

Template for a statement of significance

Please use this template in conjunction with the guidance released on the Church of England website

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/statements-significance-and-needs>

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The template was last issued in May 2025 by the Cathedral and Church Buildings Department, Church Commissioners and has been produced under the remit of the Church Buildings Council pursuant to its powers under section 55(1)(d) of the Dioceses, Mission and Pastoral Measure 2007.

Section 1. Your building and churchyard: its significance

Location and setting

- *Is it a rural, urban or suburban area?*
- *Is it in a historic settlement, or one that has more recently developed?*
- *How do the architecture and history of the church and the place relate?*
- *Are there distant or near views of the church and its setting?*
- *How do the trees or green spaces contribute to the setting?*

The Parish of Craswall lies on the north east slope of the Black Mountains and, in character, represents a transition from the narrow, steep sided valleys of the Black Mountains to the gentler hills sloping down to the Golden Valley and the Hereford plain. It is the most rural parish in Herefordshire with an approximate area of 21 square kilometres and a population (as recorded in the 2011 census) of just 153 people in 60 households. Archaeological evidence of people using and living in the area is found mostly on higher ground and, within the parish, comes from the Cefn Hill on the north east boundary. It is probably significant, therefore, that the church of St Mary is also situated on a fairly elevated spur looking down the Monnow Valley, just above the confluence of the Cwm y Canddo and Monnow rivers. Though there is no specific evidence for a very early foundation, the location of the church would seem to speak of great antiquity.

The dedication of the church to St Mary links it with Craswall Priory, founded by Walter de Lacey, Lord of Ewyas Harold, between 1220-1225. The ruins of the Priory lie about 1.6 km to the north west of the church on the east bank of the Cwm y Canddo river. It was one of only three houses of the French order of Grandmont in Britain, and Grandmont churches were always dedicated to St Mary. The Priory was suppressed in 1462 because it was a foreign order. It quickly fell into ruins and was cannibalized as a source of building material for use on nearby farms as well as, probably, the parish church.

The appearance and construction the church has much in common with other churches in this border areas. The squat, solid body of the church surmounted by a weather-boarded bell turret is very similar to the churches at Capel-y-Ffin, St Margarets and Rhulen. Although the foundations are no doubt of great antiquity, the earliest dateable details are of the 14th-15th century.



Alfred Watkins photograph of St Mary's from 1928 from a collection held by the Herefordshire Libraries.



A view of the church taken in 2023 from a similar location, showing the south elevation.

Churchyard: memorials, natural environment, biodiversity and archaeology

- *What is known about the history of the churchyard? Has it had extensions or a change of boundary?*
- *How are boundaries and entrances marked?*
- *Are there any significant gravestones, memorials or war memorials?*
- *Is the church or churchyard used by protected species such as bats, dormice, badgers, or barn owls?*
- *Is the church or churchyard a habitat for wildlife and plants?*
- *Are there any ancient, large or rare trees?*
- *Is the churchyard managed to encourage wildlife, and if so, how?*
- *Are there archaeological remains?*

The churchyard is unsuitable for burials, as there is only a thin depth of soil with solid bedrock beneath. There are only two stones visible, and these are marked enigmatically with the letter 'W' and are more likely boundary stones than gravestones. On the north side of the church there is a large, roughly rectangular, shallow depression against the wall of the church which was used as a fives court. A red line was still visible on the wall of the church in 1938, and there appears to be more plaster left in this area than elsewhere on the north wall. The game was evidently popular in Herefordshire as there are records of it being played at several other local churches. A depression in the northwest corner of the churchyard is said to have been used as a cock pit and a visitor who had lived in the parish as a child, recalled that his father had told him of seeing it used for cock fighting contests when he was a child in the 1840s.

Opposite the south porch there is a square plinth consisting of three steps of dry-stone construction with a socket in the centre for a preaching cross. Similar bases may be seen at St Margaret's and Michaelchurch Escley. Craswall's stone base now has a Celtic cross carved in yew wood from the nearby Michaelchurch estate by the former churchwarden Ken Watkins and dedicated in 2015.



The Celtic cross carved by Ken Watkins.

It is an exact copy of the 7th-9th century Neaudd Siarman stone cross now in the Brecknock Museum and Art Gallery, Brecon.

