30 June 2022

CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST MILBORNE PORT

The Building: History and Description

1. General

Church of St John the Evangelist, in the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

A site of Christian worship since at least 950. Evidence of a church here in that year.
(from *A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 7: Bruton, Horethorne and Norton Ferris Hundreds*, quoting H. P. R. Finberg, "Early Charters of Wessex" 136)

Bequest to church in Milborne Port in year 950: Will of Wynflæd provided

> ...that a gift for her soul to the value of half a pound be supplied for Milborne from the stock at Charlton, and from Chinnock a gift for her soul to the value of half a pound for Yeovil (https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk/charter/1539.html)
> (*Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* 130 (Emilie Amt ed., 1993))

Dedication to St John appears 1086 (Domesday Book), and to St John the Evangelist 1498 (Somerset Mediaeval Wills).
(Nicholas Orme, *The Medieval Church Dedications of Somerset*, 160 Somerset Archaeology and Natural History 83, at 91 (2017)).

Significance, relationship to town:

> The church of Milborne Port stands ... inside the town, not in the rural manorial centre. For a new town church to have an estate of this size is extraordinary ... The position of the church, on the end of a small promontory, above a stream, is typical of the siting of churches of the later Anglo-Saxon period, so it is possible that the church preceded the town, which was founded around it.
> (Michael Costen, *Anglo-Saxon Somerset* 165 (2011))

> In the first instances many [minsters] were founded on royal estates in open countryside. Once settled, however, they provided an economic stimulus, since feeding the minster clergy and maintaining their buildings created demands that could only be satisfied by a nearby settlement of traders and craftsmen. At ... Milborne Port ... such adjuncts evolved into permanent market towns.
> (James Bond, "Villages and Markets" in *England's Landscape, The West* 70 (Barry Cunliffe, ed. 2006))

> The only surviving building that affords clear evidence [of being in a borough] is Milborne Port, Somerset, which has the characteristic cruciform plan, the angles of which project beyond the lines of the arms. Milborne, a mint under Æthelred II and Cnut, would have ranked as a borough in the late tenth and early eleventh century.

(C. A. Ralegh Radford, *Pre-Conquest Minster Churches*, 130 Archaeological Journal 120,135 (1973))

Observation in book on Anglo-Saxon church:

Regenbald the chancellor, that hardy survivor from Edward's reign into William's, rebuilt his minster at Milborne Port (Somerset) in a sumptous hybrid style where, in Richard Gem's words, Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque features "are welded together into an articulate and satisfying whole: a truly Anglo-Norman fusion has been achieved."
(John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* 366 (2005))

Minster: a regional church serving a wide area, staffed by group of clergy living in community, prior to establishment of parish system. (For more precise, detailed definition: Blair, at 3)

Likely original minster enclosure was roughly rectangular area on south side of High Street bounded by South Street, Brook Street and Bathwell Lane.
(Miranda Richardson, *An Archaeological Assessment of Milborne Port* (English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey) at 6, citing Dunning 1996 (2003))

Present building important example of Saxon-Norman overlap in architectural style:

The church is remarkable for its Saxo-Norman overlap, and remarkable too for the height and length of the C11 work. It contains unmistak-

able Norman work in immediate conjunction
with characteristic Anglo-Saxon features.
(Julian Orbach & Nikolaus Pevsner, *South and
West Somerset (Buildings of England Series)* 439
(2014))

Buildings which contain both Saxon and Norman
characteristics are known as 'overlap' churches, and
of these, none is more instructive than Milborne
Port, Somerset. Here the basic proportions are
Saxon, the west front has gable-headed arcading,
and there is Saxon arcading on the chancel too. But
the crossing piers and their capitals, and the blank
arcading on the tower are equally clearly Norman,
yet it all seems to be of one build. Such a building
cannot be confidently dated in the absence of docu-
mentary evidence: Sometime in the late eleventh
century seems most likely.
(Gerald Randall, *The English Parish Church* 23
(1982, 1988))

Observation by scholar of Somerset churches:

The earliest Romanesque building in Somerset is
Milborne Port, where the south wall of the choir
shows Saxon pilasters, which may be of the
tenth century....
(A.K. Wickham, *Churches of Somerset* 17 (1965))

Dating to Anglo-Saxon period partially derived from
sculptures. (Sally Foster, *A Gazetteer of the Anglo-Saxon
Sculpture in Historic Somerset*, 131 Somerset
Archaeology and Natural History 49, at 51 (1987)).

In summary: Some elements of present structure

arguably Saxon, with substantial Norman construction, and later elements from 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries, with modifications in 1843, and major expansion in 1867-69.

