



Winterbourne Gunner St. Mary's Church Brief History

THE CHURCH OF ST.MARY THE VIRGIN Winterbourne Gunner

Sunday services are held at 9.30 every week and all are very welcome



There are indications a Church has existed on this site since Saxon times in Winterbourne Chyreborough, now Winterbourne Gunner. St. Mary's is assessed as late 12th or early 13th Century. The Episcopal Register begins on 1297. The tower is of Norman design, but has been much restored. The belfry contained three wheels indicating that it was originally intended to have three bells, but in 1553 there were only two bells, known to be medieval and amongst the oldest in Wiltshire. Only one bell remains which is still in use. It is thought that one bell was removed at the Reformation as well as an image of the Virgin

Mary.

The church fell into a bad state of repair and was closed between 1876-1886. There was general restoration of the church including removal of the Musicians Gallery and enlargement of churchyard in 1889. There was a gallery window on the South side close to the Tower. The floor was paved with wood block instead of loose bricks and the dilapidated pews were moved and replaced by chairs.

The font, very plain and without ornament of any kind has been described as a tub without shaft with one simply moulding around the top of the stem. It is of early 12th or 13th Century and still shows traces of the hinge and lock by means of which the Holy Water was protected – the present cover is 17th Century.

There was once a South Transcript and south aisle which were pulled down leaving intact two bays of pointed transitional Norman arches (confirming the dating 1180-1220).

The octagonal central pillar has a square capital. The new South wall of the nave with its two-light window was built outside of the arches and a new roof over the old to cover the new wall. The two-centred doorway in the in the south wall is re-set medieval arch. The roof of the Nave is of the collared and braced type – typical of the 14th Century. The central aisle is tiles with Victorian tiles. Opposite the south door was a wall painting of St. Christopher. At the entrance (waist high) etched in the stone work is a cross, it is thought that parishioners touched this and crossed themselves while looking across at St. Christopher. At the North wall of the Nave is the head of a blocked Norman window. The only medieval window remaining is the single light window with its ogree head cusped into a trefoil at the East end of the South wall.

The octagonal limestone pulpit is paralleled with steps leading from the Chancel. It is 19th Century origin. The reading desk in the pulpit was made about 1900 by John Porter, a local carpenter who also made the south door.



The lectern was presented to the church by Rev. F.E. & Mrs. Skyme, in December 1903.

The Chancel is essentially 13th century but has been renovated. The choir stalls are from Imber, (the whole village was closed and used for Military purposes, a service is still held annually in that church) that on the left having ornate carving in a face shape and dated about 1650. The unusual carving is only found at Imber and parts of the USA.



The ten Commandments are on two painted boards and hung each side of the East window – they are dated 1787.

The altar rail tapestry kneelers (known locally as “The Burdet”) were started by Helene Skyrme and finished by four ladies of the parish, in 1974. The first is of St. Mary's church, showing marriage, christening and burial. The others represent the history of the period – the fire at Figsbury Farm, the water mill, the local tramp, Figsbury Ring etc.

The Tomb of the Tanner family, on the left of the church entrance, who established a charity for the poor of the parish, which is still in existence.

The lettering on the Chancel Arch dated from the 16th and 17th Century.

A “Scratch Dial” or “Mass Clock” is in the form of a sundial, does not tell the time of day but indicates when the day Mass was read. They were used by the Saxons but can mostly be dated from 1066 until the invention of clocks. Ours is in excellent preservation and it is in the East side of the porch. It is clearly not in its original position because it misses the afternoon sun and is upside down.

Source: Winterbourne Gunner St. Mary