



## Minster Church of St. Cuthburga, Wimborne Minster, Dorset.

A seemingly Norman edifice, the actual foundation dates to Cuthburga, sister of King Ine, who founded the nunnery circa 705. King Alfred's next elder brother King Ethelred was buried here. The core of the present building is pre-conquest.

Clockwise from top left -

1. Late Anglo-Saxon stair turret, west wall of N transept.
2. A closer view of the turret and its stringcourses. Note the random coursed Saxon walling of the turret and transept which is quite different to the central tower (which raised/cased in Norman times).
3. Note that the four abutments to the tower are less than the width of the central tower, a Saxon trait (and not found in post-conquest fabric).



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Clockwise from top right -

4. South transept; W wall, Saxon stringcourse running from left and ending right of drainpipe at southernmost extent of original transept (see red arrow). There is a matching stringcourse on W wall of the north transept and which continues round the stair turret. Another matching stringcourse can also be seen high in the Saxon north walling of the tower (from inside N transept).

5. The staircase in the north transept turret, looking aloft. A very similar construction to Hough-on-the-Hill, and Broughton, in that the rubble applied supports the treads. Each tread is made up of some three stones, and not one piece as is usual in post-conquest work. A characteristic of pre-conquest circular staircases is that the newel is not integral with the tread, it is a column and which is seen here to be made up of individual pieces some two feet in height, and to which the treads abut, or are notched in. H.Taylor notes the turret and staircase in 'Anglo-Saxon Architecture' Vol III page 1076 but in error refers to it as being "the southern turret."

6. Detail of Anglo-Saxon treads in turret.



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10/09. With  
clarifications 11/15.



Nikon



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Clockwise from top left -

7. Viewed from the nave, the west wall of the tower has an elevated doorway sited over the inserted Norman nave arch and which would have perhaps given access to a gallery, or a floor over (part of) the nave, in a similar manner to the earlier church of St. Marys at Deerhurst. The archway consists of voussoirs some of which are non-radial, indeed as does its sister doorway in the east wall of the tower. It is possible these archways remain from the Anglo-Saxon build although the (rebuilt) interior face of the tower exhibits a post-conquest (Norman) arcade on all four faces. A similar doorway is to be found in the north wall of the tower (north face), having climbed the north transept circular stairway. This elevated north doorway today still gives the only access to the tower at that higher level, and that extant north doorway would seem to indicate that the pre-conquest fabric remains to that height today. There is a stringcourse some few feet or so below that north doorway and which matches exactly the section of the various stringcourses found externally on the transept walls and stairway turret.
8. The sister doorway sited over the chancel archway, and which also sits over a stringcourse of identical size/section as the other pre-conquest stringcourses.



9. A general view of the elevated chancel doorway seen in the previous photograph. In the case of both nave and chancel the original roof line/pitch can be seen as a 'mark' on the stonework of the tower walling. This pitch remained in the Norman refurbishment of the building. In the nave the inserted Norman arcade, which would have destroyed the Anglo-Saxon nave windows (see ink drawing next page) and the accompanying Norman clerestory windows (now seen as a triforium) all were (i) inserted in the Anglo-Saxon fabric of the nave.

Note i. Inserting arcades, windows and doorways in earlier/existing fabric was a standard building practice, partly to save the major expense of rebuilding work and also to allow the building to remain in use for devotions and the daily work of the church while building work progressed.

A tentative date for the remaining pre-conquest fabric. Perhaps the second or third Anglo-Saxon church on this site, and based on the features described, circa 1050.

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Sketches of the Minster church.

Left below. A birds eye view of the Saxon church seen from the north-east, the north transept visible with its (extant) stair turret, as the church may have appeared in the late Saxon period. The two stringcourses which run round the turret when extended along the nave and transept walls clearly make more sense where the lower is the springing for windows set in the walls at intervals. A higher (third) stringcourse belonging to the tower still remains today and may be viewed from inside the north transept (having ascended the turret stairs). This stringcourse has been removed outside when the tower was refurbished in Norman times but appears here and set below the elevated north doorway in the tower which today gives access to the tower proper. All four doorways remain at this level and all exhibit non-radial vousoirs in the head. Naturally the capping of the tower is a feature that is now totally lost but I have given it a timber 'roof' of the type that Breamore still has to this day and which houses bells (and which were often cast in situ in the churchyard), a common feature of Anglo-Saxon churches

Pencil sketch bottom right. I have included this pencil sketch, which I made in the late 1960's; it is a view of how the church may have appeared after the Norman refurbishment (viewed from the north-east). It shows the old north Saxon transept with its turret, and the top two stages of the tower as rebuilt by the Normans, in fact as it appears today but without the fenestrations which were built after the fall of the spire in the 16th century. Just worth considering whether the top stage to the tower (with its finely executed interlaced arcades) is a slightly later date than that below, much in the manner where towers were often raised when funds permitted. The eastern apses are a possibility and remain to be proved (or disproved) by excavation. The Norman clerestory windows in the nave still exist today and can be seen 'hidden' under the aisle roofs and now serve as a triforium on both south and north sides.

A note about the Saxon north turret: it is very probable that the stairs led to a floor, or at least a part floor, over the north transept, and which would have been used as a chapel with an altar, this being quite normal in Saxon times. Monks (or in the case of Wimborne, nuns) would then have held services and prayers in small groups and the different levels and 'rooms' inside a church enabled separate devotions to be held independent of each other. Deerhurst is a case in point with its doorways and windows on higher levels allied to the west tower and to the nave and leading and giving access to 'rooms' within the church and above the main body of the church. Now that these higher floors have disappeared 'mid air' doorways (where they exist), which lead nowhere, tend to look puzzling. In the case of Wimborne the Saxon turret stairs are now utilised to lead from the transept to the tower via a walk, to give access to the higher stages of the tower.

Right picture. Roman floor. Revealed some 10 inches beneath the present nave floor on the south side and some 15 feet from the tower, is a part of a Roman mosaic floor made of small tesserae. It is viewable and is protected beneath glass. In several known instances a room in a Roman villa was used for Christian worship and its use continued, developing into a building used as a church, such as at Rivenhall, Essex.

The Roman road from Bath (Aquae Sulis) to the Roman port at Hamworthy (near Poole) passes Wimborne on its west side, and close by is the Roman Vexillation Fortress (Lake Farm).

A little more detailed history from the 8th century. Taken from H.Taylor's "Anglo-Saxon Architecture, Vol III pg 1077).

*A monastery was founded here by Cuthburg one of the sisters of King Ine of Wessex as recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle under the year 718 in connection with other matters. Lioba, St Boniface's chief woman helper in his German mission, was trained here (Whitelock 1955: 719-24); and King Alfred's next elder brother King Ethelred was buried in the monastery (A.S.C., s.a. 871).*

