

# HOLY TRINITY CHURCH ILFRACOMBE NORTH DEVON DEVON

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING



South West Archaeology Ltd. report no. 171006

## Holy Trinity Church, Ilfracombe, Devon Historic Building Recording

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By E. Wapshott & N. Boyd  
Report Version: Final  
6<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Work undertaken by SWARCH for Holy Trinity PCC

### Summary

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*South West Archaeology Ltd. Undertook a limited programme of building recording at Holy Trinity Church, Ilfracombe, Devon. This work was undertaken in order to assess the fabric affected by the restoration of the roof of this building and to set it in its historical and archaeological context.*

*The parish church of the Holy Trinity is Grade I Listed, with a 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman church and tower, enlarged in the 1320s and the 15<sup>th</sup> century, before considerable renovations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Church of the Holy Trinity is the mother church to St. Peter's on Highfield Road.*

*The roofs at the eastern end of the church were stripped and reslated as part of a wider restoration project. The opening up of the roof allowed further analysis and information gathering, to add to the record of the Grade I Listed building. The areas viewed during the visit were the north aisles, north section beyond the tower and the north side of the chancel.*

*The observed roof works confirmed or highlighted the known phasing within the building, as interpreted by Pevsner. For example, the timbers of the north chancel aisle are of a lighter scantling than those to the widened north nave aisle and the south aisle. This matches the expected phasing of the north chancel aisle as a later addition, when the chancel was further extended in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The widening of the rest of the aisles occurred in the later 15<sup>th</sup> century. This confirms a slow expansion and aggrandisement of the church from the 13-15<sup>th</sup> centuries.*

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October 2017

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The information presented within this report represents the professional opinions of South West Archaeology Ltd. and is based upon the information available in October 2017.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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HOLY TRINITY, ILFRACOMBE PCC (THE CLIENTS)  
JONATHAN RHIND ARCHITECTS (THE AGENTS)  
THE STAFF OF THE DEVON HERITAGE CENTRE (DHC)

## PROJECT CREDITS

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REPORT: EMILY WAPSHOTT; NATALIE BOYD

EDITING: NATALIE BOYD; DR. SAMUEL WALLS

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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**LOCATION:** HOLY TRINITY CHURCH  
**PARISH:** ILFRACOMBE  
**DISTRICT:** NORTH DEVON  
**COUNTY:** DEVON  
**NGR:** SS 51407 47304  
**SWARCH REF:** IHT17

### 1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

South West Archaeology Ltd. (SWARCH) was commissioned by Jonathan Rhind Architects (the Agents) on behalf of Holy Trinity Church PCC (The Clients) to undertake building recording at Holy Trinity Church, Ilfracombe, Devon. This work was undertaken in order to assess the fabric affected by the repairs and reslating of the roof of this building and to set it in its historical and archaeological context.

### 1.2 TOPOGRAPHY AND LOCATION

Ilfracombe is a market town which lies on the north coast of Devon, approximately 10 miles from Barnstaple (Figure 1). The Church is situated on the east facing slope of a north-south orientated ridge at approximately 42m AOD.

### 1.3 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Ilfracombe is in the historic Hundred of Braunton and the Deanery of Shirwell. Ilfracombe, or Ilfordcombe, may have formerly been a considerable sea port before developing into a trading port. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it developed into a holiday resort and a place where the local baths were used in the treatment of the sick.

The parish church of the Holy Trinity is Grade I Listed, with a 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman church and tower, enlarged in the 1320s and the 15<sup>th</sup> century, before considerable renovations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The church of the Holy Trinity is the mother church to St. Peter's on Highfield Road.

### 1.4 METHODOLOGY

The assessment of the buildings was conducted by Emily Wapshott in July 2017 in accordance with a WSI (Boyd 2017). The work was undertaken in line with best practice and follows the guidance outlined in: ClfA's *Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (2014) and Historic England's *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Processes* (2016).



FIGURE 1: LOCATION MAP.

