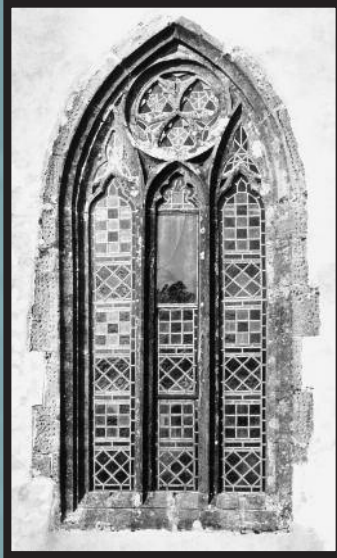


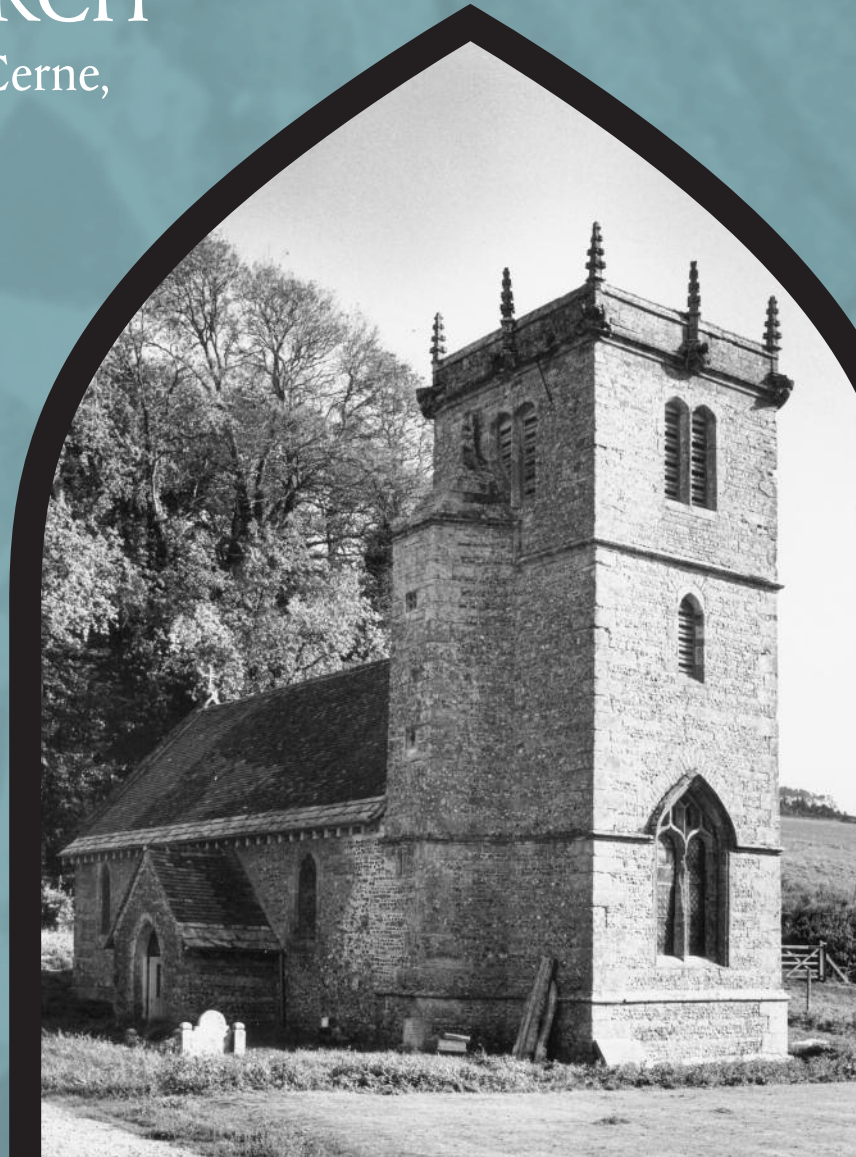


THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST



# ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

Nether Cerne,  
Dorset



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CONSERVATION TRUST

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*Nether Cerne, Dorset*

# ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

*by Kenneth Smith*

## HISTORY

The church lies in a most beautiful situation in the Cerne valley close to the small manor house of flint and stone, built in the 17th and 18th centuries. This latter is in private occupation – and visitors are asked to respect its privacy. The place name Cerne refers to the river on which it is situated and derives from the Welsh *carn* meaning 'rock, stones', with later Norman influence, while Nether differentiates the settlement from Cerne Abbas and Up Cerne situated further upstream.

