



Evaluation Report for the Heritage Lottery Fund

Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story - 2021 to 2025



The Right Honourable Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers KG



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Patron's Statement December 2025

It is with great pride and deep affection for our village that I commend this remarkable achievement — the restoration of St Nicholas' Church, Worth Matravers. For over nine centuries, St Nicholas has stood at the heart of village life. Yet even the most steadfast of buildings cannot defy time forever. By 2022, the roof that had long sheltered the church and its congregations had deteriorated to such an extent that closure seemed inevitable. The prospect of losing so precious a part of our national and local heritage was unthinkable.

Thanks to the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the unstinting efforts of all those involved, that fate has been averted. The project *Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story* has not merely repaired the church roof; it has restored to Worth Matravers a sense of continuity and pride that binds community and history together. The work carried out by Tudor Rose Masonry and Conservation, under the guidance of Crickmay Stark Architects, has been exemplary. Using traditional techniques and original Purbeck stone tiles — some dating back to Norman times — the craftsmen have brought new life to an ancient structure.

But this project has reached far beyond stone and timber. It has celebrated the story of St Nicholas and the people it serves, through film, digital media, and educational partnerships. The involvement of the Burngate Stone Centre and our local school has been particularly inspiring, enabling young people to discover the enduring skills of their forebears. Volunteers, trained to interpret the church's history, now ensure that visitors may fully appreciate its beauty, its architecture, and its place in the wider narrative of Purbeck.

Equally commendable is the care shown for the natural environment surrounding the church. Through collaboration with Sustainable Worth, the churchyard has become a haven for biodiversity — a place where heritage and nature coexist harmoniously. The award of Silver Eco-Church status is richly deserved and a stepping stone toward still greater achievement.

St Nicholas now stands renewed — a beacon of faith, craftsmanship, and community spirit. Its rescue and revival are a testament to what can be accomplished when vision, skill, and dedication unite in the service of heritage. It will, I am sure, continue to inspire gratitude and admiration for generations to come.

**Nicholas Phillips,
Baron Phillips of Worth Matravers**

Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story

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Executive Summary

For over 900 years, St Nicholas' Church, Worth Matravers, has stood as a place of worship and a focal heritage landmark in Purbeck. By 2022, the Victorian roof had reached the end of its life: corroded nails, rotten battens, and failing rafters left the Grade I* listed building unsafe and at risk of closure. Without urgent intervention, one of Dorset's most remarkable Norman churches — praised by Simon Jenkins* as “a foursquare no-nonsense church” — faced an uncertain future. With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the project 'Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story' set out to restore the roof, preserve the building, and bring its story alive for the wider community.

Restoring the roof

The restoration proved more complex than expected. Structural surveys revealed that every rafter required replacement, causing delays and additional costs. Thanks to the craftsmanship of [Tudor Rose Masonry and Conservation](#), the roof was rebuilt using traditional techniques and original Purbeck stone tiles, some dating back 900 years. By June 2025, the work was complete, and the church was rededicated by the Bishop of Sherborne. A historic building once close to collapse now stands renewed for future generations.

Sharing the story

Heritage is more than fabric. Alongside the roof work, the project developed creative ways of telling the story of St Nicholas and its community. A high-quality film, digital resources, QR-linked interpretation boards, and local radio broadcasts captured the church's long history — from Norman carvings to the story of Benjamin Jesty, the pioneer of vaccination, who is buried in the churchyard. [BBC Radio Solent](#) and [Purbeck Sounds Radio](#) featured the project, broadening its reach across the region.

Engaging people and skills

Community engagement was at the heart of the project. Volunteers were trained to interpret the church's history and support visiting groups. A curriculum resources for [KS1](#), [KS2](#) and [KS3](#) students has been created for primary and secondary schools, with plans for future educational visits. [Burngate Stone Centre](#) partnered with a local primary school, introducing pupils to traditional Purbeck stone carving inspired by features of the church and nature in the churchyard.

