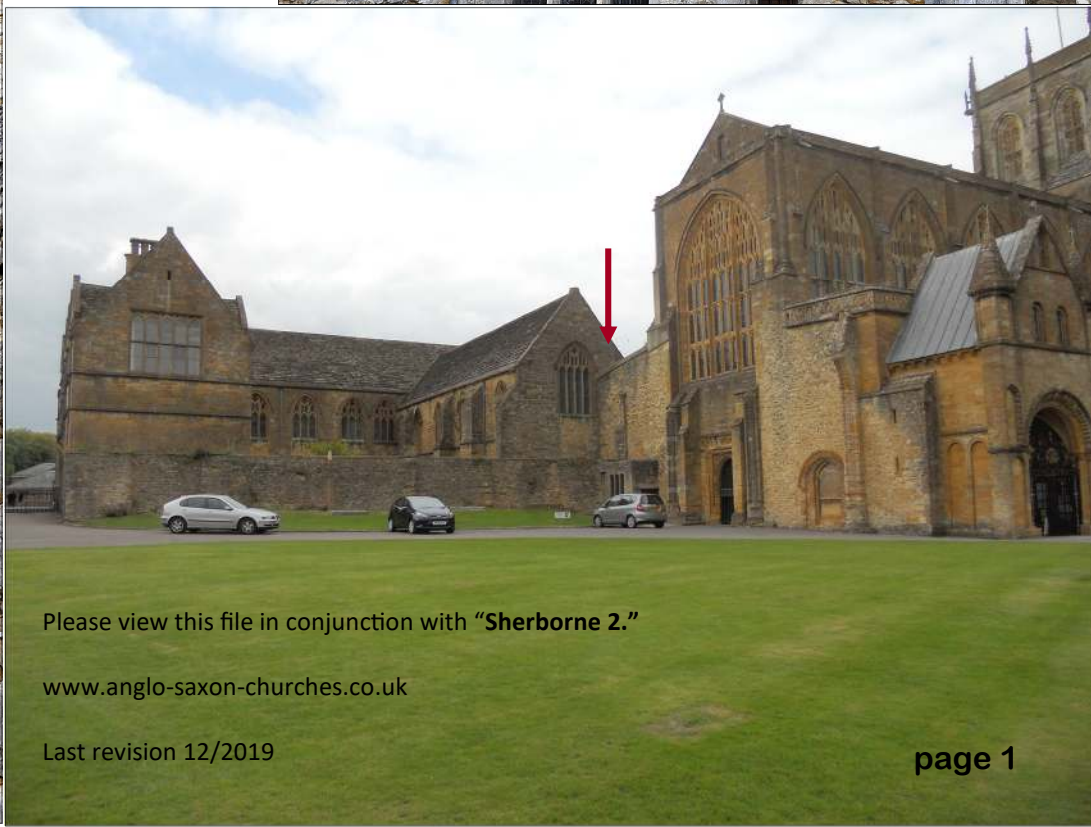


Abbey church of St Mary, Sherborne, Dorset.

A fine building of seemingly Perpendicular style, but where the fabric under the later coverings is of a far greater age (see dedicated text page for detailed information and see also "Sherborne 2" file).

Pictures on each page viewed clockwise from top left -

1. The west front and the site of the Saxon westwerken, from the SW; the 'uneven' rubble work is the Saxon walling, which is extensive (see H.Taylor). Saxon work is also to be found in the N wall of the N transept up to eave level (not illustrated).
2. A closer detail of part of the north aisle/porticus walling from the west.
3. A general view from the SW with some of the Abbey buildings to the left (now a part of the adjoining school).
4. Run of the west wall of the north porticus (standing 1045), the left-hand corner abuts an Abbey building in use by the school as a Library (and see red arrow in previous picture for location).



Please view this file in conjunction with "Sherborne 2."