Close to the churchyard boundary on the southeast side, there is a fragment of an ancient yew tree, still alive, although now much overshadowed by hazel trees. A report on the Ancient Yew Group's website from November 2016 by Paul Wood indicates that it must once have been a significant size, with a girth of approximately 6.5m. There is an existing photograph in the Herefordshire libraries' collection, of the preaching cross taken in 1928 by Alfred Watkins, showing the yew tree in the background (see photograph below).



A pile of broken stones around the remnants of the tree indicate that it was once surrounded by stone seating or a plinth.

The churchyard was once graced by several magnificent beach trees, all but one of which died following the drought of 1976, probably due to the shallow depth of soil and underlying bedrock. They were replaced by oak trees in the early 1980s. There is a substantial ash tree growing about 15m to the west of the church. However, this is showing signs of ash dieback and is currently under investigation and, if found to be unsafe, may have to be felled. There is also a large Scot's pine tree close to the kissing gate on the northwest corner of the churchyard. Beside it, and running eastwards along the northern boundary there is a small area of rough woodland comprising hazel, birch, maple, holly, young oak, and sycamore trees with an understorey of elder and bramble. Between this and the church is a substantial area of open ground, now managed as a wildflower meadow. It supports a wide variety of native plants including stitchwort, knapweed, dog mercury, cuckoo pint, speedwell, pignut, hare bells, bitter vetch, ladies mantle, yellow archangel, red campion, and celandine.



Yellow Archangel



Pignut, Ribsworth Plantain and Hare Bells

During an inspection in June 2025 by Daniel Howgego of Aware Ecology some scattered bat droppings were found within the church, and a single bat was seen in the crevice beneath the roof tiles. It was also noted that 'The church provides suitable roosting features, including gaps within the eaves and beneath the stone tiles. The site collectively provides a high-quality roosting habitat for bats, while the surrounding landscape offers high quality foraging and commuting habitats. The site is well connected to the broader landscape. Bat species recorded within 2km of the site include Common Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared.'

Social history and value to the community

- *What does the community think of the building?*
- *Is the building a source of identity, distinctiveness or social interaction?*
- *Are there any historical events or people associated with the church?*
- *Is the church or churchyard used for special events during the year, aside from regular activities?*
- *Are there important memories associated with the church or churchyard?*

St Mary's church, the village hall and The Bull's Head pub are the only community spaces which still exist within the parish of Craswall. The parish has no school, or village shop or other place where local people would naturally come together, meet for a casual chat, or just see one another in the course of going about their normal business. As such, the church plays an extremely important part in helping to maintain the cohesion of the community.

The majority of people living in the parish are involved with farming in one way or another and multi-generational, family-owned farms are still the norm. Farming would once have been much more social occupation, with even small farms employing several workers year-round, and taking on extra hands at busy times. Neighbours would get together several times a year to help with gathering sheep off the common grazing areas, shearing and harvesting and would meet regularly at the weekly markets in Hay-on-Wye and Abergavenny. Nowadays, however, farming can be a very lonely, isolated occupation, with farms run by just one man helped perhaps by his wife and children. Children living in the parish travel to Longtown, Michaelchurch Escley, Peterchurch or Hereford to attend school. In recent years some farms have diversified by converting barns and outbuildings into self-catering cottages or opening campsites, and increasingly, when houses come up for sale in the valley, they are bought by 'people from off'. The village hall, which is owned by the community, offers a venue for various activities and every year it hosts the Harvest Festival meal and a Christmas party, but the church is the only place in the parish where there are regular gatherings at which anybody from within or without the community can simply turn up and find a warm reception. In addition, the church is always open and visitors are welcome at any time of the day.

Services are held regularly on the third Sunday of the month, and are attended by a small but loyal congregation. The Harvest festival service in October and

Christmas services are well attended when the church is filled to capacity. There is also a regular monthly coffee morning on the first Sunday of the month. In addition, the church hosts music concerts organised by Concerts for Craswall, and offers night sanctuary to pilgrims walking the Golden Valley Pilgrim Way. The Craswall Barbeque, held early in July in the churchyard, is an important event on the local calendar. Not only does it raise funds for the church but it is an opportunity for neighbours, old, new and former residents and visitors to meet, and catch up on local news, and enjoy a variety of traditional games.

