



**The Church of St Mary
and St Bartholomew,
Cranborne**

Cranborne

The ancient Town of Cranborne (in earlier times written as Cranburn, Cranborn, Crenburne, etc.) derives its name from the Crane, the stream which flows through it. The Town was once a place of considerable importance, holding a Market every week on Thursday, and two Fairs, one on St. Bartholomew's Day (24th August) and one on St. Nicholas' Day (6th December); it also had a Grammar School. It stands in what was once the largest Parish in the County of Dorset, being nearly 40 miles in circumference and comprising more than 13,000 acres. The Manor House was the Court for Cranborne Chase; here were held the Chase-courts as well as the Leet-court and Court-Baron.



There were formerly seven inns in the town; the most important of them have disappeared without trace. It is known that there was a Swan, a Red Lion, a Black Horse and The Checkers. The Sheaf of Arrows became The Victoria but has now regained its ancient title. (A sheaf of arrows is part of the coat-of-arms of the Cecil family) The other survivor from former days is the Fleur-de-Lys, which alone retains much of its old-world characteristics. Cranborne is the Chaseborough of the Hardy novels, and it is at the Fleur-de-Lys that Tess of the d'Urbervilles is supposed to have rested on her journey to Trantridge (Pentridge).

The Monastery

In a manuscript of Sir William Dugdale in the Ashmolean Museum, it is stated that in ancient times there was a college of six monks at Cranborne, built in memory of certain Britons who were slain in battle there. Some of the earliest history comes from the records of Tewkesbury Abbey, in which it is stated that "about the year 930, in the reign of King Athelstan, there lived a noble knight named Ayleward Sneaw or Snow, so called from his fair complexion, who, being mindful of his death, founded a Monastery in honour of God, our Lord Jesus Christ and His Mother and St. Bartholomew, in the demesne at Cranborn." Having collected there some brethren under an Abbot, who should strictly obey the rule of St. Benedict, he made the Priory of Tewkesbury, of which he was patron, entirely subordinate to the Church of Cranborne.

The Abbey of Cranborne was established by 980 and Aylward was buried there in the church he had founded. The descendents of Aylward did much for the church in enlarging and rebuilding it. At the time of the Conquest, Brithric was the holder of the Manor, but because of an act of discourtesy to Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror, he was imprisoned at Winchester, where he died. His estates were confiscated and granted to William Rufus, who in turn granted them to Robert Fitz-Hamon, a great soldier who was also Lord of Tewkesbury.

The Domesday Book (1086) records that Cranborne was one of the important monastic foundations and held lands in Ingerlingeham (Gillingham), Bovehic (Boveridge), Monkton-

up Wimborne, Levetesford (Langford), Tarante (Tarrant Monkton) and Horced (Orchard). In 1106 the Abbey held two hides in Purbeck, the churches of Pentric (Pentridge), Essemara (Ashmore), Froma (Frome), Chettle and the tithe of Tarente.

Fitz-Hamon decided to move the Abbey of Cranborne back to Tewkesbury, so in 1102, Giraldus, Abbot of Cranborne, and fifty-seven monks, having made sufficient accommodation for themselves, moved from Cranborne and set about building the magnificent church of Tewkesbury, where evidence of the close link with Cranborne may be found.

The Priory

Cranborne Abbey then became a Priory and Cell of Tewkesbury, but though its status was thus diminished the Prior was still an important person and upon the apprehension of the descent of a foreign army on the Dorset coast was directed by writ of King Edward III in 1339 to repair there with an armed force to repel the enemy. At the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, Tewkesbury and the dependent Priory of Cranborne were surrendered to the King on January 31st, 1540. The Priory stood in the present vicarage garden and was demolished in 1703. Its heart and centre, stand today as the Church of St. Mary and St. Bartholomew.