Caring for nature

The church grounds were enhanced as a place of biodiversity and learning. Working with [Sustainable Worth](#), volunteers built a bug hotel, installed a beehive, laid traditional Dorset hedges, and hosted family wildlife events. The churchyard is now managed as a mosaic of varying wildlife habitats. St Nicholas has achieved a [Silver Eco-Church](#) award.

A lasting legacy

Since reopening, visitor numbers have risen, benefiting local businesses as well as the church. The project has safeguarded a building of national significance, enriched the story of the community, and created new opportunities for education, heritage skills, and environmental stewardship.

St Nicholas' Church today is more than a restored landmark: it is a living heritage hub, where history, community, and nature come together.

The website [The Parish of St Aldhelm, Purbeck](#) provides an overview of the different aspects of project, with photographs. It links to the Guidance for Teachers [KS1](#), [KS2](#) and [KS3](#) and two films. '[Worth Matravers: the restoration of St Nicholas Church Roof](#)', which documents the restoration of the church and '[Welcome Back St Nicholas](#)', which reports on interpretation and the community engagement encouraged and enabled by the project.

Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story

The Story of St Nicholas Church

St Nicholas' was built in around AD1100. Most of what you see today is that original church. Nave, tower and the north wall of the chancel date from that time. The church was rebuilt - but not extended - in the thirteenth century and has resulted in an Early English style. One of the delights of the church is its original corbel table.

Simon Jenkins notes that the chancel arch itself is the most striking feature and the most controversial feature of the church. It is generally accepted that it started life elsewhere and was moved here. Nobody, however, knows where from although various disestablished priories are seen as possibilities. Nor does anyone know why anyone would have gone to so much trouble when Norman chancel arches were clearly regarded as very expendable during later centuries.

The Norman carving above the south door is believed to represent the Coronation of the Virgin. It is badly damaged and this is believed to have been the work of the musket balls of the Parliamentary soldiers during the Civil War.

Within the grounds there are memorials to a number of noteworthy individuals, including Benjamin Jesty, a pioneer of smallpox vaccination.

Jenkins writes of St Nicholas, 'We can only be grateful to the custodians of this church down the centuries who have resisted the urge - or possibly could not afford! - to install an incongruous gothic window such as disfigures so many Norman churches.'

*(*Simon Jenkins 'England's Thousand Best Churches' Penguin 2009)*

The Project Team

A core project team of eight individuals, with complementary skill sets, was formed.

The project *Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story* was broken down into eight achievable and measurable tasks.

See table below:



Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story

Tasks	Who is the task for?	Where?	Who will carry out the task?	What will change and how will we know?
1. St Nicholas Roof Restoration	The community of Worth Matravers, church members and visitors to Worth Matravers	Worth Matravers as this is the location of the project	Contracted architects Crickmay Stark	Diocesan appointed architect will inspect and report
2. Develop the storytelling	The community of Worth Matravers, church members and visitors to Worth Matravers and school pupils	Worth Matravers as this is the location of the project	Project team led by project manager working with local mainstream and special school, local historians and local heritage enthusiasts.	The narrative will be in place ready to be presented through digital media film and booklets, display boards (including QR codes)
3. Working with the Burngate stone centre	Students of architecture from Bournemouth University and trainee stone masons from the Burngate Stone Carving Centre in Langton Matravers	Worth Matravers as this is the location of the project	Burngate team working with student architects from Bournemouth University and with trainee stone masons and heritage project volunteers	As part of the project's community engagement focus and to increase understanding of heritage restoration, students will have had a hands on opportunity to experience the restoration of an ancient building, to understand and appreciate the design and structure of a Norman church and practise stone carving techniques of that time.
4. Working in partnership with educational practitioners to develop projects and curriculum resource materials. Also creating a timetable of visits for young people to visit Worth Matravers to learn about, and participate in, the Purbeck heritage story	Young people in local mainstream and special schools and those attending the residential field study centre	Worth Matravers as this is the location of the project	Staff from educational establishments working in partnership with heritage project volunteers	Feedback from educational establishments which will include pupil voice and monitoring of progress by teachers and tutors. This evaluation will demonstrate an increased knowledge of the Purbeck story and an understanding of the meaning of heritage and its importance in appreciating the past, present and future. Young people will want to find out more.

Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story

5. Recruitment and training of volunteers	Training will enable the volunteers to carry out to tell the heritage story of the church and community. The recruitment of volunteers will facilitate the delivery of the information and narrative pertaining to the Purbeck story	Worth Matravers as this is the location of the project	Project team led by project manager working in partnership with local mainstream and special school, local historians and local heritage enthusiasts.	There will be a team of volunteers ready to deliver the heritage story and this will mean that the local community, visitors and young people will have high quality access to the heritage narrative and experience
6. Produce a programme of publicity including booklets, pamphlets and website. Contact affiliated organisations e.g., Swange Visitors Centre, the Purbeck Museum and the National Trust to inform them of the project and ask them to promote the church and its environs to visitors to the area.	Visitors to the local area including individuals, families and organised groups	Worth Matravers, Swanage and surrounding area	Project team led by project manager	Numbers of visitors to the church and village will have increased significantly. Records will be kept to assess increased visitor numbers and comments made by visitors. Local business will have been involved in the collation of data pertaining to increased footfall in the village.
7. Engage professionals to supply digital support for the project delivery i.e., film, QR codes giving access to interpretative stories and information. Also work with local artists to produce high quality display, informative materials and signage	Visitors to the local area including individuals, families and organised groups	Worth Matravers	Project team working with contracted professionals	Visitors to the church will be able to navigate around its heritage features and understand the back stories of the church and the village community.

Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story

Task 1. Restoration of the Church Roof

8. Recruit and train a team of practical conservationists to manage the church grounds and adjacent fields in order to encourage and sustain biodiversity	Local residents	Worth Matravers	Conservation Manager working with the National Trust, the Dorset Wildlife Trust and the Dorset Amphibian and Reptile Network	The biodiversity of the church grounds and adjacent land will be enhanced, and local people and visitors will be voicing their appreciation of the environmental improvement. The increased diversity and numbers of flora and fauna will be measured against baseline data.
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1.1 Report

[Crickmay Stark Architects](#) were appointed as the project architects. Following open tendering, [Tudor Rose Masonry and Conservation Limited](#) of Weymouth were appointed as the main contractors, commencing work on Monday 18th September 2023. The first task was to protect all the Church memorials and furniture. Scaffolders then erected full scaffolding inside and outside the church so that work could continue whatever the weather and season.

By the end of October the church was fully protected, the old radiators and associated pipework had been removed and the chimney reduced to roof level. The first tile was removed on the 1st November and by Christmas 2023 the roof had been fully stripped

and the majority of the ceiling removed, however, this revealed considerable rot on the upper side of the rafters, none of which were scheduled to be replaced.



Following an inspection by a Structural Engineer in early 2024, it was decided that all of the original rafters would have to be replaced. Inevitably this would entail a delay as well as additional costs and the need to apply to the Diocese for an amendment to the initial Faculty.

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With the support of the architects and following consultation with the Diocese of Salisbury and Historic England, the Project Team put forward a revised specification and received the required amendments to progress the project.

All rafters and beams required replacement, with new timber being sourced from the [Longleat Estate](#). This provided home grown timber for the rafters and beams. The rafters and beams were manoeuvred into place using an electric winch.

The fitting of the laths and bat-proof roofing membrane followed. In September 2024 work commenced on relaying the tiles on the chancel roof. In total 1,700 tiles, weighing approximately 40 tons, had to be relayed using, whenever possible, the original tiles. This process took much longer than originally planned as each tile required dressing before fitting. This required considerable skill. Many of the tiles are believed to be original (i.e. circa 900 years old). The chancel roof was completed in November 2024. The retiling of the nave roof was completed by April 2025.



In January 2025 work commenced on plastering the chancel ceiling and continued through to May with the nave ceiling. This was followed by painting throughout the church during April/May and finally the church was completed and handed back to the parish on the 4th June, just in time for the rededication service on Sunday 8th June led by the [Bishop of Sherborne](#). A [peal](#) of 5040 changes of [Grandsire Doubles](#) was rung to mark the event.

