

Thurlbear Church

The Church of St Thomas at Thurlbear is a building chiefly of the 11th-14th centuries. It is renowned for the quality and extent of its early Norman features, and is one of the earliest surviving aisled churches in Somerset. Thurlbear Church is Grade 1 Listed Building.

Why such an ambitious church was constructed in Thurlbear remains unknown. It may be that Thurlbear Manor held a special significance for its medieval lords the de Montacutes or their Domesday overlord, the Count of Mortain. It is also possible that the church originated as a minster or mother church although later documentary evidence for such status is lacking.



The church consists of a west tower, a nave with north and south aisles, south porch and chancel. It is constructed from local blue lias limestone with dressings in Beer Stone (from East Devon) and Ham stone (from Ham Hill). Most of the exterior walls have been rendered although the rendering on the tower was removed in the 19th century when the church underwent significant restoration. The nave, aisles and chancel are enclosed under a Welsh slate roof. The tower is

mid 15th in date. Following its completion in c. 1450 four bells cast in Exeter were provided. Each carried a Latin inscription. These bells still hang today and are remarkable for being one of the few pre-Reformation bells, which are the work of a single maker.

The stained glass of the west window was placed there by the Major William Surtees Altham husband of Henrietta Moulton Barrett who died at Stoke Court, Stoke St Mary in 1860. Her life in many ways mirrored that of her sister – Elizabeth Barrett Browning with both women growing to middle age without marriage under the very strict influence of a father who threatened disinheritance if they married. Part of the window depicts Rachel and Jacob a subject chosen as a parable by the Major for his long courtship and wife's early death. Their graves are in the south-east corner of the churchyard

In 1988 the church was declared redundant and became invested in the Churches Conservation Trust.

For more detailed information see *St Thomas's Church, Thurlbear, Somerset* by Tom Mayberry