

# Four Saxo-Norman Churches near Wallingford

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## SUMMARY

*This paper describes the primary fabric and details of four local churches of 11th- and early 12th-century date in the vicinity of Wallingford: St Michael, Aston Tirrold, All Saints, Aston Upthorpe, St John the Baptist, South Moreton and St Mary, Upton. The surveys were carried out on visits to the churches at various times between 2002 and 2005. They do not cover every architectural phase of the buildings, only the extant primary fabric and details. For this reason, only the primary phase was recorded on the plans of the churches. An exception to this is St Michael, Aston Tirrold. Unlike the structures at Aston Upthorpe and Upton, where the primary plan has hardly been altered (Figs. 14 and 18), Aston Tirrold is a complex, multi-phase building. Here, an un-phased plan was made of the entire church (Fig. 5).*

*All surveys were conducted with 5 m. tape. This was adequate for making plans, and recording the relatively low-walled buildings at Aston Tirrold, Aston Upthorpe and Upton. At South Moreton, however, it was impossible to ascertain the height of the exceptionally tall nave (Fig. 24a). Since ladders were not available, there was no other option but to make a rough visual estimate of the nave height.*

*The background to the development of local churches within the Domesday hundred of Blewbury is examined. The introductory section deals with the origins of Blewbury Hundred itself. Though there is no direct documentary or archaeological evidence for a minster church at Blewbury, the compelling circumstantial evidence for such a foundation having had existed here is discussed. The emergence of local churches within the hundred, a process not complete until the early 12th century, is described. The primary fabric of the churches themselves is then described and discussed in detail. Finally, various aspects of the churches are discussed in general.*

The churches under discussion are all located near to the upper Thames Valley between Reading and Oxford (Figs. 1 a-b). The villages of Aston Tirrold, Aston Upthorpe, Blewbury and Upton occupy the northern scarp-foot of the Lambourn Downs, the latter running west from the Goring Gap. The village of South Moreton occupies a slight gravel terrace above the flood-plain of Mill Brook, which joins the Thames south of Wallingford. The underlying geology of the flood-plains of the Thames and its tributaries is lower chalk, but this is covered by a thick layer of alluvium. The settlements under discussion, with the exception of South Moreton, lie on the border between the surface lower chalk, providing drainage and stability for structures, and the alluvium, which provides water-sources, scope for irrigation and fertile land. Between Wantage and Wallingford is a belt of Upper Greensand, the source of dressed stone for all the churches described here. Upstream from Wallingford are the sites of two Anglo-Saxon religious centres of national importance. Dorchester was the seat of the West Saxon See established by St Birinus in AD635,<sup>1</sup> and superseded by Lincoln before 1086.<sup>2</sup> The great monastery of Abingdon was founded in the late seventh century.<sup>3</sup> Cholsey was a later monastic foundation, in existence by 997.<sup>4</sup> Wantage was the centre of a royal estate and possessed a minster church.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 667.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 69.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 455n.

<sup>5</sup> J. Haslam (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England* (1984), 57.

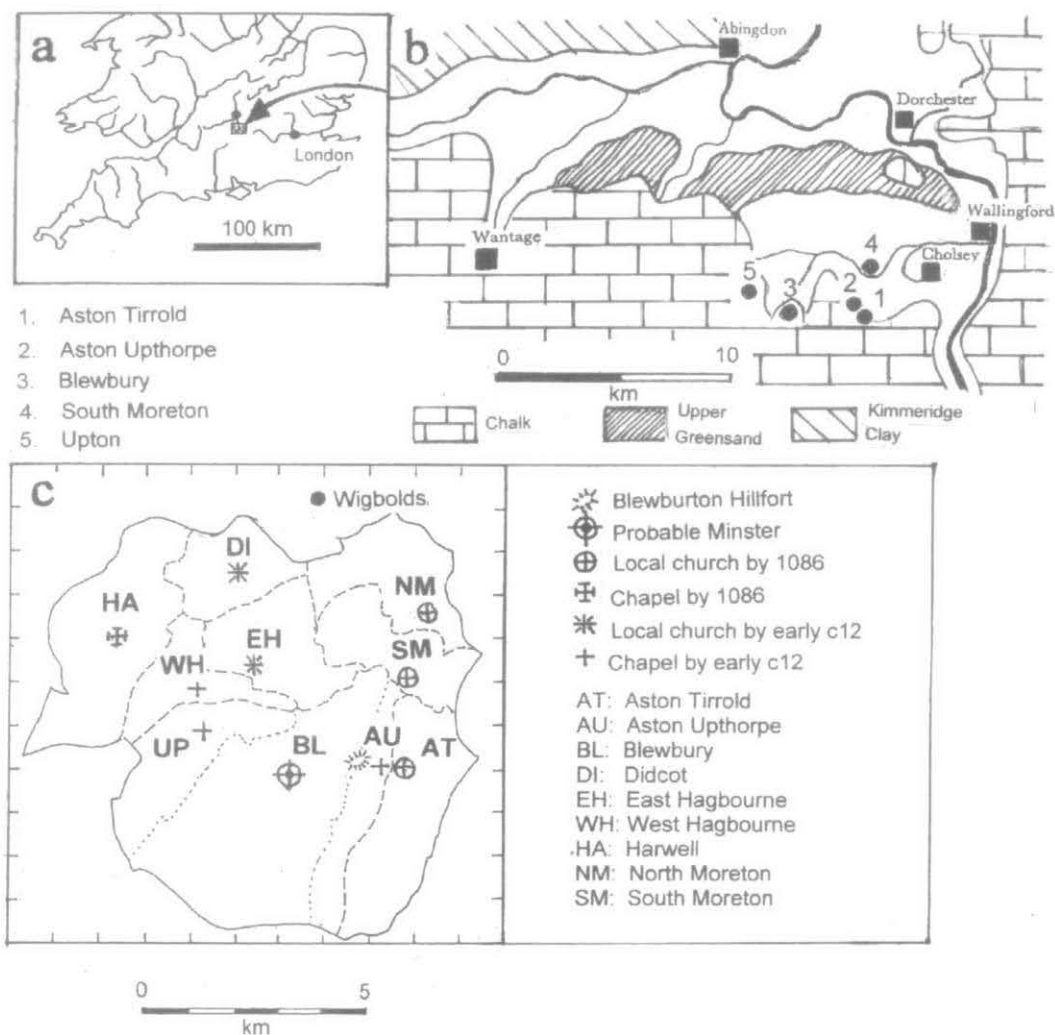


Fig. 1. Location of churches mentioned in text: (a) national location map (b) location of churches in relation to the upper Thames Valley, also indicating important Anglo-Saxon centres and simplified geology (c) churches within the former hundred of Blewbury, with parish boundaries of c.1900.

### *Blewbury Hundred, Berkshire*

The area in which the churches under discussion are situated lay in the county of Berkshire until 1974, when they became part of Oxfordshire. The land unit known as Blewbury hundred in 1086 (Fig. 1 c) ceased to exist by the 13th century, when most of the land was divided between Moreton and Slotford hundreds. The parish of Blewbury itself became a detached part of Reading hundred.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 447.

The boundaries indicated on Fig. 1 c are those of c.1900. In 1086, the hundred was clearly larger. At that time, Didcot lay within the manor of Wybaldaton, which is probably represented by the place-name Wigbolds (SU 5391 9238). This area was later incorporated into the neighbouring parish and manor of Long Wittenham. Blewbury Hundred presumably takes its name from the Iron-Age hillfort of Blewburton Hill, some 2 km. east of the settlement of Blewbury itself. The latter is first mentioned in 944. It was at this date that King Eadmund granted one hundred 'mansae' or hides to Aelfric the priest.<sup>7</sup> During Eadmund's reign, there is the first direct evidence of the use of hundreds as administrative units.<sup>8</sup> By the reign of Edward the Confessor, the manors of Blewbury Hundred were assessed at a total of 118 hides.<sup>9</sup> In addition to this, the manor of Blewbury itself had a significant geld exemption. Some of the manors within the Domesday hundred would therefore appear to be additions to the original grant. The latter are likely to have consisted of Harwell, 'Wybaldaton', later Didcot, and perhaps the Hagbournes.

#### The evidence for a minster at Blewbury

While there is no direct documentary or archaeological evidence for a minster church at Blewbury, there is compelling circumstantial evidence that such a foundation existed. The very fact that Blewbury was a hundredal centre favours a minster here. It is also notable that in the Domesday Survey, Blewbury had a significant geld exemption. While there was a population of 82 households, the manor gelded at only three hides, plus a church endowed with five virgates of land.<sup>10</sup> Wantage, which certainly had a minster, had a population of 75 households and gelded at four hides. An additional hide was allotted to the church there.<sup>11</sup>

St Michael's Church (Fig. 2) occupies the southern part of the area bounded by two branches of a tributary of Mill Brook. The area defined by these streams, and the southern boundary of the present churchyard may represent the approximate area of a minster enclosure. The postulated enclosure occupies a peninsula of lower chalk which is almost totally surrounded by surviving water-courses. The northern part of the enclosed area is undeveloped waste ground, which may have archaeological potential. The moat to the north of this area is the site of the Prebendal Manor.<sup>12</sup> The topography of Blewbury bears a certain resemblance to that of some known minster settlements,<sup>13</sup> Blewbury's geological location is similar to that of other minster sites in and around the Thames Valley.<sup>14</sup>

Blewbury's neighbouring settlements are also noteworthy. Aston, later Aston Tirrold and Aston Uphorpe is the east *tun* of Blewbury. Upton, to the west, is the upper *tun*. Moreton, later North and South Moreton, is the marshy *tun*. These names suggest satellite settlements of Blewbury itself, while *-tun* place-names are often found in association with minsters.<sup>15</sup> Documentary evidence of *-tun* place-names is rare before the 8th century, after which they become common.<sup>16</sup> It may therefore be the case that there was a minster at Blewbury in the eighth century, which was re-founded in 944.

<sup>7</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 281.

<sup>8</sup> F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 243.

<sup>9</sup> *VCH Berks.* i, 327ff.

<sup>10</sup> *VCH Berks.* i, 328.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 282-3.

<sup>13</sup> J. Blair, 'Churches in the early English Landscape: social and cultural contexts' in J. Blair and C. Pyrah (eds.), *Church Archaeology* (Council for British Archaeology, 1996), Fig. 1.3.

<sup>14</sup> J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (2005), 193 and n 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>16</sup> G. Hey, *Yarnston: Saxon and Medieval Settlement and Landscape* (Oxford Archaeology, 2004), 23.

The early Norman church at Blewbury

The earliest detail of the present church of St. Michael, Blewbury is the chamfered, round-headed window in the north wall of the nave, probably of the earlier 12th century. It is possible that the rendered-over north wall of the nave incorporates earlier fabric, but no visible evidence for this exists.<sup>17</sup> The twelfth-century architectural details at Blewbury are discussed in the online *Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture*.<sup>18</sup>

The 'churches' of Blewbury were granted to the newly-founded see of Salisbury in 1091.<sup>19</sup> The VCH has suggested that this implies the dependent chapels of Aston Upthorpe and Upton were in existence by this time. While the extant primary features at Aston Upthorpe are possibly this early (p56), those at Upton are clearly later (p62). It is of course possible

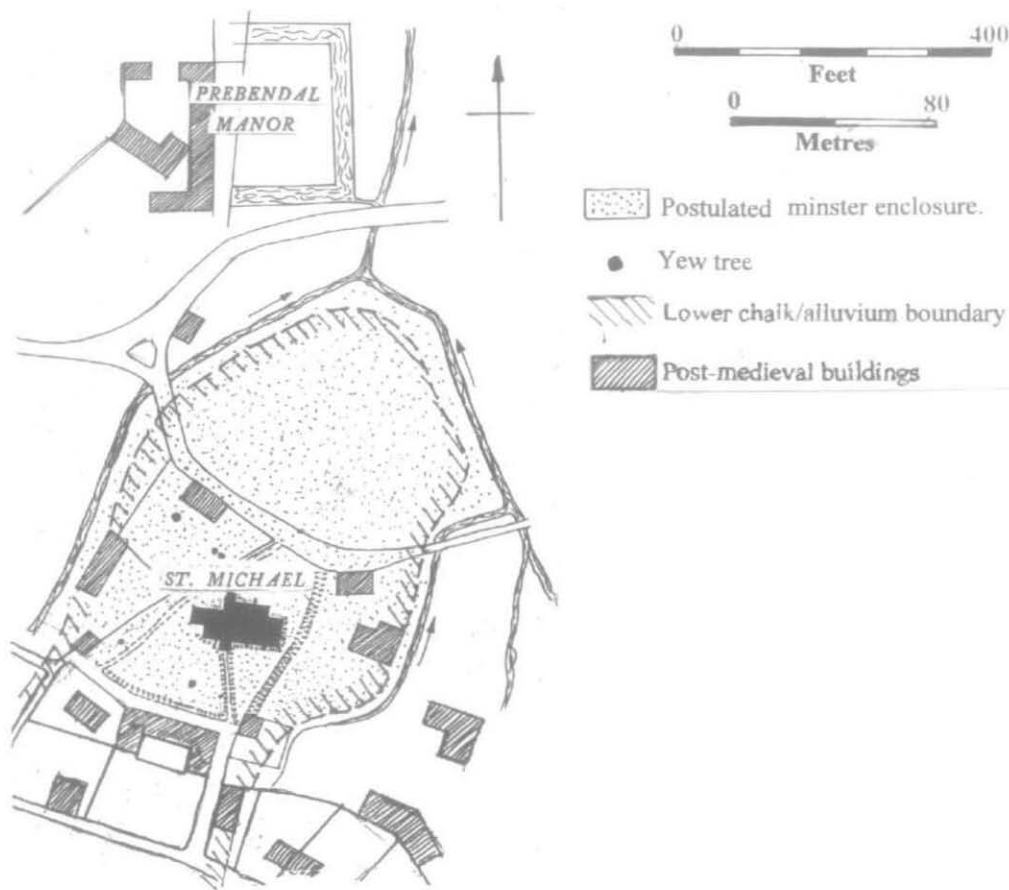


Fig. 2. Topography around St Michael, Blewbury, with existing features indicating the possible area of a former minster enclosure

<sup>17</sup> For a plan and description of all phases of the church, see *VCH Berks.* iii, 285–9

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.crsbi.ac.uk/ed/be/blewb/index.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 290.

that either or both churches had timber predecessors. Another possibility is that there was more than one church at Blewbury itself before the early 12th-century rebuilding. This would not be unusual if this was a minster site.<sup>20</sup>

*Emergence of local churches within Blewbury hundred*

As mentioned above, the 944 grant to Aelfric the priest may represent the re-foundation of an earlier minster. By 1086, Aston Tirrold, South and North Moreton and *Wybaldaton* had all acquired local churches, and there was a chapel at Harwell (Fig 1c). It is uncertain whether the church mentioned in 1086 at *Wybaldaton*<sup>21</sup> was in the area now represented by Wigbolds (Fig. 1 c), or on the site of the present church at Didcot. The earliest details of the latter are 12th-century.<sup>22</sup>

The Berkshire folios of the Domesday Survey are meticulous in their mention of churches. We might reasonably assume that if no church is mentioned in a given manor, one did not exist at this time.<sup>23</sup> Churches are not mentioned at East and West Hagbourne in 1086, but a church at the former and a chapel at the latter were in existence by 1133.<sup>24</sup> At East Hagbourne, the eastern corners of the nave retain their 12th-century quoins, the only details of that period to survive.<sup>25</sup> The earliest details at Aston Upthorpe and Upton are dated, on architectural grounds, to c.1100 and c.1120 respectively (pp53, 63).