More detailed discussion of evidence for dating construction in sections below: **3. The Structure: Chancel (Lady Chapel)** and **7. The Structure: Nave and West Front.**

Preservation recognition: Grade I listed (1961). Historic England building information:
https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1295666

Somerset Historic Environment Record:
https://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/record/54257

Building discussed and illustrated at length on web site devoted to Anglo-Saxon architecture:
http://www.anglo-saxon-churches.co.uk/milborne.html

History of church on website of Milborne Port History & Heritage Group:
http://milborneporthistory.org.uk/the-church-of-st-john-the-evangelist/

Church guidebook: *St John the Evangelist Milborne Port, A Guide to the Parish Church* (3d ed. 2003)

Milborne Port History & Heritage Group Booklet No. 1: J. Fanning and Dr L. Wray, *A Short History of the Church of St John the Evangelist Milborne Port* (July 2016)

2. The Structure: North Chapel (Medlycott Chapel)

Two-bay chapel, from 15th century. Had been divided from chancel by a screen removed in 1841, with addition of hamstone steps (from Vestry Minutes, quoted in S. G. McKay, *Milborne Port in Somerset* 179 (1986)). Sometimes described as "chancel aisle".

Outer, north wall rebuilt 1844

Formerly separated from north aisle "by a handsome screen, which was unfortunately removed towards the end of the eighteenth century"
(E. T. Long, *The Church-Screens of Dorset,* 81 The Archaeological Journal 127, at 146 (1924)).

Likely a guild or fraternity chapel. There was a guild or brotherhood of St John the Evangelist, with charitable and devotional activities, in the village from at least the 14th century. There is documented evidence of a guild in 1382, but it likely dated from much earlier. (Lesley Wray, *From Alfred's Port to Rotten Borough and Beyond: The Story of Milborne Port* 27 (2014)).

Evidence of a chapel appears from legal proceedings in 1571 that challenged maintenance by a merchants guild of

> a presbytery, mass, and anniversary in a chapel called Chepmans Ylde in the parish church … It agreed to stop maintaining the chapel and holding the mass and was allowed to keep its property.
> (Wray, at 34)

Description of findings in inquiry:
https://somerset-
cat.swheritage.org.uk/records/DD/MP/12-14

Guild as thus reconstituted in secular form continues in village as The Commonalty. History of Commonalty on website of Milborne Port History & Heritage Group: http://milborneporthistory.org.uk/the-commonalty-charity/

Beyond east end is sacristy. Probably 14th or 15th century. Was it a third bay of the chapel earlier? Interior wall against chancel has remnants of chancel window. Windows, seen from outside, appear to be from else-where: east end has one early Gothic window, and one Norman window, and north side has Norman window similar to one on east end.

3. The Structure: Chancel (Lady Chapel)

Focal point of discussion as to date of building. *Possible* original Saxon structure, with major construction added in 1090 or so.

Architectural historians, referring to proportions, note great height as compared to width as a Saxon feature. (1 H.M. Taylor & J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* 424 (1965)).

Evidence viewed from outside: South wall has features cited to establish origins in Saxon period, such as pilasters, string courses, and capitals. Sources cited in Sally Foster, *A Gazetteer of the Anglo-Saxon Sculpture in Historic Somerset*, 131 Somerset Archaeology and Natural History 49, at 51 and 76 (1987).

But note competing views as to date, seeing building as post-Conquest:

> ... although Milborne Port church dates from about 1090, it is still essentially Saxon in form and decoration.
> (George Zarnecki, *1066 and Architectural Sculpture*, 52 Proceedings of the British Academy 87, 99 (1966))

Likewise, review of Taylor book:

> Such being the general leaning of their work, it is not surprising to see the authors list as pre-Conquest such classic examples of overlap as ... Milborne Port (Somerset).
> (Jean Bony, *Review of "Anglo-Saxon Architecture"*, 26 Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 74, 75 (March 1967))

Overlap analysis:

> How are we to account for a church which in its entire length demonstrates Anglo-Saxon work, yet with such forceful Early Norman detail? Probably the building period overlapped 1066. Anglo-Saxon masons may have absorbed Norman motifs, or Norman masons inserted transepts and a crossing tower into an Anglo-Saxon church.
> (Orbach & Pevsner, at 440)

In general, note Norman influence on British architecture before Conquest, and continuing use of Saxon themes after Conquest. (See Warwick Rodwell & James Bentley,

Our Christian Heritage 59, 66-67 (1984); Peter Kidson et al., *A History of English Architecture* 31-34 (rev. ed., Penguin 1965))

Detailed discussion of dating of church, and of continuation of Saxon styles in post-Conquest period in case of Milborne Port in Richard Gem, "I. The English Parish Church in the 11th and Early 12th Centuries: A Great Rebuilding" in *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition 950-1200* at 27 (John Blair ed., 1988).