## 2.0 HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

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### 2.1 SITE DESCRIPTION

The church was visited by Emily Wapshott in July 2017. The eastern roofs of the church were in the process of being stripped and re-slatted as part of a wider restoration project. The opening up allowed further analysis and information gathering, to add to the record of the building. The areas viewed during the visit were the north aisles, north section beyond the tower and the north side of the chancel.

### 2.2 LISTING TEXT

*ILFRACOMBE  
SS5147 CHURCH ROAD  
853-1/6/31 Parish Church of Holy Trinity  
15/06/51  
GVI*

*Anglican parish church. Transeptal tower and other masonry C13; enlarged c1321 by order of Bishop Stapledon (lengthening of the nave and addition of aisles); aisles widened C15; N chancel aisle added C15; restoration by John Hayward, 1861-4. Vestry, 1894 by Henry Wilson.*

*MATERIALS: mostly random rubble slate walls, some rendered; limestone dressings; Welsh slate roof. PLAN: nave with aisles of 4 bays; chancel of 4; N and S chancel aisles; N transeptal tower (now partially internal due to widening of N aisle); SE vestries.*

*EXTERIOR: windows entirely renewed by Hayward, mostly 4-light in conventional Perpendicular style. One or two dressed features survive from before this time including a small blocked window set low at W end of S aisle. Sundial dated 1788 over porch doorway. Plaque dated 1864 commemorates rebuilding of S wall. Storeyed vestries set transeptally with polygonal stair turret; 2-light window to each floor, that to 1st under moulded pointed arch. The strangely detailed doorway arch, the rainwater hopper and the weather vane on the small spire that surmounts the turret are free Arts and Crafts in style (cf the lych gate to S also by Wilson).*

*INTERIOR: fully described in Pevsner and Cherry. Special attention may be drawn to the fine set of wagon roofs, substantially renewed and adapted over the chancel by Fellowes Prynne in 1899. Nave roof rests on stone corbels representing mythical beasts that may be older than the timber roof. The Victorian glass (all attributed in Pevsner and Cherry) form an extremely interesting and varied collection.*

### 2.3 PEVSNER'S DESCRIPTION

*HOLY TRINITY. The oldest part is the tower, in the N transeptal position, frequent in early North Devon churches. Low and unbuttressed, it has a simple pointed N door, a lancet window to the N, and a low unmoulded pointed arch to the S into the church. Then, in 1321, Bishop Stapledon commanded that the church should be enlarged, by a lengthening of the nave and the addition of aisles. The present N and S aisle arcades of four bays to the tower do in fact go well with a date in the second quarter of the C14: low octagonal piers and simply chamfered arches. Of the same date the PISCINA in the chancel. In the early C15 a N chancel was added with piers of B type and simple, fairly big moulded capitals only to the main shafts. The aisle windows, and probably the whole widening of the aisles to*

*their present size, appear to be later Perp still, though most of the outer walls was rebuilt during the 1861 restoration by Hayward. The arcade of the S chancel chapel is entirely of this date, as is the E part of the N chancel chapel. The windows with their tracery were also renewed. The chancel E window was formerly Perp, like the E windows to the N and S aisles, as is shown in old illustrations. These windows are of four lights, and so are those of the N and S sides, i.e. the church was on an ambitious scale all round.*

*The wagon roofs are specially rewarding at Holy Trinity. They are all ceiled. In the nave the beams rest on angel figures. Below them are usually corbels in the form of mythical beasts, possibly older than the roof. At the E end of the nave, i.e. above the former rood screen, is a splendid celure or 'glory', three bays enriched by cross-ribs and much decoration. The two dormer windows, one N, one S, that light this and the screen were remade in 1899 (coloured in 1961). The N porch alone has an open wagon roof. Vestry added by H. Wilson in 1894.*

