was chaplain at the British Embassy in Berlin. He was therefore in Germany at that critical period when the Nazis took power and ruthlessly transformed that country from a liberal democracy into a fascist dictatorship.

In February 1954 Maurice Elsworth Roynon became rector and was responsible for creating the guide to the parish church that was slightly updated in 1983. Finally, this survey of the living at West Monkton cannot end without a special mention of the very first female holder of the benefice, the Revd Mary Styles, who was rector from August 2016 until she was succeeded by the current incumbent, Jim Cox, in December 2023. The 21st-century rectors have a much broader geographical responsibility than their earlier counterparts, encompassing the South Quantock Benefice that also includes the parishes of Broomfield, Cheddon Fitzpaine and Kingston St Mary. They may sometimes look back with nostalgia and possibly a little envy to those earlier rectors whose burden was just the quiet rural parish of West Monkton in previous centuries.

Des Atkinson

The Local Heritage List for Somerset and Exmoor

Across the country are numerous examples of heritage assets that are recognised as being of national importance and protected through their inclusion on the National Heritage List for England. This list brings together sites that are designated as Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens, Battlefields and Protected Wrecks, as well as recording the details of World Heritage Sites. However, there are many further heritage assets (historic buildings, archaeological sites and landscapes with heritage significance) that are not formally designated in this way.

Many but not all of these assets are recorded on local Historic Environment Records (HERs); for the area of the historic county of Somerset, there are separate HERs for Bath and North East Somerset, Exmoor National Park, North Somerset, and Somerset local authority areas. Some assets may also be located within Conservation Areas, which are designated by local authorities. Local authorities are also able to establish local heritage lists, which allows authorities to work with local communities and groups to identify heritage assets that play an essential role in building and reinforcing a sense of local character and distinctiveness in the historic environment.

In 2021, the South West Heritage Trust (on behalf of the Somerset County and District Councils) and Exmoor National Park Authority received funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop and implement a Local Heritage List for Somerset and Exmoor (LHL). The joint bid allowed both organisations to pool resources and provide a systematic approach to the assessment of individual sites for inclusion in the list. A team of three officers were recruited by the SWHT, who undertook publicity and helped to create a series of supporting documents for the project, such as nomination forms and a technical guide. They also hosted a webinar on the local listing process, available to view on the project website.



*Cannington pack horse bridge
Nathaniel Williams*

To be eligible for inclusion on the local heritage list, a site must be a permanent building, structure, object, monument, item of street furniture or artwork, site, place, area, garden, or landscape, situated either within the modern administrative county of Somerset, or Exmoor National Park. It must also hold heritage interest but cannot be designated, or part of another designated asset (such as part of the curtilage of a Listed Building). Eligible nominations are then assessed against a set of criteria to establish their heritage value; these include the asset's age and rarity, any features of distinctive design or known historical associations, and its evidential, social, communal, group and collective values. To qualify for inclusion on the list, a candidate must either meet one criterion strongly, or at least three criteria at a moderate level.

There are separate assessment panels for Somerset Council (hosted by the SWHT) and Exmoor National Park Authority, where these scores are debated and verified, before each candidate is then validated for inclusion in the Local Heritage List for the respective local planning authority. Information on the heritage assets that have been added to the LHL is available on the project website and in the two HERs for the project area; the Somerset HER (www.somersetheritage.org.uk) and the Exmoor HER (www.exmoorher.co.uk).



Glastonbury Tor

Somerset Council



Left Street, Clarks' workers village

Somerset Council

Above Taunton, the Wyndham Hall

SANHS

Sites that have already been included on the LHL are varied in age and type. The hill beneath the Scheduled area at Glastonbury Tor was noted to be a striking regional landmark, with communal and historic meaning. A group of three bridges in Cannington (a medieval packhorse bridge, the turnpike bridge, and the 20th-century county bridge) help to tell the story of local travel infrastructure and demonstrate the evolution of bridge design and Construction technologies. An area of Tudor Gothic workers cottages in Street built by the shoe manufacturer C & J Clark in the 1890s and 1900s is part a larger movement for improved welfare for factory workers, and is built in local vernacular materials. The weir on the River Barle at Dulverton is of high value as a landmark feature to the local community and, together with its associated leat, provides further information on the industrial past of the settlement. The Wyndham Hall in Taunton is a purpose-built lecture hall constructed in 1927 and is little altered since this time; it is still used by the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. Some further sites, such as a pier at Burnham-on-Sea and a 20th-century coastguard station on Hurlstone Point, had been rejected for national designation but were acknowledged to hold local heritage interest as part of that process.