The church also receives a steady stream of visitors throughout the year, many of whom sign out visitors' book and comment on how beautiful, peaceful and calm it is. Visitors come from far and near and a quick look at the book reveals that recently it has had visitors from Bristol, Swindon, London, Chichester as well as Berlin and St Louis, Missouri.

Church building: exterior

You could use sections of the building e.g. nave, chancel, tower if that is helpful.

- *Is this building listed? If so, what grade?*
- *When was a church first established on the site and how has it changed over time?*
- *Are there phases of building or alterations?*
- *Does the style link to architectural and artistic trends?*
- *Who are the architects, artists, craftspeople or benefactors who have been involved?*
- *What are the building materials?*
- *What is aesthetically, historically, archaeologically or socially special about each area of the church?*

St Mary's is a Grade II* listed building (List number 1078203), currently on the Heritage at Risk register. The nave and chancel, which occupy the eastern end of the building, date from the 14th-15th century, while the room at the west end, once used as a school and still known locally as 'the schoolroom', is almost certainly a later addition, possibly added in the first quarter of the 18th century. The building is constructed of red sandstone rubble without dressed quoins, with a weather boarded bell turret, and a roof tiled in stone on the south slope and slate on the north slope. In Alfred Watkins' 1928 photograph of the church (see above) the roof looks to be free of the lichens which can clearly be seen to have colonised it in the recent photograph beneath. This would indicate that, despite the occasional slipped tile evident in the photograph, it had not long been reroofed.

The porch, which was probably added at the same time as the schoolroom, is quite typical of the area. The outer doorway has been altered since the Alfred Watkins photograph, with a wooden lintel replacing a shallow stone arch. The roof is a braced collar beam type with the curved braces forming half round arches. There are stone slab shelves along either wall and in the east wall there is a recessed scoop with a quatrefoil head and back. The inner doorway, which has moulded jambs and a three centred head, is of a much earlier origin. This doorway, and the one to the east of it opening into the nave, possibly came from the ruins of Craswall Priory.



The west door



The east door

A photograph from the Woolhope transactions for 1904, reproduced below, shows a doorway in the south side of the Chancel at the Priory which is very similar to the east door.



CRASWALL PRIORY. SOUTH SIDE OF CHANCEL, INTERIOR,
Showing seats for sub-deacon, deacon, double piscina, priest's seat, and credence; also
the splay of one of the lancet windows.
No. 36. To face No. 31, between pages 272 and 273. Photo. by R. Clarke.

The exterior of the church has several interesting features, not least of which is the stone seating on the east and south walls of the church and the east wall of

the porch. There are only two other churches in this area, Llanveynoe, just down the valley, and Patricio, in Monmouthshire, that have this outdoor seating.

The square-headed east window is traditionally said to have come from Craswall Priory. It consists of three lights with cinquefoil heads and ogee mouldings and is of a late 14th to early 15th century date.



The two windows in the south wall, pictured below, were given by Mr Guy Trafford of Michaelchurch Court during restoration work carried out in 1883 by the Rev. K.R. Green using masonry from Alveley near Bridgenorth.



The north wall, although quite unexceptional, has several intriguing features. There are two stone slabs fixed to the wall adjacent to the fives court which were probably a scoreboard, and there appears to be more plaster left in this area than elsewhere on the wall.



The remains of six timbers projecting slightly from the wall probably supported the roof of a lean-to structure, possibly used as stabling for horses. There is also a distinct straight joint in the north wall and the wall plate above is joined roughly at this point, as it is on the southern wall, probably indicating a later construction date for the west end of the church.



There is a small dormer window in the south slope of the roof which provides natural light for a wooden loft or west gallery at the end of the church. This is an unusual feature and there are no other examples like it in the area.

The bell turret, weather-boarded with a pyramidal stone tile roof contains one bell. It was cast by Rudhall of Gloucester and weighs two hundredweight, with a diameter of 20.5 inches (52.07 cm). The inscription reads 'CRASWALL. W.M. RODGERS: WARDEN, A.R. 1729'.

Church building: interior

You could use sections of the building e.g. nave, chancel, tower if that is helpful.

