

Standing Building Report

Holy Cross Church Avening

Project Data

Site: Holy Cross
Parish: Avening
County: Gloucestershire
Diocese: Diocese of Gloucester
Archdeaconry: Cheltenham
Deanery: Cirencester
Revd: Celia Cater
Benefice: Avening with Cherington

Landowner: Church of England
Contact: D. Pierce
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Avening
Gloucestershire
GL8 8PB

Survey Method: Photographic survey
Date of Survey: Drawn January 2008, updated April 2012
Survey team: Emma Slater
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Photographs: Antony Slater – Slater4Ltd.

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1.0 Introduction

This Standing Building Report has been produced for the main assessments of the Standing Building until as part of the Landscape Archaeology Masters at Bristol University. This report presents the results of a detailed survey of the 12th Century Holy Cross church, Avening. It is elaborating on a previous study of the Church which was produced in 2008 by Emma Slater. Sections of this report are currently being used on the Holy Cross website.

Permission was kindly granted for this report to take place and the survey to be undertaken by Revd C. Cater. In 2008 Holy Cross was drawn to scale and it was updated and amended in April 2012.

There have been numerous reports done on Holy Cross but each highlights different aspects of the church's long complicated history. This report tries to tie all of these together and come up with a complete history, analysing when the church was altered and why.

1.1 Location

Holy Cross, Avening is in the Diocese of Gloucester and sits on the Southern side of the valley, which the village of Avening is situated within. The church is towards south west of the village, and is set back from the main high street (B4014). Avening is a picturesque village situated in the Cotswolds, South West of Gloucestershire South West England. The village is placed at the bottom of a valley which has Nailsworth 5 km to the North West and Tetbury 5.6 km to the South East (figure 1). The medieval village has a population of c.1000 making it one of the largest in the southern Cotswolds. The rolling hills surrounding the village bring people from far, a constant stream of ramblers and visitors occupy the local public houses and wondering throughout the village. Avening got its name from the River Avon that runs through the village.

1.2 Geology and Topography

The village of Avening is spread along the bottom of a large limestone valley which runs from the west of the village all the way to the closest town, Nailsworth to the North West.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The department of Archaeology and Anthropology at Bristol University runs a Masters degree in Landscape Archaeology for which this Standing Building Report has been produced for the Standing Building unit. This assignment has been designed to help students gain an understanding of how Standing Building reports are produced and what is required to produce a high standard report on different buildings.

The secondary aim is to compile a fill history for the Holy Cross. This is, as stated previously, because many reports have been produced on the church all giving different sections of it's complicated history. Understanding Holy Cross history is important to both the church and the local residents of Avening as the church is still at the heart of the community. Putting all of these histories together will help identify what happened to the church, this is important because Holy Cross has been altered in many ways multiple times.

2.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

Holy Cross is an important part of the community of Avening, most Sundays the church is full and overflowing at special occasions in the Christian calendar like Easter and Christmas.

2.1 History of the Area

Despite Avening being a small village in the Cotswolds, it has a lot of history. People have occupied Avening from Prehistory. It is possible to trace the growth of Avenings' modern population through many different historical sources. Holy Cross has grown in size and been altered with the growth of the local population. The following information was gained from sources provided by Gloucestershire Archives and through investigation of previous tax records and other historical documents.

2.1.1 Prehistory

There is clear evidence that Avening was occupied throughout Later Prehistory. There is no evidence for occupation in the Palaeolithic, although a small microlith has been found which can be dated to the Mesolithic.

Surrounding Avening there are 3 Neolithic Long Barrows, one of which contains 11 skeletons in 3 different chambers, was excavated in 1806. Several flint fragments from a hand axe have also been found when fields have been ploughed. There are several potential Bronze Age round barrows, many of which have trees growing on top. An Iron Age enclosure can be found in crop marks but it has yet been excavated.

2.1.2 Roman

Despite Avening only being 9 miles away from Cirencester, one of the largest Roman towns, there is very little evidence Roman occupation. Only one coin has been found. A fragment of Samian ware, apparently found in association with a human skeleton by workmen making up the road near Old Hill, was taken to Gloucester City Museum for identification by Canon Cooper, rector of Avening. The skull and the 2 bones are once kept in the Holy Cross but have been moved into storage.

