



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

CHURCH OF ST PETER

Winterborne Came,
Dorset



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

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View from the north-west showing Came House

Winterborne Came, Dorset

CHURCH OF ST PETER

*by Dr Joseph Bettey (formerly Reader in Local History at Bristol University,
and author of numerous books and articles on the history of Dorset)*

HISTORY

Winterborne Came is one of a string of deserted settlements along the south Winterborne Valley. Like the other Winterborne in east Dorset, the south Winterborne is so called because the stream tends to dry up in summer; it runs from Winterbourne Abbas through Martinstown and around the south of the great hill fort at Maiden Castle, and then flows past several former village sites to join the river Frome at West Stafford. The settlements along the south Winterborne valley were gradually abandoned during the 15th and 16th centuries as more and more of the land was turned over to large-scale sheep farming.

The records of numerous complaints survive from the tenants of farms along the valley of the pressures they faced as more and more sheep were kept by their landlords. At Winterborne Came in 1521 the tenants appealed to the Crown, stating that because of the large sheep flocks being kept they were not able to cultivate their land nor pay their rent 'nor to abide in their country'. By the mid-17th century Winterborne Herrington had only three remaining households, Winterborne Farrington was completely deserted and Winterborne Came had only two households.

At Winterborne Came the village was also deserted and only the fine 18th-century mansion, Came House, and its associated buildings now remain. The church of St Peter is surrounded by Came Park and is close to the high stone and brick wall enclosing the kitchen garden. The noted Dorset poet and scholar, William Barnes, was rector of Winterborne Came for 24 years from 1862 until his death in 1886. Barnes had wide interests, including

*Front cover: Monument to
John and Anne Meller*



Exterior from the south

languages, music, wood engraving and historical studies, but is chiefly remembered for his published poems, most of which were written in the Dorset dialect and described many aspects of contemporary life in the county. He was greatly admired by Thomas Hardy, his near neighbour.

During the early Middle Ages Winterborne Came was part of the possessions of the Abbey of St Etienne at Caen, of which the name Came is a corruption. Later it was one of the estates belonging to the college of St Stephen at Westminster. During the 16th century Came was acquired by the Earl of Pembroke, and in 1561 was purchased by the Meller or Miller family in whose hands it remained until the early 18th century when it was sold to the Damer family, later Dawson-Damer, Earls of Portarlington in Ireland. The mansion (1754–62) was built of Portland stone for John Damer by Francis Cartwright of Blandford Forum, the interior being completed after his death in 1758. Came House is in private hands and visitors to the church are asked to respect this. The church survived because it continued to be used by the Meller and Dawson-Damer families and by their servants.

THE CHURCHYARD

On the south side of the church is the large Celtic cross decorated with intertwined dragons and beasts which marks the grave of William Barnes. The churchyard also contains monuments to members of the Dawson-Damer family, and the family vault of the Williams family of Herringston. Close to the east wall of the chancel are some good headstones of the 18th and early 19th centuries with finely carved lettering and cherubs.

EXTERIOR

The simple church of St Peter consists of a chancel, nave, west tower and north porch. The walls are built of local rubble stone, and the roof is covered with slates. The whole building is in the Perpendicular style: the nave dates from the late 14th century, and the chancel was rebuilt and enlarged early in the 15th century, while later in the 15th century the plain western tower was built, and new square-headed windows were installed. The roofs were restored in 1883 while William Barnes was incumbent. Clearly, the population of Winterborne Came during the 15th century

was still large enough to justify and finance all this building work. There were originally doors on each side of the nave, but the south door is blocked and the north door has certainly been used as the entrance to the church since the 17th century, when the porch was built, with a plaster ceiling and with stone benches and hat pegs. The fine inner door with its heavy oak timbers, nail studs and strap hinges also dates from the 17th century.

INTERIOR

The church contains numerous furnishings and monuments of interest. Most notable is the 16th-century wooden screen, dividing the nave from the chancel, with linfold panels and vine-scroll tracery along the top. The screen has been considerably restored in the Arts and Crafts manner, as has the painted inscription

'Let us hear the Conclusion of all things Fear God & keep his Commandments for that toucheth all men for God Judgeth all things'.