Boveridge

There was a “Chapel of Ease” here, just to the north of Cranborne (intended to make it easier to attend worship when the parish church is at a distance). It was dedicated to St. Aldhelm, the first Bishop of Sherborne. There have been several chapels here; the present one was built about 1834 but the chapel was closed in 1980 and deconsecrated. It is now a private dwelling. There was an alms house near it built and endowed by Thomas Hooper of Boveridge. In the Will (about 1660) a provision was made that the Vicar of Cranborne or some person appointed by him, should come to the Alms House on Saturdays and instruct the inmates in the principles of the protestant religion for two hours, for which duty he was to receive the sum of £12 per year. This Alms House no longer functions. The Vicar in 1790, Henry Donne, did not care for the journey to Boveridge in the winter for he made this note in the register: “Boveridge Chappel from Lady Day to Michaelmas is pretty well. A Sunday before or a Sunday after is as far as can well be gone.”

Cranborne Manor

The Manor House is surely one of the most lovely of country houses. A gracious building of grey stone, with a courtyard and two porter's lodges on either side of an archway. The core of the house was King John's Hunting Lodge and was enlarged, decorated and altered in the 17th Century. The figures of Justice and Mercy stand over the south Porch reminding men of the days when the Chase laws were administered here.



The Manor and Lordship of Cranborne was granted by James I to Sir Robert Cecil, the second son of William Cecil, Lord of Burleigh, in 1603. In 1604 he was made Viscount Cranborne, and in 1605 Earl of Salisbury. The Marquessate was granted in 1789, and the present Marquess of Salisbury is one of the Patrons on the benefice.

The Church

No part of the Saxon church of Aylward now remains; the oldest part is the Norman doorway in the north porch, the date of which is about 1120. Two consecration crosses are to be noticed on the west side of this doorway. The church was rebuilt in the thirteenth century in the Early English style; it was completed and re-consecrated in 1252 and dedicated to St. Mary, St. Peter and St. Bartholomew. The name of St. Peter appears only at this time, and for centuries the dedication has been only to St. Mary and St. Bartholomew.

A walk round the Church (Numbers in text refer to church plan inside the back cover)

Upon entering the Church the first thing to meet your eye is the **Font (1)**. Here is celebrated the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, (otherwise known as “christening”) through which we are “washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” (*1st Corinthians 6.11*). Baptism marks our coming into the Church, our adoption into God’s family; standing where it does the Font is a reminder to those who have been baptised and an open invitation to those who have not.



It was made about 1240, fashioned out of Purbeck stone and originally stood against the west face of the fourth pier on the south side where there is an incised cross with a niche on either side, and an iron hook to hold up the cover. During extensive repairs in 1854 the font was moved to the base of the tower and in 1970 to its present position. An early cover, shaped like a spire, is to be found by the monuments in the north-west corner.

The whole of the nave is from this Early English period and some notable **mural paintings** are to be seen on the south wall either side of the Font, appropriately, considering their subject matter:

- **St. Christopher (2)**, patron saint of travellers is often shown in medieval wall-paintings. Seen wading through the river, he represents the Christian pilgrimage which begins with taking the Baptismal plunge.
- **The Tree of the Seven Deadly Sins** (Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Anger, and Sloth) and **The Tree of the Seven Virtues** (Justice, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, Faith, Hope, and Charity) **(3)** indicating the Baptismal decision to

turn away from evil and turn to Christ, and asking us which side we are on. Another interpretation of the Tree of Virtues is that it refers to the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy (i.e. putting faith into practice by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick, ministering to prisoners, and burying the dead).

Estimates of their date range from c.1240 to c.1400. They were discovered under the lime-wash in 1870. The Cranborne Tree of Virtues is thought to be unique. In 1927 the doorway behind the Font was discovered; this was doubtless the entrance into the cloisters, which stood to the south of the church, with the refectory, used as a tithe barn, which was pulled down in 1870.

