



THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST

# CHURCH OF ST JAMES

Cameley, Somerset



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*Cameley, Somerset*

# CHURCH OF ST JAMES

*by Roy Tricker (Field Officer with The Churches Conservation Trust 1991–2002,  
church enthusiast, historian and Lay Canon)*



## HISTORY

Nothing could be more delightful than the peaceful rural setting of this wayside church, beside the winding lane which links Hinton Blewett and the main A37 road at Temple Cloud. Ekwall thinks that Cloud derives from the Old English *clud*, meaning a rock or hill, and Temple probably signifies that the place belonged to the Knights Templars. Cameley is a tiny community – a handful of scattered houses, the pretty valley of the little River Cam, from which it takes its name, and this venerable old church in a fold of the Mendips and on the lower slopes of a hill which rises to the south. Because of this the churchyard slopes downwards to the north and east, and even the floor of the church itself has a slight downhill slope.

*Front cover: Interior looking east  
(Christopher Dalton)*

*Left: The west end  
(Clifford Knowles)*



*Left: Exterior from the south-east (Boris Baggs)*

*Below: The south entrance (Christopher Dalton)*

## EXTERIOR

The situation of this church is beautiful and the slope of its trim **churchyard** reflects the hillside location. The churchyard is bordered on the south by yew trees and affords pleasing views across the valley to the north. It contains some attractive chest tombs, a few interesting 18th-century headstones carved with cherubs to the south and south-east of the church, and also urns, an hourglass, and other emblems of mortality. There is one to Charles Sage (d.1808),

with its cherub's head and its little wagon, which was probably used to convey coal in one of the mines in the small local coalfield.

The church itself is small and simple in plan, comprising a western tower, nave with south porch, and chancel. The leaning walls of the Norman **nave** have stood for at least 850 years, although about 1400 the double window was inserted on the south side, and the two single windows which pierce the rendered north wall

Cameley is one of the many places where the population of the parish in the 19th century formed the nucleus of its community round the main turnpike road. Accordingly the village of Temple Cloud developed on what is now the A37, about three-quarters of a mile (1.2km) to the east of St James' where, in 1924, the church of St Barnabas was built to the designs of W D Caroe, who also created the delightful church of Charterhouse on Mendip, about 6 miles (9.7km) to the west as the crow flies. St Barnabas is where parishioners now regularly worship, allowing the ancient mother church of St James to retire gracefully. Neglect of the building during the Second World War caused its closure because the roof was dangerous, but the nave was re-roofed in 1960; and in 1961, thanks to the enthusiasm of the late Mr Kenneth Gallop, a group of Friends was formed to care for the church and to raise money for its

upkeep. It was declared pastorally redundant in 1976 and in 1981 it was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund, now The Churches Conservation Trust.

This church is one of England's unspoilt treasures. Its special interest and value lie in the fact that, unlike the majority of our old churches, restorers in the second half of the 19th century did not alter its interior and did not replace what may have seemed to them a jumble of worn and obsolete furnishings with 'better' ones of their own design. This has left us with an interior of great atmosphere and charm.



were fashioned in the 1700s, one possibly reusing earlier stonework. West of the porch, 11 stone steps lead to the very domestic-looking door of 1819 which gives access to the galleries inside – an unusual, but very practical, feature. The south doorway is late Norman work (c. 1150–80) with detached shafts each side, supporting carved capitals of different designs, which in turn support the semicircular arch, embellished with an interlacing rope pattern.

This doorway is well preserved, having been sheltered by the simple **porch**, which was restored in 1620, at a cost of £4 8s. 1d. The medieval wooden cornices remain at the tops of its east and west walls, and the floor is paved with worn and broken burial slabs. On its eastern wall, traces of a wall painting have been revealed.

The **chancel** is lit entirely by double square-headed 15th-century windows, indicating that it was probably rebuilt at this time. The arch of the small priest's doorway is almost flat and we are reminded that the maintenance of the chancel was the responsibility of the Rector, whilst the parishioners, including the Lord of the Manor, were responsible for the remainder of the building. This is a trim little chancel, with pink stone used in its eastern quoins and in some of its windows. The charming sundial of 1698, above the south-east window, is surprisingly well preserved.