There were several reasons for the emergence of rural local churches in the 10th and 11th centuries.<sup>26</sup> These were: Firstly, privatization of undeveloped ritual foci. Secondly, devolution from minster communities. Thirdly, the emergence of proprietary chapels attached to manorial centres and fourthly, divided proprietorship. None of these categories is mutually exclusive, and origins of local churches may be more complex than is immediately apparent. At South Moreton, the later 11th century church is immediately adjacent to the castle-motte (p. 17 and Figs 9-10). This might suggest the church was a proprietary foundation, but immediately east of the church is an ancient yew-tree which appears to pre-date the church. The triple foci of tree, church and manorial centre is paralleled at the excavated site at Ketton, Rutland.<sup>27</sup> Aston Upthorpe and Upton were apparently established as subordinate chapels of Blewbury, but the church at Aston Upthorpe is aligned towards a Sarsen orthostat (p. 51 and Fig.13). This, again, may hint at an earlier ritual focus.

The proliferation of late medieval crosses within the parish of East Hagbourne is of interest (Fig. 3). The High Cross, which is intact, stands adjacent to the church. The base of the Low Cross, which now stands 500 m. east of the High Cross, at the opposite end of the village street, formerly stood 1 km. west of the High Cross, in the hamlet of Coscote. 150 m. west of the former position of the Low cross is the base of a third cross, apparently *in situ*. Do these crosses, despite their late date, represent early ritual foci? Between this cross and the former position of the Low Cross, the road makes a very pronounced semicircular

<sup>20</sup> Blair, 'Churches in the early English Landscape', 9. For multiple churches at minster sites, see Blair, *op. cit.* n. 14, 199 and Fig.24.

<sup>21</sup> *VCH Berks.* i, 348.

<sup>22</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 473.

<sup>23</sup> Apart from, possibly, a field-chapel (p 00).

<sup>24</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 477, 483

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 374-401.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 382 and Fig. 44.

deviation. This deviation is at least as old as the 17th century, since Coscote Farm, of 1683<sup>28</sup> stands adjacent to it. Does the semicircle represent the southern half of an ancient enclosure which was 'Christianized'?<sup>29</sup>

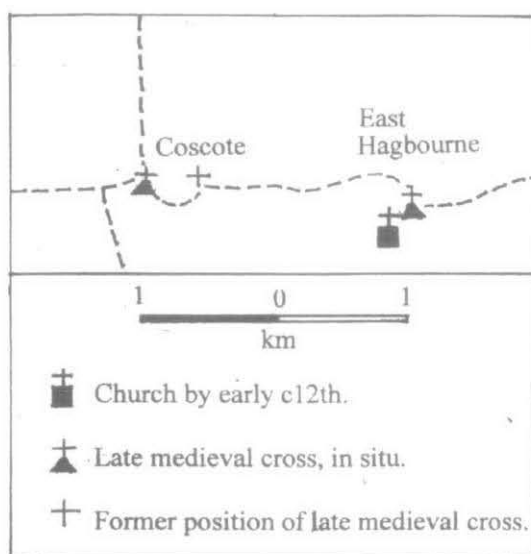


Fig. 3. East Hagbourne, locations, and former location of medieval crosses within the parish.

#### *General notes on churches described*

This paper is concerned only with the primary fabric and details of the churches under discussion. For general descriptions of all phases of these buildings, the reader is referred to volume iii of the *Victoria County History of Berkshire*.

On the plans of the churches described below, primary fabric is indicated in black. Where later features have been inserted into primary walls, these areas are shown stippled. Conjectural courses of primary walls are indicated in broken lines and later features are outlined. On the elevations, sections through primary walls are shown in black, while hatching denotes blocked openings.

Building materials are identical at all churches. The fabric is always of flint rubble. Flint, together with chalk for lime mortaring is abundant on the Lambourn Downs. Dressings are always of Upper Greensand, a relatively durable sandstone found in the sub-soil below the low-lying gravel terraces to the north of the settlements described.

<sup>28</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 476.

<sup>29</sup> For crosses as ritual route markers, see Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 479-82.

## ST MICHAEL, ASTON TIRROLD

*Church and settlement*

The parish church of St Michael, Aston Tirrold (SU 5571 8607; Fig. 4, a) is situated at the north end of the village. It is adjacent to the early 18th-century manor-house (b). Both stand within a shield-shaped area defined by Aston Street to the east and a back lane to the west. This is now occupied by buildings.

The area fossilized in the street pattern might represent a former village green, but an alternative interpretation is that it represents the boundaries of an enclosed Anglo-Saxon homestead or *tun*,<sup>30</sup> Aston (Tirrold) being the east *tun* of Blewbury. In many places, the enclosed area is raised some 0.6–0.9 m. above the surrounding roads, and is contained by recent revetment walls. The north-western part of the enclosure, in the grounds of the 18th-century manor-house, is represented by a bank some 1.2 m. high. South-east of the church is an enigmatic mound on the enclosure perimeter, described below.

It is not impossible that these earthworks represent a thegnly enclosure which contained a church represented by the surviving re-set Anglo-Saxon doorway (Fig. 7c).

Six former crofts of a nucleated village can be made out amongst present property boundaries (Fig. 4, c). These are between 12 m. and 20 m. in width. From these, a settlement of 28 crofts can be postulated.

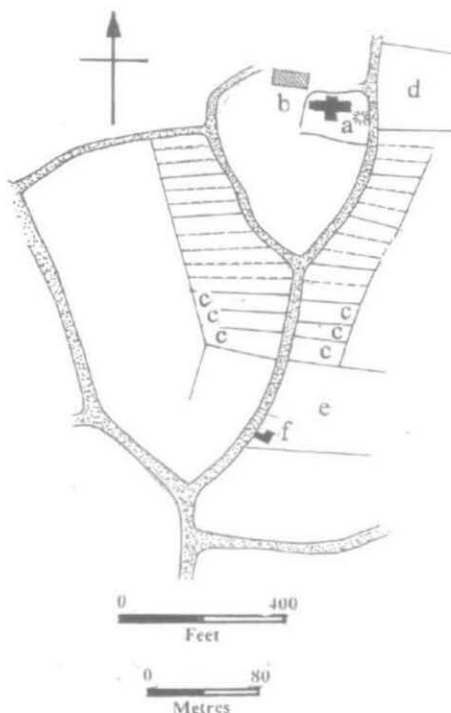


Fig. 4. Aston Tirrold: church and settlement.

<sup>30</sup> G. Hey, *Yarnton: Saxon and medieval settlement and landscape* (Oxford Archaeology, 2004), 23, 90. Published in *Oxoniensia* 2006, (c) Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society

Immediately east of the church is Manor Farm (d). The outer boundaries of this may represent those of Priors Manor. This was held by Preaux Abbey, the proprietors of the church, between 1080 and 1411.<sup>31</sup> At the southern end of the village, further boundaries appear to represent the site of Danvers Manor (e). This was the portion of Aston Tirrold held by a resident subtenant-lord during Henry I's reign. Since the postulated boundaries effectively 'seal' the settlement, this would suggest the latter was laid out around this time.

Within the postulated boundaries of Danvers manor is Tirrold House (f). This is a remarkable survival. Its earliest part, the south wing, has been dendro-dated to 1286.<sup>32</sup> It consists of a timber-framed building, formerly two-storied and measuring about 8 m. by 4 m. externally. The north wing is only 4 m. square. It contains timberwork ranging from the 14th to 17th centuries. The building may have formed part of the capital messuage mentioned in 1336 (p 44).

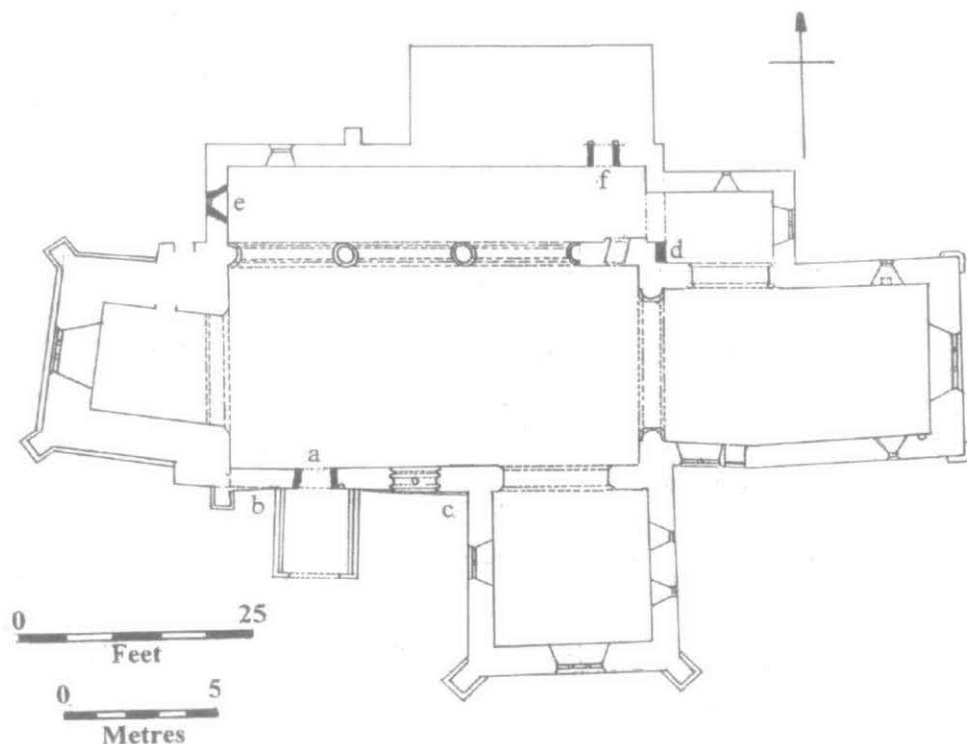


Fig. 5. St Michael, Aston Tirrold: ground-plan, all phases.

<sup>31</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 455.

<sup>32</sup> The date 1284 is given in C. R. J. Currie, 'Larger Medieval Houses in the Vale of White Horse', *Oxoniensia*, lvii (1992), 103-7, where the house is called The Cottage, Aston Tirrold. The date was later improved to 1286 by Dan Miles of Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory (pers. comm.).

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### *The churchyard*

The present churchyard is 48 m. west-east by 36 m. north-south. It is defined by 18th-century walling which is contemporary with that of the adjacent manor-house. The Anglo-Saxon and medieval churchyards were probably larger, but their extent has been obscured by post-medieval development. At a distance of 2.4 m. south-east of the east end of the church is a small mound. This measures 12.3 m. west-east by 10.0 m. north-south. It is 0.6 m. high. To the south, the mound has been cut by a sunken pathway which is revetted by re-used 18th- and 19th-century headstones. Upon the mound is a yew tree with a trunk about 1 m. in diameter. Yews with a diameter of c.1.2 m. tend to be about 300 years old,<sup>33</sup> so the Aston Tirrold yew may be roughly 250 years old. It is, however, impossible to tell how much older than this the mound is.

### *The present church*

The church is orientated on a true west-east axis. The nave is on a double-square plan with internal dimensions of 13.18 m. by 6.92 m. While much primary work, described below, survives, the nave contains work of many periods. The chancel has internal measurements of 8.92 m. by 5.1 m. The external quoining and lancet windows in its north and south walls are of early 13th-century date. The south transept is also 13th century, but slightly later. In its eastern wall are two trefoil-headed lancets, below which runs a contemporary external chamfered string-course. The west tower is of mid-15th-century date, not the 13th century as *VCH Berks.* iii, 456 suggests. Also of 15th-century date is the doorway in the eastern part of the north wall of the nave which formerly gave access to the rood-loft stairs.

There was extensive remodelling of the church in Victorian and Edwardian times. The north aisle is of 1868, as is the chancel arch and vestry. The organ chamber at the angle of the aisle and chancel is of 1910. The porch is recent, but incorporates re-used 14th-century woodwork.

### *The primary church*

#### South doorway and blocked window

The south doorway (Fig. 4, a; Fig. 5) is slightly wider on its outer side (1.08 m.) than the inner one (0.96 m.). Similarly, the western jamb is marginally broader (0.6 m.) than its eastern counterpart (0.58 m.). The doorway is 2.33 m. high to the head of the soffit. It is of a single round-headed order with no rebates. The abaci are double roll-moulded with a single square-ended moulding above this. The vertically set, unbonded through-stones composing the jambs indicate 11th-century work. The stones are finely joined, the tooling predominately vertical. While the jambs are composed of through-stones, the arch is not, being barrel-vaulted.

Above the internal side of the doorway is the splay of a window, which has been blocked at a depth of 0.30 m. It is completely obscured on its external face, and the internal splay is entirely plastered over. The latter is 0.85 m. broad and 1.60 m. high to the head of the soffit. The former window here must have been longer and broader than its northern counterpart, which was subsequently re-set in the Victorian north aisle (Fig. 7b).