*FONT. Square, Norman, with scalloped underside and a decoration of three rosettes on each side, much recut. - PULPIT. Elizabethan, with two tiers of the characteristic arched panels on short columns; flowers with stalks and leaves as the motif within each panel. - Perp SOUTH DOOR with its original knocker. - CHOIR STALLS by Fellowes Prynne, 1900. - STAINED GLASS. An instructively varied sequence of the 1860s onwards. Clockwise from the E: chancel E by Hardman 1861. Crucifixion and other scenes, excellent blue backgrounds, angels in the trefoiled lights. - S, easternmost, Willement, much harder colours and drawing style, also 1861. - S chapel SE, Stabb Memorial, 1896 by Ballantyne in an old fashioned painterly technique. - S second, St John Baptist, with a lively floral background. - S aisle W, 1908 by Kempe & Co., typical pale colours, saints, etc. and many charming angels. - Then nothing of much note until the N aisle third from W, 1893, a vision of the Trinity, three angels, realistically depicted forest. - N, E of tower, 1861 by Lavers & Barraud, Resurrection scene, excellent colours. - N, first from E, 1860, crude but colourful. - N chapel by E by O'Connor, 1862, memorably virulent purples and blues.*

*MONUMENTS, C12 tapered tomb slab with incised cross, very worn. - Marie Selwood died 1634, a small crude tomb slab with interlace, still in the medieval tradition. - Many minor wall monuments, including good architectural tablets in the N aisle, e.g. one of 1677 with an oval centre and a segmental pediment with arms. - Richard Bowen died 1797 by Regnart, large, with sarcophagus and big trophy above. - LYCHGATE. By Henry Wilson, 1894. A delightfully inventive Arts & Crafts design. The roof with small graduated slates and pierced lead parapet. Frond-like iron bars set in a wooden frame.*

## 2.4 BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

### 2.4.1 CHURCH TOWER

Pevsner's description of the tower is somewhat different from that which we see today. The base of the tower survives as described, a likely 13<sup>th</sup> century structure with narrow lancet windows and simple mouldings. The current tower, however, has elaborate ashlar crenellations which look too crisp to be anything older than 19<sup>th</sup> century and are unaddressed by Pevsner. The belfry openings are pointed arches, with chamfered mullions and jambs, simple tracery and a moulded pointed dripstone or hoodmould. These are very different to the form of the lancet window below and the style postdates 1300. Possibly part of one of the later stages of expansion and aggrandisement; their mouldings are, again, surprisingly crisp for a coastal church.

There is a blocked opening in the upper stage of the church tower, with dressed blocks forming rough quoins to reveals, seen under a blue-faced octagonal clock; the opening blocked in at least two phases. This suggests that the bell chamber may have been set lower in the tower. A lower and simpler terminus would better suit the proportions of this tower; the obvious battering of the tower



walls does drop back markedly, but there is no clearly defined build line, a similar type of tightly packed shale and slate rubble rises to the top. There are two narrow rectangular openings seen in the north side of the tower but the north and west sides are obscured by a dark grey, either heavy pointing or a roughcast thin skim of render. Therefore the tower has potentially been raised, the crenellations a further addition, probably 19<sup>th</sup> century.

On the south face of the tower, within the pitch of the north aisle roof, there is a previous roofline with scarring from lead flashing and lime plaster. This roofline was gabled, with a double pitch, running north-south indicating a wholly different orientation and structure to the roof at the point where it would abut the celestory on the nave. Pevsner discussed the celestory in some detail in his text, with an overview of it probably being 18<sup>th</sup> century, with 19<sup>th</sup> century alterations, most notably the inserted 1899 windows by Fellowes Prynne. The marked change in roof structure at this point would seem to confirm significant changes from its intended late medieval design.

#### 2.4.2 NORTH AISLE

The north chancel aisle is a 15<sup>th</sup> century addition, adding to the core 13<sup>th</sup> century structure and oddly abutting the transeptal north tower.