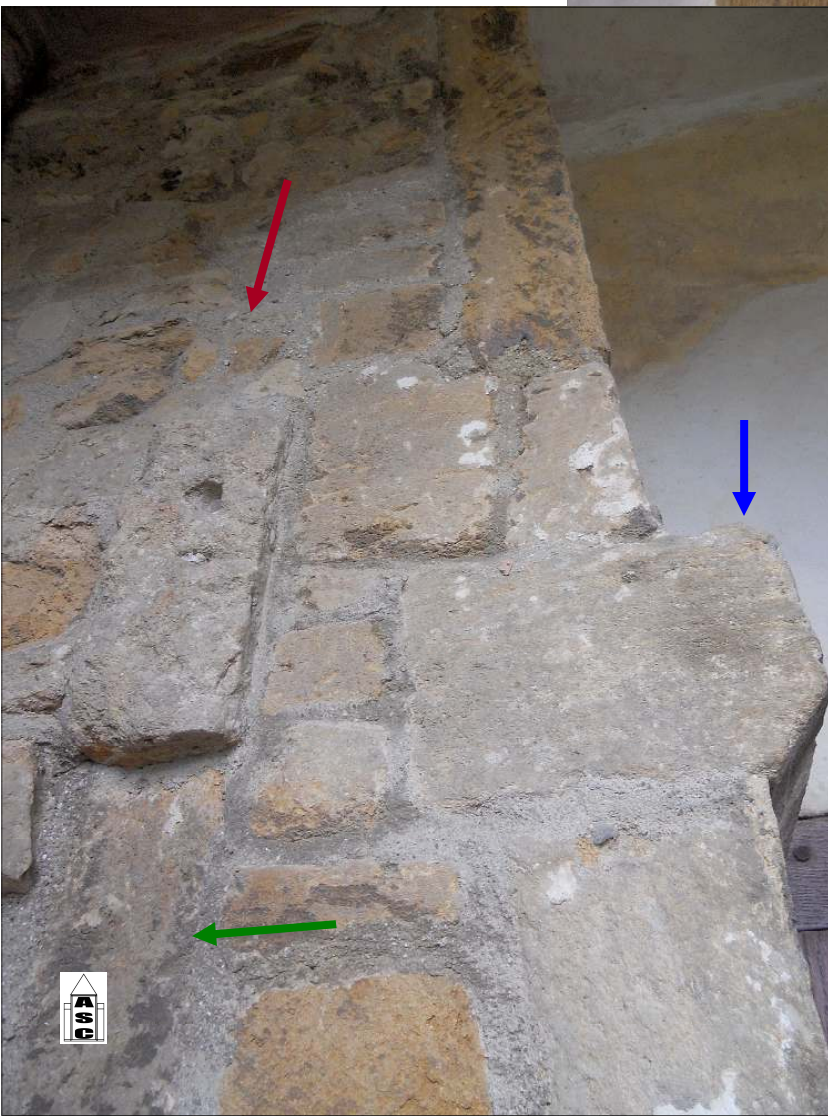
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Last revision 12/2019

Abbey church of St Mary, Sherborne, Dorset.

Viewed clockwise from top left.

5. Altered Anglo-Saxon archway (now a doorway having been unblocked in modern times) at west end of nave N aisle, interior view from aisle; dating to c.995AD. Note the distinctive pre-conquest style non-radial voussoirs. See page 3 for a line drawing of this archway in original condition showing hood moulds and pilaster strips.
6. Detail, the south impost of doorway in pic 5.
7. Bulbous stop to foot of pilaster on south side of west face of archway.
8. The west face of the mutilated archway, the blue arrow points out the south impost, the red arrow the cut back (defaced) hood mould which is starting its curve and is continuing upwards from the pilaster strip below (green arrow). The arch on this side is cut away vertically, the later tympanum filling the otherwise void which would have remained.
9. Shows the north jamb/impost of the archway, with descriptive arrows as in 7.