Recent interesting analysis: This discussion is enhanced by a valuable new analysis of the church emphasizing the complex relationship between Anglo-Saxon building traditions and practices and Norman building traditions and practices, with detailed discussion, and examination of analogous structures elsewhere.

With respect to chancel wall, author notes that:

> Without any physical evidence to suggest that Milborne Port's exterior chancel decorations were later additions, it seems likely that they signal the continuity of Anglo-Saxon motifs post-Conquest.

and concludes about the building generally:

> ....the combination of fashionable Norman designs and fully developed Anglo-Saxon techniques positions Milborne Port in a post-conquest milieu towards end of the 11th century (*c.* 1090-1100).

(Ronald Lvovski, *Anglo-Saxon or Norman? The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Milborne Port*, 160 Somerset Archaeology and Natural History 57, at 67 and 75 (2017))

Distinct Norman features: high window openings (now covered) on north and south sides.

Later features in south wall. Toward west end: single lancet, 13th century, and adjoining double lancets, from late 13th century. Toward east end: window and priest's door, likely 14th century. East wall window likely 15th century; stained glass 1910.

Rafter roof, possibly 18th century, exposed by Sir Walter Tapper in 1908.

Burials under chancel described by McKay:

> ...the only surviving ones are in the chancel. Here are to be seen the tombstones of two former vicars, Caleb Cooke (1674 to 1708) and John Hall (1748 to 1765), the latter behind the altar.
> (McKay, at 176)

Not easily visible. Hall tombstone in floor under pad behind altar. Cooke tombstone described as on north side of chancel (McKay, at 43) not visible; presumably covered by fitted carpet after McKay's inspection. Note bits of decorative carving, with inscriptions, in floor visible under choir stalls at west end of chancel, near rood screen.

4. The Structure: Crossing

Proportions with respect to rest of building cited as evidence of Saxon design, i.e., wider than chancel, nave, and transepts.

Arches to transepts clearly Norman in style. Slightly depressed, basket-handle (three-centered or *anse de panier*) shape, compared to more familiar semi-circular style.

Arguably result of pressure:

> The original north and south arches are now of slightly elliptical form, having been somewhat distorted by the extra weight of the medieval tower, and it is no doubt this distortion which led to the rebuilding of the eastern and western arches.
> (H. M. Taylor, *The Pre-Conquest Churches of Wessex,* 58 The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine 156, at 164 (1962))

But note competing view that they were constructed this way, in discussion of continental Romanesque influences in the building:

> But in other ways it is less orthodox: for example in the flattening of the roll mouldings of the crossing arches... (Gem, at 27)

Some arches of the period apparently built this way:

> Arches of the [Norman] period are round-headed, or occasionally have a depressed or

elliptical profile....
(Simon Bradley, *Churches, an Architectural Guide* 19 (2016))

Likewise, Mr Toni Ferrari, experienced stonemason, opines that the arch was constructed this way (Conversation, 25 December 2014).

More recent "original construction" analysis by Lvovski:

> While the warping is possibly due to the weight of the crossing tower, the depression of the arches may not be altogether different from how they originally existed.
> (Ronald Lvovski, *Anglo-Saxon or Norman? The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Milborne Port*, 160 Somerset Archaeology and Natural History 57, at 67 (2017))

Arches to transepts not centred in walls of crossing, but hug east end. Why? Possibly related to design of tower after nave and chancel (Hugh Braun, *Parish Churches: Their Architectural Development in England* 41 (1970)).

Additional wall space may have been to accommodate stairs to bell tower, which occupy space created by the offset. ((Ronald Lvovski, *Anglo-Saxon or Norman? The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Milborne Port*, 160 Somerset Archaeology and Natural History 57, at 67 (2017))

Complex Taylor analysis: "...and the church can legitimately be regarded as having been of five-compartment integrated transverse type..." (3 H.M Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* 988-989 (1978)).

East and west arches modified to pointed style in late 14th century, possibly connected with effort to strengthen when tower had addition.

Very large piers at northeast and northwest, visible from north transept, likely installed in 13th century. Outside, corner buttress at southeast meeting of transept and chancel perhaps at same time or 14th century.

Columns surrounding crossing: Thirty of them. Capitals are of major interest and subjects of scholarly inquiry, especially as to date.

Some are stone, some are plaster; one analysis sees 16 stone capitals as original, and the rest as stucco restorations in 19th century.