The 15th-century western **tower** dominates the exterior, its handsome proportions and grand architecture contrasting somewhat with the 'plain and wholesome' church below, and its warm red Mendip stone standing out against the 'blue' lias, actually light grey, of which the rest of the church is built. A shield above the west doorway displays the arms of the St Loe family, whilst a smaller shield set in the south wall has the letters 'J.B.' – maybe for John Benet, who arrived here as rector in 1483.

Although not one of those great towers for which Somerset is famous, like nearby Chewton Mendip, it is still a noble structure, rising some 62 feet (18.9m) to the top of its openwork parapet of quatrefoils, and about 68 feet (20.7m) to the apex of the panelled and crocketed pinnacles which crown it. It is not surprising that this tower appears taller than it actually is, given that the entire length of the nave and chancel is only 60 feet (18.3m). Medieval creatures peer out from the four corners at the base of the parapet. The tower is strengthened and enhanced by elegant diagonal buttresses, and an embattled staircase turret rises at its north-east corner and terminates a little above the parapet. Above the west doorway, which contains a door of considerable age, is a three-light Perpendicular window; the two-light belfry windows are well proportioned and are filled with latticed louvres.

## INTERIOR

This is an unforgettable interior, where the work of several periods combines to create one of the West Country's most 'atmospheric' small churches. Here the ancient nave walls lean outwards, betraying their great age; the floors of flagstones and burial slabs gently slope downwards towards the east, and light pours in through the clear glass of the windows, shining upon the mellow colours of ancient paintings upon the walls, the wonderful array of furnishings and fittings, and other features of beauty and interest. The charm of Cameley's

interior lies in the fact that so many of its features could not be more humble, functional and devoid of airs and graces; and it is this 'plain and wholesome' feel which makes St James' so homely, welcoming and intriguing.

Two Christian traditions have created what we see here. The pre-Reformation church has given us the structure of the building, the font, the remains of the chapels which flanked the former screen and fragments of the paintings which covered the walls. During this period churches were full of colour and carving, providing an





array of exciting visual aids to teach the Faith to the ordinary folk in the days when the services and Scriptures were in Latin.

After the Reformation in the mid-1500s, church interiors were altered to cater for the liturgical needs of the 'Reformed' church, with its services in English, its English Bible, its emphasis upon the preaching of the Word and its new identity as 'The Church of England, by Law Established'. It was thought that visual aids, seen in statues, pictures and symbols, were unnecessary, and what the reformers did not remove, the Puritans most certainly did in the 1640s. The 17th-, 18th- and early-19th-century church provided the galleries, the box pews and pulpit, the communion table and rails, two sets of royal arms and the Ten Commandments above the chancel arch. Nineteenth-century restorers tended to dislike these innovations and threw them out of most of our churches, replacing them with their adaptations of pre-Reformation furnishings.

Here there was no drastic Victorian restoration and everything has been left as it must have appeared more than a century and a half ago, only the lectern, choir stalls and chancel roof being representative of Victorian work.

The nave has a plaster **ceiling** which may have been reconstructed in the 17th century (it can be seen on the tower wall outside that the roof has been lowered slightly), but at the intersection of the ribs at the centre are three fine wooden bosses – at the west end an intriguing face, in the middle a mitred Bishop and at the east a foliage carving. A Romanesque 'beak-head' discovered during the repair of the nave roof in 1960 is on loan to the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities of the British Museum. The late-14th-century carved head, now on the west wall of the nave, was the westernmost boss of the roof. Two further carved bosses were reinstated in the repaired roof structure. At the west end stands the

12th-century **font**, the base of its square bowl moulded like a Norman scalloped capital, with cable moulding surrounding the top of the short circular stem, which has a moulded base. The wooden **font cover**, with its radiating scrolls, was made in 1634 at a cost of £1 12s. 4d.

The **tower partition** and its door are very basic work of the 18th century (they hide openings on the tower side which are filled with slender 17th-century balusters). Displayed on the partition are three pieces of **lead from the roof**, where presumably those who laid or repaired it autographed it with their footprints and the dates 1733, 1757 and 1795. The **List of Rectors** of Cameley from 1297 was made in 1914. From 1153 until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s, the living of Cameley was held by the Abbey of Bath and since that time the patron has been the lord of the manor.

The base of the tower has in its north wall a **door** giving access to the spiral staircase of 85 steps which lead to the stages above. The five **bells** were hung upon steel girders by J Dawson of Clutton in 1966, leaving their early-17th-century oak bell-frame still in place.

