

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that it is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are over 335 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

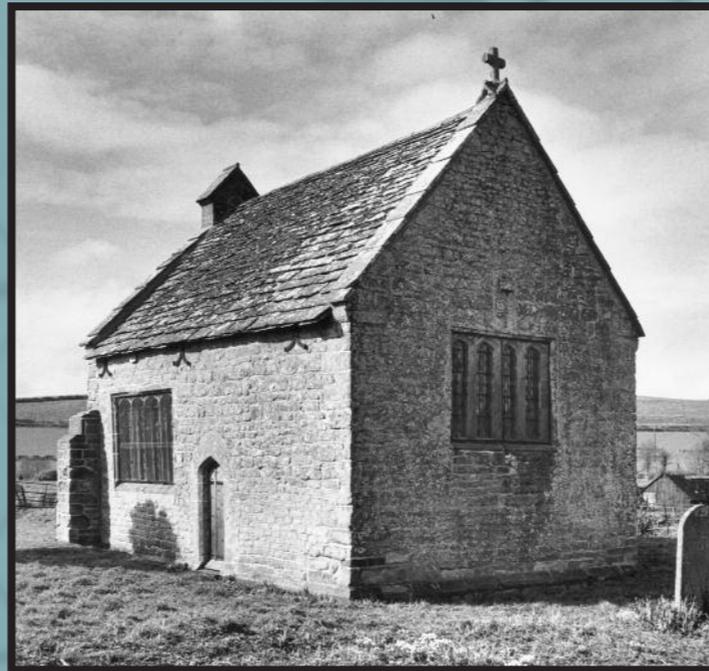
Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website www.visitchurches.org.uk.

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF
St Edwold, Stockwood
7 miles S of Yeovil off A37

St Andrew, Northover
5 miles N of Yeovil on B3151

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THE CHURCHES
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ST CUTHBERT'S OLD CHURCH

Oborne, Dorset



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Front cover: Interior looking east (Christopher Dalton)
Back cover: Exterior from the south-east (Christopher Dalton)

Oborne, Dorset

ST CUTHBERT'S OLD CHURCH

by Kenneth Smith

HISTORY

Over a thousand years ago the Saxon King Edgar gave Oborne to Sherborne Abbey (then a cathedral) in memory of Alfred the Great's elder brothers, who reigned before him and were buried at Sherborne. Though no trace remains of whatever building may have been put up in AD970, it seems clear that from then until the dissolution of the abbey in 1539, Oborne remained a 'chapel of ease', served by monks of the abbey. The last of these, John Dunster, then sacrist of the abbey, built the chancel now preserved. That was in 1533 and the shadow of growing royal authority is reflected in the crowned arms of King Henry VIII over the east window. John Dunster, with a pension from the abbey, served on after the dissolution as vicar of Oborne and, later, as curate of North Wootton also: this mediaeval church has now largely disappeared, but its 15th-century font is appropriately preserved here. The name Oborne derives from the Old English words *wōh* and *burna*, and means a crooked stream.

Exterior from the west
(Christopher Dalton)



Interior looking west (Christopher Dalton)

In common with many parish churches, St Cuthbert's, Oborne, was seemingly grievously neglected in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and by 1860 the then archdeacon reported that nothing short of complete rebuilding was called for. On the advice of the bishop the parishioners erected their new church, designed by William Slater, half a mile (0.8km) to the north in 1862 and destroyed all of the old St Cuthbert's except for the chancel. For some 70 years the old chancel lay neglected until, in the early 1930s, a new incumbent set about restoring it, with advice from the antiquary and architect A R Powys. On Trinity Sunday 1936 the Bishop of Sherborne celebrated Holy Communion in the chancel as it now appears – and a service has been held annually on that day ever since.

The chancel was transferred to the Redundant Churches Fund (now The Churches Conservation Trust) in 1975 and further restorative work undertaken, notably to the roof and bell-cote, under the supervision of Kenneth Wiltshire of Salisbury and latterly Penelope Adamson of Guildford.

EXTERIOR

The chancel lies between the main A30 road and the Salisbury to Exeter railway line. It is built of local rubble with a stone-tiled roof. Nothing remains of the mediaeval nave, but the footings can be traced for some 35 feet (10.7m) west of the present building and experts consider that these suggest there may at some time have been a western tower. The framed reproduction of a drawing made by John Buckler in 1802 gives an excellent impression of the church as it would

have appeared until it was largely destroyed in about 1862. The west front of the chancel was walled up in the 1930 restoration and the 15th-century doorway inserted was probably the old north doorway to the vanished nave. The wooden beam which supported the ancient rood loft was, however, preserved and the two 15th-century window-heads inserted in the new walling came from the old nave.

Over the lintel of the east window are the remains of the following inscription:

Orate pro bono statu do(m)jni Jobis. M. abbatis de Schirborn ano. Domini MCCCCXXXIII

(Pray for the good standing of John Meyer Abbot of Sherborne in the year of our Lord 1533). John Myer was the last abbot but one of Sherborne. Flanking the inscription are shields bearing respectively the arms of the abbey and a crozier between the initials I.M. Above are the Tudor royal arms and on the gable is a cross with a weathered crucifixion. Above the blocked window in the north wall is a similar inscription:

Orate pre (pro) bono statu dompni Jobis Dunster sacriste de Schirborn qui hoc opus fieri fecit ano. Domini...

(Pray for the good standing of Master John Dunster Sacristan of Sherborne who built this place in the year of our Lord...). This inscription ends in two shields: one with the initials I.D., the other with the arms of the Horsey family.

INTERIOR

The chancel retains its 16th-century barrel roof and moulded wall-plates. The pulpit, dated 1639, and communion rails are good examples of early-17th-century rustic workmanship. Even more rustic was the coffin-rest of 1790 with its date in nails. This was stolen c.1990 and has been replaced by a simple copy. The octagonal 15th-century font of Ham Hill stone comes from the former church of North Wootton, two miles (3.2km) to the south as the crow flies. Reset on the west wall are floor tiles of the 14th and 15th centuries. Beneath the square opening in the south wall of the sanctuary is a

mediaeval piscina from North Wootton; the mouldings on one side are 14th century, but the scalloped mouldings on the other indicate that it was originally of the 12th century. The small, unscribed, bell in the cote has been identified by Mr George Elphick as an early-14th-century casting, from an unknown foundry. Sadly, the 17th-century communion table was stolen in 1988; it has been replaced by a simple table of pine wood.

A little to the south of the present churchyard, enclosed in iron railings – and largely destroyed by an elm tree – is a tomb the inscription on which, now illegible, deserves to be recorded:

'In Memory of Mr. Robert Goadby, late of Sherborne, Printer, who departed this life, August 11th 1778, Age 57.

*Death is a Path that Must be Trod
If a Man would ever Come to God.*

*The Fir-Tree aspires to the Sky and is clothed
with Everlasting Verdure;
Emblem of the Good, and that everlasting Life
which God
will bestow on Them. Since Death is the Gate
to Life, the Grave
should be Crowned with Flowers.'*

The fir tree and the perennial flowers planted on Mr Goadby's grave have long vanished; and the elm is now dead. The weekly paper Mr Goadby published, *The Sherborne Mercury*, was the ancestor of the modern *Western Gazette* – which flourishes.