The thickness of the walling on either side of the south doorway should be noted. To the west of the latter, it is noticeable that the external wall has been thickened (Fig. 5, b). This thickening terminates in a buttress which post-dates the 15th-century west tower. At this

<sup>33</sup> A. F. Mitchell, *Conifers in the British Isles, a descriptive handbook* (HMSO, 1972), 284.  
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point, the primary walling has been cut back to accommodate the tower. West of the south doorway, the primary walling is 0.6 m. thick, but to the east of the former, the wall is 0.85 m. broad. On the external face of the wall is a rendered-over single-step plinth (Fig. 5, c). This is 0.35 m. high with a 2.5 cm. projection. The date of the plinth is uncertain, but it is notable that the lowest primary quoin at the north-eastern corner of the nave (Fig. 7a) is of similar dimensions to the former.

Quoining at north-east corner of nave

Despite extensive rebuilding of the north-eastern corner of the nave in the 15th, 19th and 20th centuries, primary quoining survives there (Fig. 5, d; Fig. 7, a). While the lowest stone at this point is contemporary with the 1910 organ chamber, the upper stones are 11th-century. The lowest stone of the primary work is 0.65 m. broad on its eastern face and projects 2.5 cm. beyond the upper primary quoins. The width of that stone may reflect that of the walls of the primary nave. Its height and projection reflect that of the rendered-over single-step plinth of the south wall of the nave (Fig. 5, c). It is possible that this stone represents a continuation of that plinth, the original foundation having been destroyed by Victorian or Edwardian underpinning. If this was the case, the northern plinth of the nave

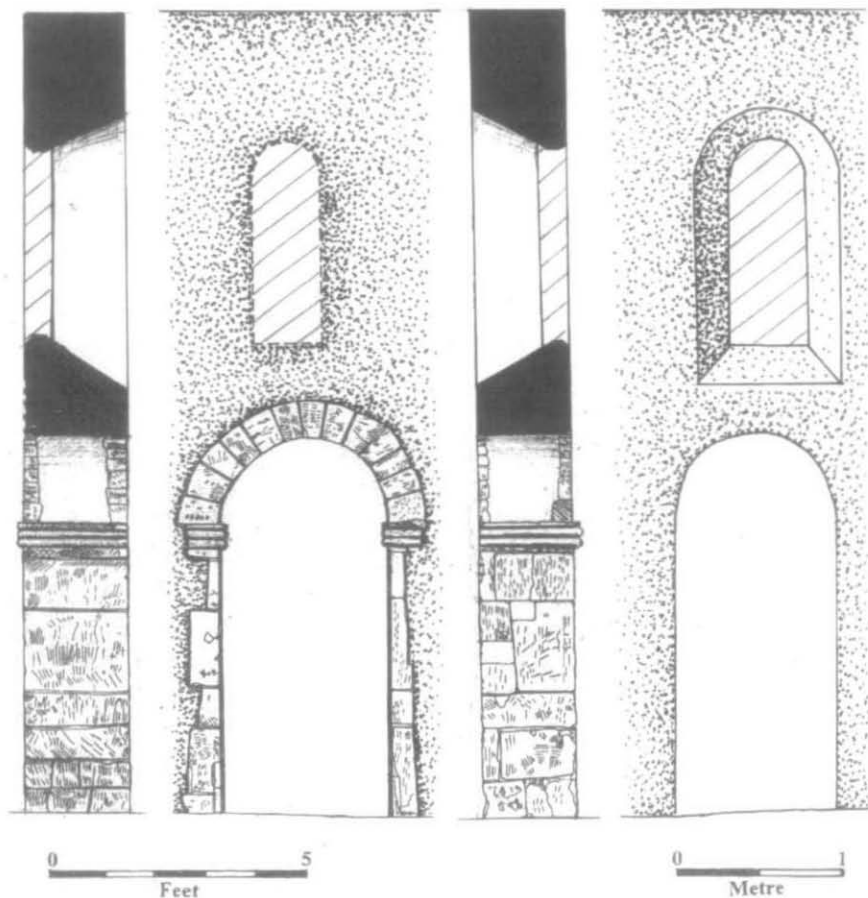


Fig. 6. St Michael, Aston Tirrild: south doorway and blocked window-splay.

would have been 0.48 m. above the level of the southern one, indicating a north-south sloping floor-level in the primary nave. Uneven floor-levels were not unusual at this time.<sup>34</sup>

The fine joints and vertical tooling of the quoins above the level of the lowest primary stone at this point are comparable to the masonry of the south doorway. Also notable is the vertical setting of the stones and the lacking of their bonding-in.

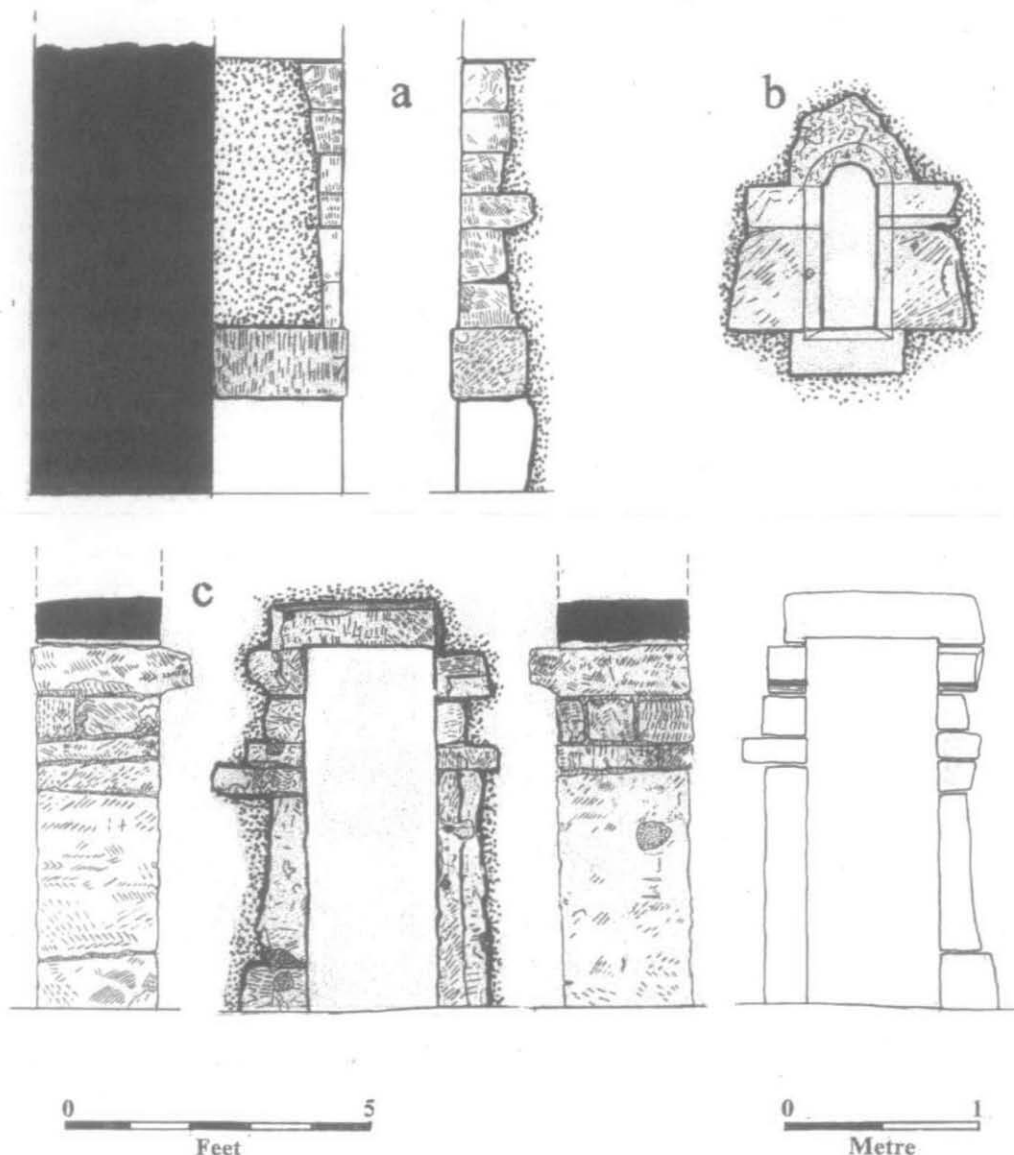


Fig. 7. St Michael, Aston Tirrold: (a) quoining at north-eastern corner of nave (b) re-set window in western wall of north aisle (c) re-set Anglo-Saxon doorway in northern wall of north aisle

<sup>34</sup> W. J. Rodwell, 'Holy Trinity Church, Bradwell-Juxta Coggeshall: A survey of the fabric and appraisal of the Norman brickwork', *Essex Archaeology and History*, 29 (1998), 66.

Re-set window in west wall of north aisle

The window now situated at the western end of the north aisle (Fig. 5, e; Fig. 7, b) is known to have formerly occupied the upper western part of the north wall of the nave.<sup>35</sup> The light is 0.28 m. broad and 0.88 m. high to the head of the soffit. The original surviving jambs are diagonally-tooled, though the central stone of the right jamb is Victorian. The head-block is formed from a rough, un-tooled stone. The window is chamfered to a width of 3 cm. and a depth of 2 cm. If, as seems highly probable, the window is contemporary with the south doorway, this is a very early example of chamfering.

Re-set Anglo-Saxon doorway in northern wall of north aisle

The doorway which presently provides access to the 1868 vestry from the north aisle of the same date (Fig. 5, f; fig. 7, c) was formerly situated opposite the south doorway.<sup>36</sup> It is 0.63 m. broad and 1.92 m. high to the soffit of the lintel. The lower parts of the jambs are formed from huge megalithic slabs, the upper parts from irregular through-stones. The eastern slab has a flange on its internal face. On both external faces are corbel-like projections below the lintel.

In contrast to the masonry already described, the work here is crude. The tooling is more roughly executed than that of the south doorway and the quoining of the north-eastern corner of the nave. It would appear that this doorway has been re-set twice: firstly, in the later 11th-century church represented by the south doorway, the plan of the nave and its north-eastern quoining, and secondly in the north aisle of 1868.

The primary chancel

The present chancel is almost totally the result of a 13th-century rebuilding, and deviates three degrees north of the true west-east axis (Fig. 5). It is, however, notable that the westernmost 3.9 m. of the south wall of the chancel deviates four degrees south of the same axis. The masonry here is pierced by a 13th-century priest's door and a two-light window of c.1300, but it is possible that the fabric itself is later 11th-century work.

Plan of the later 11th-century church

Though much of the early church has been obliterated by later development, the original plan can still be recovered (Fig. 8). The features at the north-eastern corner of the nave (Fig. 7, a) suggest its northern wall was 0.75 m. thick here, but the surviving primary walls adjacent to the south doorway are only 0.58–0.6 m. thick. This suggests that while the internal proportions of the 11th century nave were planned on a near-true double-square (13.18 m. x 6.92 m.), the external walls tapered towards the west. As already noted the re-set north doorway (Fig. 7, c) belongs to an earlier church, and has jambs generally 0.6 m. broad. If this was incorporated into the western end of the later 11th-century church, the walls might have been narrowed here to accommodate it.

DiscussionThe re-set Anglo-Saxon doorway

The doorway presently set in the Victorian north aisle seems earlier than any of the 11th-century fabric and details which remain *in situ*. Stylistically, the megalithic jambs and lintelled head of the doorway can be compared with numerous examples at Deerhurst,

<sup>35</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 456

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Gloucestershire, which are of 8th- to 10th-century date.<sup>37</sup> The latter church, however, was a minster. There is no evidence that Aston Tirrold was anything other than a local church. It is rare for such buildings to retain masonry *in situ* which is earlier than the 11th century.<sup>38</sup> The doorway at Aston Tirrold, however, seems to have been a relic from an earlier church. Excavation has shown that substantial mid-late 11th-century churches sometimes had diminutive 10th- or early 11th-century predecessors. These early buildings were usually of timber, like the excavated examples at Wharram Percy, North Yorkshire and Raunds, Northamptonshire. At Raunds, Northamptonshire, however, the primary church was a small rubble-built structure.<sup>39</sup> The latter had a timber-framed doorway. If the re-set doorway at Aston Tirrold is from a similar diminutive predecessor to the present church, this must have been a more elaborate building than Raunds. At Wharram Percy, N. Yorkshire, a 10th-century timber church was replaced by a small 'rebuilding period' church in the mid 11th century, which in turn was replaced by a much larger masonry church in the early 12th century.<sup>40</sup> Was the re-set doorway at Aston Tirrold from a similar early-mid 11th-century structure?

#### The 11th-century church

The through-stones of the south doorway at Aston Tirrold indicate 11th-century workmanship,<sup>41</sup> yet the apparently contemporary window which was formerly situated in the western part of the nave is chamfered. Chamfering of details is rare before the early

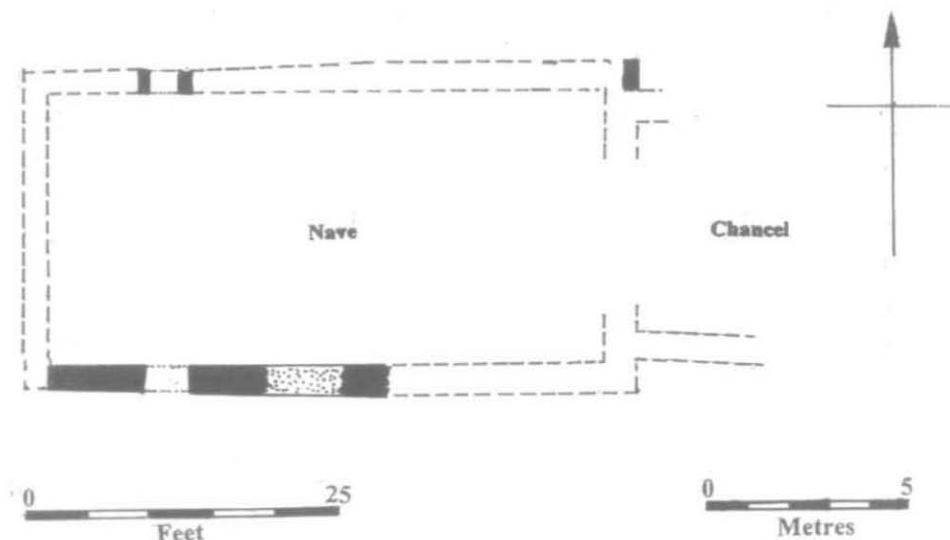


Fig. 8. St Michael, Aston Tirrold: reconstruction of plan of later 11th-century church.