Local groups and the public are welcome to nominate heritage assets for inclusion in their Local Heritage List. Further information on the Somerset and Exmoor Local Heritage List is available from <https://swheritage.org.uk/historic-environment-service/local-heritage-list/>.

Catherine Dove

Smuggled Salt

Smuggling is often considered a romantic business bringing luxury goods into England duty free but most smuggling was in manufactured goods to undercut prices in England and often hurt local producers. In Somerset most smuggling was from Ireland where labour was cheaper. The government imposed duties to protect English manufacturers. One of the goods smuggled was salt and an interesting case of a Minehead captain and a Bridgwater smuggler sheds a lot of light on the true nature of the trade.

Thomas Needs of Minehead was master and owner of sloops trading to Wales and Ireland including the *Two Sisters* and the *Three Brothers*; he had a large family. He was not above running smuggled goods although ostensibly he imported hides for the Minehead tannery. He had presumably dealt with smugglers several times, which explains his willingness to accept an order for salt from William Reynolds of Bridgwater described as 'the most notorious smuggler that ever inhabited Somersetshire'. In January 1790 Reynolds agreed to pay £160 for 20 tons of salt to be delivered to Shurton in Stogursey and pay for landing it. Shurton is a small village in Stogursey and the coast half a mile north-west is known as Shurton Bars, immortalised in a poem by Coleridge. It was used as a landing place for small vessels that could be beached mainly for coal and culm from the late 18th century to fuel the limekilns of which five were in use by the later 19th century.

Needs sailed to Slade near Waterford in Ireland to buy the salt. In February he delivered the salt to Shurton and it was unloaded secretly with the assistance of Reynolds's son and Philip Williams and other men employed by Reynolds. The first night 10 tons were landed and hidden in a cave and the next night the rest was unloaded and hidden in a house occupied by Williams.

Philip Williams was from Cornwall and was employed by Reynolds to assist with his smuggling and Reynolds placed him in his house in Shurton presumably near the spot where Reynolds' smuggled goods were landed. It was said that by such means Reynolds would not be involved if the smugglers were caught. Reynolds remained in Bridgwater while the salt was being landed and wrote to Williams. 'You'l take notice that I have sent these men to assist the Capt & that the goods are not mine but beg you to do your best for him I think if it is put in the Coal Piles & found query if the[y] would not fine me for it so if you can think any plase better would rather suppose the Lime kiln with 100 bags and the Folle House Chamber on the Hill. Beg youl not leave any open in my premises – as the Capt is so wild as to run in I think 10 tons is risque sufficient for me'.

Reynolds sold the Irish salt wholesale and retail by mixing it with English salt so that the dealers and buyers would not realize they were buying the cheaper Irish salt. However he was unable to buy enough salt at Bridgwater to mix the whole 20 tons and wrote to Needs ' I wish you would take 10 T[on] in one of yr ships – don't know what to do otherwise'. On 3 March he wrote again 'I must beg youl come or send up a boat & take down 10 T[on]. I cannot nor will not be answerable for it as you known that was contrary to my last order to Sherton.'

As Thomas Needs would not take it the salt was left at Shurton for several months until it was found by excise officers. Reynolds refused to pay Needs for any of the salt, making excuses and pretending he had none of it and it was with Williams, 'a poor man not worth a groat'. Needs only obtained five guineas of the £160 promised. Reynolds avoided any fine for smuggling but would not pay Needs who sought legal advice in the autumn as to whether he could sue for his money. However, the learned counsel Mr Gibbs was not sympathetic.

‘I am of the opinion that Needs cannot support any action against Reynolds for the residue of the price of the salt, which was sold by the former under an illegal contract nor for the work and labour performed in carrying this illegal contract into execution. I also think that Edwards [to whom Needs owed £10, which Reynolds had undertaken to pay] cannot maintain an action against Reynolds upon promise to pay the debt of £10, unless such promise was in writing, and there was some consideration for it (as a forbearance on the part of Edwards to sue Needs) and Edwards was ignorant of the transaction between Needs and Reynolds. Under the circumstances of this case I think Needs would not be an admissible witness’.

It is not clear if Needs pursued his case but he later earned enough to buy the *Nancy* in 1795 and made his son Thomas the captain. She was a 16-year old ship of 150 tons square rigged with two decks and 10 guns. The younger Thomas died of yellow fever on a voyage in the *Nancy* to Martinique in 1798 and in 1801 his father moved to London with the *Nancy* and registered a sloop *Nelly* for his son James. Thomas presumably retired to Minehead where he was buried in 1821.