2.1.3 Early Medieval, Medieval and Post Medieval

Apart from the Anglo- Saxon cemetery that was found while the local primary school was expanding their play ground, and the 12th Century church (Holy Cross), most of the evidence comes from Post Medieval times. Within this Anglo- Saxon cemetery, seven skeletons were found quite close to the surface. One of these skeletons was in an excellent sate of preservation, and again like the Roman burial it was for a while held inside Holy Cross Church in a glass case its current location it not known. The note with the skeleton stated that it is that of a young woman, and dates to c.500-600AD. The skeleton was found with edged with stones which can also be seen in the church - they were originally arranged around the body in a single line.

Holy Cross, Avening was built on a Saxon church site, the evidence for which can be seen in the fragmentary carved stones inserted in the west wall of the north aisle, which bears Saxon designs. These fragments were recovered during restoration works at the end of the 19th century and are the only surviving remains of the Saxon church. Holy Cross was built for Queen Matilda and has grown with the population changes of the village.

Surrounding Avening there are ten Hollow Ways which can be dated to Post Medieval. Several of these are still used today as local footpaths. There are earthwork remains of a Post Medieval quarry and four square dew ponds. Due to the amount of modern ploughing and the reuse of the same fields only a single block of ridge and furrow remain.

2.1.4 Modern

There are many different modern elements to Avening, including several houses numbered 14, 16 &18 on Woodstock lane which can be dated to the 17th century, an 18th century mile stones, a 19th century Baptist church which built in 1805 and altered in 1821. The site of an old corn mill dating to the early 19th century can still be seen. There are remains of many 19th century quarries scattered around the village. Avening as a village grew with the growth of the wool trade in the Cotswolds in the 19th century. It is possible to see this growth from looking at many historical records that are available for public access and through map regression. The wool trade brought with it modern changes to the village, the main alteration was the mill

that was built in the early 19th century, with that came more houses as the population grew. There is still evidence of the World War II defence system which was put in place during June 1945 as part of Line green that was put in place to defend Bristol.

2.2 Previous Archaeological Investigations

As stated previously, Holy cross has had numerous investigations and reports done on it but none have brought all its history together, which this report aims to do bringing the history together to explain the changes in the church. The project done in 2008 By Emma Slater started on the task of identifying these alterations which occurred to the church but due to in experience was not successful to identify all of the changes and their dates.

2.3 Site visits

Site visits were very important to this standing building report, as Holy cross has been altered so much since the 12th Century. Despite being a member of the Holy Cross choir, I was unable to see the church and its full archaeology potential until I started attending services on a regular basic as a member of the congregation. Being a member of the local community I have grown up knowing about different parts of the church, but being talk to talk to the other members of the congregation and getting their accounts of Holy Cross and how it has changed to them was a important to this reports and vital in trying to understand the relationship between how the church was altered.

2.4 Tax Records and Historical Documents

There are several tax records and historical documents that are available for Avening and its population, but one needed to know more local history and name changes to use them to their full potential. The following list is the documents which I used to gain a further understanding of Avening in hoping identify when the church was altered and more important why.

- The Domesday Book
- Maps – modern and historical
- National Tax Return records

- Poll Tax records
- Hearth Tax records
- Longtree Hundred tax records
- “Men and Armour in Gloucestershire” – historical document
- The Census
- Victorian County History (VCH)

I started looking at the Domesday Book (1086) to see if there was anything useful to me. I came across much information, which helped me develop my question and start looking at the economic and social factors of the village. Looking at the Domesday Book I first found out that Avening was part of the Longtree Hundred. Because I did not really understand what this meant I looked it up and found out that the county was divided up into ‘Hundreds’, and that each Hundred leader came to Chavenage Green every 4 months to talk about political events, which is how Chavenage house developed. At the time, Brictric owned Avening, which was in Longtree Hundred. Looking at the Domesday Book I also found out that Avening must have been a valuable manor because of the number of slaves that they had. It also shows that Avening was full of agriculture because they had 16 ploughs and a large area for ploughing; 4 mills; and also lots of woodland for the sheep. Once I had found out about the Longtree Hundred it was much easier to find more information about Holy Cross and the village.

Maps are very important when it comes to looking at the economic and social factors in a village because you are able to see how it has either increased in size over time, or decreased, which Avening did.

The National Tax Return (1327) gives the population of the whole of Longtree Hundred, but from that I was able to get the population for, what are now different villages, but were once in Avening. It also gives surnames. The only problem with the National Tax Return is that only the rich people were taxed. About ¼ of the population was not counted because they did not have an income so they did not get taxed.