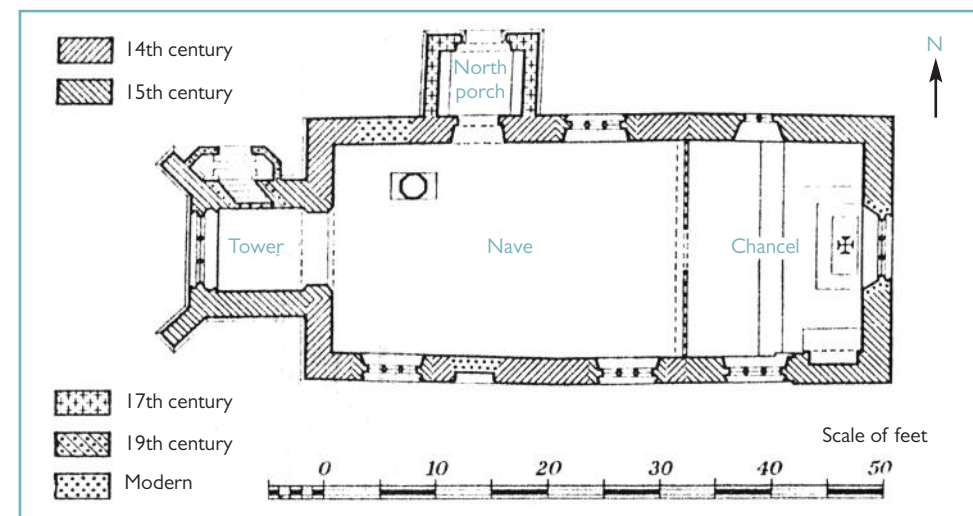
The octagonal oak pulpit has the initials **IM**, which stand for John Meller, and the date 1624. The oak communion rails also date from the early 17th century.

In the nave the late medieval font has a plain octagonal bowl made of stone from Ham Hill, and a Portland stone base.

The stained glass windows were inserted in the 19th century, and most of them were given by various members of the Dawson-Damer family. Five windows contain Victorian stained glass. The east window c. 1860 is possibly by Ward and Hughes, the north chancel and south nave windows (1867) by J & W Warrington, and perhaps also the south chancel window c. 1865, and the west window (late 1880s) is by Henry Holiday. The east window has two angels with scrolls and a long memorial inscription on a scroll in the centre light, the north chancel window has two lights with angels, the south chancel window has the armorial shield of Colonel G L Dawson Damer flanked by angels, the north nave window has The Crucifixion flanked by Christ told of the death of Lazarus and The Raising of Lazarus, and the west window portrays Faith, Hope and Charity.

The oak lectern, with a carved figure of St Peter, was also given by the family in 1892. The pews in the nave date from the 19th century. The painted panels with the Commandments beside the north door are probably a little later.

In the tower are two bells: one 15th century from the Salisbury foundry and inscribed **'Sancta Maria'**; the other just **'Maria'**, early 16th century by an unknown local founder. There are three 19th-century hatchments for members of the Dawson-Damer family.





MONUMENTS

Since it was for so long associated with the wealthy families of Meller (Miller) and Dawson-Damer, Winterborne Came church has a remarkable number of fine monuments. On the south side of the altar is a plain stone tomb chest to Dorothy Meller who died in 1591, having an arched recess in which are set two plates, one with an elaborate heraldic shield and the other showing the kneeling figures of a woman and child. The inscription records that she was the wife of Robert Meller and the daughter of Henry Baylie, Esquire.

On the north side of the altar is the large tomb chest to John Meller who died in 1595 and his wife, Anne, who died in 1610. This has two recumbent effigies, he in a gown and feet with his head resting on a helmet and his feet on a lion; she with embroidered gown, high ruff and elegant headdress, her head on a decorated cushion. Around the base are small kneeling figures, and above is a square panel with the family arms and a faded inscription. The whole tomb has traces of its original colour.

There are numerous wall monuments to members of the Dawson-Damer family, including the colourful memorial of Lionel Arthur Henry Seymour Dawson-Damer, 6th Earl of Portarlington, who died in 1959, and to his son who was killed on active service in 1944. Another wall monument in the chancel records the eventful military career of the Right Hon. Colonel G L Dawson-Damer, who was with the French cavalry at the retreat from Moscow in 1812, and fought in several later battles including Waterloo where, during the battle, he had two horses shot from under him. He survived these adventures to become an MP for Dorchester and Portarlington and lived at Winterborne Came until his death in 1856. Close to the screen on the north wall of the nave is an interesting Arts and Crafts tablet with angel and scroll to Mary Frances Seymour Mills d. 1895.

A small population and the proximity of other churches led to St Peter's being declared redundant and vested in what is now The Churches Conservation Trust in 1989. Repairs have been carried out by the Trust under the supervision of Mrs Penelope Adamson and Mr Philip Hughes.

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the national 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. In 2009 the Trust celebrates 40 years of saving historic churches at risk.

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Easton, Isle of Portland off B151

Whitcombe Church
2 miles SE of Dorchester on A352

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Left: Interior looking east

Photographs by Christopher Dalton