Mary Siraut

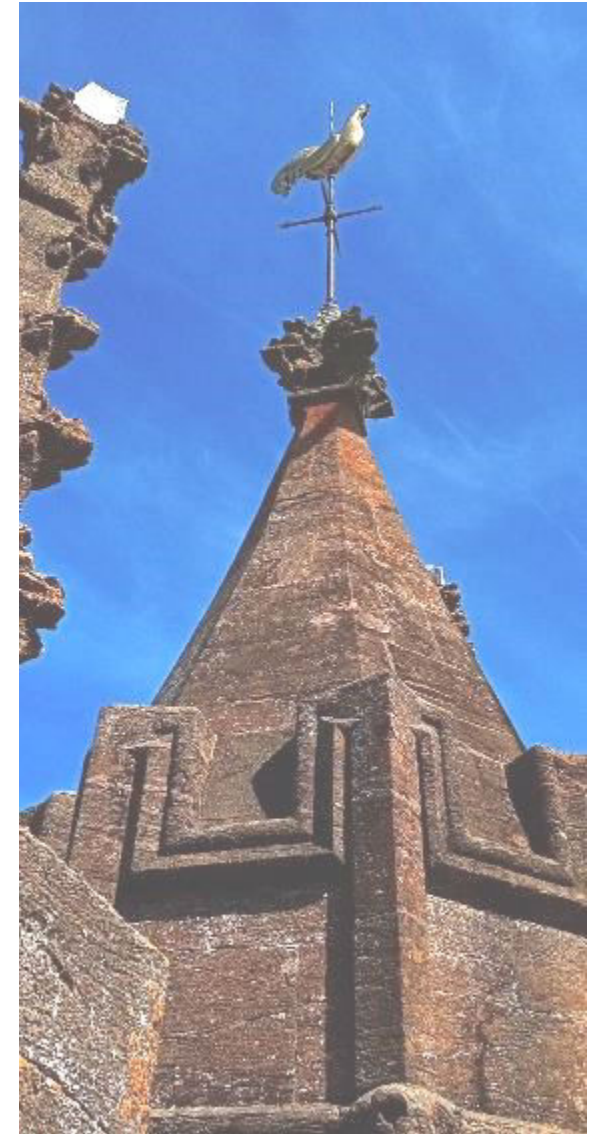
A view from the Tower

Heritage Open Days are very popular and one of our newsletter readers took advantage of one last September to brave the heights of St James’ tower in Taunton and took several fascinating images. The tower itself was rebuilt from 1870 and restored in 1927. Few will have seen the top level or the weathercock at close quarters.



Above The top section of St James’ tower

Right The weathercock



Right Looking over the cricket ground towards Priory Bridge Road and the Quantocks.

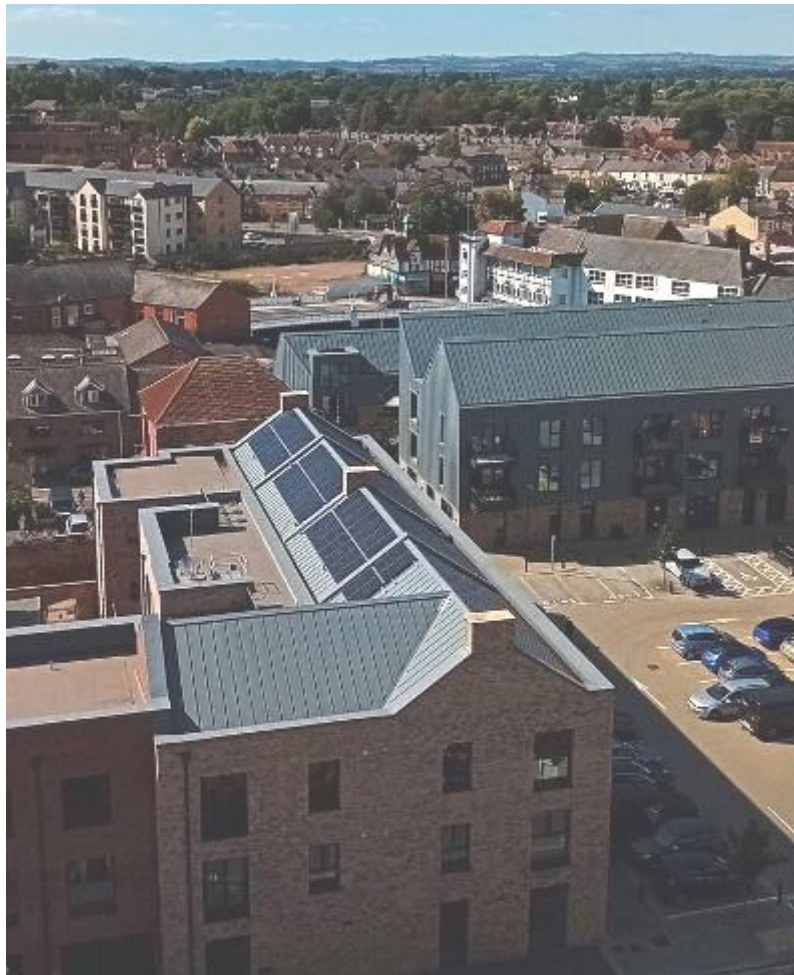
Far right The only remaining building from the first St James' school now a church hall. Its later extensions were demolished for the doctors' surgery behind.