Reused timbers in the south face of the north aisle roof and the surprisingly lightweight timbers used on this north section confirm it as a different phase than the south section, which has more substantial trusses. One of the reused timbers has alternating square foliate and floral geometric plaque carvings of bas relief positioned along its length; this timber is probably a 15<sup>th</sup> century wall plate. Other timbers in the same section of reworked roof have smaller socket holes for partition rails, and larger cut sockets, having been purlins or former timber frames. Some of the timbers used are crudely cut to fit a length required and the whole is both pegged and nailed in areas; the nails are all large square-ended and handmade. Some of the timbers have heavy nail mark staining indicating they have been part of lathe and plaster ceilings. All the trusses here are reused and indicate this whole section of roof was significantly reworked. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century thin timbers which carry the current slated nailed roof are applied over these reused timbers so they are at least 19<sup>th</sup> century in their construction.

#### 2.4.3 NORTH PORCH

The north porch contains an inscribed stone, with the date 1866, to the right of the arched opening. The open wagon roof has a crispness of carving to the moulded ribs and lighter scantle to some beams suggesting heavy restoration or a wholly 19<sup>th</sup> century date of reconstruction, reusing timbers. Two sections of wallplate have plaques of bas relief of geometric alternating foliate and floral motif. This wall plate is identical to that reused in the roof against the north tower and is probably 15<sup>th</sup> century in date.

#### 2.4.4 EAST END OF THE CHANCEL AND NORTH AISLE

There is a secondary crude outer skim of rubble stone, using smaller neater stones, closer set, in a harder lime mortar, capped with limestone coping. The inner rubble is heavier, in a chunkier more rustic lime/clay mortar. It is likely that the outer walls have been 'neatened up' with an outer skim and additional 19<sup>th</sup> century carved stone detailing has been added as a further aggrandisement.

The opening of the roof confirmed the outer walls were refaced as part of the 1860s restoration works, at the same time as the perpendicular windows were fitted. It also showed slight differences in scantling weight in the roofing across the various sections of the church, expected due to its complex developmental history. The 15<sup>th</sup> century roof over the north aisle alongside the chancel due to the relatively narrow width of the range had surprisingly lightweight scantling. This roof has been altered several times, most notably near the tower.

Of note is the reuse of elaborated timbers in the restructuring of the roof around the celestery and between the nave and the tower. This indicates that at least some of the late medieval decoration work within the church was altered/removed and upgraded in the newer fashionable 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic style during the major restoration works. It also indicates the celestery, with some evident phasing, dates structurally to one of the 19<sup>th</sup> century phases of alteration, the whole area of the roof reworked.

Known phases of 19<sup>th</sup> century works on the church are the 1836 addition of the lych gate, the main the 1860s restoration phase, and the 1894 vestry addition. The celestery was further reworked in 1899 by Fellowes Prynne. It may be that the celestery is not quite as early as previously suggested (18<sup>th</sup> century) but was more likely developed in a series of closely set chronological phases of 19<sup>th</sup> century development.

## 2.5 HISTORIC PHASING OF THE ROOFS

The observed roof works confirmed or highlighted the known phasing within the building, as interpreted by Pevsner. For example, the timbers of the north chancel aisle are of a lighter scantling than those to the widened north nave aisle and the south aisle. This matches the expected phasing of the north chancel aisle as a later addition, when the chancel was further extended in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The widening of the rest of the aisles occurred in the later 15<sup>th</sup> century. This confirms a slow expansion and aggrandisement of the church from the 13-15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The main value of the recording work was in confirming the extent to which medieval fabric survives within the church and how, despite appearances, much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century work was cosmetic, such as outer skims to walls and window insertions. Of particular note is how the timbers/trusses of the roofs are predominately surviving medieval structures with little modern interference save lightweight overlays carrying the modern slate roofing. Generally, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century ceiling decoration or alterations are limited to the interior plaster elements of the roofs. Both south aisle and north chancel aisle roofs exhibit good surviving carpenters marks on the beams and the sequenced numbers indicate little to no later supplanting of truss blades, but some bracing and cutting out of localised rotten sections appears to have occurred in the 1940s phase of works on the south aisle, at the ridge.