But note observation by Malcolm Thurlby that he believes all are original (Lecture, Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland (CRSBI), *English Romanesque Sculpture in its Architectural Context*, 24 April 2018 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKNaERSxg60 [at about 55:])). He says "a wonderful church to go and explore".

Two are Norman in form and decoration (at west, presumably last to be carved); others are Anglo-Saxon in style, but likely carved post-Conquest.

Apparent actual examination:

> The Rev. G. M. Evans (formerly vicar) and I carefully examined these capitals with the aid of a ladder, and we found as follows:
> West arch, Capitals all stone.

North arch, west capital stone, east capital
plaster.
East arch. Part of capitals just above the screen
is stone, the rest plaster.
South arch, capitals entirely plaster.
(F. J. Allen, M.A. M.D., *The Problematic Early
Work at Milborne Port Church,* 80 Proceedings of
the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History
Society 25, 28 (1934))

Discussed at length in George Zarnecki, *1066 and
Architectural Sculpture,* 52 Proceedings of the British
Academy 87, 99 (1966); Robin Downes, *St. John the
Evangelist, Milborne Port* (manuscript, 2006, in south
transept); C. E. Ponting, *The Church of St John the
Evangelist, Milborne Port*, 60 Proceedings of the Somerset
Archaeological and Natural History Society 46, 48-49
(1914).

Design origins of capitals, with acanthus leaves, possibly
from manuscript paintings of late Anglo-Saxon period
(Henry P. McGuire, *A Twelfth Century Workshop in
Northamption*, 9 Gesta 11, 19 (1970)).

Coffered oak ceiling, nine panels, 15th century. Easily
removed, as for opening space to lower bells for refurb-
ishment. It appears from vestry records that it was
covered by a plaster ceiling until 1844 (Mc Kay, at 180).

Rood screen. From 15th century. Probably moved from
west end of crossing. As examined now, installation
suggests not originally here, and that it was wider.
Originally had gallery above; removed 1842 (Richard
Duckworth, *Yesterday's Milborne Port* 97 (2004); Wray, at
54). Why and when was it moved?

Note inscription (date?) in support of king:

> Where y word of a king is there is power and
> who may say unto him what doest thou?
> Ecclesiastes VIII:IV.

Observations (including picture) about screen in
E. T. Long, *The Church-Screens of Dorset,* 81 The
Archaeological Journal 127, at 131, 132, 136,146
(1924).

5. The Structure: South Transept (Gethsemane Chapel)

Gable rebuilt about 1335 (Wray, at 23), and then
"[R]ebuilt from the foundations" 1843 (from Vestry
minutes, quoted by McKay, at 180).

Window to south perhaps early 14th century. Norman
window to west moved from elsewhere, 1843. Interesting
design, colouring.

Window to east and niche surrounding altar, analogous
to transept chapels in larger churches? (Malcolm
Thurlby, *Review of "Rochester Cathedral 604-1540:An
Architectural History"* 29 revued'art
canadienne/Canadian Art Review 101, 103 (2004); see
also Braun, at 163).

Roof described as "nice 14th century barrel vault raising
from a good cornice" (C. E. Ponting, *The Church of St
John the Evangelist, Milborne Port*, 60 Proceedings of the
Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society 46,
50 (1914)).

Rebuilding report for 1843 work speaks of restoring outer

roof to "its supposed original pitch" (from Vestry minutes). Vestry report of 1844 speaks of "inner roof completed".

6. The Structure: South Door, Observed from Outside

Tympanum over door important Norman feature. 11th -12th century. Described as "raw, vigorous Celtic decoration" with "two extravagantly maned lions"

> affronted, but one with head turned to bite its tail while the other breathes a fleur-de-lys flame. (Orbach & Pevsner, at 17 and 440).

> The motif of confronted animals is...very close to the animals on the Bayeux Tapestry. (George Zarnecki, *1066 and Architectural Sculpture*, 52 Proceedings of the British Academy 98 (1966))

Recognized as original, with considerable attention in architectural history literature: Rita Wood, *The Two Lions at Milborne Port*, 141 Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society 1 (1997); George Zarnecki, *1066 and Architectural Sculpture*, 52 Proceedings of the British Academy 98 (1966); Robin Downes, *St. John the Evangelist, Milborne Port* (manuscript, 2006).

Restored in 1843; inner order and tympanum original, but with new

> filleting and zigzagging over the archway being copied, the former from that remaining over the capital of one of the columns of the doorway, the

latter from Stoke under Ham Church, and the
finish of the upper part of the doorway from
Iffley.
(from Vestry minutes, quoted by McKay, at 180).