Below The new Coal Orchard development on the site of the former public baths and carpark looking towards the town bridge and new flats on the site of former timberyards on the river bank.



The cricket ground dominates the immediate area but there is also a new development at Coal Orchard and the old church school.

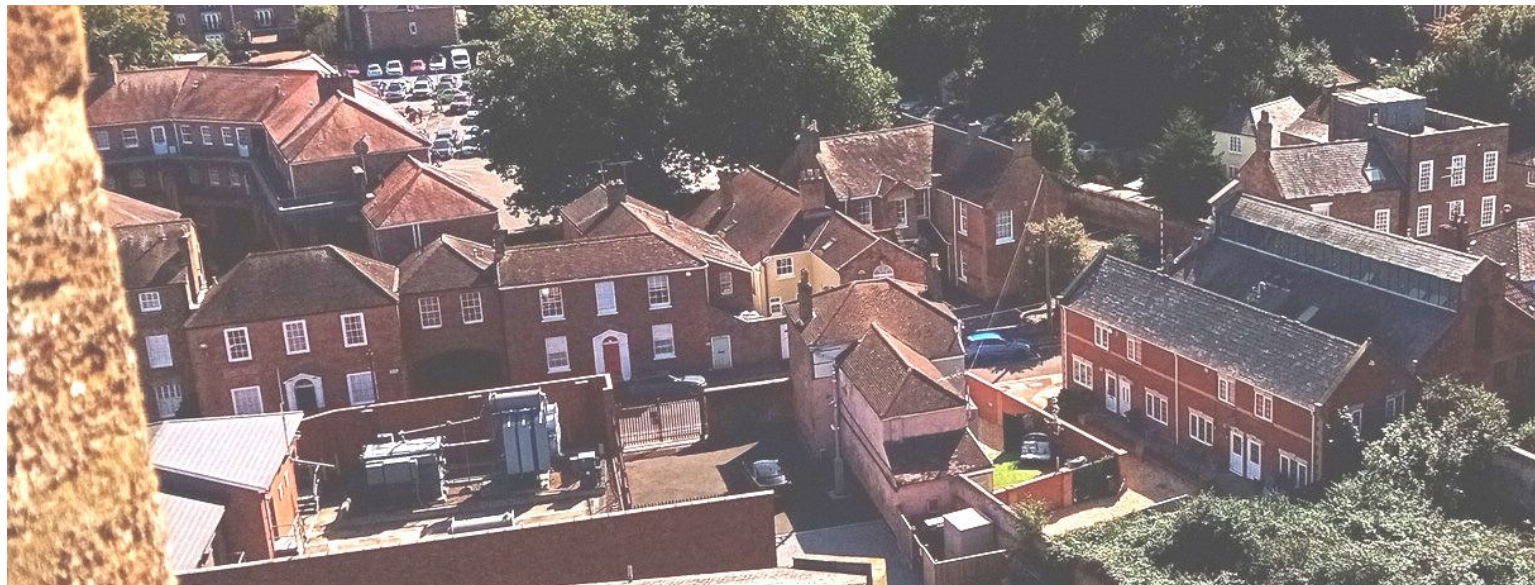
The original St James School designed by Richard Carver was built in 1828 north-west of the church and opened in 1829 as the Taunton Church of England six hours a day in 1833 supported by subscriptions and school pence and paid the master £110 p.a



Among the older streets in the neighbourhood are Canon Street left and Middle Street right. The garage complex is on the site of the former Canon Street Brewery.

The roof of Wesley's Octagon can be seen behind the houses on the right .

Holy Trinity tower is just visible in the distance with the Blackdown Hills beyond.



The Georgian houses of Middle Street face the site of the former coal-fired power station on the left..

On the right is the roof of the 1895 YMCA gymnasium behind modern Quadrant Court facing one of the few early houses to survive on the north side of the street .