<sup>37</sup> P. A. Rahtz, *Excavations at St Mary's Church, Deerhurst 1971-73* (CBA Research Report 15, 1976).

<sup>38</sup> Blair, 'Churches in the early English Landscape', 12.

<sup>39</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 390-2 and Fig 46

<sup>40</sup> W. J. Rodwell, *Church Archaeology* (English Heritage, 1989), 26-7.

<sup>41</sup> They occur in the west doorways of the nave at Sherborne, dateable to 1042-58; J. H. P. Gibb, 'The Anglo-Saxon Cathedral at Sherborne', *Archaeological Journal*, 132 (1975), 72-3 and Fig. 1.

12th century,<sup>42</sup> but there are exceptions. At Sherborne in Dorset, the fabric of the Anglo-Saxon cathedral incorporated in the later abbey church includes a wall-arcade with chamfered arches. The latter is almost certainly the work of Bishop Aelfwold and dateable to 1042–58.<sup>43</sup> At Richmond Castle, North Yorkshire, a window on the eastern side of Scotland's hall, built in c.1090, is chamfered.<sup>44</sup>

While the details of the 11th-century church at Aston Tirrold are Anglo-Saxon in style, and the windows are, or were set high up in the nave in the Anglo-Saxon manner, the walls of the nave have a relatively low profile comparable to many Norman churches (Fig. 24, c).

#### *Historical background*

Before the Conquest, there were three manors of 'Estone'. One of these was held by Regenbald of Cirencester and formed the later manor of Aston Upthorpe (p. 27). The second, held by the wife of Lanc, formed the later manor of Aston Danvers. The third, held by one Anschil, formed the later manor of Aston Priors. The wife of Lanc's holding then gelded at fifteen hides and was worth fifteen pounds; Anschil's holding gelded at five hides and was worth three pounds.<sup>45</sup>

After the Conquest, both manors were in the king's hands. In 1080, William I granted the land which had formerly belonged to Anschil to Preaux Abbey, near Liseux. That monastery was under the patronage of the king's half-brother, count Robert of Mortain. With this land came the church of Aston Tirrold.<sup>46</sup>

At the time of the Domesday Survey, that land which had been held by the wife of Lanc was still in the king's hands, now gelded at five hides and was worth nine pounds.<sup>47</sup> Preaux Abbey's portion of the manor now gelded at two hides and was still worth three pounds. The abbey held this land until 1413, when it was acquired by Witham Priory, Somerset.<sup>48</sup>

The overlordship of that portion of the manor held by the king in 1086 was in the hands of the Earls of Warwick by 1166. At that time, the subtenant-lord was Nicolas son of Torold, who held a knights fee here.<sup>49</sup> It was Torold, son of Geoffrey, who gave his name to the village. Geoffrey was probably the first subtenant-lord here. It is likely that Henry I granted the manor to Henry, Earl of Warwick 'the king's warmest friend',<sup>50</sup> and that Geoffrey held from him. Nicholas's successors in the 13th century were the Danvers family, and the manor became known as Aston Danvers. The capital messuage appertaining to that manor mentioned in 1336 was possibly Tirrold House (p38).

#### *The builder of the 11th-century church*

Which one of the recorded 11th-century landowners commissioned the primary extant fabric of the church? The latter came into the hands of Preaux Abbey together with the land formerly held by Anschil. If Anschil indeed held the advowson of the church before the Conquest, it is hard to see how he could have commissioned this structure. He was a very minor landowner. This portion of Aston (Tirrold) was his only manor in Berkshire and,

<sup>42</sup> Rodwell, *op. cit.* 98.

<sup>43</sup> J. H. P. Gibb, *op. cit.*, 72 and 92–5.

<sup>44</sup> F. Mattassaro, *The English Castle* (Cassell, 1995), illustration on p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> *VCH Berks.* i, 328, 346.

<sup>46</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 457.

<sup>47</sup> *VCH Berks.* i, 328.

<sup>48</sup> *VCH Berks.* i, 346.

<sup>49</sup> *VCH Berks.* i, 453.

<sup>50</sup> D. Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen 1135–1154* (Longman, 2000), 65.

apparently anywhere. It is, however, not necessarily the case that Anschil did hold the advowson before the Conquest. If the advowson had been in the hands of the wife of Lanc, she, as a wealthier landowner, might have the resources to build this church.

Ultimately, it is uncertain who the proprietor of the church was in Edward the Confessor's time. In any case, despite the fact that the south doorway (Fig. 6) was the work of an Anglo-Saxon mason, there is evidence that the church is post-Conquest. Firstly, the chamfering of the re-set window (Fig. 7, b) pushes the date of construction forward. Secondly, the relatively low profile of the nave (Fig. 24, c) might imply Norman influence. Thirdly, the church is aligned on a true west-east axis. Pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon churches tended to be more haphazardly laid out.<sup>51</sup>

If the building is post-Conquest, it is unlikely that it was built during the period 1066–80, when both manors were in the king's hands. At that time, the land was presumably administered by a steward or bailiff, who would be more interested in revenue than expenditure on projects such as new churches. It is therefore suggested that the present 11th-century church was not that granted to Preaux Abbey in 1080, but a building commissioned by the abbey shortly after that date which employed indigenous masons. Incorporated into the north wall of the nave of this building was a doorway, perhaps, from the earlier church (Fig. 7, c).

## ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, SOUTH MORETON

### *Church and settlement*

The church (SU 5579 8804; Fig. 9, a; Pl. VI), motte (b) and the later mill (c) all stand by Mill Brook in isolation from the linear nucleated village. Four crofts of the latter (d) can be identified. The southernmost of these has been laterally truncated by a modern trackway (g), which forms the present approach to the church. Originally, these crofts appear to have been one chain, 66 feet or 20.3 m. wide. At least 22 crofts can be postulated, but the western extent of the nucleated settlement cannot be ascertained.

The eastern termination of the northern line of crofts occurs at the road leading to Sanderville's Manor (e). This was the land held by William Lovet in 1086. Within the moated site is a late 15th-century manor-house, consisting of a timber-framed hall with two end-wings.<sup>52</sup>

On the southern side of the nucleated village is a walled enclosure representing the site of the manor-house of Adresham's (f). The latter was established between 1154 and 1166.<sup>53</sup> The relationship between the walled enclosure representing the former manorial complex, and the settlement pattern is uncertain. It is quite possible that, since the crofts respect the site of Adresham's Manor, they were laid out in the late 12th century or later. Alternatively, Adresham's Manor may have been built over former crofts.

The present approach to the church (g) is modern. The VCH notes a 'paved ford' near the motte, perhaps the 'Stony Street' mentioned in 1398.<sup>54</sup> The latter perhaps ran south from the corner in the present main street (h) and crossed Mill Brook about 90 m. west of the motte. The arable land in this area is now under intense cultivation, and all earlier field-boundaries have been obliterated. It is, however, mentioned that a field in this vicinity was

<sup>51</sup> Rodwell, *op. cit.* 95.

<sup>52</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 499–501.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



known as Brook Ham.<sup>55</sup> It is uncertain whether this place-name derives from Ham 'farmstead' or Hamm 'meadow'.<sup>56</sup> Field-walking and/or geophysical survey might determine whether there was indeed settlement in this area. What does appear certain is that the church and castle-motte at South Moreton were originally approached from the west rather than the east.

#### The Norman castle-motte

The church can hardly be considered in isolation from the adjacent castle-motte (Fig. 10, b). The mound is generally 49 m. in diameter at the base. Its western half was largely quarried away in the late 19th century.<sup>57</sup> To the north-east, however, it attains a height of 3.7 m. above the ditches, and is 1.5 m. high above terra firma. The penannular form of the ditch indicates that no bailey ever existed to the east of the motte, and it is unlikely that one ever existed to the west. It is possible that the motte represents the strongpoint of an otherwise undefended manorial complex associated with the church.

It has been tentatively suggested that the motte represents the castle built within sight of Wallingford by Rannulf, Earl of Chester in 1145–6.<sup>58</sup> If this was the case, the context would be Rannulf's aid to King Stephen, who was attempting to capture Wallingford from the Empress's supporter, Brian fitz Count.<sup>59</sup> It is most unlikely that the motte was raised at this time. A fortification intended to frustrate Wallingford would be far more likely to be raised east of the 11th-century church. It might be expected to include the latter within its defensive circuit. It is far more likely that the motte was raised by Humphrey Visdelou, the lord of this portion of the manor of South Moreton in 1086.

#### Churchyard and yew tree

The churchyard walls are modern. There is no evidence that they represent earlier boundaries, apart from on the southern side of the church, where there is a natural scarp which descends towards Mill Brook.

At a point 7 m. east of the northern, and primary half of the church (Fig. 11) is an immense yew tree (Fig. 10, i; Pl. VII). Its trunk is approximately 3 m. in diameter. Not only is the tree entirely hollow, but the trunk has split into several segments. The branches are doubled-over and now reach to the ground. A tree of this size must be at least 1000 years old, perhaps 1100 years old,<sup>60</sup> and would therefore pre-date the later 11th-century primary fabric of the church. Its position at the east end of the church is ritually significant. It is possible that the tree is aligned to a church on the site, and perhaps the orientation of the present one. To the west of the church are two young yews (Fig. 10, j).

#### The Church

The church is orientated nine degrees south of a true west-east axis (Fig. 11). The present double-nave plan dates from the middle of the 13th century. The nave arcade, however, is of the earlier 13th century, indicating a previous, narrower south aisle (a). Prior to the restoration of 1849,<sup>61</sup> there was a wall dividing the nave and chancel arcades, perhaps of

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> J. N. L. Myres, *The English Settlements* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 44.

<sup>57</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 499–501.

<sup>58</sup> D. F. Renn, *Norman Castles in Britain* (John Baker, 1968), 117.

<sup>59</sup> Crouch, *op. cit.* 228.

<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.* 284–5.

<sup>61</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 503.





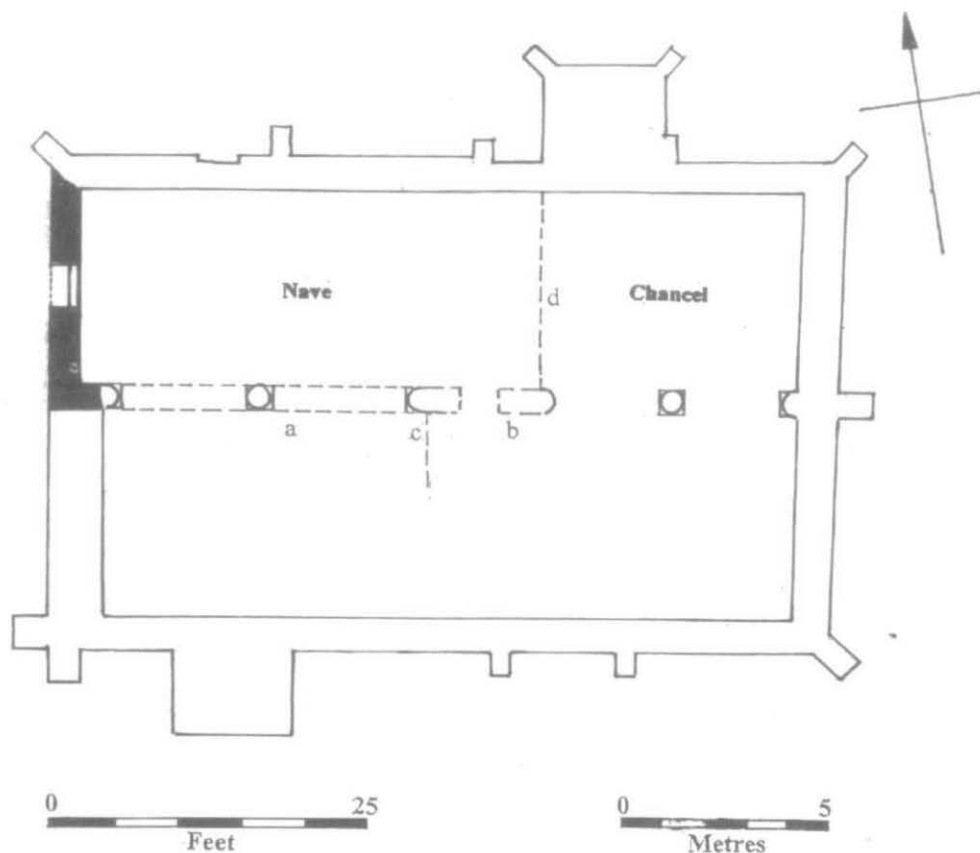


Fig. 11. St John the Baptist, South Moreton. Ground-plan indicating primary features.

11th-century date (b). It is possible that the early 13th-century south aisle did not extend to the current length of the nave area, but terminated just east of the present nave arcade (c). There is now no structural division between nave and chancel, the latter commencing at the west end of the eastern arcade (d).

The height of the walls of the nave is noteworthy. It was, unfortunately, impossible to measure their height (p2). They are, on a visual estimate, about 8 m. high. The present steep roofs and gables of the double-nave church are Victorian. Before the restoration of 1849, it is known that the church had low-pitched roofs.<sup>62</sup> The primary church, however, could have had a roof of about the same pitch as the Victorian one.