- *What shape is the footprint, and what are the different sections of the building?*
- *What is it like inside the church? Is the interior large, small, tall, light, dark?*
- *What are the floors, roofs and walls like?*
- *Who are the architects, artists, craftspeople and/or benefactors involved?*
- *How it is lit and heated?*
- *What is aesthetically, historically, archaeologically or socially special about each area of the church?*

A number of features indicate that the church, as originally built, was shorter than it is now, extending just to the nave and chancel, and that the room on the west end, known locally as 'the schoolroom', was a much later addition. There is the straight join evident in the north wall; the difference in floor level between the two rooms; the width of the dividing wall (clearly excessive for an interior wall), which corresponds to the width of the walls in the nave and chancel, indicating that it was once an outside wall (the north, west and south walls of the schoolroom, while still substantial, are about 20cm thinner); and the roof truss in the schoolroom which of a different construction to those in the nave and chancel and appears to be of a much later date.

It is possible that somewhere there exists documentation (until 1858 Craswall was part of the Diocese of St David's in Wales) which would allow the addition of the schoolroom to be dated. However, there is perhaps a clue from the date 1729 inscribed on the bell and it seems probable that the schoolroom and porch were added around this time. If so, it may be that a doorway or window in the original west wall of the church, incorporating a four centred arch, was blocked up at the same time. The outline of this opening is still clearly visible and can be seen upstairs in the church where the job of infilling was never quite completed. Blocking it would not only have separated the schoolroom from the church but also have allowed for the installation of the west gallery, a wooden loft lit by a small dormer window, at the west end of the nave. The present day, low, square-headed doorway in the dividing wall was constructed using recycled Victorian timbers to form the lintel. This opening may have been made in the later 19th century and was noted in the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments for south west Herefordshire, published in 1930.

It is not known when the schoolroom was first used for that purpose, but it was certainly in use in the 19th century, when the fire place in the northwest corner was probably added (this is now defunct, as the chimney was removed after it became unsafe following a spate of storms). There is a piece of 13th century moulded corbel incorporated in this fireplace, which may have come from Craswall priory. A visitor to the church in 1938 recalled attending the school when he was a boy in the 1860s. It is said that the fee for attendance was one penny per day. Craswall village school was built in 1876 further down the valley and so the schoolroom would have been redundant after this date. It has also been related that farmers, in the 19th century brought their wool to the church and stored it there before going to wool fairs.

The schoolroom retains its original flagstone floor, which is approximately 35cm higher than the floor of the rest of the building. The flags near the doorway are broken and uneven in a way typically found in farmhouse kitchens where wood has been chopped to feed the fire. It is lit by a tall window in the west wall and a rather squat, square headed window, which is generally covered by a wooden shutter, in the south wall. Interestingly, the interior opening of the west window does not match the exterior opening. The interior opening is square headed while the exterior opening is round headed.



The west window.

The nave and chancel are undivided, although a low, plain wooden communion rail near the east end marks the beginning of the chancel. The east doorway is rather curious as the opening on the inner side does not match the profile of the opening on the outer side. The inner opening has chamfered jams with a three

centred arch, while the outer opening is much narrower and has a round arch. The door frame has been made to accommodate this difference, while the door itself, which is very ancient (and possibly comes from the Priory), more closely matches with the inner opening.

The roof over the nave and chancel is supported by 6 slender arched braced raised collar trusses and dates from the 15th century. The trusses may once have had tie beams, indicated by the blocks at the base of the curved braces. The remains of a painted design of running foliage can still be seen on the purlins of the eastern most bay and on the truss west of it. The roof is under-boarded with vertical oak panels with moulded ribs, and the wall plate is moulded and embattled. Three rough tie beams were added at a later date.

A wooden loft or west gallery, accessed by a wooden staircase, was installed against the west end of the nave possibly at the same time that the schoolroom was built. It would have accommodated a 'west gallery' choir and attendant musicians. West gallery 'ensembles' were quite common before the days of the universal acceptance of the organ as the main musical accompaniment in churches in the 19th century. A dormer window has been let into the southern slope of the roof to provide light to the gallery, and was probably added at the same time.