1.2 Evaluation

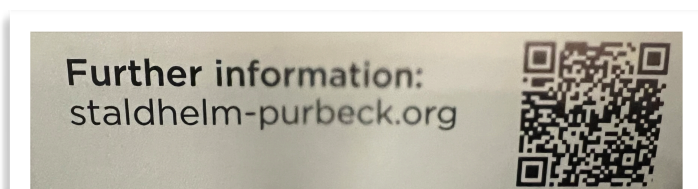
The condition of the roof was in a far worse state than originally anticipated. The sourcing of the rafters delayed the completion of the roof replacement part of the project by some six months and inevitably increased costs.

The craftsmen who comprise Tudor Rose Masonry and Conservation were highly skilled and dedicated to the task of rebuilding the church roof using traditional skills and material. The Project Team, with the support of the architect, managed the arising challenges professionally. A Grade 1* listed building has been rescued from collapse and preserved for current and future generations to visit and enjoy, with the opportunity to learn about traditional Purbeck building construction and the history of the church and the community it serves.

Task 2. Develop the Storytelling

2.1 Report

The story of the church and the the history of the village has been articulated and promoted through the two films; '[Worth Matravers: the restoration of St Nicholas Church Roof](#)'; and '[Welcome Back St Nicholas](#)'; [local](#) and [regional](#) radio interviews, the [website](#), displays and QR codes on interpretive boards in the church and church grounds. Material has been compiled through literature written by local historians and through conversations with members of the Worth Matravers community. Film and spoken presentations have been made to the local community.



2.2. Evaluation

The high quality films recounting the story of the project have been compiled through a partnership between a member of the Project Team and a professional film maker. The films offer valuable guidance for subsequent HLF supported projects.

It was initially hoped to involve GCSE film and drama students in recording and articulating the progress of the project. Following initial engagement, this proved unworkable as the church was designated as a building site and access was severely restricted on health and safety grounds. Excepting this, story telling has been a key part of the project process with the narrative ready to be presented through digital media, film, leaflets and display and interpretive boards with embedded QR codes.

Task 3. Working with the Burngate Stone Centre

3.1 Report

[Burngate Stone Centre](#) proved willing community partners in the project. The Centre worked with pupils from a local Primary School to produce carvings in Purbeck Stone that represented features of the church including carved images of wildlife found within the church grounds. 18 pupils from Years 5 and 6 were involved in the carving project which was based at the church and the school. The stone carved images are displayed in the sanctuary of the church.

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3.2 Evaluation

Initially it was intended to involve students of architecture from Bournemouth University in studying the heritage skills involved in the restoration. This was to be part of a course facilitated through the Burngate Stone Centre. In the event, the course did not run and this lead was lost to the project. Attention turned instead to a partnership with a local primary school. The partnership with Burngate, the school and the church will continue beyond the completion of



the project referenced in this evaluation. Pupils have acquired skills in stone carving and have been introduced to the building techniques and carving styles originally employed 900 years ago.

4. Projects and curriculum Resource

4.1 Report

A comprehensive curriculum resource for students at [KS1](#), [KS2](#) and [KS3](#) has been created in partnership with [St George's C of E Primary School](#), in neighbouring Langton Matravers. The curriculum resource enables visiting schools to explore the church and its history and work within the grounds of the church, which are being managed to enhance biodiversity. The curriculum resource is available on line and will be promoted amongst schools within Purbeck and to schools visiting [Leeson House Field Study Centre](#). Heritage project volunteers have been recruited to work on site with visiting schools.

4.2 Evaluation

School parties and organised groups of young people have worked in the grounds of the church, exploring the biodiversity of the site and hearing stories about the history and personalities associated with the site. Young people from the local community have been involved in constructing a bug hotel.

Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story



The church itself has only recently been declassified as a building site. Health and Safety requirements have therefore prevented the church being used as an educational resource. A timetable for is currently being drawn up, following promotion of the curriculum resource booklet. The first school visits will take place in January 2026. It has not as yet been feasible to gain feedback from schools.