Nikon

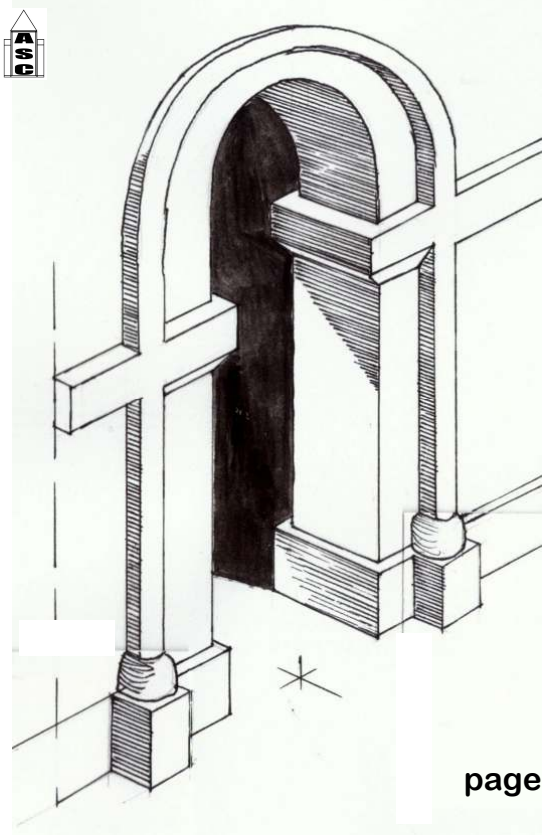
Abbey church of St Mary, Sherborne, Dorset.

10. The roughly coursed rubble walling (seen inside the blue dotted box) belonging to the west wall of the north transept, is probable Saxon work (but with blocked later medieval doorway, or archway, in the earlier fabric). The north aisle of the nave is running out to the right.
11. Part of the crossing viewed from the SW. Note how the nave (which runs to the left) is decidedly narrower than the crossing, a Saxon feature and not found in post conquest work. Indicates the core of the walling is Saxon, it has simply been extended upwards during later rebuilds.



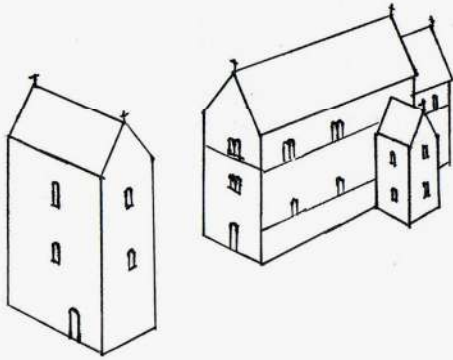
12. The Anglo-Saxon archway (see page 2) which originally led to the westwerken. This drawing has been made, noting the remains of pilaster strips and hood mouldings on its west face, and shows how both faces probably would have appeared in 'as built' condition, with rectangular section hood-moulds and matching pilaster strips. The 're-styling' (perhaps in the 12th century) resulted in the hacking back of the pilaster strips and their stops and the hood-mould, together with shaving back the imposts. A tympanum was added. This defacing has totally destroyed the character of this archway, radically weakened its aesthetic strength and negated its classical impact.

Nikon



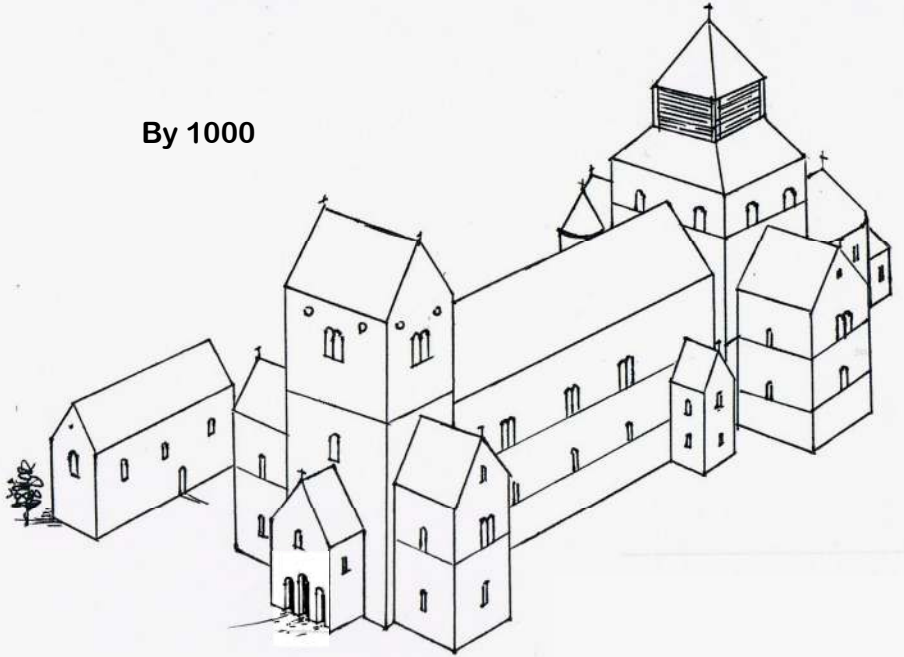
Abbey church of St Mary, Sherborne, Dorset. Consecrated in 705 in the presence of king Ine and St. Aldhelm. Possibly the site of an earlier Celtic church.