Might originally have been surmounted by gable with
figure of Christ, and carved paterae, as found above the
north door of All Saints church, Lullington, Somerset, as
suggested by Mr Brian Gittos (History & Heritage Group
church tour, 20 June 2016). Likewise, Orbach & Pevsner,
at 440. Were paterae installed in chancel? Note
discussion, below, of their origin: **No. 10 Design Features
of Interest.**

Present wooden door restored by John Taylor, local
craftsman, 1996.

Porch installed over door early 14th century (Wray, at
23). Removed in 1843 work: described in Vestry minutes
as "dilapidated by reason of banging in and about it".
Note stone flooring in front of door.

7.   The Structure: Nave and West Front

Major rebuilding in 1867-69. Architect Henry Hall,
builder Alfred Reynolds. Nave before that extended only
one bay to west beyond south door. West front removed,
building extended by 28 feet. North transept rebuilt, and
previous north aisle, added in 1826, replaced. (Vestry
minutes describing 1826 work, McKay, at 175). (Henry
Hall was also architect of old school, corner of Sherborne
Road and Gainsborough (1863-64, 1878), now Clockspire
Restaurant).

New, higher roof; see line of previous roof at east end of nave.

Merits of rebuilding addressed:

> ... and between 1867 and 1869 the heavy hand of Henry Hall of London came down and the nave and north aisle were entirely demolished and rebuilt nearly 30 feet longer in a very undistinguished style.
> (Robert Dunning, *Fifty Somerset Churches* 25 (1996))

> The detail is lavish, over-rich for the medieval work, with fussy roofs on shafts from angel corbels.
> (Orbach & Pevsner, at 440)

Outside, south side, shows older ashlar stonework below window in old east bay, differing from stonework in new west bays. East bay window perhaps 15th century; 1869 windows in extended nave similar, but not identical.

What was there before 1843 and 1869 work? Photograph (circa 1855) shows small window with Norman arch, just west of south door. (Duckworth, at 98). Window on south wall of mortuary building at north side of church-yard looks very much like this window. Mortuary building was constructed from stone from old nave when nave was extended in 1869.

Likewise, McKay, at 183, shows picture with what appears to be a small window with Norman arch, and profusion of foliage unlikely to be covering a large Gothic window.

Drawing by J. Buckler, 1839, shows single lancet west of south door (and hint of 15th century window to east of that door) and low nave roof. (Michael McGarvie, ed. *Sir Stephen Glynne's Church Notes for Somerset* 239 (1994))

A less likely image: painting by Rev William Hamilton Turner (1844) (nave north wall, near north transept/choir vestry) shows large Gothic window, similar to window east of south door. Query accuracy: e.g., painting shows high, sharply-angled roof of nave, seemingly inaccurate in light of former roof line visible at east end of nave and roof height as displayed in photographs of west front before 1867-69 (Page 30, below. From English Heritage Archive. Also in McKay at 183).

West front. Photos just cited show remnants of triangular arches, cited by Orbach & Pevsner (at 439) as an Anglo-Saxon motif.

But note competing *glance back and reinterpretation* analysis:

> ... the demolished west façade had intersected triangular arcading suggesting a glance back at Anglo-Saxon buildings like the apse of Wing, but its reinterpretation in terms of Romanesque intersected arcading.
> (Gem, at 27)

Door from 15th century rebuilt and inserted in new front. Niches for statues moved to front of mortuary building to north of church, built at same time.

What happened to the pre-15th century door? Interesting suggestion by Alfred Reynolds, 1867-69 builder, that

Norman door in Guildhall on High Street, next to butcher shop, might have been church door (A. Reynolds, *Milborne Port Church*, 14 Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society 70, 71 (1893)). Guildhall door is pictured in Alastair Service, *Anglo-Saxon and Norman: A Guide and Gazetteer*, at 88 (1982), referring to "The extraordinary doorway, probably of c. 1200."

But: It seems unlikely, if there were a door there, that it would have been of this style (Rita Wood, *The Two Lions at Milborne Port*, 141 Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society 1, at 3 (1997))

Did the structure there before the 15th century even have a west door? Many eleventh-century churches had only north and south doors (Helen Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* 177 (2013)).

8. The Structure: Tower

Crossing towers (rather than west end towers) seen as part of standard plan of major Norman churches, and cited as important feature of churches (including this one) constructed in mid and later eleventh century. (Orbach & Pevsner, at 17; Gittos, at 177).

Three levels. First and second Norman; top, belfry level 15th century. Height 70 feet.