The Brewhouse theatre with the Georgian brewery manager's house overshadowed by the new cricket ground seating and block of flats. The Tone flows between the trees behind while in the central middle distance is Taunton School. In the far distance are the Brendon Hills on the left and the sharp slope of the Quantock Hills above Rowbarton on the right.

Photographs courtesy of Mandy Trimby

Snippets from VCH research

Letters from I. K. Brunel

Building a railway involves many individuals and organisation as well as the workforce. When the Bristol and Exeter Railway Line was begun one of those unhappy about the work was the Taunton Turnpike Trust, worried about the damage to their roads. They were particularly concerned with the planned railway bridges.

In the early 1840s the Taunton Turnpike Trust in the person of James Bunter and the Bristol and Exeter Railway Company in the person of Isambard Kingdom Brunel argued by letter over the damage to roads from the construction of Beam Bridge, Staplegrove, Kingston Road and Bathpool railway bridges.



Beam Bridge before it was rebuilt in concrete

SWHT

Much of the correspondence has not survived but two letters from Brunel were copied into the minutes.

The Trust seems to have desired to have a separate footpath arch under the Kingston road bridge, which Brunel was not happy about.

*18 Duke St,
Westminster
April 12 1843*

Sir

I have considered the possibility of effecting some arrangement in the manner suggested by you by which your fellow Townsmen might attain the object they seem to have in view. I find upon going into the calculation that the separate arch would cost more than I had supposed, and I am more convinced than ever that if made it would be only a source of disgusting nuisance. If however you really want more footpath let the object be attained properly and if you will advance £120 I will on the part of the Company widen the whole Bridge 5ft. I think this is a very liberal offer and I make it only from the sincere desire to avoid all hostile feeling.

Your early reply will oblige Sir

Your obedient servant

I K Brunel

The Trust agreed to offer £50 for the bridge widening as suggested by Brunel, a footway on the east side of the Staplegrove railway bridge and perfecting the drainage and fencing on the Trust's roads. That seems to have upset Brunel further.

18 Duke St,
Westminster
April 19th 1843

Sir

I have felt considerable difficulty in replying to your note and proposal of the 15th. In proposing a payment of £120 I had no idea of subsequently bargaining as to the amount and if I considered my own feelings only I should decline accepting any smaller sum much as I wish to arrange amicably all our differences but as I have the views of others to consider as well as my own. I will make an attempt to meet you half way, but beyond this I beg to say that I cannot go and that as far as I am concerned it must be taken as a final proposal. If therefore the Trustees will contribute £85 I will undertake the widening of the bridge as proposed. the addition of the footpath at the Staplegrove bridge the alteration of the path to the north of Kingston Rd bridge and the other matters discussed and referred to in your letter being understood to be undertaken by the Company. On the other hand it is equally understood that no impediment is to be thrown in our way either by the Trustees or the County Magistrates to the immediate diversion (or at such time as may be convenient to us) of the road at Beam Bridge

To prevent future misunderstanding I take the precaution of informing you that the alteration of the Kingston road bridge will be a work of some little time possibly two months as the timber work must be altered and in small portions at a time before the brick work can be touched.

*I am Sir
your obedient servant
I K Brunel*

The Trust agreed to pay £85 for widening the roadway under the Kingston road bridge by 5 ft, setting back the viaduct's western abutment, adding a footpath at the Staplegrove Road bridge and other alterations but said they had no power over the magistrates. They would seem to have had a bargain.

