



Dorset Churches

Parish churches, abbeys and minsters

12–16 September 2022 (MI 474)

5 days • £1,690

Lecturer: Imogen Corrigan

A range of architectural interest, including murals, fonts and memorials.

Almost exclusively exquisite parish churches.

Beautiful drives through idyllic English countryside.

Stay in Sherborne throughout, a charming market town.

Yorkshire, says Pevsner, is known for the 'Norman exuberance' of its churches, Somerset for its church towers. Dorset churches have not been considered in the first rank. 'Yet when one sets down all one has seen of [them] ... one suddenly realises how much one has enjoyed.' Not just enjoyed but admired, been surprised by, one might further aver. What the county's churches lack in scale and self-importance they make up for in character, charm and exquisite detail, enhanced in many cases by their setting in conserved villages of honeyed limestone and reed thatching.

Sherborne Abbey steals all their thunder – 'the largest Anglo-Saxon church we know,' says Pevsner. Founded by St Aldhelm, new bishop of the West Saxons, in the early 8th century, it served as a Benedictine house until the Reformation and retains early features such as the Saxon doorway in the north-west corner and long-and-short-Saxon quoining. This latter detail is also found at St Martin's-on-the-walls in Wareham, said to be Dorset's most complete Anglo-Saxon church. Wareham's other historic church, of Lady St Mary, has a greater number of Saxon inscriptions than any other English building – five in all, dating from the seventh to the ninth centuries.

Intriguing examples of medieval wall paintings and decorative wooden carvings are other notable features of the county's churches. St Mary's and St Bartholomew's in Cranborne has a rare depiction of a Tree of the Seven Virtues. Red stars painted on one wall of St Martin's-on-the-walls are said to represent plague victims. The twelve protruding roof beams at St John the Baptist, Bere Regis are carved into robed figures that may represent the apostles, while in St Andrew's at Trent the 16th-century bench ends are carved in a variety of figures, animals and flowers.



Dorchester.

Itinerary

Day 1: Bournemouth, Cranborne, Tarrant Hinton, Sherborne. The coach leaves Bournemouth railway station at 2.00pm for the drive to the church of St Mary and St Bartholomew in Cranborne. This sets the tone for our tour – an unspoilt village and a delightful church of Norman origin with striking features that include 14th-century wall paintings. Our next church, St Mary's at Tarrant Hinton, has a rare 16th-century Easter Sepulchre.

Day 2: Bere Regis, Wareham, Studland. Head for the coast, stopping at Bere Regis to admire an outstanding hammerbeam roof. Wareham has two churches of great antiquity and charm. One of them, St Martin's-on-the-walls, contains an effigy of TE Lawrence by Eric Kennington, originally destined for St Paul's Cathedral. Free time in Wareham precedes a visit to the beautifully preserved Norman church of St Nicholas at Studland, which has some remarkable, explicit stone carvings.

Day 3: Puddletown, Dorchester, Upwey, Toller Fratrum. A day of quintessential Wessex villages, each with a church of distinction, punctuated by free time in the county town of Dorchester. The church at Puddletown has strong Thomas Hardy connections. St Lawrence's at Upwey features two painted

Tudor roses. The tiny church with the unusual dedication of St Basil at Toller Fratrum has a Norman relief of Mary Magdalene washing Christ's feet.

Day 4: Melbury Bubb, Sherborne, Bradford Abbas, Trent. Explore Sherborne Abbey and the north of the county, with free time in Sherborne itself. The Abbey, among its many splendours, has England's earliest fan-vaulted roof and arguably its finest. St Mary's at Melbury Bubb has an Anglo-Saxon font carved from the base of a cross, while St Mary's, Bradford Abbas is notable for its four-storey Perpendicular tower and St Andrew's, Trent for its medieval spire, one of only three in Dorset.

Day 5. Wimborne, Bournemouth. With two towers, one Norman and one Perpendicular, Wimborne Minster was originally a Saxon nunnery. It has a fine Norman font, a Gothic east end and Decorated aisles. The tour finishes at Bournemouth Railway Station by 2.00pm.

Lecturer

Imogen Corrigan MPhil. Specialist in Anglo-Saxon and medieval history, and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. She spent 20 years in the army, retiring in the rank of Major, then obtained a first-class degree in Medieval History from the University of Kent, and has been studying and lecturing ever since. She is the

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author of *Stone on Stone: the Men who Built the Cathedrals* (Crowood Press, 2019).

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £1,690. **Single occupancy:** £2,100.

Included: travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts and 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. The Eastbury, Sherborne (theeastburyhotel.co.uk): a four-star luxury Georgian townhouse hotel in the market town of Sherborne. Rooms vary in size, but all are comfortable and modern with décor in keeping with the historic nature of the building. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking where coach access is restricted, and a lot of standing in churches. Uneven ground and irregular paving are standard. A good level of fitness is essential. You will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. Average distance by coach per day: 47 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with: *Cyprus*, 3–11 September 2022; *The Etruscans*, 5–11 September 2022; *Gastronomic Emilia Romagna*, 17–23 September 2022; *Monet & Impressionism*, 18–23 September 2022.