There is considerable wall-space between the nave arcade and the eaves. The wall above the west doorway contains a late 14th-century window which has obliterated primary details at this point.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

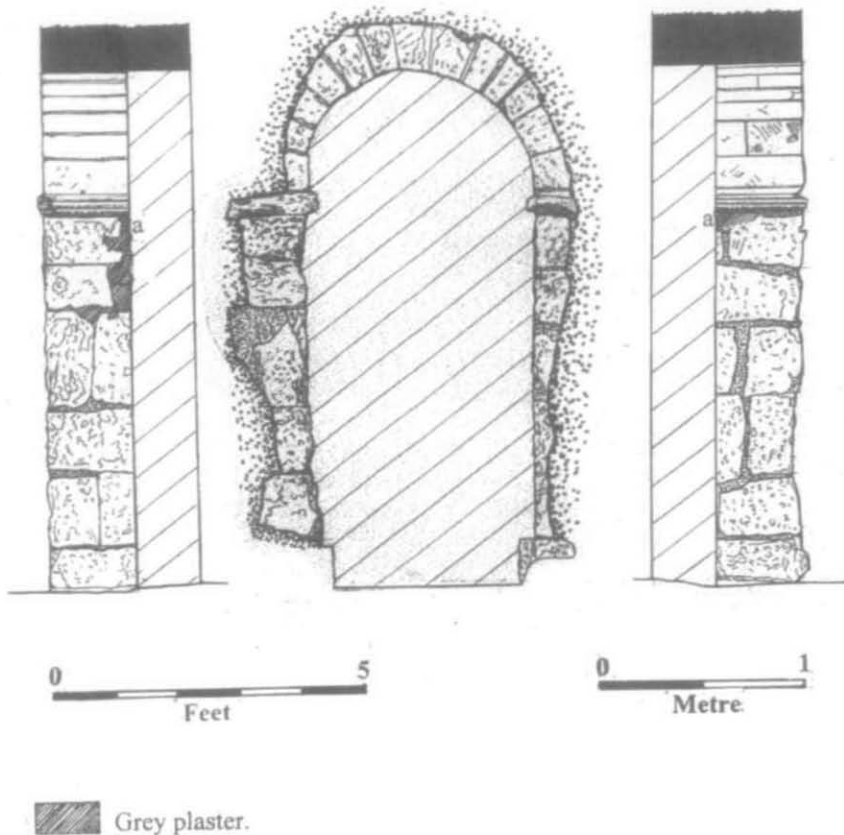


Fig. 12. St John the Baptist, South Moreton: the west doorway.

#### The 11th-century plan

So much of the primary fabric has vanished that the form of the 11th-century church is largely hypothesis. The lofty walls of the nave arcade might imply that the latter was cut through extant primary fabric, but if this was the case, later plastering has obscured original details. In the former wall (b), now pierced by a Victorian arch, there is said to have been 'a low and plain semicircular-headed opening'.<sup>63</sup> It is possible that this assertion is erroneous, and no such archway existed. Otherwise, there are three possibilities as to what it represented. Firstly, that it was the entrance to a porticus. Porticus, however, are usually associated with minsters, and there is no evidence that South Moreton was anything other than a local church. Secondly, the reported archway here may have been a priest's doorway, which would imply a single rather than a double-celled building. Thirdly, the archway might not have been 11th-century, but a later breach.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

*The west doorway*

The blocked west doorway (Fig. 12) is 1.03 m. wide at its base, but 1.06 m. wide below the abaci. It is 2.39 m. high to the head of the soffit. The abaci were double-grooved. This detail is preserved above the internal jambs, but has weathered externally. In contrast to the finely-tooled and jointed work of the south doorway at Aston Tirrold, the jambs of the doorway at South Moreton are crudely constructed. There are large mortared gaps between the stones. Some of the latter may be through-stones, but the blocking of the doorway makes this impossible to verify. The workmanship of the archway is more accomplished. The latter is composed of through-stones which have true joins. While weathering has destroyed all external tool-marks, some diagonal tooling survives on the soffit.

The most significant features of the west doorway are the fragments of dirty grey plaster below the abaci (Fig. 12, a). Plaster is now completely absent on the abaci and arch. The contrast between the crudely-worked jambs and more finely-worked arch has already been noted. It is possible that the lower portion of the doorway was plastered from the outset. The presence of plaster, rather than render suggests the doorway may have originally been internal. There is the possibility of some kind of western structure having had existed here. If this was the case, the latter would have been obliterated before the insertion of the west window in the late 14th century.

*Historical background*

Before the Conquest, South Moreton was divided between two thegns, Toti and Osmund. It was Osmund's former holding to which the church belonged in 1086. By this time, the land was held by a minor Norman tenant-in-chief, Humphrey Visdelou. Humphrey's main manors in Berkshire were Speen, Boxford and Benham, all in the Newbury area. Each of these manors were individually more important than South Moreton. In addition to this, Humphrey held a close in Wallingford.<sup>64</sup> Humphrey's Wallingford connection might have been the reason he established his caput here, and not on one of his more important manors around Newbury. The Visdelou family were proprietors of the church at South Moreton until they forfeited their lands during Henry II's reign.<sup>65</sup>

*Discussion*

While the west doorway at South Moreton has strong stylistic similarities with that at Aston Tirrold, the abaci at the two churches are different. The double grooved abaci of the west doorway at South Moreton can be compared with those on the bell-openings of St Michael-at-the-north-gate, Oxford, which are single-grooved, and those of the chancel arch at St Mary, Strethall, Essex, which are triple-grooved. At St Michael's, the tower has been variously dated to the earlier 11th century<sup>66</sup> and the later 11th century.<sup>67</sup> At Strethall, crude saltire ornament occurs on the chamfers below the abaci. This form of surface treatment is generally Norman, but possibly had Anglo-Saxon origins. The chancel arch at Strethall is therefore more likely to be late 11th century, rather than mid-11th century as the RCHME suggests. If grooved abaci are a late, rather than mid-11th-century device, the present primary extant fabric at South Moreton probably represents a post-Conquest structure built by an Anglo-Saxon mason under the patronage of Humphrey Visdelou. Since the latter was

<sup>64</sup> *VCH Berks.* i, 325.

<sup>65</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 104.

<sup>66</sup> RCHME, *City of Oxford* (1936), 140–141.

<sup>67</sup> *VCH Oxon.* iv, 394–6.

a more important landowner than his Anglo-Saxon predecessor, Osmund, Humphrey would have been more able to finance the building of a new church. The combination of a Norman earthwork castle and a related post Conquest Anglo-Saxon church is paralleled at Winchester.<sup>68</sup>

The possibility that some kind of western structure, which must have been demolished before the late 14th century, existed at South Moreton has already been discussed (p20). The loftiness of the walls of the church has also been noted. In some 11th-century churches of similar height, there was a first-floor chamber in the west tower or narthex, with a window opening into the nave. Examples of this arrangement survive in Northamptonshire at Blatherwyke,<sup>69</sup> Nassington<sup>70</sup> and Tansor.<sup>71</sup> Such first-floor chambers might have provided an area for the lord to observe services. At South Moreton, the proximity of the west doorway to the castle-motte may have been to provide direct access to the church for the lord from his residence.

The yew tree which is axially aligned to the east of the 11th-century nave is of some significance. It is older than the primary extant fabric of the present church, and is suggestive of an earlier church on the same alignment. What does the yew represent?

One possibility is that, given the yew tree's traditional association with death, the tree was planted upon the site of the grave of an early thegn of South Moreton, who may have lived in the 10th century.

If the yew tree served as the initial ritual focus, it may be that some kind of church or chapel west of the yew preceded the 11th-century building

#### ALL SAINTS, ASTON UPTHORPE

##### *Church and settlement*

Topographically, Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe form the bifocal settlement of Aston, a mere 500 metres separating the two. The church of All Saints, Aston Upthorpe (SU 5525 8618; Fig. 13, a), stands adjacent to the 17th-century manor-house (b). Both cluster around a spring (c). This water-source may have initially attracted settlement here. At the foot of Spring Lane, and on the parish boundary with Aston Tirrold is a Sarsen orthostat (d). It is unworked, about 1.5 m. high and stands on the western side of the road. It is possible that the church was aligned so that the east end pointed towards the Sarsen (J. Blair, pers. comm.). This would suggest that the latter is earlier. While the orthostat would therefore appear to be at least as old as the 11th century, there is no evidence that it is prehistoric. The relationship between the church and the stone at Aston Upthorpe might be compared with that of church and yew tree at South Moreton.

The nucleated settlement at Aston Upthorpe is L-shaped. Among present property boundaries, three former crofts (e) are discernable. Each is about 12 m. wide. From this, a village of at least seventeen crofts can be postulated, but the northern extent of settlement is unknown. The church stands in a minute churchyard hardly worthy of the name. It is 25 m. west-east, and generally 15 m. north-south.

<sup>68</sup> C. Platt, *Medieval England: A social history and archaeology from the Conquest to 1600 A.D.* (Routledge, 1978), 6.

<sup>69</sup> RCHME, *Northamptonshire*, vi, 20–2.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 120–2.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 145–8.



Fig. 13. Aston Upthorpe, church and settlement.

### *The Church*

The church (Fig. 14) is orientated eighteen degrees south-east of a true west-east axis, being aligned to the adjacent road. The nave, in its present form, has internal dimensions of 13.84 m. by 5.51 m. The chancel, which measures 5.38 m. by 4.0 m. internally, was entirely rebuilt in 1860.<sup>72</sup> It is probable, however, that the latter follows the plan of a primary square-ended structure.

At a point 3.7 m. west of the north doorway is a plastered-over break in the wall (Fig. 14, a; Fig. 15a). The upper part of the western wall here is 4 cm. thinner than that to the east. Above this break is an internal heightening of the wall 0.65 m. high. The latter fabric is probably contemporary with a 14th-century tie-beam. The suggestion is that the nave of the church was extended westwards at some period between the 12th and 14th centuries. The only detail in the western extension of the nave, however, is the 15th-century window in the west wall.

The primary church, it would appear, consisted of a nave measuring 10.45 m. by 5.51 m. internally, with a chancel of identical dimensions to the present Victorian work.

Only one of the primary windows has survived. This is in the north wall of the nave (Fig. 14, b; Fig. 16, b). This has a broad internal splay 1.2 m. wide and 1.82 m. high to the head of the soffit. The diagonally-tooled jambs and voussoirs, like all primary details of the church, are not bonded in with the fabric. Externally, the window has been entirely rendered over. The light is 0.19 m. broad and 0.65 m. high to the head of the soffit. The window has an external rebate 2.5 cm. broad and deep. Though it is possible that this rebate was to accommodate a glass window, the early date and relatively humble status of the church make this doubtful.

The north doorway of the church (Fig. 14, c; Fig. 16a) has an arch and jambs of 1860, but the rear-arch is probably original. It is quite possible that the Victorian masonry replicates the original design. The doorway is 1.08 m. wide and 2.08 m. high to the head of the soffit. There is no rebate, but the rear-arch is 0.28 m. higher than the outer one. The former is slightly chamfered, as is the rear-arch of the blocked south doorway.

<sup>72</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 289.

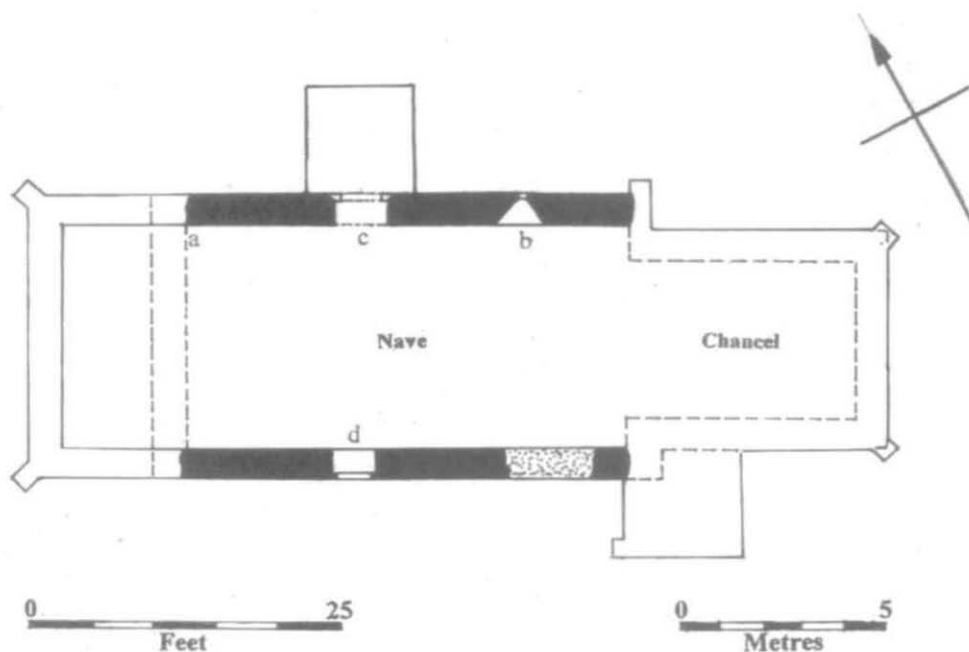


Fig. 14. All Saints, Aston Upthorpe, ground-plan indicating primary features.

The south doorway (Fig. 14, d; Fig. 16, b) has been blocked by 18th-century brickwork. The external arch is of a perfectly plain continuous order. It is 0.87 m. broad and generally 2.0 m. high to the head of the soffit. It would appear that the external ground-level was originally lower here, and there may have been a step towards the internal floor-level of the church. The arch of the south doorway is composed of near-cubical blocks which vary in size from 0.15 m. to 0.23 m. across. There is a complete lacking of bonding-in. A slight rebate exists between the outer arch and rear-arch, the latter being 0.4m higher than the former.

#### *Discussion of layout and details*

The plan of the church at Aston Upthorpe is very similar to that of Upton (p. 29), though the former is undoubtedly earlier in date. At both buildings, the nave is planned on the usual double-square. At both churches too, the north and south doorways are not situated at the west end of the nave but marginally west of its centre. The austere form of the work at Aston Upthorpe points to a date of construction late in the 11th century or very early in the 12th. The masonry here is in contrast to the more ornate, slightly later work at Upton.

Though the extant churches at Aston Upthorpe and Upton are very similar in plan and date, there are significant differences in the orientation of the buildings and the size of their churchyards. Upton (p. 56 and Fig 17) is on a true west-east alignment and is situated within a clearly-defined churchyard. At Aston Upthorpe, the deviation from a true west-east orientation is notable, as is the church's alignment towards the orthostat. The churchyard is hardly worthy of the name, being a small green space with a few eighteenth-century tombs on the northern side of the building.