Taunton turnpike roads and railways 1871

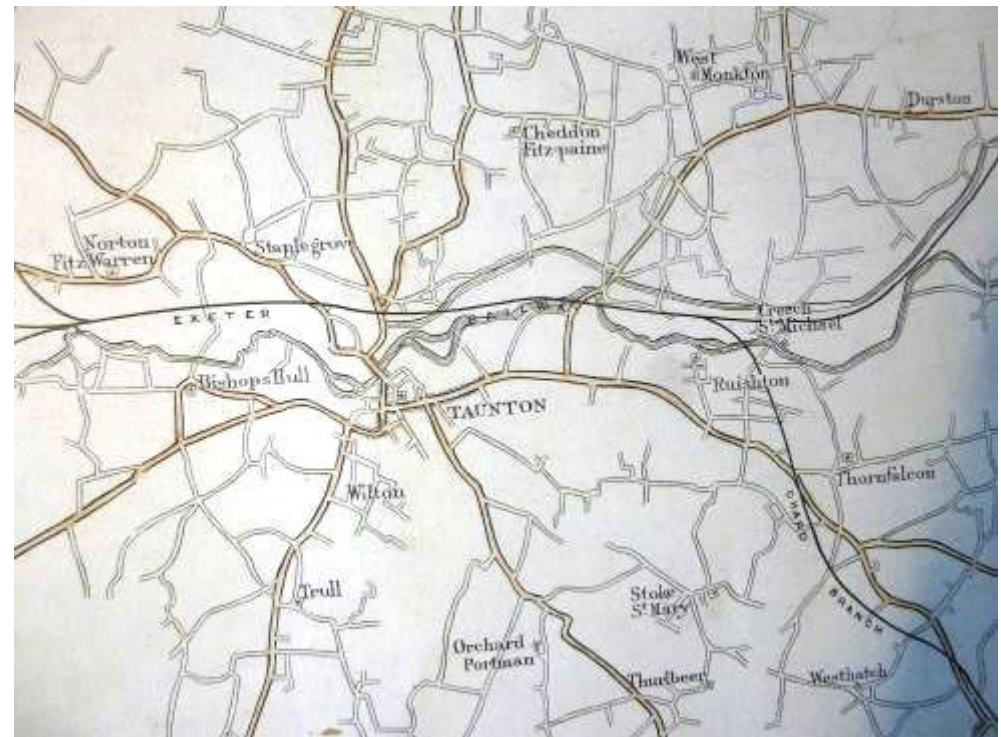
SWHT

Settlement of the dispute did not put an end to complaints and in March 1844 they wanted the railway company to speed up their work on the station as the roadways were in a terrible state.

However the trust did benefit. The Cockpit gate, at the junction with Canal Road had an income of over £1,000 from tolls and the trust resented demands to remove it beyond the railway station in 1847 as they would lose considerable income from station traffic.

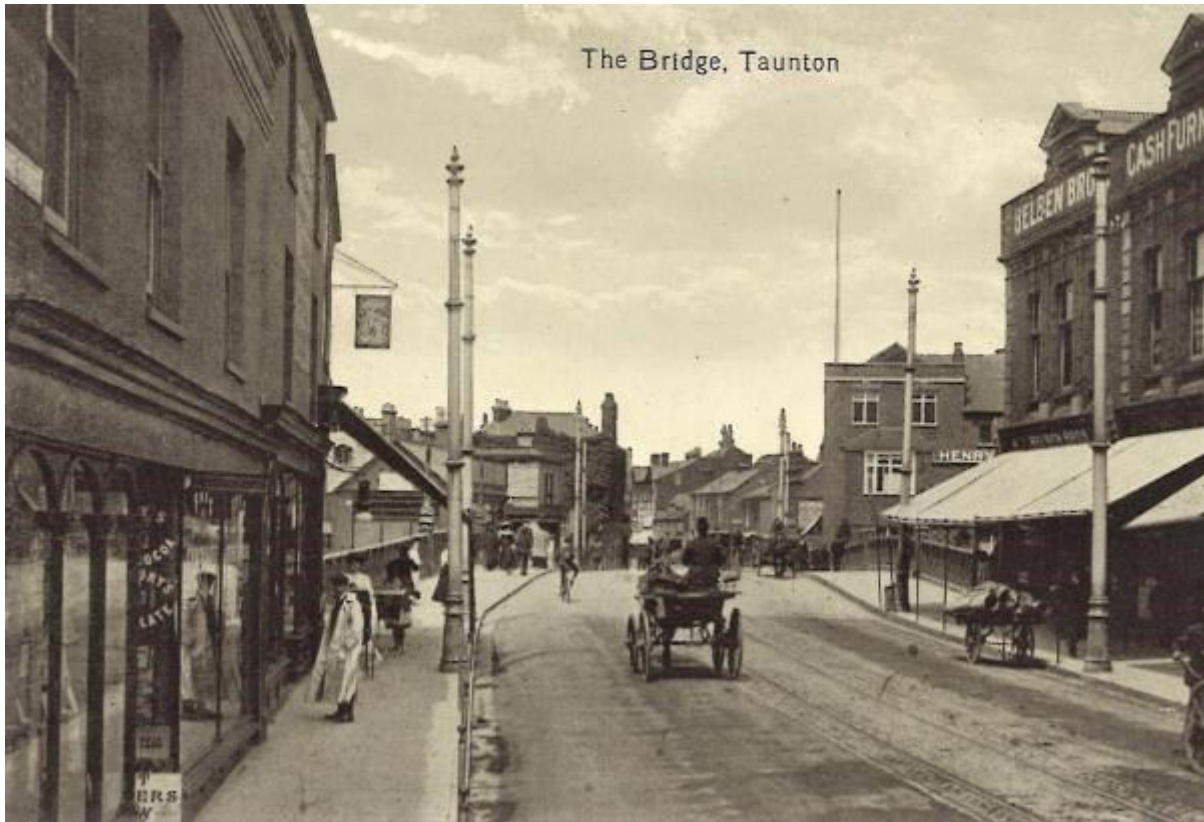
A proposal to widen the Kingston road bridge to accommodate the enlarged Taunton station in September 1865 was put before the trustees. They wanted a better structure than the existing one 'which has a Barge like unshapely and most ugly appearance, not only offensive to the Eye, but degrading to the taste of the day'!