On outside, stair-turret, perhaps from 12th century, provides access to belfry. Faced with distinctive Norman small squares set diamond-wise

>like the *opus reticulatum* found in monastic buildings at Westminster Abbey of *c.* 1065 and later.
>(Orbach & Pevsner, at 440)

Note possible argument from external location that original tower was Saxon, since Normans knew how to put stairs in tower and would have done so if they built it. (1 Taylor & Taylor, at 426).

Entrance to stair was previously from inside transept; changed in 1843 work (McKay, at 179).

Good photograph of stair-turret in Robert Dunning, ed. *Somerset Churches and Chapels: Building, Repair and Restoration* at 31 (2007) (Church dedication misidentified).

Bells. Peal of eight bells. Earliest dates from early 17th century; recast in 1736. Two bells gift of Sir William Medlycott in 1846. (McKay, at 173-74). Major refurbishments 1909 and 2012, the latter by John Taylor & Co. of Loughborough.

Very interesting, detailed account of 2012 bell refurbishment: John Barker & Susan Wales, *The Bells of St. John the Evangelist, Milborne Port, Somerset*, The Ringing World (No. 5314, Mar. 1, 2013) p. 197 et seq. Includes technical description of bells.

9. Furnishings

Font. Northeast corner of nave. 11th or 12th century. Octagonal, with shallow blank arcading on three panels. Purbeck marble. Very crude base, from 14th or 15th

century. Cover from 17th century.

Originally square; corners hacked off sometime between 1839 and 1842:

>Buckler's drawing, dated 1839, in the Pigott collection at Taunton Castle, shows a square bowl.
>(C.E. Ponting, *The Church of St John the Evangelist, Milborne Port*, 60 Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society 46, 53, fn 2 (1914))

Description of church, October1842, speaks of "...Early English font of marble and an octagon in form..." (Michael McGarvie, ed. *Sir Stephen Glynne's Church Notes for Somerset* 229, at 231 (1994))

July 1888 drawing shows font as at present (*Ancient Church Fonts of Somerset: Surveyed & Drawn by Harvey Pridham* 47 (Adrian J. Webb ed., 2013))

Motivation for alteration? Possible effort to reflect ancient baptismal symbolism:

>Eight was a symbol of regeneration — the world started on the eighth day of Creation — and it was also a symbol of resurrection, for Christ rose from the dead on the eighth day of the Passion. St Ambrose and other Early Christian fathers emphasized that, as a spiritual regeneration, baptism was represented by the number eight.
>(Roger Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture* 61 (1999))

Font was formerly at northwest corner of nave. Moved to present location in modernization in mid-twentieth century. Watercolour in north chapel (Turner (1845)) shows font in north chapel; likely temporary placement during construction.

Chancel altar (said to be copy of stone altar at Porlock) and canopy installed 1906. Designed by Sir Walter Tapper.

Chancel communion rail, by Mr J A Cross in art metal workshop at King Arthur's School, Wincanton; oak portion from carpentry shop in same school (1967).

Altar in crossing **(Caution: atypical plinth height)** from parish church at Furnham, Chard. Dates from 1966 modifications, to provide an altar closer to congregation than chancel altar. Likewise, choir stalls moved out of crossing to present locations (chancel, south transept, a few left in crossing) at same time.

Interesting history of these modifications and the *very considerable* discussion that preceded them in Duckworth 101-105, and in memoir by rector, Edmund Digby Buxton, *Then and Now* 29-103 passim (1997).

Rector's "signature" ("E D B") for these modifications in floor stone at east end of nave, to north. (Buxton, at 125).

Altar might well have been located in crossing in Anglo-Saxon times. (Rita Wood, *The Two Lions at Milborne Port*, 141 Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society 1, at 12 (1997)).

Pulpit [date?]. Decoration similar to chancel altar? New

pulpit and desk purchased from Mr Davis of Frome, 1854, at cost not exceeding £70 (McKay, at 181): probably not this one. Pulpit in mid-1950s described as "stained black, being almost as dark as the only altar way back in the Chancel." (Duckworth, at 101)

South transept altar previously in Mission Room in Newtown section of Milborne Port, in use 1894-1943. (Richard Brewer & Richard Duckworth, *Sherborne & Milborne Port* (Images of England Series) 42 (2006)).

10. Design Features of Interest

Chancel. Niches on east wall of chancel show, inside, above statues, poignant remnants of medieval colour decoration. Statues of St John the Evangelist and Virgin Mary, installed 1972. By John Skelton (1923-1999) of Hassocks, E. Sussex, sculptor of font at Chichester Cathedral and other church sculptures (nephew of Eric Gill, with whom he worked.)