In a baptism register for Craswall there is an entry, dated 17th June 1832, recording that a "violoncello" had been purchased by Subscription for the use of the singers of "Craswall Chapel".

In the south wall of the chancel, in a low recess is a piscina with two round drains which may have come from Craswall Priory.



A rather curious feature of the church are the wooden batons with prominent pegs fixed to the north and south walls, as well as high up on the west wall in the loft, and on the beam against the west wall which supports the loft. Pegs for coats and hats, perhaps? There seem to be far more pegs than the number of people who can be accommodated in the nave, but perhaps people were smaller and thinner back in those days!



The nave and chancel are lit by three square headed windows, one in the east wall (said to have come from Craswall priory) and two flanking the doorway in the south wall. There is no internal evidence that there were ever any windows in the north wall. The floor is bare concrete, covered in places with carpet. It is

believed that this is a concrete skim laid over the original flagstones, which can still be seen in the cupboard under the staircase giving access to the gallery.

The church is now equipped with electric heaters fixed to the north and south walls just below the wall plate. Presumably in the past it was heated by a stove of some sort, but there is no indication of where this might have been installed.

Contents

Items to include: altar; reredos; pulpit; lectern; font; communion rails; stained glass; wall paintings; bells and bell frame; monuments; organ; communion plate; registers; pews and other woodwork; metalwork; floor finishes.

- *Describe the contents of the church*
- *What is their age?*
- *Are they part of a suite of furnishings or a group of items of similar date?*
- *Are any of the artists or craftspeople recognised locally, regionally, nationally or internationally?*

Within the schoolroom the only significant piece of furniture is a small, unornamented, boarded hutch oak chest with 'H M 1745' carved on the front.



It contains a fragment of oak from the front of the old tithes chest with the inscription 'For the use of Craswolds Township 1705'. The spelling used is interesting - 'wold' comes from the Old English term 'wald' or 'weald' meaning highland area covered with trees, wood, or forest, (the current meaning of wold as open, hilly ground, often associated with chalk uplands, is a more recent evolution) which would probably be a good description of Craswall at that time.



There is a large, rectangular wooden cabinet dating perhaps from the 1950s which makes a convenient counter for serving coffee and tea from; an old, roughly square, wooden farmhouse-type table which has seen better days but remains perfectly useful; and a smaller tabletop, now perched on the carcass of an old organ which is used for displays, information leaflets and the visitor book. There is also an old wooden bench which is said to be an old sheepshearing bench.

Within the church, the stone font is a quite recent addition, having been given in 1912 by Mary Maude Harris in memory of her father. The communion table is small rectangular oak table from the late 17th or early 18th century. There is another smaller oak table of similar date and style. The pews are of oak, and look more like benches than traditional pews.



A rather beautiful, small oak cupboard to store prayer and hymn books was made by the former church warden Ken Watkins. The initials 'JP' are carved on

the front and it was commissioned in memory of John Price of Pentwyn Farm, Craswall.



The harmonium, which is still played regularly at services, was made by a local pianoforte maker Nicholas Heins & Co. who was active between 1890 and 1926. It was rebuilt in 1984 in memory of Mrs M. Watkins, music teacher in the parish for 53 years.



There is a wooden pulpit; a wrought iron and brass bookstand book-stand and a wrought iron stand for flower arrangements, donated in 1993 in memory of Gladys Brown.

Section 2. The proposals: the impact on significance

If you prefer, you could provide this information in the form of a table. Whatever format you choose, make sure you assess the significance and impact of your project.

Identify the parts of the church, its setting and/or contents that would be impacted by the proposals

This can be a list. First, include the parts that would be directly impacted by the proposals, and then describe how the changes might have a broader impact on the character of the church. E.g. for pew removal, the pews will be impacted, but so too will the character of the nave/aisles, the flooring and the spatial quality of the church.

The Quinquennial report prepared in October 2024 by Deborah Johnson made a number of recommendations, the most important and significant being the observation that the current roof is nearing the end of its useful life and there is an urgent need to re-roof the church and porch and to repair the structure and covering of the dormer window to safeguard the integrity of the building.