This page; pen and ink illustrations to be viewed with reference to text on the next page.

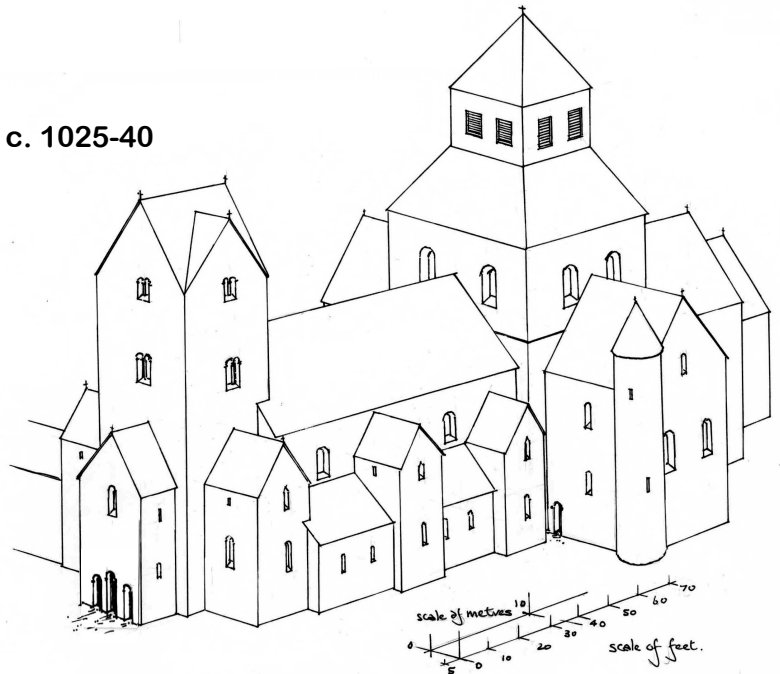


705 AD

By 1000



c. 1025-40



Abbey church of St Mary, Sherborne, Dorset. Consecrated in 705 in the presence of king Ine and St. Aldhelm. Possibly the site of an earlier Celtic church.

Previous page. A tentative illustrated explanation of how the Anglo-Saxon Abbey church may have evolved. Reference has been made to the great seal of the pre-conquest Saxon Abbey and to the Anglo-Saxon remains of the fabric extant today, with particular reference to the observations and the account by Dr.H.Taylor. Also the notes by R.H.Carpenter regarding the westwerken foundations, also remains of pre-conquest arcading below the Perpendicular west window (destroyed 19th century). The foundations were again explored in 1952 and later investigations in the 1960's & 70's (Gibb 1975) attested the attendant north and south porticus and with indications of a west porch, and the gable of the north transept; these all gave very positive pointers.

The first picture. The church that king Ine knew (705AD), a nave not exceeding 60 feet x 35 feet, with south and north porticus, short chancel, and a quite separate west tower. This is extremely close to the first layout (648AD) of Winchester cathedral (nave 75x40 feet) and seems to fit nicely at Sherborne. Carpenter described the massive foundations of "Roman type" of the westwerken and it is possible that this tower may have stood free of the main church (as Winchester). It may not necessarily be of precisely the same date as the nave.