The Poll Tax (1381) taxes every individual, so in this way it is better than the National Tax Return. It is also helpful that it is after the Black Death, because this meant I was able to compare it with the National Tax Return and see how the Black Death affected the population of Avening. Once I had gone through that, the Poll Tax gives the population of the people in Avening.

The 'Men in Armour for Gloucestershire' (1608) gives the names of the adult males who are able to fight. It also gives their surnames, and with this you can identify their occupations, as their surnames reflect this. It gives this both for Avening and Nailsworth which was originally part of Avening.

The Compton Census of 1676 gives the number of Conformists (Church of England) and Paposis (Roman Catholics) and Non-Conformists. This was probably taken on an Easter Sunday when everyone would have been at church. This also shows that the church and people's denominations are starting to change.

Kelly's Directory of the County of Gloucestershire of 1879 and 1927 gives a detailed location of Avening. From this article you can see that the location has altered slightly because of the transport links, which changed due to the developments in transport, which in turn changed due to the transformation in industry.

The Victoria County History (VCH) is a very important secondary source because it provided me with the first map of the parish boundaries. From this I got a more detailed plan. It also gives names of the manors and other estates, and who owned them. It talks about the economic history and how it changed.

It also gives the first information on the church. It says that it was given to Queen Matilda by the nuns of Caen. It also gives a basic floor plan, and explains what happened to the Non-Conformists.

The final source I looked at was the History of the Parishes of Minchinhampton and Avening. It gives detailed characteristics but from reading both of the VCH and this, I came to the conclusion that this was basically written from the VCH. However, it did come up with some interesting conclusions.

Listed below are the population figures of Avening and .

The Domesday Book 1086 breaks down who is in the village so it was a simple sum to get the total population for 1086.

$$24 + 5 + 30 + 1 = 60 \text{ adult males} \times 4.5 \text{ (multiplier)}$$
$$= \text{c.}270 \text{ inhabitants in Avening.}$$

The National Tax return 1327 gives several names of places which all came under Avening so I added all of them together to get the estimated population for 1327.

$$11 \times 4.5 = 49.5$$

$$28 \times 4.5 = 126$$

$$11 \times 4.5 = 49.5$$

$$= 49.5 + 126 + 49.5 = 225.$$

This is lower than the Domesday Book because very poor people were not taxed, which could have been up to a quarter of the population. A guesstimate of the population would be $225 + 56.25 = 281.25$ people, which increases it to a good population for a village of this time and size.

The Poll Taxes of 1381 gives a population of c.204 inhabitants.

$$58 \text{ adult males} = 64 \text{ but } 8 \text{ not married so } 56 \times 3.5 = 196 + 8 = \text{c.}204.$$

This population is much lower than the national tax return population in 1327 because of the Black Death in 1348, which had a major effect on the population, not only in Avening but throughout England.

Men and Armour of 1608 identifies the number of adult males who are able to fight.

$$\text{Avening} = 75 \times 4.5 = 337 + 15 = 352 \text{ inhabitants}$$

$$\text{Nailsworth} = 58 \times 4.5 = 261 + 2 = 263 \text{ inhabitants}$$

Which gives a total population of c.480.

The Census in 1676 gives a population of c.612.5

$$= 340 / 2 = 170 \times 3.5 = \text{c.}612.5.$$

This information is important when looking at the development of the church.

In C 17th the wool trade is starting to develop which means the population can start to develop – this is happening. Because of the increasing population in C 18th the galleries are added to the church making room for 400 more people in the church. In 1892 Nailsworth became its own village so the population fell.

Between 1831 and 1841 there was a decline in the wool trade and many people migrated to Australia.

This table shows an overview of the population;

Date	Population
1086 (doomsday book)	c.270
1327 (national tax return)	c. 281.25
1381 (poll taxes)	c.204
1608 (men in armour)	c.480
1676 (census)	c.612.5

After looking at the population, I needed to understand why the population had increased.

When you look at maps of Avening in the 1800s, there is as clear sign that there is a large population. The parish boundaries are much bigger than they are at present day. This is because Nailsworth and Forest Green have become their own towns, leaving Avening sitting between them and Tetbury. The size of the original village can be seen in [map 100](#) and the present village can be seen in [map 101](#).

