

The pulpit is possibly Tudor but more probably 17th century Jacobean and the heraldic arms under the canopy have been interpreted as being those of a Mr. French (a common Dorset name). Look closely and you will see bullet holes in the pulpit left by the parliamentarians when their forces expelled a royalist garrison from the church and the Strangway's manor house in September 1644 during the Civil War.



On leaving the church via the porch you will notice a shallow carved effigy of an abbot dated to the 12th century. Opposite the porch are two medieval stone coffins of the early 14th century – you will see them against the wall on the right. They may well have been used for the burial of abbots or high-ranking members of the local community. Now turn to your left and look up at the tower. In the front, above the window, is an ancient stone carving of unknown date but believed to be from a far earlier period than the construction of the tower attests. The carving symbolises the Holy Trinity. Of particular interest is the dove portrayed above and to the right of the seated figure with the crucified Saviour between its

knees. A dove is also depicted on the ceiling of the tomb of the Black Prince at Canterbury and the same Trinity effigy is also on a tomb in Derbyshire, giving us some clue as to the age of this ancient carving.

If you now walk around the outside of the church there are several other items of interest to see. Along the southern boundary wall of the churchyard is a third coffin that is particularly interesting since it has pagan symbols carved on it (see below).



Also around this side of the church is the chancel south door that was probably constructed by Sir John Strangways in 1636. This may have been his private entrance into the church – some stone steps along the path from here may indicate the entrance to his manor house. Also in this area are numerous remnants of stone from the old abbey buildings and part of the north wall of the Abbey Church of St Peter.

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3: The Abbey & the Great Barn

For more information about our village visit the Abbotsbury Heritage website at:
www.abbotsbury-heritage.org.uk

DISCOVERING ABBOTSBURY



2: St. Nicholas Church (Walk – wheelchair access)

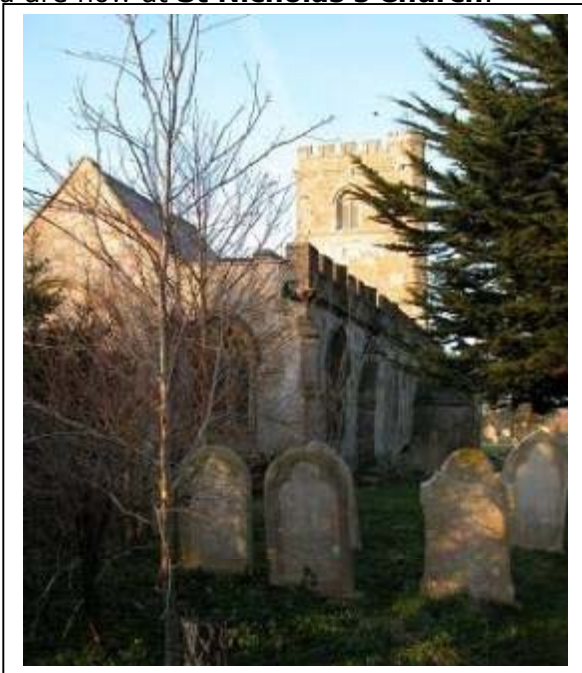
Prepared by Chris Wade & Peter Evans for
**Abbotsbury Heritage
 Research Project**



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Leave the public car park using the little lane opposite the ticket box and turn left through the kissing-gate into the churchyard. [Wheelchair users should exit the car park further down in the bottom right-hand corner. Pass the buildings on either side then enter the churchyard by the gate on your right and continue around the church to the north side] You are now at **St Nicholas's Church**.



Looking at the external structure of the church you will see that the general style is Perpendicular - a style that is characteristic of the late 14th-16th centuries. The difference between the aisles is very obvious. The north aisle (pictured above) is ornamented with crenulations like the tower and has pinnacles and gargoyles, whereas the south aisle has no such adornments. The south aisle is recessed slightly, giving the impression that the aisle has been added to an older building. This is further demonstrated by the situation of the tower, which is also obviously a later addition joined to a more ancient tower buttress.

The tower, the present north wall and part of

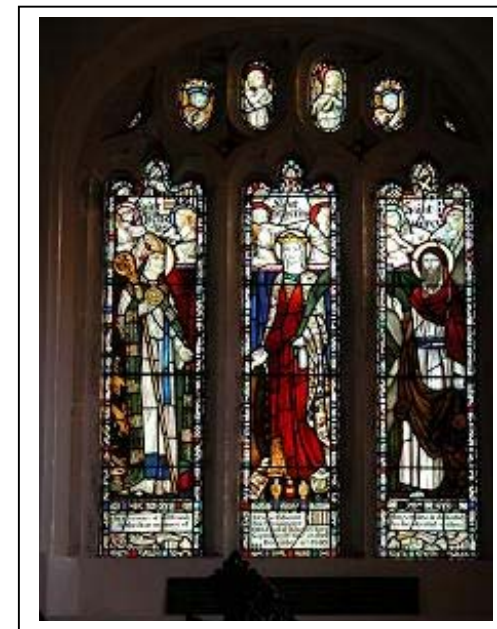
the east wall were most likely to have been built in the 14th century - at about the same time as St Catherine's Chapel on the hill and the Tithe Barn. It seems the abbot decided to build a church adjoining the monastery church for use by the parishioners - presumably to keep them away from the monks! The two church buildings were probably under one roof span and the filled-in doorway on the north side of the church could have been where the two buildings connected. The fact that the parish church is dedicated to St. Nicholas is probably due to the saint's connection with sailors - his saint's day is 6th December.

It may have been the unsatisfactory appearance of the original church that caused Abbot John to alter the whole construction in the first part of the 16th century. He unroofed the church and pulled down the south wall but left the north wall, porch and east wall, only strengthening the east wall with buttresses where the south wall had been removed.

If you now step inside the church, you will see that there is no division between chancel and nave. The simple narrow pillars are 16th century and the windows above are of the same date. Comparing the windows provides further evidence that the aisles are of different periods.



The small medieval window panel in the south aisle is reputed to depict St. Catherine. In 1920 Mary, Countess of Ilchester, commissioned the chancel window (pictured below) in memory of her husband and two children.



It represents St. Nicholas, St. Catherine and St. Andrew. The other stained windows are in memory of the Sellers family and were installed in the 1920's. Note the badge of St. John's Ambulance Association in the top left window commemorating Dr. Sellers, who was a revered member of the association.

The nave has a flat ceiling (dated 1808); the brass candelabrum is English 1750. The east window was obliterated in 1751 by a huge wooden reredos, which displays the 10 commandments. The chancel has a remarkable armorial plaster ceiling dated 1638. The Strangways coat of arms (amongst others) are on its south and north side.

The font is probably original to the church but was placed in its present position during the renovations of 1885.