5. Recruitment and training of volunteers

5.1 Report

A team of six local people are equipped to tell the heritage story of the church and community. The volunteers are facilitating the delivery of the information and narrative of the *Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story*.

5.2 Evaluation

The team of volunteers are equipped to deliver the heritage story, drawing on written notes, display material with QR codes and the curriculum resource for [KS1](#), [KS2](#) and [KS3](#). The local community, visitors and young people from schools and educational establishments have high quality access to the heritage narrative and experience.



6. Produce a programme of publicity

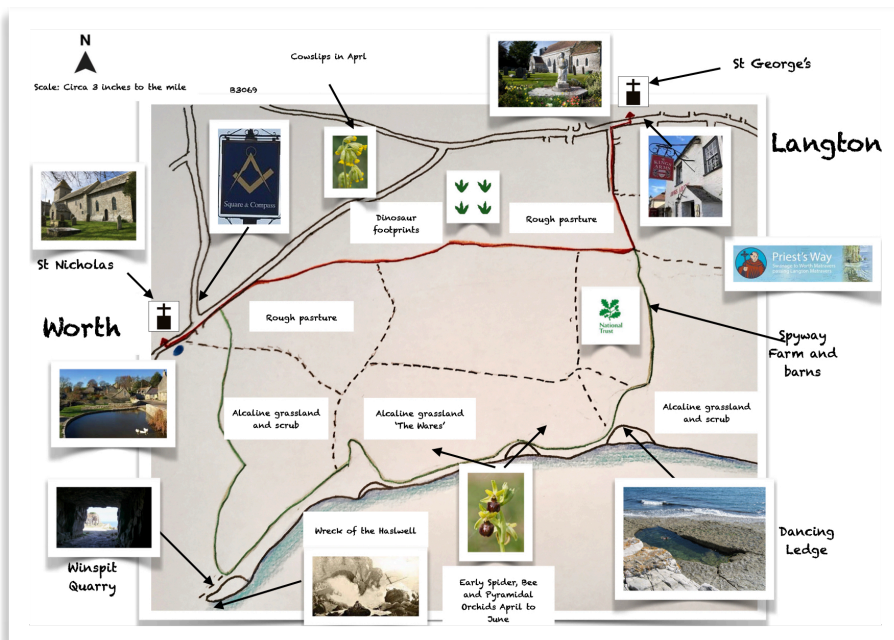
6.1 Report

Booklets, pamphlets, an eco-pilgrimage map, a [website](#) and the two films '[Worth Matravers: the restoration of St Nicholas Church Roof](#)'; and '[Welcome Back St Nicholas](#)'; recording the progress and outcomes of the project, have been created. The films will be accessible via Purbeck National Trust, the Swanage Visitor Centre and [National Churches Trust](#). Additionally press releases have been published in [local papers](#), church related publications and [local media](#) and through [local](#) and [regional](#) radio.



6.2 Evaluation

Since the church reopened in June 2025 there has been a 33% increase in visitors recording their details in the Visitors Book compared with the same period in 2023, prior to the church closing for the restoration work. There has been an (admittedly anecdotally) reported positive economic impact of this increase in visitors on local businesses. The village [Tea Rooms](#) has estimated a circa 10% increase in customers served during the summer season 2025. A necessary caveat being that exceptional summer is also likely to have contributed to the rise in visitor numbers! However the Tea Rooms have reported regular comments from visitors saying that they are in Worth to visit the restored church and its ecologically managed grounds. High quality information has been printed for visitors in a variety of creative and accessible media.