From the Font proceed up the central aisle, called the **Nave**, from the Latin for ship. The Church is described as the Ark, a life-boat which we come on board at Baptism. On the south wall there are traces of another medieval wall painting, **the Three Living and the Three Dead (4)**. Three noble hunters in all their pomp represent Man at the beginning, middle, and end of life; they encounter three walking corpses, reminding them that death comes to us all, and we know not when. This *memento mori* image was often used as a call to humility and repentance.



Somewhat chastened we continue our journey, and are invited to take heart and have hope in the Word of God: the **Lectern (5)**, (from the Latin for reading desk) stands on the right, carrying the Holy Bible. On the left is the **Pulpit (6)**, from which the sermon, expounding and applying the Scriptures, is given. (Nearby, on the north wall of the nave, there are traces of a painted text, now illegible, probably dating from the 17th century. While our lectern is plain and relatively modern, the oak pulpit is of great interest. It bears the monogram TP, which stands for Thomas Parker, Abbot of Tewkesbury and Cranborne from 1381 to 1421. The fine carving includes emblems of the chase, a hound, a hawk catching a hare, a falcon and a crowing cock. They also had symbolic meanings in medieval times. The hound represented faithfulness (and his large ears could be a reminder that we should listen to the preacher!) The cock recalls St. Peter's denial of Jesus, warns of judgement but also offers the hope of a new day dawning (and perhaps encourages us to stay awake during the sermon!).



Abbot Thomas Parker was a great builder and there is much evidence of his work both in the Church and the Manor. He



The Chancel of Cranborne Church





ch previous to the year AD 1875



built a Chantry chapel in Tewkesbury Abbey over the tomb of the founder, Robert Fitz-Hamon, and where prayers for his soul would be offered.

The wooden **Rood Screen (7)** is a modern replacement of what would have been a medieval feature. It represents not just the barrier between this world and the next, but an invitation to continue our pilgrimage through the way opened for us by Christ's death on the cross. We *stand under* the Rood (an old word for cross) in wonder, and try to *understand* – “through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing in the glory of God.” (*Romans 5.2*) Pause for a moment and imagine how it would feel to be barred from going on – we have no right to approach God, other than that won for us by Jesus – and before proceeding retrace your steps to the church door and turn right, up the north aisle. The **Victorian stained-glass (8)** depicts:-

- Our Patron Saints Bartholomew (with the knife symbolic of his martyrdom and the Blessed Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven (an ancient honorific title)
- Jesus the Good Shepherd (*St. John 10*)
- Jesus the Light of the World (*St. John 9*)
- St. Peter with the Keys of the Kingdom (*St. Matthew 16.19*)
- St. Paul with the sword of the Spirit (*Ephesians 6.17*)

Also in this north aisle is a mural monument with a figure of a boy seated. His right elbow rests on a skull on his knee, and in his left hand is a posy of flowers. There is a translation of the Latin inscription in a frame below the memorial.

The **Chancel** we now enter was rebuilt in 1875, the vestry on the north side was enlarged and an organ chamber built on the south side. The chancel screen, the reredos in the lady

chapel, and the tower screen were all carved by the Rev. F.H. Fisher, Vicar from 1888 to 1910, in memory of whom there is a window in the south wall. The wall painting on the chancel arch (**9**) would appear to date from this period. It shows Christ enthroned in glory, with the twelve Apostles. They can be identified by their symbols: e.g. St. Peter is shown with the Keys of the Kingdom.

Each bears witness to the words of the Apostles' Creed, the summary of the Christian Faith in use since at least the 4th century.

The **organ (10)** is a fine two-manual instrument with pedal board, built in 1880 by Wadsworth Brothers and described by the British Institute of Organ Studies as being “of importance to the national heritage”.

Our journey brings us to the **Sanctuary**. Here, at the **Altar (11)** is celebrated that Holy Sacrament which



is known by a variety of names in Christian tradition, Mass, Holy Communion, Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, the Divine Liturgy. Each of these brings out a particular meaning of the rite which Jesus instituted on the night he was betrayed, which we call Maundy Thursday. It is at once a showing forth of his death on Good Friday, a proclamation of his Resurrection at Easter, and a pledge and anticipation of Kingdom come, likened by our Lord to a joyful wedding reception. The Altar is at the East end of the church, where the sun rises, for we celebrate the Rising of the Son. The **East Window** was installed in 1992 – please see the note by the artist, Alan Younger.