A visual inspection of the church nave roof structure and subsequent structural condition report by Ian Ceney of c2designs Ltd in May 2025 concluded that:-

'There is a need to thoroughly overhaul the existing primary roof structure. Where existing connections have failed or are failing they will need to be supplemented to improve their ability to continue in service. Open joints between primary truss members may need to be packed with seasoned strips of timber to fill open gaps and then strapped or pinned to improve their capacity to support tension loads. Where joints have opened considerably then some consideration may be given to removing the load from the truss and attempting to reconnect adjacent elements.

On the matter of a program of re-roofing and reinstating a heavy stone roof finish to both slopes, the evidence of long term movement of the roof structure and failure of the trusses, informs my opinion that the existing roof structure would not be capable of accommodating a heavy stone finish to both slopes

without significant repair to the existing trusses and the likely need to supplement these with additional new steelwork.'

The principal proposal therefore is to overhaul the existing roof structure of the church and to replace the existing roof. It would be preferable to replace the entire roof with stone tiles but further investigation is required to determine whether this is feasible.

In addition, Ian Ceney recommends improving 'the restraint connectivity between the roof structure and the head of flanking walls and east gable wall' by providing a 'more positive connection between roof structure elements and adjacent external and internal masonry wall head' and incorporating 'supplementary stainless-steel angles at bearings and providing bolting detail to stabilised head masonry.'

He also recommends improving 'the bonding of wall junctions, particularly at the internal north east and south east corners with lightweight aggregate reinforced concrete elbow ties.'

In addition, he recommends that 'where inner and outer facing work have moved apart these areas need specific attention, installing a system of resin fixed spiro-ties to reconnect inner and outer facing stonework, likely at a rate of five ties per square metre, which is then followed by a process of localised grouting in order to stabilise loose core material between tied stonework faces.'

Deborah Johnson has three further recommendations which would contribute significantly to improving the integrity of the building:-

1. Redecoration of external walls to 'bag and lime wash'.
2. Redecoration of internal walls with a breathable paint.
3. Removing the concrete floor in the nave and chancel. She notes that this floor traps moisture and forces it out through the walls which, over time, will tend to contribute to the inner and outer faces of the walls moving apart.

It is also noted that the church does not have a lightning conductor and it would be prudent to install one when the roof is renewed.

Set out significance of those parts

If you have already described the significance of the parts in Section 1, you can simply refer back to the description.

If not, assess significance by writing about what is architecturally/aesthetically, historically, archaeologically or socially valuable.

The local stone, known geologically as Old Red Sandstone, splits easily to produce good quality building and flagstones, and in some areas, the sandstone beds laminate to produce thin sheets very suitable for roof tiles. Originally, the church would have been roofed with these stone tiles, probably quarried very locally. Currently, only the south side of the roof is of stone tiles, the north side being slate. There is a considerable difference in the weight of stone over slate leading to speculation that at least some of the movement evident in the roof trusses is due to this uneven weight distribution.

From a historical perspective, and to best reflect the original appearance of the building, it would be desirable to replace the existing roof with a new stone tile roof. However, as the structural report makes clear

'On the matter of a program of re-roofing and reinstating a heavy stone roof finish to both slopes, the evidence of long term movement of the roof structure and failure of the trusses, informs my opinion that the existing roof structure would not be capable of accommodating a heavy stone finish to both slopes without significant repair to the existing trusses and the likely need to supplement these with additional new steelwork elements'.

This raises the possibility, which requires further investigation, that the church should be reroofed either with slate tiles or with artificial/reproduction stone tiles.

Describe the impact of your proposal on these parts and the building and/or setting

Impacts could include loss, alteration, obscuring, change of context, change of use or environmental harm.

You can also include positive impacts such as bringing back into use, conserving, revealing, improving setting, reducing energy consumption and increasing biodiversity.

It is clear, from both the Quinquennial report and the structural survey, that doing nothing is not an option and the work of overhauling the roof structure and replacing the roof itself is urgently required to safeguard the integrity of the building as a whole.

Explain how you intend to mitigate the impact

- *Are the proposals reversible?*
- *Are examples of historic furnishings retained in situ?*
- *Is any interpretation proposed?*
- *Will the building be recorded prior to change?*

St Mary's church has presided over the parish of Craswall for at least 500 years, probably longer. This project is essential to ensure that it will still be there to serve the community for the next 500 years!