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## ST MARY'S CHURCH

STOCKLINCH OTTERSEY  
SOMERSET





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION  
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ST MARY'S CHURCH  
STOCKLINCH OTTERSEY, SOMERSET

*Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.*

*Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.*

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**SEAVINGTON, ST MARY**  
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**NORTHOVER, ST ANDREW**  
5 miles N of Yeovil on B3151

**THURLBEAR, ST THOMAS**  
3 miles SE of Taunton off A358

## ST MARY'S CHURCH

STOCKLINCH OTTERSEY, SOMERSET

by MARK McDERMOTT

### INTRODUCTION

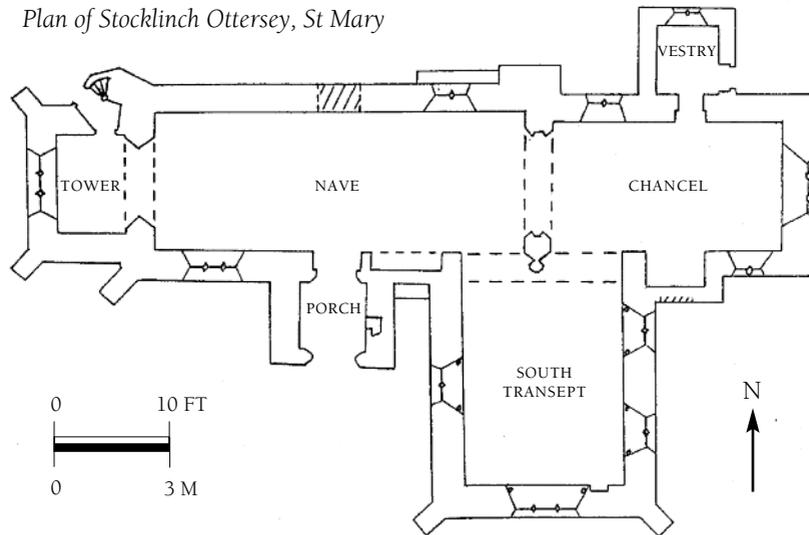
The village of Stocklinch lies on the lower slopes of a hill which has given the place its name: Old English 'stoc' means 'place' or 'secondary settlement' and 'hline' (sic) a hill. From St Mary's church, which occupies an isolated position on the hillside, there are extensive views west and south across the valley of the river Isle towards the Quantock and Blackdown Hills and, closer at hand, the village and church tower of Whitelackington and the grounds of Dillington House. The Ilminster bypass (A303) passes through the valley but at one time an important route between Ilchester and Taunton ran over the hill above Stocklinch village and crossed the river at Ilford Bridges.

The higher ground in the parish tends to be used for pasture or meadow and the lower-lying land for cereals, but the area was also known for growing hemp and flax in the past. Until the 19th century much of the land was still arranged in narrow strips in 'open' fields surviving from the mediaeval period. Traces of this pattern are still visible, especially in the form of cultivation terraces or 'lynchets', such as those which can be seen on the hillside above St Mary's church in a field known as 'The Linches'. This field was planted with specimen trees, probably in the 19th century, to create a parkland setting for Stocklinch Manor, the house south-west of the church, and some uneven ground to the west of the church may indicate a former area of settlement which could have been cleared at the same time.

### MANOR AND PARISH

Until 1931, when they were united, Stocklinch consisted of the distinct ecclesiastical parishes of Stocklinch Ottersey and Stocklinch Magdalen, but their lands (300 and 200 acres (121 and 81 hectares) respectively) were closely interwoven within a common overall outline. The shared name and

Plan of Stocklinch Ottersey, St Mary



geographical outline suggest that originally there was a single estate which subsequently split into two manors, each of which acquired a church and became a separate parish. This division may have occurred before 1086, for it has been argued that Stocklinch Ottersey can be identified with a Domesday Book manor named 'Stoche' which was held by one Alward and his brothers, and that their father, who had held it in 1066, was Siward, hawker to Edward the Confessor. The manor was certainly held by hawking sergeantry during the 12th–14th centuries and the title or name 'Ostricer' (Hawker) taken by, for instance, John le Ostricer who held the manor in the mid-13th century, was added to the place-name and eventually evolved into 'Ottersey'. The riverside terrain on the western and southern boundaries of the parish has been described as ideal hawking country.