The roof of the church has undergone several phases of repair in the early 1900s, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the 1940s. This phase used iron nails and larger slates, of a more even width and size. The south aisle roof particularly was sagging (the aisle was extended and is now surprisingly wide, the roof therefore under more stress). Modern timbers were attached to the back of the truss blades and battens braced off them, to make the roof more even and spread the weight of the slates. These timbers were all attached with iron nails and were very lightweight. On the north aisle roof, they were nailed to the backs of the truss blades to carry the battens but were required to balance out any sag in the roof (the north aisle is much narrower) so only shorter sections of reused narrow timber were used.

Previous 19<sup>th</sup> century phases used copper tacks and were of typical graduated scantle form, with some lime torching. Changes to the celestery area include changing the roofline markedly, using timbers from the church, probably in the first 1860s phase of restoration works.

An earlier phase of roofing used oak pegs and heavier thicker lime torching, was of scantle form and may have been an earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century phase of roof slating and repair, or even pre-1800, possibly associated with the first phase of celestery works/alterations at the juncture of nave and chancel.

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, ILFRACOMBE, DEVON

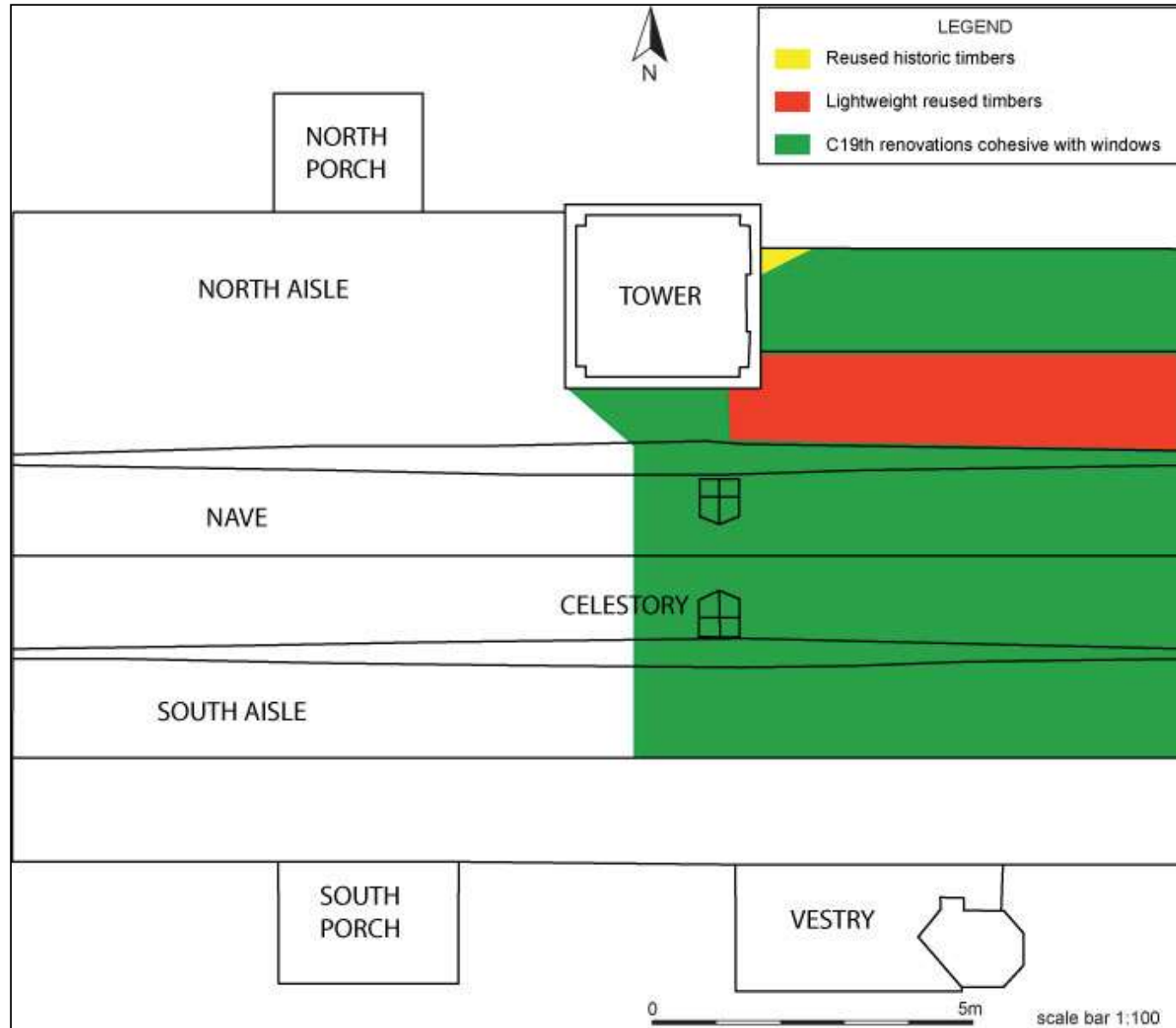


FIGURE 2: SKETCH PHASE PLAN FOR THE EXPOSED ROOFS.

## 3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 3.0 CONCLUSIONS

The parish church of the Holy Trinity is Grade I Listed, with a 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman church and tower, enlarged in the 1320s and the 15<sup>th</sup> century, before considerable renovations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The church of the Holy Trinity is the mother church to St. Peter's on Highfield Road.