As already noted (p. 45), awkward alignments of churches, relating to existing topographical features may suggest an Anglo-Saxon rather than a Norman foundation. It is therefore just possible that the church here had a timber predecessor. In 1020-1, the

distinction was made between a church where there was 'little service but there is a graveyard' and a 'field-church where there is no graveyard'.<sup>73</sup> Did the Berkshire Domesday folios mention the former but not the latter, and does the present church at Aston Upthorpe occupy the site of an earlier timber field-church?

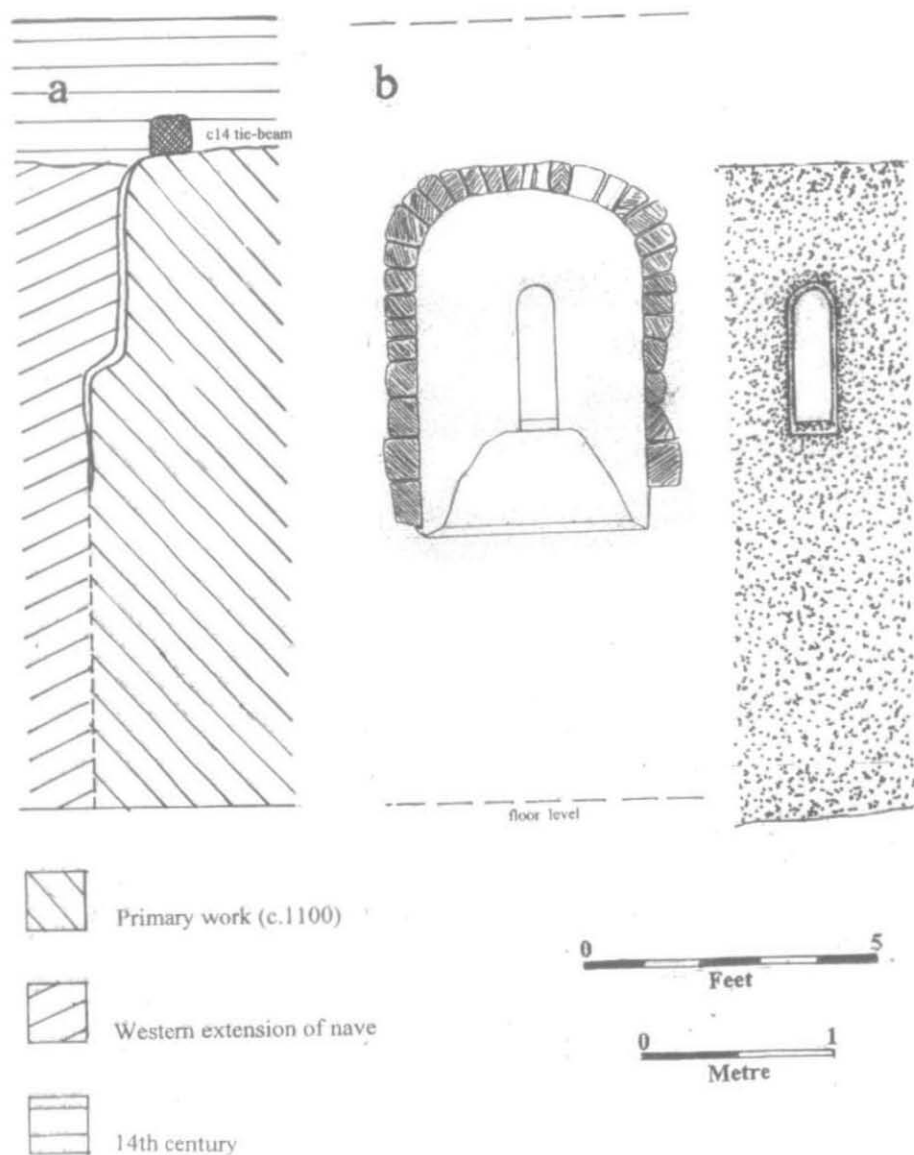


Fig. 15. All Saints, Aston Upthorpe: (a) break between primary and later masonry in north wall of nave (b) primary window in north wall of nave

<sup>73</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 368.



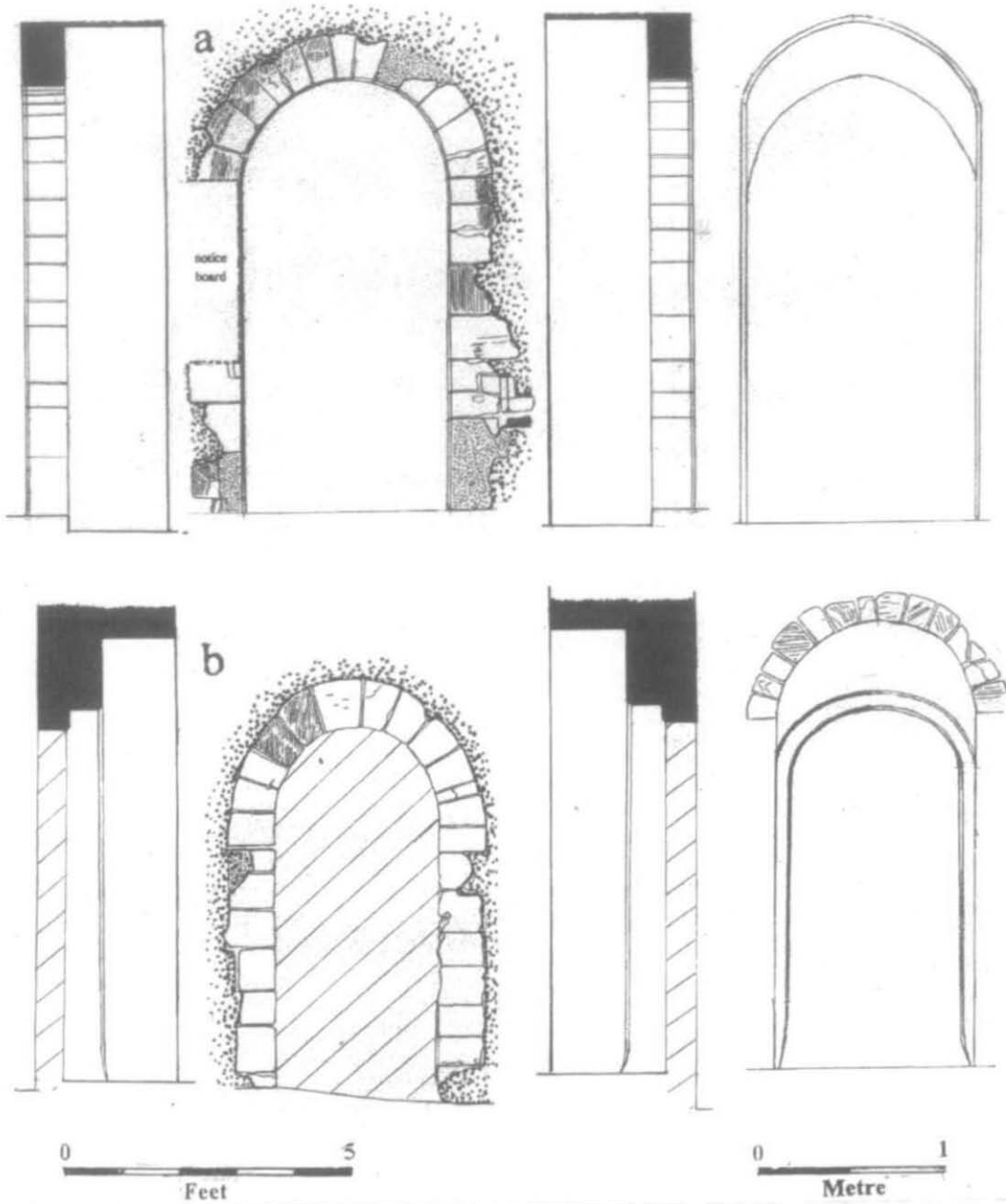


Fig. 16. All Saints, Aston Upthorpe (a) north doorway (b) south doorway

*Historical Background*

At the time of the Domesday Survey, Aston Upthorpe was held by Regenbald of Cirencester.<sup>74</sup> Regenbald was a royal chancellor under both Edward the Confessor and William I. In this capacity, he held five minster churches.<sup>75</sup> Though Regenbald held Aston Upthorpe and East Hagbourne in Blewbury Hundred, he did not hold the manor of Blewbury itself. The reasons for this are obscure.

In 1091, the 'churches' of Blewbury were granted to the see of Salisbury (above, p. 34), thus separating the advowsons from the lords the manor. Salisbury was to hold the churches of Blewbury, Aston Upthorpe and Upton throughout the medieval period and beyond.<sup>76</sup>

## ST MARY, UPTON

*Church and settlement*

Upton is situated adjacent to the Reading-Wantage road. The church (SU 5418 8700; Fig. 17, a) is at the north end of the village. As at Aston Upthorpe, the settlement is centred around a spring (b). The focal point of the nucleated village is not the church, but the manor-house (c). The present building and associated barn are 17th-century, but probably occupy the site of a manor-house of Bermondsey Abbey, who acquired the manor in the 12th century.<sup>77</sup> It may have been the abbey who laid out the nucleated village. Three former crofts (d) survive amongst present boundaries, and a total of twenty crofts are postulated. Property boundaries adjacent to the church might imply further, smaller crofts (e), indicating a possible bifocal settlement.

The churchyard (Fig. 17, inset) is roughly trapezoidal. The present churchyard wall is contemporary with the restoration of 1885, but the yew trees along its perimeter indicate an earlier boundary. The oldest of these (f) has a trunk about 1.9 m. in diameter. Since yews of half this diameter are generally about 300 years old,<sup>78</sup> yew tree (f) at Upton may be 600–700 years old.

*The Church*

The chancel of the church (Fig. 18) is on a true west-east axis, but the nave is slightly misaligned, deviating three degrees to the south. The nave measures 10.3 m. by 5.15 m. internally, forming a true double-square. The chancel has internal dimensions of 4.9 m. by 4.15 m. The nave is on level ground, but the eastern end of the external ground level of the chancel is 0.25 m. lower than the western one. There are clear constructional breaks between chancel and nave (Fig. 18, a). The butt-joints indicate that the chancel was completed before the nave, though both are probably the result of a continuous building campaign.

*The church exterior*

A very thorough restoration in 1885 resulted in the entire re-facing of the building with cut flint, and the complete rebuilding of the east end. The porch and vestry date from this time. An old painting of the church, of c.1800, hangs beside the rear-arch of the north doorway. The painting suggests that the Victorian window in the eastern part of the south wall of the nave replaces a late medieval one (Fig. 18, b). This might, in turn, have replaced an original

<sup>74</sup> *VCH Berks.* i, 328.

<sup>75</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 364.

<sup>76</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 282.

<sup>77</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 283.

<sup>78</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.* 284.

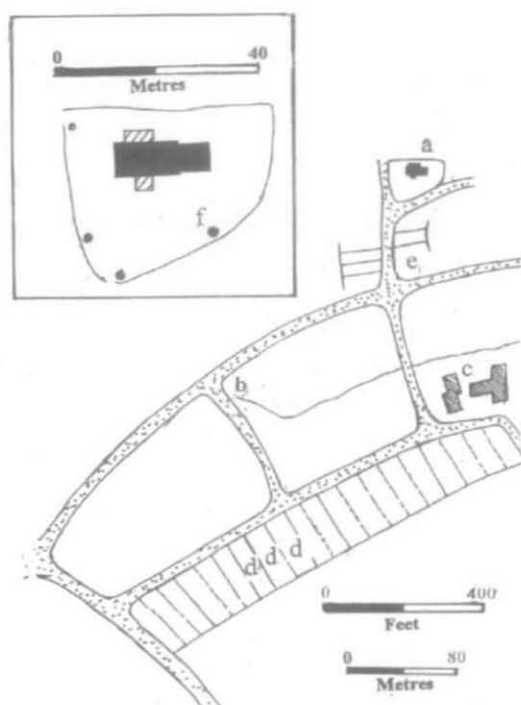


Fig. 17. St Mary, Upton: church and settlement

Norman window. The round-headed Victorian window to the west of the south doorway of the nave (c) is not indicated at all on the painting, suggesting this window is entirely a creation of 1885. Above this area, the painting indicates a dormer window. In the west wall of the nave, a two-light window, possibly of late medieval date, is indicated. At this point, there is now a Victorian round-headed window (d). The splay of this, however, may be primary work.

#### Original windows in nave and chancel

The window in the north wall of the chancel of the church (Fig. 18, e; Fig. 19, a) has an external light at a lower level than its southern counterpart, though the sills of the internal splays are at the same height. The northern chancel window is 2.0 m. above the Victorian guttering which runs around the entire church. The light of the window is 0.22 m. wide and 0.45 m. high to the head of the soffit. It has a very slight chamfer 1 cm. broad. Unlike the other primary windows at Upton, the head-block of this feature is rectangular, being more conventional for its time than the triangular head-blocks of the other two primary windows (Fig. 17, b-c). As is the case with most of the details at Upton, tooling on the stonework is diagonal. The sill of the window is a Victorian restoration.

The eastern window in the south wall of the chancel (Fig. 18, f; Fig. 19, b) has a light set 2.21 m. above the guttering and 0.60 m. below the eaves. It is 0.16 m. broad and 0.65 m. high to the head of the soffit. The light is surrounded by an incised roll-moulding. Unlike the northern window, the jambs below the head-block are bonded in with the fabric. The head-block itself is of an unusual triangular form, and has been deliberately worked into this shape. The sill and the lower stone of the east jamb are Victorian.

