13313-MWB-XX-XX-RP-S-0551

3rd October 2026

By email: dperreau@gmail.com

Dear Deborah

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Wambrook – Inspection of Fracturing to Chancel

Mann Willilams have been instructed by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of The Blessed Virgin Mary, Wambrook to undertake a visual inspection of fracturing of the Chancel walls of the church.

Our inspection was undertaken on Thursday 10th September 2026. The weather during this inspection was dry and overcast.

The church is Historic England listed GV II*. With reference to the listing the church has C13 origins; the Nave is noted as having been rebuilt C15. The Chancel is noted as being rebuilt in 1812. Masonry appears to be predominantly random rubble chert stone with Ham stone dressings as described in the listing.

With reference to the British Geological Survey (BGS) online Viewer, the church is underlain by a bedrock geology of Charmouth Mudstone. Further review of the available BGS data for Mass Movement Deposits confirms that overlying the Charmouth mudstone are landslip deposits from the Quaternary Geological period (these deposits are noted as being of variable material).

The ground slopes downward to the east with the River Kit at the base of the valley. On visual inspection, the farmland east of the church is characterised by sloping, bumpy uneven terrain (hummocky slips). The long-term angle of stability could be in the range of 6 to 10 degrees to the horizontal in weathered near surface material. The ground is estimated to slope more steeply than these lower limits and the potential for mass movement of ground is a consideration.

Mann Williams were first contacted in respect of the fractures to the south wall of the Chancel back in December 2025. At that time, we were not appointed and the PCC took the decision to monitor the fracture for deterioration through fitting of an Avongard tell-tale. Since that time the movement has progressed substantially. The movement progression has occurred over a prolonged hot, dry summer. Whilst there is a likelihood that some of the movement is due to drying and shrinkage of founding clay deposits, there is also the possibility that the movement is due in part (or entirely) to limited slip of the ground. Intrusive ground investigation, likely followed by slope analysis, would be needed to determine with a higher degree of certainty the cause of movement and to provide parameters for design of remedial repairs.

The following paragraphs describe the nature of the fractures and reference the various photographs enclosed below.

Photo 1 shows the entire south elevation of the church, noting that the ground falls away steeply to the east. Photo 2 shows the generally ground profile, sloping downward to the east with hummocky slips evident.

Photos 3 to 6 demonstrate the extent of structural movement around the easternmost window to the south wall of the Chancel.

The tell-tale internally and external measurements taken by us during our visit (Photos 7 and 8 respectively) suggest that movement has been of the order of 12 to 13mm since the start of the year when the tell-tale was fitted.

Part of the floor of the Chancel has also subsided; this movement is greatest towards the south-east corner as demonstrated in Photo 9.

There is a notable fracture extending up through the southern side of the Chancel arch (Photo 10). This has caused fracturing of one of the voussoirs and there is the danger that with further movement a section of stone will break

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away and fall to the floor. This fracture continues above the roof line right up to the head of the wall (Photo 11).

Whilst there is also a fracture to the north side of the Chancel arch and fractures to the north wall of the Chancel, at this time they are less structurally significant but may potentially worsen with time along with the other fractures noted.

Whilst there is evidence of past movement in the south wall of the Chancel at easternmost window position, this recent movement is more severe than that which has previously occurred and demonstrates a progressive problem.

We have discussed that the floor levels within the church are relatively unusual in that there are steps positioned under the Chancel arch with the Chancel floor being at a higher level than the Nave. This is unusual in how it contrasts with the externally ground levels sloping to the east.

The next step is to commission a Geotechnical Investigation. We would be pleased to prepare a brief for geotechnical investigation contractors and obtain estimates for the investigation work needed if you would like us to do so; their work would need to include:-

- Trial pitting to establish the founding conditions of the Chancel walls (excavated around the external perimeter)
- Geotechnical window samples or boreholes around the perimeter of the Chancel
- Possible slip trenches to understand in more detail the nature of landslip deposits
- Laboratory analysis of soils including tests to confirm shrinkage potential of the soils
- Possible slope stability analysis work
- An interpretive geotechnical report.

You would need to raise significant funds for this investigation work but could do so once you have the estimates to hand.

Should landslip be determined to be a factor, rather than simply subsidence related to founding clay shrinkage, then this may necessitate a more complex remedial foundation repair solutions such as a piled underpinning (rather than traditional underpinning). It is important to undertake the investigations in a structured and rigorous way such that the correct remedial repairs are determined. At this stage we keep and open mind in respect of the nature of remedial works that will be required and whether underpinning will be necessary.

Consideration should also be given to understanding the nature and condition of any below ground drainage serving the rainwater downpipes but this would be a separate investigation by others and can be commissioned once the findings of the geotechnical investigation have been reviewed.

We have discussed that moving forward you should be vigilant in respect of signs of further deterioration / movement. We have agreed that you will put the Chancel out of use for the time being and not use it for Communion.

Please should you have any further queries do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Swinbank

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Director

Mann Williams

cc **–** Michael Vaughan, B2 Architects

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Photo 1 – South Elevation of Church



Photo 2 – General ground profile down to river at bottom of valley, demonstrating hummocky slips



Photo 3 – Severe fracturing focussed around window to Chancel South Wall (internal).



Photo 4 – Displacement of voussoirs to window head.

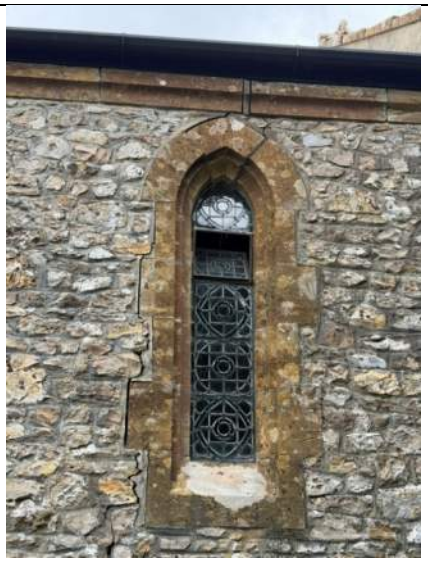


Photo 5 - Severe fracturing focussed around window to Chancel South Wall (External).



Photo 6 - Severe fracturing extending below window to Chancel South Wall (External).

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Photo 7 – Tell-tale below window to Chancel South Wall (Internal).



Photo 8 – Measurement of fracture below window to Chancel South Wall (External).



Photo 9 – Demonstrates subsidence of the floor in the south-east corner of the Chancel.



Photo 10 – Fracture extending up through the voussoirs of the Chancel arch (south side)

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Photo 11 – fracure extending up through wall head above Chancel arch.

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