Two of the bells, the second and tenor, were cast at Bristol c.1450. The fourth is by Roger Purdue of Bristol (1612), the third was cast by a later Roger Purdue and William Covey of Bristol in 1676 and the treble by William Bilbie of Chew Stoke in 1779.

The nave is provided with an interesting assortment of seating accommodation. The medieval **benches** have plain and sturdy flat-topped ends (only those to the west of the south doorway have very rudimentary moulding) and date probably from the 1400s. Their timbers have been warped by time and worn to a shine by use. There are also some 17th- and 18th-century **box pews**, from the time when these commodious chambers were either owned or rented by their occupants – and woe betide any stranger who dared to sit in them! The tall 18th-century one near the entrance was probably the **churchwarden's pew**. Its high back protected the occupants from draughts. A smaller and lower pew remains in the north-west corner of the nave and at the east end on the south side is a grander pew with a step up to it, which may well have been the **manor pew**. More 18th-century panelling, probably from a former pew, lines part of the south wall.

The **pulpit, reading desk** and the **pew to the east of it** have fine woodwork of the 1600s, with characteristic carving of the period. Inscribed on the pulpit and reading desk is the date 1637. The service was conducted from the reading desk and the sermon preached from the pulpit, which is equipped with a fine sounding-board (or tester) to throw the preacher's voice outwards so that he could be heard. The pew to the east may have been for the parish clerk, who usually had his own small desk at the front, often beneath the reading desk – but here there



is seating for several people, possibly for the rector's family. Along the north and south walls of the nave are rows of 18th-century **hat pegs**, where the gentlemen could hang their hats. The **lectern** is 19th century, but its stem is shaped like a large 18th-century baluster.

Further seating accommodation was provided by the two **galleries**. That which fills most of the south side of the nave was, as the inscription states, built in 1819 'for the free use of the inhabitants' – i.e. no rents were charged for seats in it. Its panelled front is rather plain compared with the musicians' gallery at the west end, which is over 100 years earlier (the date 1711 is carved on the pillars which support it). Its front has turned baluster rails, and there is another, smaller set, on the tower side. Fixed to the gallery are the framed and painted **royal arms** of King Charles I which replaced the set painted on the south wall. These reminded the faithful of the position of the monarch as temporal head of the English Church. Access to the galleries is by the external entrance to the west of the porch.

All that remains of the church's **medieval stained glass** – a few jumbled fragments – has been collected together in the eastern window on the north side of the nave and in the west window of the tower.

The medieval structure of the nave shows several interesting features. The low and narrow **chancel arch**, with its plain Norman impostes supporting an unusual arch which is probably a

15th- or 17th-century reconstruction, contrasts with the tall and elegant tower arch, built some 350 years later. Looking at the stonework in the east wall of the nave, to the north and south of the chancel arch, it is clear that considerable alterations have taken place here, probably to accommodate **the former rood screen**, with its loft which would have straddled the nave in front of the chancel arch, and the side altars beneath it. In many churches new screens and lofts were provided in the 1400s and adjustments were made to the fabric accordingly. The southern altar was once backed by a 13th-century arch, whilst the arch for its northern counterpart appears to have been more crude. In the 1400s, both arches appear to have been filled in and trefoil-headed **image niches** were provided to contain the statues of the saints to whom the side chapels were dedicated, probably St Mary and St James. In the south wall is the **piscina**, into which the water used at the Eucharist at the nearby altar was poured. In the north wall is the medieval **door to the rood-loft staircase**.

The **chancel** is bright and intimate. Its simple 19th-century **roof** is at least 400 years later than the five foliage **corbels** high on the walls which once supported the wall-posts of the medieval roof. The communion rails, with their exquisite workmanship, may well be those which were placed in the church in the 1630s when Archbishop Laud decreed that all churches should be provided with rails so that dogs could not 'defile the sanctuary'. The **communion**

**table** is probably of the 1700s and its supports are in the form of Tuscan columns. The later top has extended the length of the table somewhat, but the Laudian-style cover fits very well into the décor of this sanctuary. A piece of 18th-century panelling, capped by urns on each side, forms a low **reredos** behind the communion table.

One of the treasures of this church is its series of **wall paintings**. Although only fragments remain, these remind us that the walls of our churches were covered with pictures and symbols before the Reformation, and with carefully designed and executed inscriptions afterwards. At Cameley even the porch shows traces of wall paintings, but most of what remains may be seen in the nave.