7. Digital Support

7.1 Report

Professional support has enabled production of the project films '[Worth Matravers: the restoration of St Nicholas Church Roof](#)'; and '[Welcome Back St Nicholas](#)'. QR codes have been embedded in the interpretation and display material, enabling visitors to explore the story of the church and its community in greater detail. This includes reference to [Benjamin Jesty](#), the unsung hero

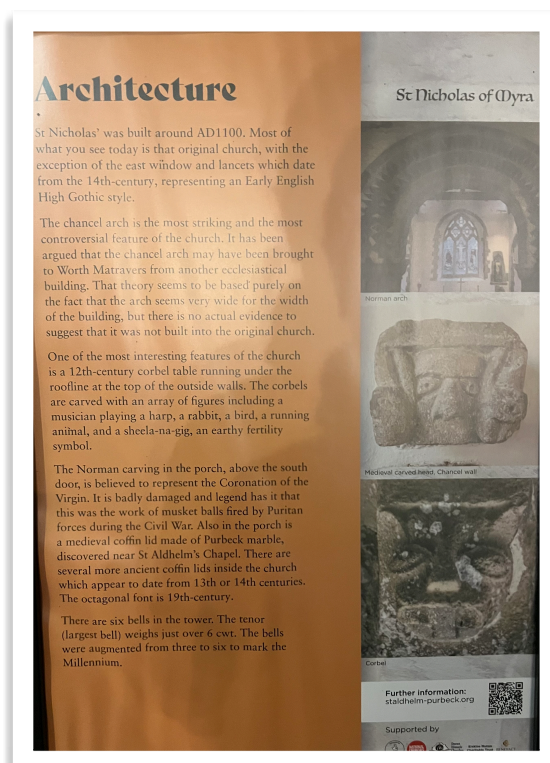


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of vaccination, notable shipwrecks, including the [SS Treveal](#) and [The Halsewell](#), the latter depicted dramatically by [JMW Turner](#). Dorset artist [Nicholas Hely Hutchinson](#) was commissioned to create an evocative post-restoration representation of the church in its village setting.

7.2 Evaluation

Visitors to the church are able to navigate around its heritage features and understand the back stories of the church and the village community, drawing on a variety of display and interactive media.



8. Recruit and train a team of practical conservationists to manage the church grounds to encourage and sustain biodiversity

8.1 Report

In partnership with [Sustainable Worth](#), a team of volunteers have been recruited and trained as practical conservationists to manage the church grounds and engage the local community and visitors in exploring and understanding the wildlife and ecosystems in and around Worth Matravers. Some of our recent events that have been offered include:

- Meet A Moth. Practical opportunities to enjoy their rarely seen variety and beauty.
- Worth Matravers Gardens, our personal wildlife spaces, as shared by villagers.
- Dawn Chorus walk.



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- Bat Talk and Walk Presentation in the Church by David Brown, Land and Nature Manager for the National Trust, Purbeck followed by bat watching with bat detectors in the churchyard. 25 people
- Family mini-beast safari.
- Liaised with Swanage Swift Group to give us a talk on Swifts and to install 6 nestboxes and continuously survey Swift breeding numbers.
- Oly Rush, campaigning for cleaner oceans presentation & discussion.

Within the church grounds a bug hotel has been constructed as a family project and a Bee Hive installed. The grass in the churchyard is managed as a mosaic of different lengths, part of which is only cut yearly in late autumn.

8.2 Evaluation

The management of the church grounds and the partnership with Sustainable Worth has increased understanding of the the importance of conservation management and biodiversity, drawing local residents and families into active and practical engagement with local habitats and wildlife. Regular surveys of species diversity are being undertaken to assess the impact of sympathetic and traditional habitat management. Led by an experienced hedge layer, hedgerows surrounding the church have been cut and laid by community volunteers, according to Dorset practice. The church has been awarded an A Rocha [Silver Eco-Church](#) award and is working towards achieving the prestigious Gold award.



Purbeck Heritage Set in Stone and Told Through Story

1.2.1 Raising the Funds

Below is a summary of the sources of funds raised to enable the project to be realised:

Donations from Individuals \ Legacies		£70,409
Own Reserves		£100,000
Picture Raffle		£19,251
Other fundraising		£6,429
VAT Refund		£104,889
Erskine Muton		£28,000
Dorset Historic Churches Trust		£16,000
Garfield Weston		£10,000
National Churches Trust + assoc trusts		£30,000
Benefact Trust		£7,700
Heritage Lottery (maximum amount)		£249,008
Total		£641,686



JJM December 2025