From the 15th century the manor belonged to the Paulet or Poulett family of Hinton St George (Sir Amias Poulett (1536?–88) was Mary Stuart's keeper during her captivity). In the 19th century, however, the lordship of the manor and patronage of the church were held by the Allen family, who lived at Stocklinch Manor until well into the 20th century and who are commemorated by memorial tablets and stained glass in the south

transept of the church and by the glass in the east window of the chancel. The churchyard cross is also an Allen monument and the Jefferys and Allen vault lies under the tower arch.

The Jefferys family (unrelated to Judge Jeffreys, despite local tradition) was prominent in the parish in the 17th and 18th centuries. Marmaduke is referred to as a churchwarden in an inscription on the 1664 royal coat of arms over the south door of the church; an inscription on one of the bells, dated 1670, refers to John, another churchwarden; and there are more inscriptions on a stone slab in the transept.

Two other interrelated families, the Stephens' and the Hexts, are commemorated by memorial plaques in the nave and burials in the churchyard, including the tomb of John Hext (d.1824), with its classical mouldings.

## THE CHURCH

The style of the font suggests that there was a church on this site in the Norman period, but no architectural features survive from that time and the earliest known documentary references occur in the 14th century: in 1321, for instance, Thomas Thok was instituted as rector of Stocklynch Hoterser. The present building, consisting of chancel, north vestry, south transept, nave, south porch and west tower, is built of golden Hamstone (much of it clad with silvery-grey lichen) and derives further charm from its intimate scale and delightful setting. The roofs are mainly of slate, but surviving Hamstone tiles at the eaves indicate the earlier form of roof-covering.

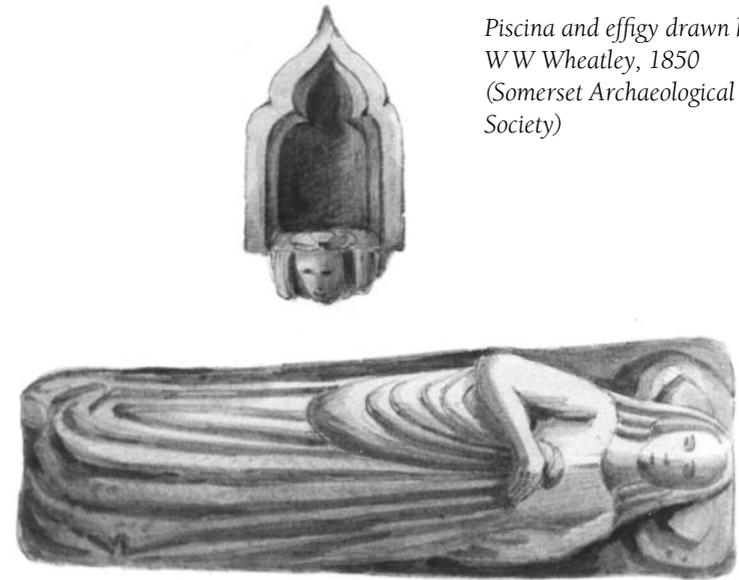


*The font drawn by J Buckler 1835 (Somerset Archaeological Society)*



*South window c.1300  
of south transept, with  
its unusual tracery*  
(CHRISTOPHER  
DALTON)