The frontal is a different colour for the different seasons and festivals of the Church Year, each with a symbolic significance.

To the left of the altar is an arched recess, known as an Easter Sepulchre. As part of the Holy Week ritual the consecrated bread would be placed here after the Maundy Thursday service as a kind of symbolic burial of Christ, until Easter Day (This rare feature was preserved and re-assembled when the original sanctuary was replaced).

On the floor at the right is our only remaining ancient memorial brass, commemorating Margaret, successively Mrs Wallop and Mrs Hawles, who died in 1582. Looking back down the church you notice that some of the pillars lean and arches are a bit off-centre, but considering the tools and materials available the medieval workmen achieved wonders. Notice the strong and simple lines of the remarkable **Barrel Roof**. Turning down the south aisle we see.

- The Mother and Child worshipped by shepherds and wise men
- Christ inviting all sorts and conditions to come unto him (*St. Matthew 11.28*)



This latter window is in memory of John Tregonwell, (died 1885). He lived at Cranborne Lodge, a fine Georgian House across the road from the Garden Centre, and after suffering a series of misfortunes retired to a farm on the coast where a small stream runs into the sea. Here he recovered his health and bought the farm and lands adjoining it, and from that small beginning grew the modern town of Bournemouth.

Set in the next window are the **remnants of medieval glass (12)** referred to by Alan Younger in his notes on the East Window. Stained glass is intended as a visual aid, with something to teach us, and even



these fragments have a message. They are a reminder of the fragility of human life, how we see “in part” (*1st Corinthians 13*) and try to fit the puzzling pieces together to make sense of things.

Along this and the other walls are several **monuments and memorials**, each typical of different periods in history, but each with a human story to tell. Many were originally in places of honour in the old chancel. We could say that their social status demanded this, but there was also a spiritual purpose, e.g. the recumbent couple resting in peace, facing east, would have directed our attention to the altar, where we “show forth the Lord’s death until he comes” (*1st Corinthians 11.26*).



Note the monuments to the Stillingfleet family, the most famous member of which, Edward, son of Samuel and Susanna, was born at Cranborne on April 17th, 1635, and eventually became Bishop of Worcester. He is commemorated in the great west window (**13**).

There is a complete list of Abbots, Priors and Vicars from 1100 to the present day and a list of Churchwardens from 1645.

The **Tower (14)** was built in 1440, Richard, Duke of York and his wife Cicely probably contributing largely to the cost. Their arms are to be seen on two shields outside on either side of the west door. There is a peal of eight bells in the tower. They were augmented from six to a peal of eight and rehung in 1890. Seven of the bells were recast in 1951, and a new number 5 bell added to replace the old pre-

reformation bell bearing in Lombardic letters the inscription *Ave Gratia Plena*, Hail Mary, full of grace (the archangel Gabriel’s greeting to Mary) This latter bell now hangs by itself out of the peal in its old fitting and is no longer used, though God still sends his messengers to announce good news!

On the walls of the tower are **funeral hatchments**, at one time carried before the coffins of the local gentry. Another painted board illustrating the social structure displays the **Royal Arms (15)** of Queen Anne over the door, reminding you as you leave of your duty to Queen and Country. The **fragments of masonry** lying on the floor come from various period in the church’s history. They remind us that we are to be living stones, built into a spiritual house (*1st St Peter 2*). Our time spent in church should renew our vision of the Kingdom of God and our longing to love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength, and our neighbours as ourselves (*St. Mark 12.28-31*)

As you go on your way, look back once more at St. Christopher, fading on the wall, say a prayer for those who worship and visit here, and for yourself, that the Lord will make his way plain before you.