The roofs at the eastern end of the church were stripped and reslated as part of a wider restoration project. The opening up of the roof allowed further analysis and information gathering, to add to the record of the Grade I Listed building. The areas viewed during the visit were the north aisles, north section beyond the tower and the north side of the chancel.

The observed roof works confirmed or highlighted the known phasing within the building, as interpreted by Pevsner. For example, the timbers of the north chancel aisle are of a lighter scantling than those to the widened north nave aisle and the south aisle. This matches the expected phasing of the north chancel aisle as a later addition, when the chancel was further extended in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The widening of the rest of the aisles occurred in the later 15<sup>th</sup> century. This confirms a slow expansion and aggrandisement of the church from the 13-15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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[http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer\\_google/googleviewer.html](http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer_google/googleviewer.html)

APPENDIX 1: SUPPORTING PHOTOGRAPHS



SOCKETS IN ONE OF THE REUSED BEAMS, SOUTH SIDE OF THE TOWER, SHOWING OTHER REUSED BEAMS USED TO FORM THE BARREL CEILING; FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.



DETAIL OF REUSED TIMBERS IN NORTH AISLE ROOF, SOUTH FACE, AGAINST TOWER; FROM THE SOUTH, SOUTH-EAST



AS ABOVE.



AS ABOVE.



PEG SLATE, INDICATING SCANTLE SLATE ROOF WITH OAK PEGS, RECOVERED FROM SOUTH FACE OF NORTH AISLE ROOF.



LEFT & RIGHT: THE THICK EAST STAGGERED RUBBLE WALL OF THE NORTH AISLE, SHOWING POSSIBLE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY OUTER SKIM REBUILD, WITH STONE COPING; FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.





THE CARPENTERS MARKS ON THE NORTH AISLE ROOF TIMBERS; FROM THE WEST-SOUTH-WEST.



LIGHTWEIGHT JOINTED TRUSSES WHICH CARRY THE BARREL VAULTED CEILINGS OVER THE NORTH AISLE, SHOWING PEGGED JOINTS AND MODERN TIMBERS ATTACHED TO BACK OF BLADES TO CARRY THE SLATED ROOF; FROM THE EAST, SOUTH-EAST.



LEFT: DETAILED VIEW OF THE TOWER, SHOWING THE EAST SIDE AND BLOCKED OPENINGS, INDICATING PHASING, ALSO SHOWING ODD ANGLE OF ROOFLINE WHERE ATTACHED TO TOWER; FROM THE EAST, NORTH-EAST.