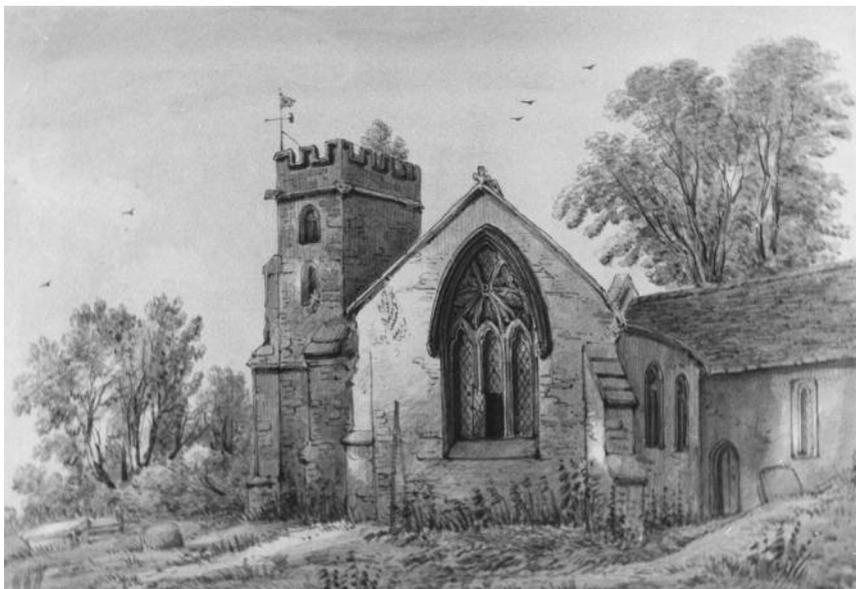
The most striking feature of the building is the south transept built in the Decorated style of the late-13th or early-14th century. This includes a remarkable three-light south window with radiating tracery and a rere-arch with pierced cusping. This window and the two-light east and west windows (with more modest Decorated tracery) have side-shafts to the internal reveals. To the north, two double-chamfered arches, supported by an octagonal central column and by corbels with carved heads, open into nave and chancel respectively (an unusual arrangement). High in the wall above the arches is a quatrefoil, now blocked, the original function of which is unclear. In the south wall is a piscina with a carved head (simi-



*Piscina and effigy drawn by  
WW Wheatley, 1850*  
(Somerset Archaeological  
Society)

lar to those on the corbels) beneath the bowl, and on the sill of the south window is a repositioned female effigy believed to date from the late 13th century. The transept walls, which contain some reused moulded stonework, including a gravestone with a floriated cross, were reinforced and the roof reconstructed in 1910.

The porch has a roof of stone slabs. The porch entrance and nave south doorway have wave-mouldings, but only the outline of the blocked north doorway is visible. The east jamb of the south doorway shares some stonework with a tomb-recess in Decorated style in the south wall of the nave: this has a cusped ogee arch with carved lobes instead of points to the cusps. The external weathering on the projecting back of the recess is similar to that on a projection on the north side of the nave, which presumably forms the back of another tomb-recess which has been blocked internally. The south-west nave buttress also has similar weathering, and the remains of the thick west wall of the nave suggest that this supported a bell-cote in the 14th century. Windows in Perpendicular style (of varying forms and dates) were subsequently inserted into the nave, and the west tower was added. The tower has diagonal buttresses and a battlemented



*The Church in 1850 drawn by WW Wheatley (Somerset Archaeological Society)*

top; two-light belfry windows and a three-light west window, all with Perpendicular tracery; but no west door.

Within the church the tower arch has Perpendicular mouldings, as does the panelled chancel arch. The south side of the chancel arch has been built against the octagonal column of the transept arcade, which has been distorted by lateral pressure. The form, and even the position, of the preceding chancel arch is unknown. An unusually shaped external buttress beyond the north side of the present arch may perhaps have contained a rood-stair.

The chancel was heavily restored in the 19th century: the two-light south window has replaced a lancet which existed in 1850, and the north and east windows (the latter in Early English style) and the vestry also appear to be Victorian. The organ recess, in which the mediaeval priest's door shown in 1850 has been rebuilt in blocked form, dates from 1928. The chancel roof was apparently completely rebuilt in 1974, but the nave roof is said to retain some mediaeval timbers above the 19th century wagon ceiling.