1. On the head of the chancel arch and on parts of the east wall of the nave are some red dash and scroll patterns of the 1200s.
2. On the jambs (sides) of the chancel arch are the arms of England (north) and the de Clare arms – the Earls of Gloucester – who were overlords here until 1314 (south).
3. Nave, north-east and south-east: 15th-century yellow and black damask patterns in and around the two niches in the former side chapels.
4. Over the chancel arch is a fine early-17th-century set of the Ten Commandments, in cartouche frames, decorated with foliage and cherubs. Above this is a yellow sun, which is probably what was known as a

'Glory' – usually seen with the 'IHS' monogram, surrounded by rays.

5. Part of the eastern section of the north nave wall has large oak leaves with acorns inside them, forming a damask pattern and reflecting the designs on the east wall nearby, and again possibly 15th century.
6. Nearby is a fragment of a mid-14th-century painting of a man on horseback in armour (part of his armour and horse can be made out) – maybe St George. In front of him is a fascinating human face – possibly that of a 'knave' – with a forked tongue.
7. Further west on the north wall is the lower part of an early-14th-century St Christopher. The picture of this saint, carrying the Christ Child over the water, was usually placed so that people could open the church door, look across at him and ask his prayers that God would keep them safe that day. Only one large foot of the saint survives, surrounded by water containing a few fish and one rather menacing-looking crab.
8. Immediately above this, masonry patterns in a reddish-brown colour have been revealed. These may well date back to the 1100s, when the nave was first built.
9. On the south wall of the nave is the lower part of a large painting of the royal arms of King James I (1603–25), most of which has been obscured by the gallery above.

## MEMORIALS

Several people from the past, who were associated with this church and parish, are commemorated on the walls and floors of the church. From west to east the following memorial slabs are in the floor:

1. Ann Mogg (1796) and Joyce Mogg (1835).
2. 'F.R.M.' and 'N.R.M.' inscribed upon a slab near the entrance, marking the burial place of further members of the Rees-Mogg family.
3. Worn and ancient burial slab without inscription.
4. (Beside 3) John Dudden (1753) and his wife Hannah.
5. Brass plate to Mary Symes Willing (1789).
6. Worn slab with the remains of carving in relief and of an inscription around its border.
7. (Beside 6) Small black coffin-shaped ledger slab, with coat of arms, to Hugh Browne, son of Cadwallader and Elizabeth Jones (1691), with an epitaph to him.
8. The Revd Thomas Seccombe, who was rector here (1796), his wife Mary (1822) and their son, Thomas Arthur Seccombe (1778).

The following people are commemorated by plaques on the walls:

1. The Revd Thomas Williams, rector here (1852).

2. His wife Susannah Williams (1846). Oval tablets draped with branches by Reeves of Bath, both on the north chancel wall.
3. A sturdy memorial on the south wall of the chancel, with a coat of arms at the top and columns flanking its Latin and Greek inscription, to Cadwallader Jones (1692). A brass plaque beneath it tells us that his descendant, Benjamin Edward Summers, restored this memorial in 1892.
4. A brass plaque on the south nave wall records a bequest from Ann Mogg in 1796 of 100 guineas and a gift from Joyce Mogg in 1830 of £100, the interest from this money to be given to the poor annually in bedding on 5 November.
5. Also on the south nave wall is a memorial to the nine Cameley people who lost their lives in the First World War (1914–18).
6. On the north nave wall is a large memorial, with coat of arms and drapes, to the Revd John Rees-Mogg of Cholwell House (1835) and Mary Mogg Rees Mogg (1846) by Reeves & Son of Bath.
7. East of this is another memorial by the same firm to Ann, second daughter of John Mogg of Cholwell (1796) and Joyce, his third daughter (1835). (They are also commemorated in ledger slab 1, and plaque 4.)

# 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.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that it is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are some 340 churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk).

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

**NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF**  
The Blessed Virgin Mary, Emborough  
5 miles NE of Wells off B3139

St Mary, Hardington Bampfylde  
3 miles N of Frome off A362

St Andrew Old Church, Holcombe  
10 miles NE of Wells off A367

St Thomas à Becket Tower, Pensford  
(exterior only)  
7 miles S of Bristol off A37

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*Right: Interior looking west (Christopher Dalton)*