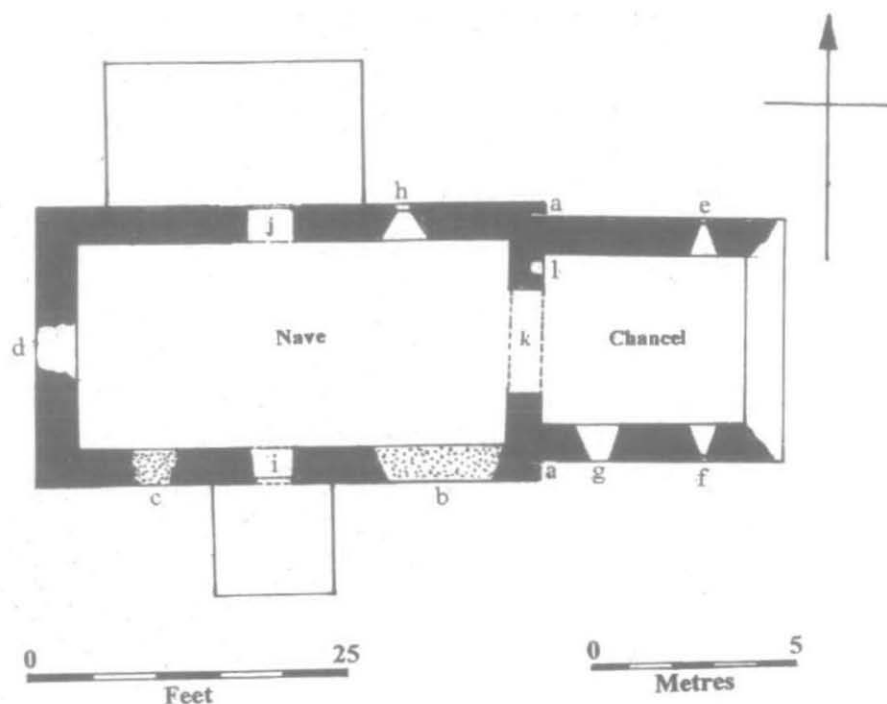


Fig. 18. St Mary Upton: ground plan indicating primary features.

The western window in the south wall of the chancel (Fig. 18, g) has a 13th-century two-light window frame carved from a single ironstone slab.<sup>79</sup> This must be a replacement of a primary window. The latter would have probably been larger than the window immediately to its east, since the splay of the western window is considerably broader (1.18 m.) than the eastern one (0.75 m.). There is also a differentiation in the height of the splays. That on the west is 1.52 m. high to the head of the soffit, that on the east is only 1.18 m. high.

The splay of the western window in the south wall of the chancel is comparable in size with that of the primary window in the north wall of the nave. The latter (Fig. 18, h, Fig. 19, c) is 2.7 m. above the Victorian guttering and its head-block reaches to the eaves. The light is 0.26 m. wide and 0.71 m. high to the head of the soffit. There is a substantial chamfer 5 cm. broad and 6 cm. deep. The sill is Victorian. The window is similar in form to the re-set example in the north aisle at Aston Tirrold (Fig. 7b).

#### Quoining at corners of nave

Some original quoining survives at all of the four corners of the nave (Fig. 20). All of the work is bonded-in. The quoins to the north-east and south-east (a-b) are generally well-preserved. On the upper part of the south-eastern quoin is a mass-dial dated 1629. Only three original quoins survive at the south-western corner of the nave (c), while the south-eastern corner (d) was similarly heavily restored in 1885.

<sup>79</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 289

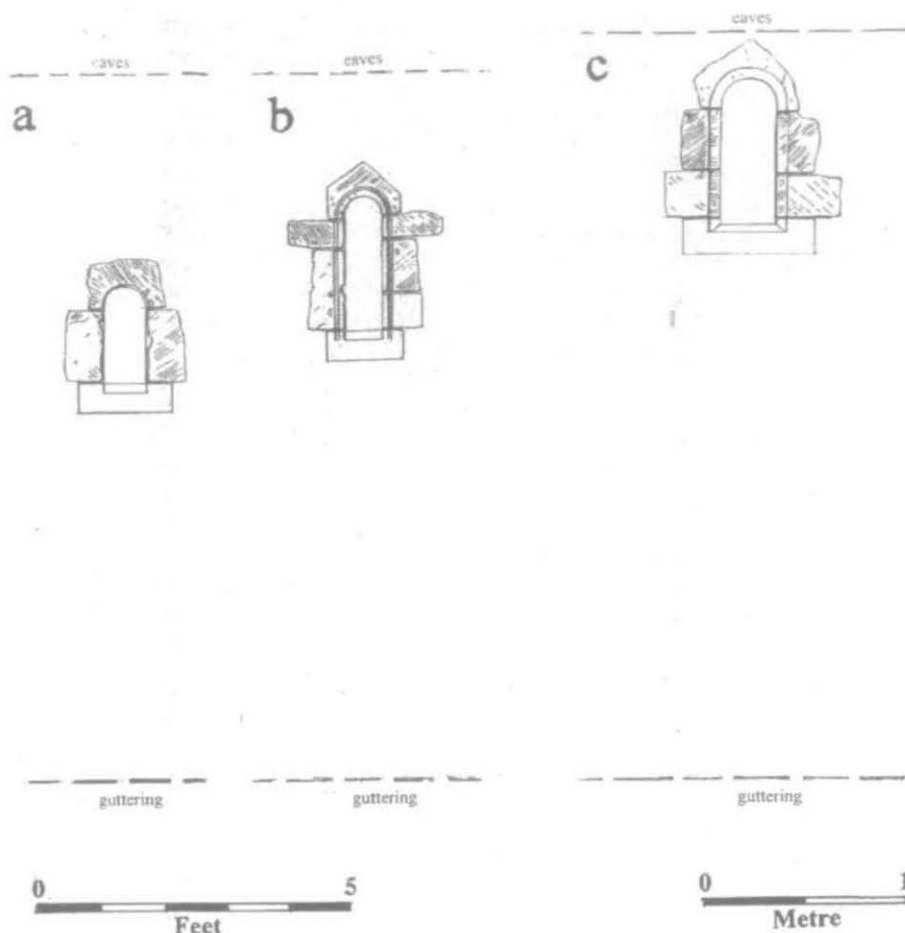


Fig. 19. St Mary, Upton (a) window in north wall of chancel (b) eastern window in south wall of chancel (c) window in north wall of nave.

#### The south doorway

The south doorway of the nave (Fig. 18, i; Fig. 21, a-b) is 0.94 m. wide and 2.19 m. high to the head of the soffit. It is fully rebated, the jambs of the outer arch being 0.18 m. wide. The shallowly-bonded quoins are quite weathered. The archway has crudely-incised chevron ornament. Though the first band of carving from the top is slightly convex between the incisions, and that below it slightly concave, there is no relief moulding. Incised chevron ornamentation similar to that at Upton occurs on the archway of the gatehouse at Durham Castle, erected by bishop Rannulf Flambard between 1099 and 1128.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> M. Roberts, *Durham* (English Heritage, 1994), 24. For a more complete analysis of chevron ornament, see Alan Borg, 'The Development of the Chevron Ornament', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd ser. 30 (1967), 122-40.

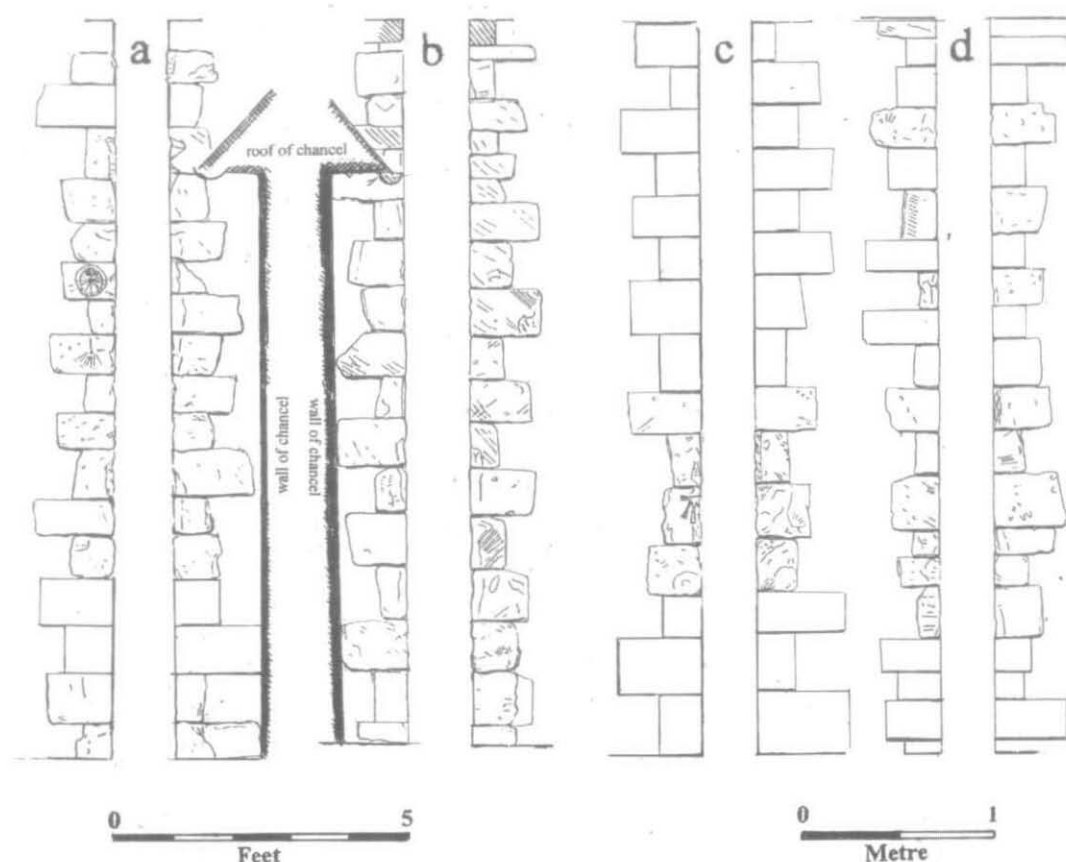


Fig. 20. Nave quoins: (a) south-eastern corner (b) north-eastern corner (c) south-western corner (d) north-western corner.

The rear-arch of the south doorway at Upton (Fig. 21, b) is lop-sided to its west. The westernmost voussoir is an un-tooled grey Sarsen block (a). This is the only non-Greensand stone used in the primary dressings of any of the four churches described in this paper.

#### The church interior

Only the rear-arch of the north doorway (Fig. 18, j; Fig. 21, c) was recorded. It is 1.15 m. broad and 2.75 m. high to the head of the soffit. The jambs and voussoirs have been plastered over. There is a modern step down towards the exterior, which is 0.15 m. below the internal floor level. The external doorway has a tympanum which has been plastered over, and is adorned by a modern painting on its internal side.

#### The chancel arch

The chancel arch (Fig. 18, k; Fig. 22) is 2.16 m. broad. The base of the northern abacus is at a higher level (1.54 m.) than the southern one (1.49 m.). The portal is 2.75 m. high to the head of the soffit. The abaci are carried round the western side of the arch, but not the eastern one. At some point, the jambs have been partially chamfered away. The abaci are adorned with a framed saltire motif. Their lower parts are chamfered. Saltire, as mentioned above, occurs in

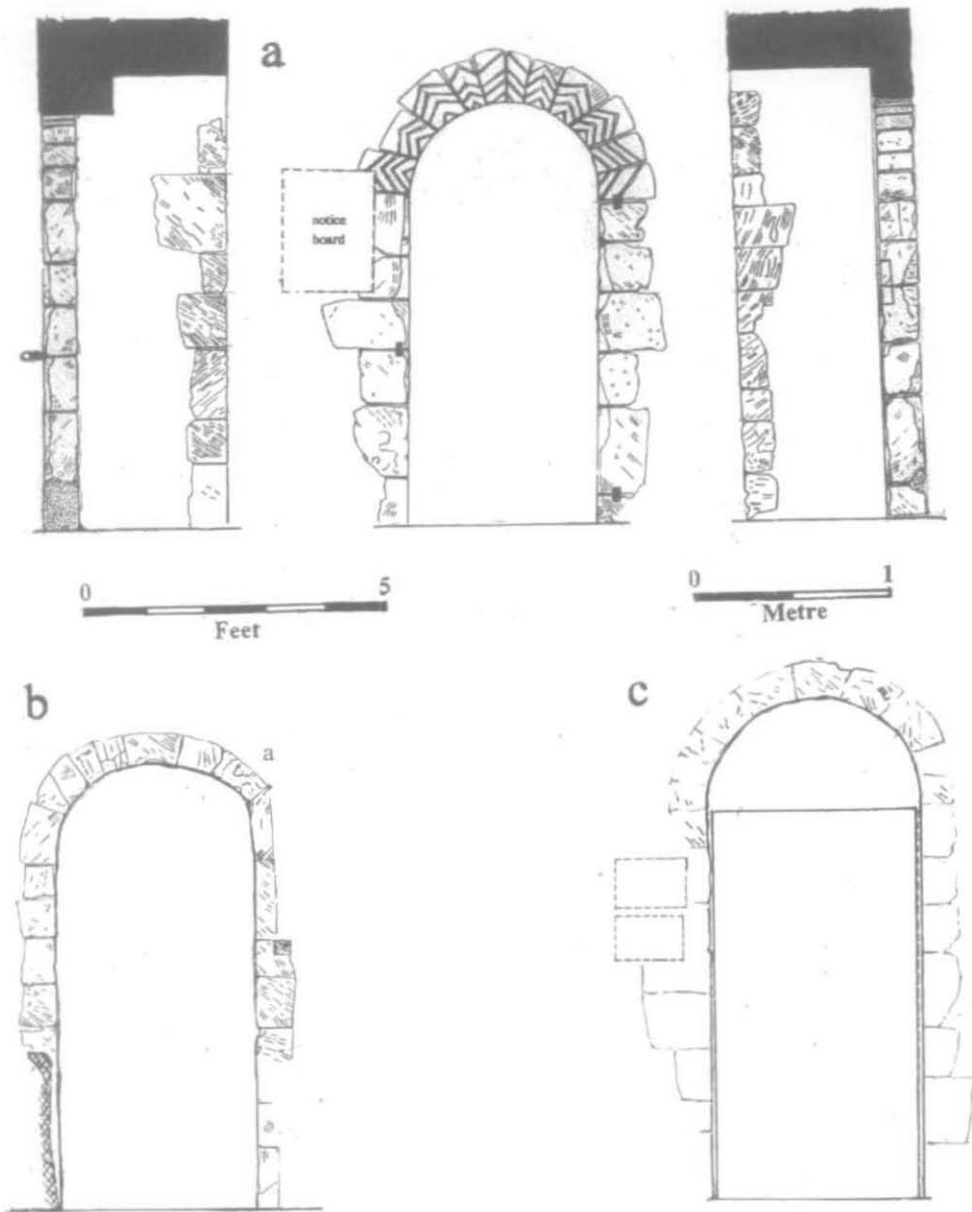


Fig. 21. St Mary, Upton (a) the south doorway, exterior and jambs (b) the south doorway, rear-arch (c) the north doorway, rear-arch.

a 11th-century context at St Mary, Strethall, Essex (p50). The motifs at Upton, however, are more sophisticated in form and are likely to be early 12th-century in date.