Second picture. Possibly by 1000 the following improvements and additions had been made, although probably not all in one build: the old chancel had been replaced by the erection of a great central tower (the core of the existing tower today) and with north and south transepts, that on the south having a turret with staircase leading to the first floor chapels (as at Wimborne). An apsidal chancel was built to the east and possibly an ambulatory to the east of that and where the remains of King Ethelbert, brother and predecessor of King Alfred the Great, may be expected to have been buried. Their burial 'behind the high altar' at Sherborne was recorded by Leland. The burial of the two brothers (Ethelbald & Ethelbert) at Sherborne is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle under the year of Ethelbald's death, 860. The nave by now has been lengthened and heightened and joined to the westwerken (tower) and which at some point will be raised by a belfry stage. Building work was generally of an ongoing nature, and was spread over time, as funds permitted. Both old porticus (with their chapels on two floors) have been retained. There is now a west porch and north and south porticus to the west tower (housing chapels). The monastic buildings I have simply indicated by a dormitory to the north of the westwerken, it is not yet joined physically to the church.

Third picture (c.1040).

Work proceeded steadily as the monastery became richer. The Benedictine rule was introduced at Sherborne by Bishop Wulfsize in 998 and this would herald further work. A new doorway (surviving) belongs to his time and links the north porticus (to the westwerken) with the range of chapels on the north side of the nave. The west tower has received new gables on the west and east faces and has been re-roofed and additional (heavier) bells have been hung. The central tower retains the 3 original bells. The west porch has received another stage. Two grand porticus are constructed midway to the nave, as at Wareham St Mary, and each also houses a chapel at first floor level. Although work would have proceeded as and when funds allowed, most quarters of the tenth and eleventh centuries would have seen some work of one kind or another. Possibly in the first two decades of the 11th century additional altars are housed in new chapels running (to the north and south of) the length of the nave and abutting the pair of porticus. The church may now have in excess of 16 altars (pre-conquest Christchurch had 12). The north and south 'aisles' are not in fact aisles at all, as at Deerhurst and possibly Wareham, each archway (of the nave arcade) opened into a separate chapel with its own altar. The chancel is lengthened over the old ambulatory and thus the graves of the two Saxon kings now rest behind the high altar (which has been moved eastwards into the new build). The dormitory has been linked to the church by a new range. Other monastic buildings would have been updated and added to, or rebuilt in stone as the monastery grew. This is now the grand and imposing Abbey church which was to receive the Normans.

Post-conquest (not illustrated).

Herman was the last Bishop of Sherborne (1058-1078), the see being removed in 1078 when he then became the first Bishop of Salisbury. The **Norman** makeover/tidying may be expected **after 1080**. Minor changes were made by the Normans to the basic ground plan. There was a rebuild of the south transept and with two archways inserted to link both transepts to nave aisles which were totally rebuilt and the four allied porticus' being swept away. Nave, north transept and tower were all heightened receiving new windows. The crossing received four new great arches (being inserted into the old work). Possibly the chancel was refashioned. The old westwerken was untouched. A grand new south porch abutted the east side of the south porticus to the west tower, and projecting beyond it. Much medieval work followed. In 1539 the Abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII. It then became the parish church, having been bought from Sir John Horsey.

I have tried to describe the building work as it may have been carried out, to bring it alive in ones imagination. But of course some detail has to be, to a degree, a calculated guess, there simply isn't enough pre-conquest fabric to be seen after the alterations and passage of time. However the central tower, the foundations of the westwerken/west tower with the two allied porticus and the west porch with its 3 archway entrance, the long-and-short quoin to the north porticus (H.Taylor), the gable of the north transept, the Saxon doorway existing today, these are actual remains (some from excavation) around which a picture may be constructed. A building is like the scene of a crime, it has to be pieced together, reconstructed logically with certain events happening in time, in the correct sequence. No building is a static thing and the changes provide valuable clues. It is all part of the excitement and interest of a building so venerable. At Sherborne the Normans appear to have adapted the existing cruciform fabric (whereas at Winchester the cathedral was of an archaic type and was demolished). I hope you have enjoyed this journey back in time.