[SHC D/T/ta/11]



Historic Images of Somerset

The Bridge, Taunton



The Bridge, Taunton c. 1901

SWHT

This is an interesting photograph as people go about their business on foot or bicycle or with perambulators, carts and carriages. However, considerable changes to this traditional pattern of urban life are already in motion. The rails have been laid for the new electric trams but the posts have yet to be fitted up for overhead wires. The system was beset with problems, especially noise owing to the use of setts rather than tarmacadam to bed the rails, and the network was never completed with only one line in operation. In 1902 the trams carried 773,318 passengers originally in 50-seated double deckers but later in single deckers for 24 people.

Across the bridge, only about ten years old, a sign on Allen's foundry says 'Garage', which was to become their main business including car assembly. Across the road merchant Henry Trood was still in business. Beyond can be seen the board advertising Charles Goodland and Sons coal, coke and salt merchants. On this side of the bridge, still known as Bridge Street at that date, is the row of shops built in the 1870s with matching shopfronts. First comes the long-lived Singer sewing machine shop and next door a man gazes into the window of Child's tailors and outfitters. The third shop advertising cocoa and chocolate was demolished in the mid 20th century to provide access to Goodland Gardens.

Opposite is the row of shops designed by Edwin Thomas in 1890 with narrow pedimented gables characteristic of many Taunton buildings of the decade. Belben Brothers discount furnishers at number 6 have replaced the shoe warehouse, which had revolutionised shopping in the later 19th century with its first floor-restaurant and toilets for men and women. What look like rolled rugs are stacked on a hand cart outside.

New Somerset books

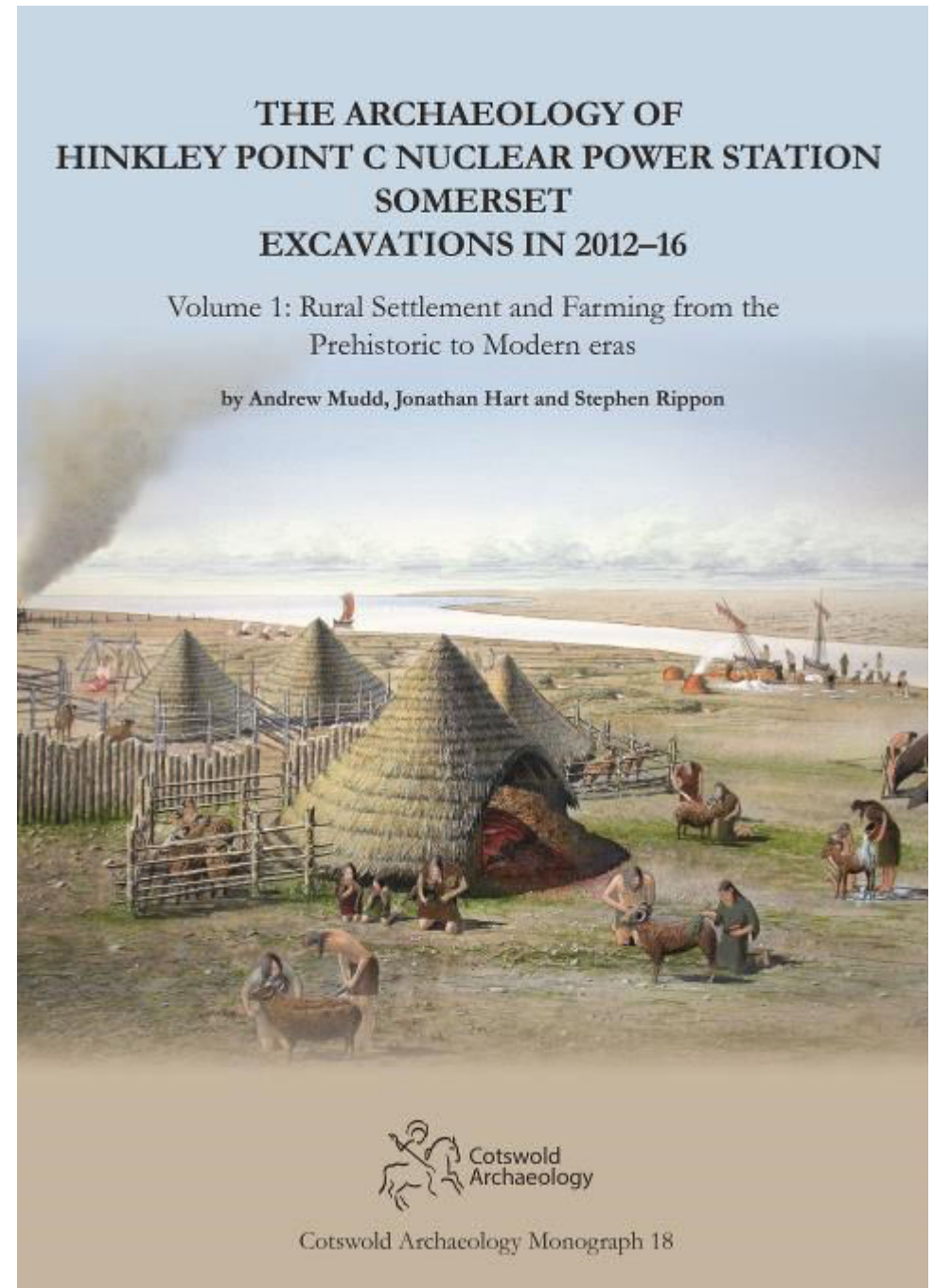
The Archaeology of Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Station Excavations in 2012—16