Looking at these figure it is clear to see why Holy cross had to increase in size.

2.5 History of Holy Cross

4.0 Results

These are the results from a detailed photographic study of Holy Cross. Starting at the entrance porch; this was added as a school house in the C 16th. It is clearly identifiable as the Tudor period because of the square window (fig 312). It was used as a small museum in 1972.

At the Western end of the Nave there is a blocked off door. There is no evidence to identify what it was used for, but there is evidence both inside and outside for the door (figs 3430 and fig 3405).

The whole west wall was rebuilt in the C18th following its collapse. On the west wall there is also evidence that the trench around the outside of the church was deepened in C20th, as there are kerb stones at the original level (fig 3432). This could have been done to improve protection against dampness.

On the South side of the church there is a filled in door to the C19th galleries. There would have been a platform across the drainage trench and into the galleries (fig 305). As well as the filled in door, there is also dating evidence in the windows. There are 3 Decorated Gothic windows which date to the early C14th; the middle window is later than the other two. The stonework is freestone coursing, especially below the eastern most window. The darker stone suggests that it was below ground until C20th (fig 301) when the trench around the church was deepened.

The tower has six bells incorporated into it. It was originally built with five, but in 1830 the people of Avening stole the treble bell from St Nicholas Church in Cherington and added to this tower to make it a ring of six. One is by Abraham Rudhall, inscribed 'Prosperity to this Parish, 1756'. Three are dated Anno Domini 1628 and one with no date. In 1902 part of the tower collapsed, destroying the east end of the nave roof and part of the north aisle. When the repairs were done, they incorporated much of the original material. Most of the tower is built with free stone.

On the west wall of south transept there is clear evidence for it being partly rebuilt - this shown in fig 302. On the same transept, again in the restoration, you can see that they have used the same stones from both this part of the church and others. In fig 3442 you can see the blocked-in perpendicular window. Opposite this window is the newest part of the church, the vestry. Around it you can clearly see how this side of the church looked before the vestry was added. The exact date is not known, but with reference to the plans which were produced in 1827-1829 (plan 200 and plan 201) you can see that it was already there.

On the eastern end of the church, the window is a decorated gothic shape dating from C 14th. This can be identified by the original carvings and the stops (fig 307). When measuring this side of the church you can see that the floor level outside is different to that of the inside. Talking to people and looking in the inside, I think that it would have been used as a grave. There are grave stones set into the floor on the inside, which would clarify this because there are no burials outside of the church before the 1700's.

On the north side of the Chancel there is some evidence that in the early C 13th a small chapel existed. The evidence is the door jams which are very visible and there is also a 'step' which would have been used to enter the chapel, as the floor level would have been lower than that of the other parts of the church (Fig309). There is also a piscina which would have held the bread and wine for communion. Just above the evidence for the extra chapel there is a blocked in Norman window. This can be identified by its shape - it has an oval curve at the top, and the outside of the window is much smaller than the inside because they did not have glass. The windows were small on the outside and panned out inside to let more light in (fig 309 and fig 325). There is also clear evidence of lifts, each between 1½ - 2 ft which are finished off with the bigger stones (fig 308)

The church retains Norman features including the door into the nave (fig 314) of the church and the chancel walls and ceiling (fig 324). I got this not just from the wall thickness but the style and shape of the windows. The door going into the nave is the original Norman arch that was created by the nuns of Caen who built the church for Queen Matilda, this is very important because the door is very high status.

As you go inside the church through the Tudor porch, you pass through the original Norman door. The door is of a high status for a church door (fig 315). This is because Avening was owned by Bricitc who gave the estates were then given to Queen

Matilda who gave it to the nuns of Caen, who then built the church of Queen Matilda. As she was a very important person the door way was build for her standards.

As you look to the right (north porch doorway) as you go in, there is a Norman sculptural stone set in probably showing the gifting of the estate to Caen Abbey (fig 319).

There are also sculptural stones set into west wall of the north aisle, they are stones from the original font that was demolished and placed into the wall (fig 320)

On the East wall of the nave into the tower there is a Norman archway with decorated capitals; the upper section was rebuilt in early English style (Fig 328). This also shows the social changes. Removing the top of the rounded Norman arch and replacing it with a pointed English style top because it was more fashionable to have this. But because only one of the arches was reshaped, this may not have been considered successful; otherwise they would have changed the other arches in the same way. Possibly it was a financial issue?