At east end, south side, a piscina (basin to wash communion vessels) likely from 13th or 14th century, with hooks for door, suggesting later use as aumbry (cabinet to store communion vessels).

High on north and south walls: paterae, bas-relief medallions. which may have come from south door. A puzzling feature, with origins unclear. One possibility was original place above south door (above, No. 6). Recent detailed analysis of many possibilities and explanations:
Ronald Lvovski, *Anglo-Saxon or Norman? The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Milborne Port*, 160 Somerset Archaeology and Natural History 57, at 74 (2017)

South transept. Piscina likely from late 11th century, with modern surround; possibly moved from elsewhere. Recumbent effigy of woman, likely circa 1300. Chandelier by Mr A J Cross.

South wall of nave. Holy water stoup adjacent to door, from 14th century, but restored and re-installed.

11. Hangings, Commemorations, and Memorials

Royal arms [?required by law after Restoration?]. In north aisle of nave, diamond-shaped hanging, 1662, with Charles II arms, and admonitory quotes from scripture:

> My sonne feare thou the Lord & The King and
> Meddle Not with Them y are given to chang
> (from Proverbs 24:21)

> Let every soule be subject to the higher powers
> for there is no power not of God
> (from Romans 13:1)

(Stephen Friar, *A Companion to the English Parish Church* 393 (1996)).

Hatchments. Diamond-shaped panels with coat of arms, often of fabric, prepared to be carried in funerals, and then placed in church or, sometimes, homes. Four in north transept:

> Jane Walter, wife of William Coles (1801);
> Jane Coles, wife of Thomas Medlycott (1824);
> Elizabeth Tugwell, wife of Sir William Coles
> Medlycott, 1st Baronet (1847); and (probably)
> William Coles Paget Medlycott, 3rd Baronet (1887).

(From Peter Summers & John Titterton, *Hatchments in Britain (7) Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Somerset* 163 (1988)).

Medlycott family memorials: In north transept/choir vestry, memorial on east wall, with obelisk top, by Humphrey Hopper, commemorates Thomas (d. 1716), James, son and heir (d. 1731), and James, second son of James (d. 1729), buried below.

Also, on west wall of north transept, large memorial plaques commemorating Medlycott family members (north panel) with deaths 1887 through 1986, and (south panel) with deaths 1738 through 1815. Additional smaller panels obscured.

In north chapel, east wall, elaborate Gothic-style memorial by Humphrey Hopper commemorates William Coles Medlycott (1st Bt) (d. 1835), his wife Dame Elizabeth Medlycott (d. 1847), Sir William Coles Medlycott, 2d Bt (d. 1882), and Sarah Jeffrey, wife of Sir William Coles Medlycott, 2d Bt (d. 1879).

Medlycott family burials in vault, now sealed, below north transept and north chapel. Later graves of seven members of family at east end of churchyard, with tombstone surrounded by grove of trees.

Bequest board. On north wall of nave, at far east end, bequest board commemorating charitable bequests to benefit parish (1860). These funds now managed by The Commonalty, successor to medieval guild. Discussed interestingly in Friar, at 49.

Ten Commandments. On south wall of nave, toward west, inscribed by Ralph Beyer (1962).

12. Stained Glass

Glass from mid-19th, and 20th, centuries.

East window, 1910, by W. Bainbridge Reynolds.

In the nave

> ... four three-light windows dated 1869 illustrating scenes from the life of Jesus, the most easterly the Raising of Lazarus and the most westerly the Draught of Fishes miracle, all by Clayton and Bell except possibly the latter. (Hugh Playfair, *Jewels of Somerset* 43 (2012))

Nave windows described as "a good series by Clayton & Bell, 1869...."   (Orbach & Pevsner, at 441).

West window:

> The five-light west window in two tiers dated 1969 [1869?] illustrating scenes from the life of Jesus with the bottom tiers concentrating on the Nativity, by Clayton and Bell. (Playfair, at 43)

Window at west end of north aisle, behind organ, presented by Rev. Mr Turner, BD, of Trent (McKay, at 182) and installed at same time, has distinctive colouring ("... acid-coloured... probably by *O'Connor*" (Orbach & Pevsner, at 441)). Michael O'Connor (1801-1867) "There are many O'Connor windows, which are unmarked, in Somerset." (Playfair, at 14).

Evidence of earlier glass: "By 1548 stained glass windows had been added..." (Wray, at 32).

South window in south transept had [Victorian stained?] glass until reorganization of worship space by Rector in 1966:

> ...I even agreed to Fry's men putting clear glass
> in the south transept window to replace some
> rather ugly cheap glass...
> (Edmund Digby Buxton, *Then and Now* 116
> (1997))

In chancel, single lancet presumably had stained glass until clear glass installed post-1971 (per small commemorative plaque on choir stalls, north side of crossing).