RIGHT: 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ELABORATE WEATHERVANE IN FORM OF HISTORIC SAILING VESSEL; FROM THE ROOF OF THE VESTRY



SPLIT OAK LATHE USED IN SCANTLE SLATE ROOF, RECOVERED FROM THE SOUTH FACE OF THE NORTH AISLE ROOF.



PEG SLATE, FROM SCANTLE ROOF COVERING OVER NAVE AND NORTH AISLE, WITH ORIGINAL COPPER PIN/PEG.



THE CHURCH AND TOWER VIEWED FROM THE NORTH-EAST, SHOWING THE NORTH END OF THE NAVE, NORTH AISLE, AND NORTH TRANSEPTAL TOWER.



VIEW OF THE CHURCH, FROM THE LYCHGATE, SHOWING SOUTH PORCH, SOUTH AISLE AND THE LARGE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REPLACEMENT PERPENDICULAR STYLE STONE WINDOWS; FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.



ELABORATE LYCH GATE WITH SCANTLE SLATE ROOF AND PEGGED TIMBER FRAME, DATED 1836; FROM THE NORTH-WEST.



INSCRIBED STONE TO RIGHT OF ARCHED OPENING TO NORTH PORCH, WITH DATE OF 1866; FROM THE NORTH.



THE OPEN WAGON ROOF IN THE NORTH PORCH, SHOWING THE SECTIONS OF WALLPLATE WITH SQUARE LEAF AND FOLIATE GEOMETRIC DESIGNS, THE SAME AS THAT ON THE REUSED TIMBERS IN THE NORTH AISLE ROOF; FROM THE NORTH-WEST.



PEG SLATES, SHOWING TWO HOLES, INDICATING AT LEAST ONE REUSE, WITH LIME TORCHING REMOVED FROM THE NAVE AND NORTH AISLE ROOFS, ONE WITH INTACT OAK PEG.



HISTORIC ROOFLINE, SHOWING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PITCH WITHIN ROOF SPACE AGAINST SOUTH SIDE OF TOWER; FROM THE SOUTH-EAST.



LEFT: THREE REUSED TIMBERS WITHIN ROOF OF NORTH AISLE, BUILT AROUND NORTH TRANSEPT TOWER, PART OF A FORMER PARTITION; ALSO SHOWING FORMER ROOFLINE ON TOWER WALL, FROM THE SOUTH-SOUTH-EAST.  
RIGHT: HEAVIER TRUSSES OVER THE SOUTH AISLE ROOF.



HAMMER AND HANDMADE IRON TACKS/NAILS FOR ROOFING, FOUND IN SOUTH AISLE ROOF, INDICATING AN EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PHASE OF RESLATING/REPAIRS.



NEWSPAPER FROM 1948, THE ILFRACOMBE CHRONICLE, FOUND IN SOUTH AISLE ROOF.



CARPENTERS NUMBERING MARKS ON THE SOUTH AISLE TRUSSES.





LEFT: 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TIMBERS NAILED TO TRUSSES ON SOUTH AISLE TO CORRECT SAGGING AND BRACE AND REPLACE ROTTEN SECTIONS, SHOW A PHASE OF EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REPAIR AND RESLATING.

RIGHT: DETAILED VIEW OF THE CARVING ON REUSED TIMBER SEEN IN NORTH AISLE, AGAINST TOWER.



LEFT: AS ABOVE.

RIGHT: NORTH SIDE OF CHANCEL ROOF, WITH MODERN TIMBERS AND BATTENS OVER THE ORIGINAL ROOF STRUCTURE BENEATH.



VIEW INSIDE THE NORTH AISLE ROOF SHOWING ITS RELATIVELY NARROW WIDTH COMPARED TO THE OTHERS.



THE OLD DAIRY  
HACCHE LANE BUSINESS PARK  
PATHFIELDS BUSINESS PARK  
SOUTH MOLTON  
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