Andrew Mudd and others 2 volumes

Cotswold Archaeology monographs 18—19

Hardback Vol 1 424 pp £35; Vol 2 312 pp £30; colour illustrations

Early Neolithic occupation (from about 3600 BC) was represented by small groups of pits which were partly contemporary with a well-known round barrow – a protected monument called Wick Barrow or Pixies’ Mound – lying just outside the development site. Later prehistoric remains included Bronze Age burnt mounds, boundary ditches, a Late Bronze Age enclosure, and an Early Iron Age midden. There was more widespread Late Iron Age and Roman settlement, including a seasonally occupied linear settlement with evidence of salt-making. Contemporary activity included a nearby late Roman settlement. On another site a sequence of occupation from the late Iron Age to modern eras was examined. Here historical documents add to the account of the site and preserve the names of some of the farm’s recent inhabitants.



THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF HINKLEY POINT C NUCLEAR POWER STATION SOMERSET EXCAVATIONS IN 2012–16

Volume 2: The Early Medieval Cemetery

by Andrew Mudd, Sharon Clough, Frances Healy,
Mandy Jay and Linus Girdland Flink



Cotswold Archaeology Monograph 19

The cemetery was excavated in its entirety and contained the remains of around 300 individuals. Its form is shown to have many characteristics in common with other cemeteries of this period in the western British Isles, including the extended, supine posture of the deceased in simple earth-cut graves largely aligned in a west/east orientation. There were a limited number and range of grave accompaniments. Peculiarities included a concentration of intercutting burials within a small central rectangle, with the later re-use of this space for the deposition of fragments of carved stone, followed by the construction here of a wooden building. The deposition of seashells with a number of the burials appears to be a rite so far unique to this community. The stratigraphic sequence allied to radiocarbon dates on 51 individuals has enabled an unusually refined chronology, showing that the cemetery was used from the early 5th to the later 7th centuries. Measurements of the isotopes of strontium, oxygen, carbon, nitrogen and sulphur in various combinations from a selection of individuals provides insights into aspects of origin, movement and diet. Mitochondrial DNA has provided information on the maternal lineage of 44 individuals, some of whom were buried in the same grave as others of the same lineage. Material remains were sparse but provide insights into the burial practices at this time.

Cotswold Archaeology

Forthcoming Events

We are planning more events for 2025 and will let our newsletter readers know as soon as details are available.

As usual we enjoy getting outdoors, fingers crossed for some good weather!

There will be an afternoon ramble around Taunton's Trinity area probably on Sunday afternoon 13 April 2025 and possibly a later walk around Alcombe.

We are also hoping to arrange an archaeology walk in 2025.



Quantock Belle dining train in the rain at Minehead

Mary Siraut

Please Support Us

Further work is entirely dependent on public generosity. If you would like to support the future work of the Somerset VCH please consider making a donation or legacy.

Please note that the Somerset County History Trust has been dissolved and the VCH now forms part of the South West Heritage Trust, itself a charity: Charity Number 1158791. Cheques should be made payable to the 'South West Heritage Trust' with a note that the money is for the VCH account.

For more information contact:

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Signalbox from Frome now at Didcot railway centre

Mary Siraut