North chapel: Watercolour on north wall of north chapel (Turner (1845)) shows stained glass in windows of that chapel, now clear. Likewise Turner watercolour (1844) on east wall shows stained glass there. Artistic licence, or was there stained glass there in 1845?

13. Organ

Harrison organ, dedicated 1912:

> 'In Honour of the Glory of God & in memory of
> the Rev Charles Hubert Payne Crawfurd Vicar of
> this Parish from 1893 to 1907 who entered into
> rest December 12th 1908. This Organ was
> dedicated October 16th 1912'

Case (1934) constructed of oak from the belfry; 'Dedicated to Bernard Southcombe on Ascension Day'

Previously in north chapel, then in south transept; moved here in 1964. Replaced Gray organ of 1840.
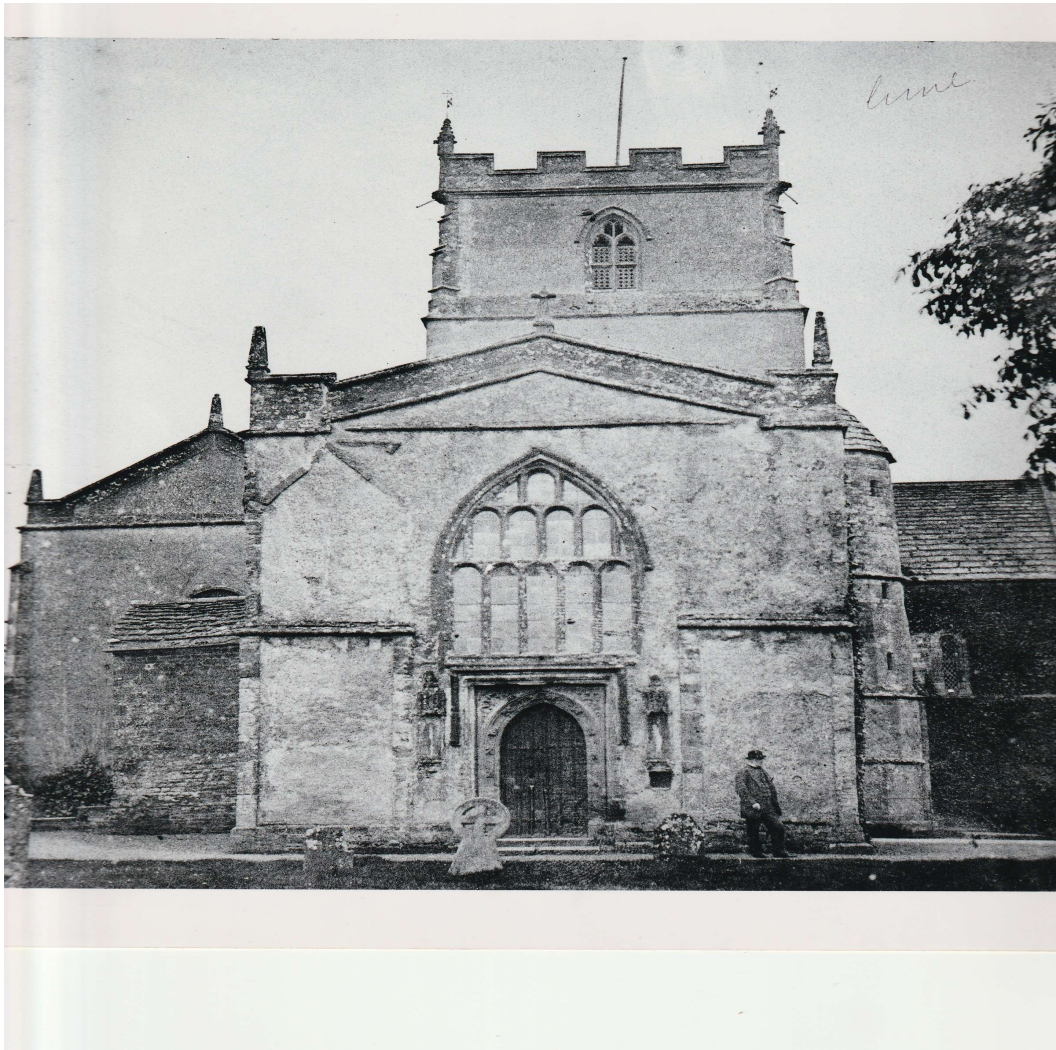
Technical description:
www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N12256

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This outline prepared by John P Fanning

30 June 2022

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Church before 1869 extension.

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