The small parish of Nether Cerne was part of the original endowment of the abbey of Cerne. As the abbey was founded in the 9th century it is possible that some Saxon building may have existed on this site but, if so, no trace of it remains. Nether Cerne was a chapelry of the abbey, served by the Benedictine monks, until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. Thereafter, it became a 'perpetual curacy' served at various times by the incumbents of Frampton, Godmanstone and Cerne Abbas. In 1968 the church ceased to be used for services, owing to the very small population of the parish, and was declared redundant in December 1971. The church of Cerne Abbas is now the parish church of the combined parish. Because of its historic and architectural interest All Saints came to the Redundant Churches Fund, now The Churches Conservation Trust, for preservation in March 1973.

*Front cover: Exterior from the north-east  
(Christopher Dalton)*

*Left: Interior looking west  
(Christopher Dalton)*



When the church first came to the Trust a programme of urgent repairs, involving substantial work to the roofs and rainwater disposal arrangements and a good deal of repointing to walls and parapets, was carried out by Chutters of Hermitage under the supervision of Mr Colin Crickmay, architect. During the

1990s tower repairs, inclusive of a new roof, were carried out under the supervision of Penelope Adamson. The nave, chancel and south transept roofs were re-covered during 2003–04, the architect being Annie Evans of Fiddington, Bridgwater.



## EXTERIOR

The building material used in the construction of the church is local rubble stone banded with flints and with freestone dressings.

The tower, built in the late 15th or early 16th century, is of three stages with a parapet, below which are eight angel gargoyles carrying Gothic texts. These angels are unusual for Dorset as most of the gargoyles in the county are carved to represent devils and demons. Despite suggestions that they are 'modern', 18th- and 19th-century records mention them as contemporary with the adjacent parapet. Possibly the Victorian restoration included some re-cutting of the angel faces.

The chancel, nave and south transept are all basically of the late 13th century. However, a restoration of 1876, probably by G R Crickmay, involved complete replacement of the roofs and renewal of the external stonework of two of the three northern windows of the nave. The east window of the chancel has three graduated lancets under a common retaining arch inside. The south transept has a 13th-century lancet window to the east, with a pillared and cinque-foiled retaining arch. To the south it has a fine traceried window of the late 13th century. This window represents an early form of cusped and circular decoration and is not common in Dorset.



## INTERIOR

The springing of the arch opening from the tower into the nave has, facing west, two small angels holding shields and, on the east, an owl and an unknown beast both, sadly, now headless.

A chapel in the south transept was dedicated in 1396 to St Etheldreda, an East Anglian saint associated with the foundation of the monastery at Ely. The simple arch connecting the south transept with the nave dates from the 14th century.

The Norman font of Purbeck stone is the oldest item in the church. With a fluted and ribbed bowl, it dates from the 12th century, but the octagonal stem, and square base of Ham Hill stone, are of the 14th century.



The only memorial of interest described by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments' survey in 1951 is a floor slab to John Damer, who died in 1685. It is worth recording here the original verse-text:

*His will was to be layed with his deare wife  
When he by Death's stroake was bereft of life.  
The souls of both are in eternal joy,  
Their bodys freed from what did them annoy.  
Tho humane force have thus their bodys parted  
They rest in peace, both being upright hearted.*

It is thought that this John Damer may have been the great-grandfather of the first Lord Milton (later Earl of Dorchester), who refashioned Milton Abbey and built the existing 18th-century 'model village' of Milton Abbas. His wife, from whom he was parted in death, was buried at nearby Godmanstone – possibly because John Damer was denied burial there as a noted dissenter.

There is a chime of three bells. The treble (inscribed 1607) is by William Warre of Leigh, near Yetminster, the second was probably cast in Salisbury in the late 15th century and the tenor, also most probably by a Salisbury founder, dates from the early 15th century.

*Interior looking south-east  
(Christopher Dalton)*

## 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](http://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**  
Whitcombe Church  
2 miles SE of Dorchester on A352

St Peter, Winterborne Came  
2 miles SE of Dorchester off A352

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