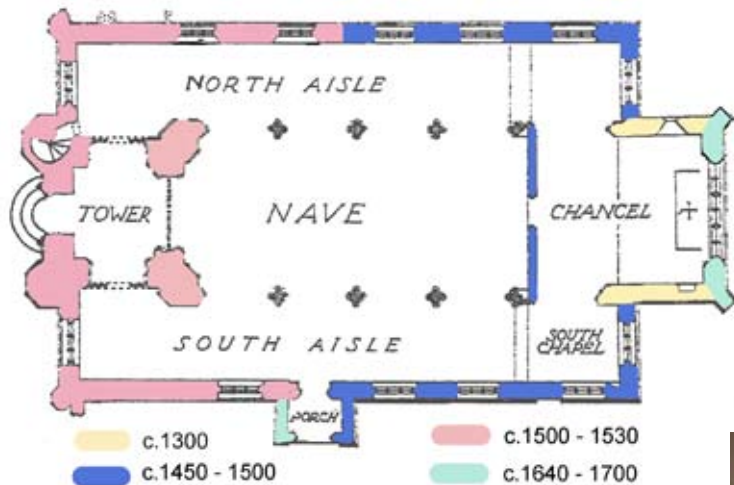


History

An important Benedictine Abbey was founded in Cerne in 987 AD. The villagers probably used the nave of the Abbey Church until about 1300, when the monks built this church dedicated to St Mary the Virgin. The first vicar was inducted in 1317. A list of vicars to the present day may be found on panels on the vestry wall. The church had fallen into disrepair and major restoration work was undertaken in 1960-1. The roof was replaced, heating installed, a new floor laid, and the rotting pews replaced by chairs.



East Window

The east window is 15th century. It appears to be the upper part of a much larger window and may have been salvaged from the Abbey. The significance of the date 1639 inscribed in the stonework, bottom left, is unknown, but may have been when the window was installed.



Medieval Wall Paintings

To the left of the altar there is an early 14th century wall painting of four scenes from the life of St John



the Baptist. On the opposite wall is a portrayal of the Annunciation, now sadly in poor condition. Doubtless the medieval church was painted in these bright colours



Screen, Nave and Aisles

The screen, nave and aisles were added in the mid 15th century. An arch was inserted in the screen in 1870 so that the east window could be seen from the nave. Above the arch are what remain of three painted panels of the ten commandments and the royal coat of arms of Charles 11. The wooden screen between the nave and the tower was erected in 1749. The date and the names of the two churchwardens are above the door.

Painted Wall Texts

On both sides of the nave painted shields contain biblical texts. Three of these were painted in 1679 by Robert Ford for which he was paid twelve guineas. The texts are from the Geneva Bible of 1560. An additional text was added in 1961 when the most recent restoration work was carried out.



Font

The font is 15th century mounted on a modern base and plinth. The painted cover was added in 1963 and was much admired by the late Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother during a visit to the village.



Clerestory

The upper windows were added to the nave in 1530 by Thomas Corton, the last abbot of Cerne Abbey. His initials **TA** (Thomas Abbot) are above two of the windows on the south wall.



Stained Glass Windows

The stained glass fragments that can be seen in most of the windows of both the south and north aisles probably came from the east window when it was restored in the 19th century.

Of particular interest, inset into the top of the central window of three on the south side, is what appears to be a man with his tongue sticking out.



In fact, it is a lion's head with its origins in the patriotism that surrounded the 'Hundred Year's War' with France. It probably dates from about the mid 14th to early 15th centuries.

Pulpit

The richly carved oak pulpit and canopy was fitted in 1640. The date is carved on a shield on the back panel.



Black Memorial Panels

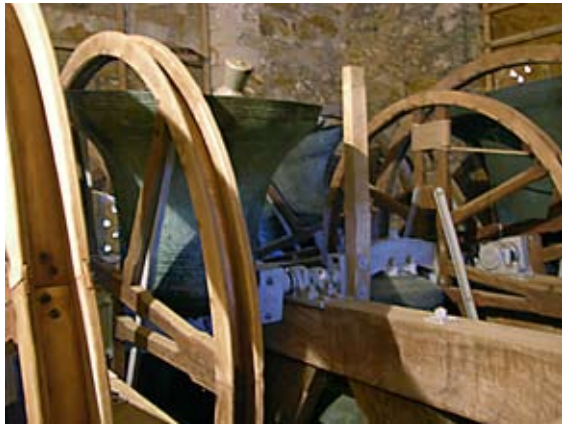
There are two most unusual memorial panels painted in black. They record details of notables of Cerne. One is in the north aisle by the Lady Chapel altar and the other to the right of the porch door.



Consecration Cross

A six pointed black star inside a red circle, drawn on the north wall of the chancel, is of unknown origin. It could be a consecration cross.





Bells

The five 17th and 18th century bells were not rung for over 70 years because the frame holding them was unsafe. In 1974-5 they were dismantled and re-cast and a sixth bell was added. They are now regularly rung by local and many visiting teams.



The American Connection

Two memorial tablets in the floor of the nave refer to the Notley family. Some of the family were early settlers in America and owned the site in Washington on which Capitol Hill stands today. The original name for this site was Cerne Abbey Manor.

Tower

The tower, complete with gargoyles, was added in the late 15th century. A stone carving of the Madonna and child stands in a niche above the west door. It was one of the few such statues to have survived Cromwell's men.



Altar Kneeling Rails

The altar rail kneelers were made by village people to commemorate the millennium of the Benedictine Abbey (987 AD).



Roof

It is likely that the roof of the original chapel was thatched. Re-roofing in lead is known to have been carried out in 1682 from the plaque left behind by the leadworker and the churchwardens of the time. This plaque is one of the oldest to have survived in Dorset.



South Porch

Above the south porch, on the outside, is a plaque bearing the date 1696 and the names of churchwardens Willi Tulledge and Tho Dussell. To the left of the door is an open mouthed gargoyle, the chimney outlet for a fireplace in the priest's chamber.

Parish Burial Ground

The parish burial ground is at the north end of Abbey Street. It is approached through an iron gate beyond the duck pond.