On the eastern side of the north jamb of the chancel arch at Upton is an aumbry (1). This is an important survival, since it suggests the primary altar either lay just east of the chancel arch.

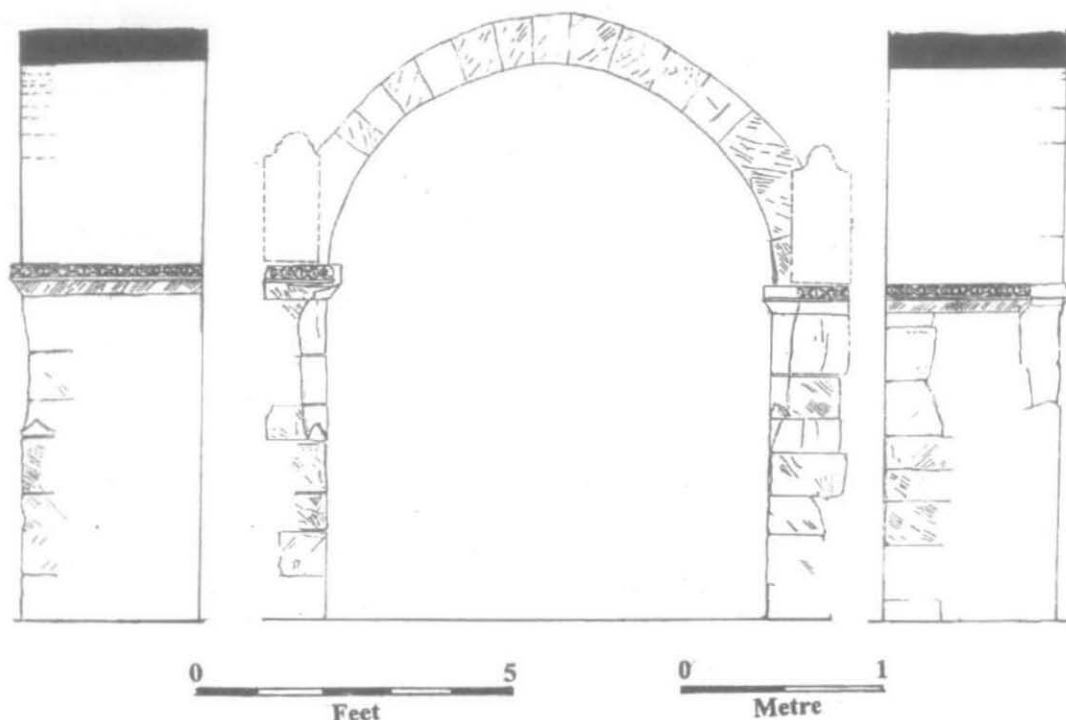


Fig. 22. St Mary, Upton: chancel arch.

### *Discussion*

#### Masonry and details

There is a notable contrast between the unbonded dressings at Aston Upthorpe, and the ubiquitously bonded-in work at Upton. Also notable is the presence of surface ornamentation at Upton. The most idiosyncratic features are the triangular head-blocks of the south-eastern window of the chancel and the northern window of the nave (Fig. 21, b-c).

Incised chevron ornament like that on the south doorway at Upton can be regarded as the precursor to the more mature moulded chevron form. As already mentioned, incised chevron ornament was employed between 1099 and 1128 at Durham Castle. The saltire ornament on the chancel arch at Upton is more sophisticated than the 11th-century carvings at Strethall, Essex, but less so than that at St Leonard, Wallingford. At the latter church, chancel and apse arches were inserted into the primary 11th-century structure in the mid-12th century. The arches are completely encrusted with a developed saltire combined with beadwork. It is possible that the work at St Leonard's is a development from that at Upton. On stylistic grounds, the primary extant building at Upton might have been built in the second or third decade of the 12th century.

#### Layout and Liturgy

Despite the severity of the Victorian restoration, the primary two-cell arrangement at St Mary, Upton is almost completely preserved (Fig. 18) and retains much original fenestration.



The primary chancel is the most important survival, since the majority of chancels were rebuilt from the 13th century onwards. The fenestration at Upton is of interest. The north window of the chancel (Fig. 18, e; Fig. 19, a) is presumably smaller and plainer than that on the southern side of the church, because the latter was the building's public face. The position of the aumbry (Fig. 18, l) is particularly significant. In the context of the latter, it is notable that the splay of the south-western chancel window (Fig. 18, g) is much larger than the eastern one. One reason for this is that the primary altar may have stood directly north of the south-western window, and the window at this point was larger to illuminate the altar.

Such a position would be appropriate for a church built in the first quarter of the twelfth century. From the seventh to the early eleventh centuries, the altar generally seems to have stood at the east end of the nave. From then on, 'it may be that by the 11th century, it had become usual for the altar to be placed just inside the chancel'.<sup>81</sup>

The nave at Upton, like that of Aston Upthorpe, is on a double-square plan. It is reasonable to assume that the surviving original north window had a southern counterpart which was obliterated by a late medieval window, which was in turn destroyed by a Victorian successor (Fig. 18, b). This hypothesis has been assumed for the reconstruction drawing in Fig. 25.

It is notable that at both Aston Upthorpe and Upton, the north and south doorways are situated towards the centre of the nave rather than its western end. The same arrangement occurs at the late 12th-century St Catherine's Chapel, Milton Abbas, Dorset.<sup>82</sup> There must have been a reason for this arrangement, which is more typical of chapels than proprietary churches. Did the western part of these chapels contain some kind of accommodation for a chaplain?

#### *Historical background*

In 1086, the manor of Upton was held by Turstin fitz Rolf, William I's standard-bearer.<sup>83</sup> Turstin was an absentee lord, the bulk of his estates being in Somerset.<sup>84</sup> The mention of 'churches' at Blewbury in 1091 has already been discussed (p34). While it is just possible that the primary extant masonry at Aston Upthorpe is this early (p53), that at Upton cannot be.

In 1092, Winebald de Balun, who succeeded Turstin fitz Rolf as lord of Upton, granted the tithes of this manor to Bermondsey Abbey.<sup>85</sup> This does not necessarily imply a church at Upton at this early a date, since the tithes might have been rendered to the mother church at Blewbury. By the early 12th century, the manor of Upton itself was in the hands of Bermondsey Abbey.<sup>86</sup> There is thus no direct evidence of a church at Upton in 1091-2. The foundation of a church here might be dated, on architectural grounds alone, to the early 12th century.

#### GENERAL DISCUSSION

The churches described in this paper did not develop in isolation. As rural, local churches, it is likely that the buildings of the 11th century were influenced by higher-status buildings in the area, and by churches in the urban centres of Oxford and Wallingford. Aston Upthorpe and Upton were chapelries of Blewbury, itself a peculiar of the See of Salisbury.

<sup>81</sup> D. Parsons, 'Sacarium: ablution drains in early medieval churches' in L. A. S. Butler and R. K. Morris (eds.), *The Anglo-Saxon Church: Papers on History, Architecture and Archaeology in Honour of Dr H. M. Taylor* (CBA Research Report 60, 1986), 105-20.

<sup>82</sup> RCHME, *Dorset* vi, 190-1.

<sup>83</sup> Stenton, op. cit. 630.

<sup>84</sup> *VCH Somerset*, i, 514ff.

<sup>85</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 290.

<sup>86</sup> *VCH Berks.* iii, 283.

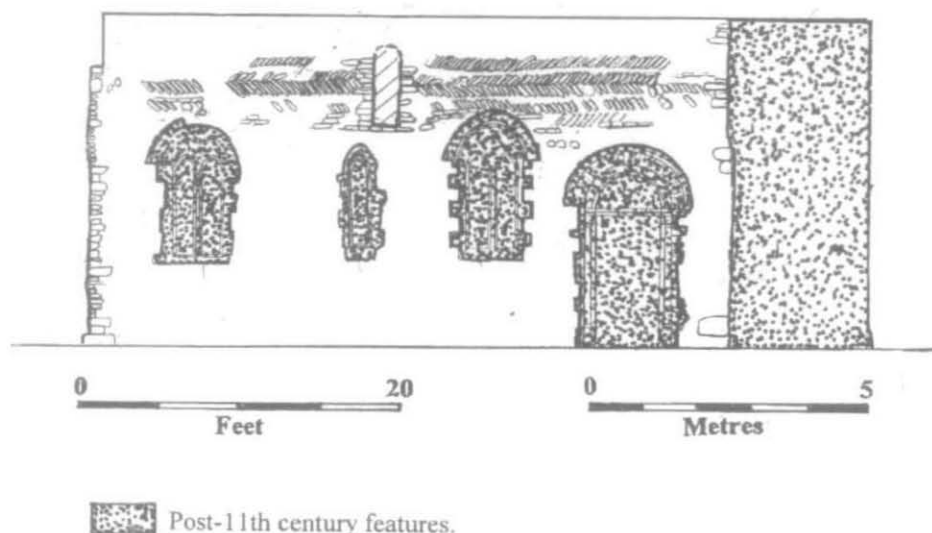


Fig. 23. St Leonard, Wallingford: elevation of north wall of nave (random rubble omitted)

Though the churches at Aston Tirrold and South Moreton are Anglo-Saxon in style, the evidence suggests they were commissioned for Norman patrons (pp. 45, 50). This hypothesis would assume an existing indigenous school of masons in the area which the Norman conquerors could employ. These people might be found in the boroughs of Oxford and Wallingford. The west doorway at South Moreton (Fig. 12) has grooved abaci similar to those of the bell-openings at St Michael-by-the-north-gate, Oxford (p. 21). At Wallingford, the 11th-century nave at St Leonard's church has a window set high up in the nave (Fig. 23) in a similar manner to that of the window above the south doorway at Aston Tirrold (Fig. 6). St Michael, Oxford, and St Leonard, Wallingford may well be pre-Conquest structures, but the school of masons could well have been operating after this time.

If as has been argued, the primary extant fabric at Aston Tirrold dates from *c.* 1080–90 (p. 16), this would mark the beginning of the period when Anglo-Saxon master masons trained before the Conquest were dying out, while more Norman masons were arriving from the Continent.

It is just possible that Aston Upthorpe was constructed between 1086 and 1091 (p. 26). If this was the case, Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe could have been constructed contemporaneously, but by masons trained in different traditions. It is however more likely that Aston Upthorpe is a decade or so later than Aston Tirrold. It might not be one of the 'churches' mentioned in 1091, but a building commissioned by the See of (Old) Sarum shortly after that date.

While, in contrast to Aston Upthorpe, the work at Upton has some surface ornamentation, this early-12th-century sculpture is crude and tentative compared with that of the 1130s and 1140s, for example, the sculpture on the chancel and apse arches at St Leonard's Wallingford (p. 33). This more sophisticated ornamentation might have been inspired by the Cluniac foundation of Reading Abbey, established in 1121.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> *VCH Berks.* ii, 62–73.

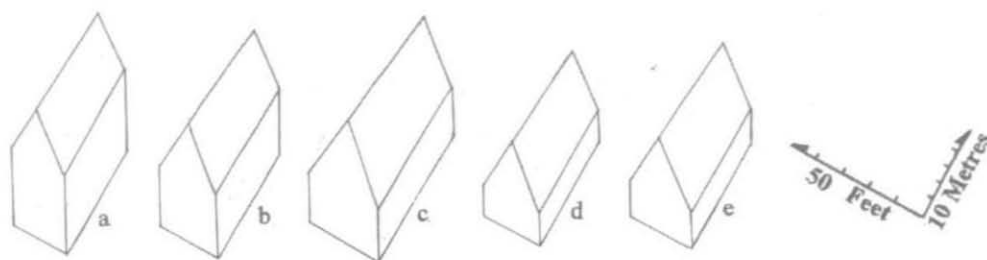


Fig. 24. Comparative sketch-models of church naves (a) St John the Baptist, South Moreton (b) St Leonard, Wallingford (c) St Michael, Aston Tirrold (d) All Saints, Aston Upthorpe (e) St Mary, Upton.

The height of the naves of the four churches under discussion is worth noting, as is that of the neighbouring church of St Leonard, Wallingford (Fig. 24). Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain the exact height of the nave at South Moreton (a). On a visual estimate, it appeared to be about 8 m. high to the eaves. St Leonard's (b) had a wall 6.9 m. high. Aston Tirrold (c), however, had a lower and broader profile, being 4.95 m. high to the eaves. While the details at this church are Anglo-Saxon, the profile is more Norman in style, and comparable to the purely Norman naves at Aston Upthorpe (d) and Upton (e), which are generally 3.3 m. and 3.391 m. high to the eaves respectively.



Fig. 25. Reconstruction of St Mary, Upton, c.1150. The windows of the south wall of the nave, and the south-western window of the chancel are based on the surviving original window in the north wall of the nave. The western gable and bellcote are based on the arrangement suggested at the early 12th-century church at Holy Trinity, Bradwell-Juxta-Coggeshall, Essex.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Rodwell, *op. cit.* 82–3.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Plate V. Artist's impression of the AD-44 gate by Deborah Miles-Williams. [Sauer p. 13]



Plate VI. Church with yew planted axially due east of chancel, South Moreton, Berks.

Photograph by John Blair. [Secker p. 45]

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Plate VII. Churchyard yew, South Moreton, Berks. Photograph by John Blair. [Secker p. 46]



Plate VIII. Moreton, near Thame. The chapel was one of several built in Oxfordshire in 1839, at the start of a period of rapid expansion for Primitive Methodism in the county. The building was extended in 1869 and fronts the village street on a prominent corner site given by Joseph Way, whose farm can be glimpsed beyond the chapel. It was the only place of worship in Moreton. (Photo by author). [Tiller p. 90]

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