The tower contains an oak bell frame believed to be of 17th or 18th century date including some reused earlier timberwork. Of the three bells, the tenor (largest) is a late mediaeval casting from the Bristol foundry – it was cracked but has recently been welded by a specialist firm at Lode near Cambridge. The treble and second bells were cast by Somerset founders, the former in 1670 by RA and TB, whose identities are uncertain, and the latter in 1637 by William Purdue III.

## THE CHANTRY

Ralph de Stokelinche, who was patron of Stocklinch Ottersey church, founded a chantry in c.1330 and in 1442 the chantry priest was described as chaplain of the perpetual chantry at the altar of St Mary in the parish church. It seems extremely likely that the chantry was accommodated in the transept (which contained an altar, as the piscina indicates) although expert opinion has suggested that the transept may have been built slightly earlier than the date of the record of the endowment of the chantry.

In some cases the same man was both chantry priest and rector, as in 1448 when a priest named Lewis Davy was appointed to both positions. This seems to be the last known reference to the chantry, although it is known that Thomas Gunwyne became rector in 1452 when Davy resigned. When the chantries were suppressed in the 1540s during the Reformation no reference was made to a chantry at Stocklinch Ottersey and it is conceivable that the positions of chantry priest and rector had merged after 1448 and that the chantry endowment had become absorbed into the rector's glebe, which in 1606 included two pieces of land called 'Chantry haye' and 'Chauntery pitt'.

## LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Within the tower are 18th and 19th century benefaction boards recording charitable donations by members of the Jefferys and Allen families; two low forms at present in the belfry may be those which were made in 1822 'for the children to sit on in church'; and two boards inscribed with the Ten Commandments at the west end of the nave must be survivals of the work of John Best of Shepton Beauchamp who in 1819 was paid £3 17s 6d for putting up the Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer.

The church was restored, apparently without drastic remodelling, in 1840 but in 1856 a vestry meeting agreed to permit the Revd Charles Jefferys Allen (who was lord of the manor, patron of the living and rector) to alter the church 'according to the plans produced with an understanding that no rate should be raised for the work'. The exact details of Allen's scheme are unknown but it seems likely that this was the occasion of the restoration of the chancel and the addition of the vestry. The font was refashioned at some time between 1850 and 1898 to provide it with a stem between the bowl and the base.

The communion table dates from the 17th century, but the choir stalls, reading desk, pulpit and pews all seem to date from the Victorian period or the early 20th century. When the transept was restored in 1910 other work included repairs to decayed pews, although the faculty does not refer to the new pews recommended by the architect.

## THE CHURCHYARD

The churchyard, which contains an ancient yew tree, was apparently altered in 1857 when the Revd CJ Allen was permitted to proceed with another scheme, based on a report by the architect James Mountford Allen. Again no details are available, but the scheme may have included the Allen memorial cross.

## PAROCHIAL REORGANISATION

The benefices of Stocklinch Ottersey and Stocklinch Magdalen were combined in 1886, but the two small ecclesiastical parishes were not united until 1931 when the combined population had declined to 123. Of the two Stocklinch churches, Ottersey (St Mary the Virgin) is architecturally more impressive, but access to it was difficult in bad weather and it is still only equipped with oil lamps and candles. After a period when services were only held during the summer months it became redundant and in 1973 was transferred to the care of the Redundant Churches Fund (now The Churches Conservation Trust). Repairs of a general nature have been carried out for the Trust under the supervision of Mr Kenneth Wiltshire and, more recently, Mr John Schofield. An annual Anglican service is still held in the church and in September 1993 a Latin mass was conducted – perhaps for the first time since the Reformation.

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- The author acknowledges with gratitude the help given by Mrs R Harding of Stocklinch, Tom Mayberry, Mary Siraut and the late Dr John Harvey.

*Front cover: The church on its hillside from the south-west* (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

*Back cover: Interior looking east* (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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