

The interior of the church is plastered, apart from the tower which is whitewashed internally. The nave has a cradle roof with an external pitch of about 40 degrees. Internally the roof structure is divided into twenty-four ceiled panels with carved floral bosses at the interstices of the panels. At wall-plate level are six carved wooden heads on each side of the nave. There are four wall posts on either side of the nave, running from the wall-plates and sitting on carved stone corbels. The nave and chancel aisles have lean-to roofs; that of the north aisle is enclosed, whereas the rest have exposed beams. The chancel and porch have simple pitched roofs, about 10 degrees steeper in pitch than the roof of the nave. The roof timbers are mainly oak.

The roof coverings are of three types. The nave and chancel are covered with limestone tiles; the north and south aisles of the nave and the tower are covered with lead cut in wide strips; while the north and south aisles of the chancel are slate-tiled. The flashings are of lead, as are some of the guttering components. All other drainage systems are cast iron.

Historical Development

A composite plan (Figure 4) shows the seven phases of structural alteration visible in the present fabric of the church at ground level. The historical development of the church is discussed with reference to the Buckler painting (Figure 5) which shows a phase not evident in the surviving structure. Certain events are not shown on the phase plans (Figure 6) as they do not affect the ground plan and, as a result, they are discussed with the phase to which they are most closely related in chronological terms.

Pre-Phase 1 (? Anglo-Saxon)

A substantial stone wall, formed with irregular sarsen stone rubble set within a soft silty mortar, was discovered in the 19th-century coal cellar to the north-east of the chancel. Although the wall is in alignment with the wall of the north aisle, it is unlikely to have formed part of any structure represented by the surviving building. It would seem highly probable that the wall was encountered by Victorian labourers while excavating soil for the construction of the cellar, then left, as its removal would have been both difficult and time-consuming. It is highly unlikely that any other stone structure would have been erected on the site so close to an existing church. There is no evidence to suggest that the Phase 1 chancel was ever extended and, in any case, the wall is poorly situated to support such a claim. An earlier Norman church on a slightly different alignment is an

outside possibility but most unlikely. Where churches have been excavated, it is commonly the case that Anglo-Saxon structures have been completely demolished to make way for a new building. It is not unusual for the new building to be built without respect for the situation of the old as at St Mary's, West Bergholt, Essex and St Paul-in-the-Bail, Lincoln (Turner 1984; Gilmour 1979). On these grounds, a possible Anglo-Saxon date is proposed.

Phase 1 (late 11th or early 12th century)

This phase consisted of a two-celled masonry church. Parts of the nave survive at either end and possibly above the arcades, although there is no evidence for the position of windows and doors. The chancel is shown on the 1806 Buckler watercolour which, in terms of its portrayal of surviving features, can be presumed to be reliable. Although no Romanesque windows are evident in the chancel, its date is confirmed by the round-headed doorway in the north wall and the clasping buttresses at the eastern end. Surviving stonework of this phase suggests that well-coursed rubble formed the walls, with ashlar blocks used as quoin stones. The painting gives some idea of the appearance of the church as a whole at this time.

Phase 2 (late 12th century)

The north aisle, divided into three bays, was added, with half piers at either end of the arcade set against the stubs of the north wall of the nave. The piers are circular with square capitals. The base mouldings are closely matched by those in the nave at Framlingham, Suffolk (Rigold 1977, 125, No. 216), which are classified as mature forms of the Attic revival and are dated to the last quarter of the 12th century (*ibid.*, 129). The original arches of the arcade have been replaced, while the two westernmost capitals are unfinished. The trumpet scallops, although formed, are not decorated. Examples of unfinished work are not common and their interest lies in that they show *in situ* working of architectural detail (*ibid.*, 100).

A transitional date may be assigned to the arcade, on the grounds that the trumpet scallop decoration of the two easternmost capitals can be exactly paralleled by that on circular capitals of early Gothic style at St Lawrence's church, Hilmarton, 4km to the north. At both churches the stone carving has been poorly executed with similar characteristics, very probably by the same mason. There is no other surviving masonry of this phase.

Phase 3 (mid 13th century)

The south aisle was constructed in the same manner

St. SWITHUN'S CHURCH COMPTON BASSETT

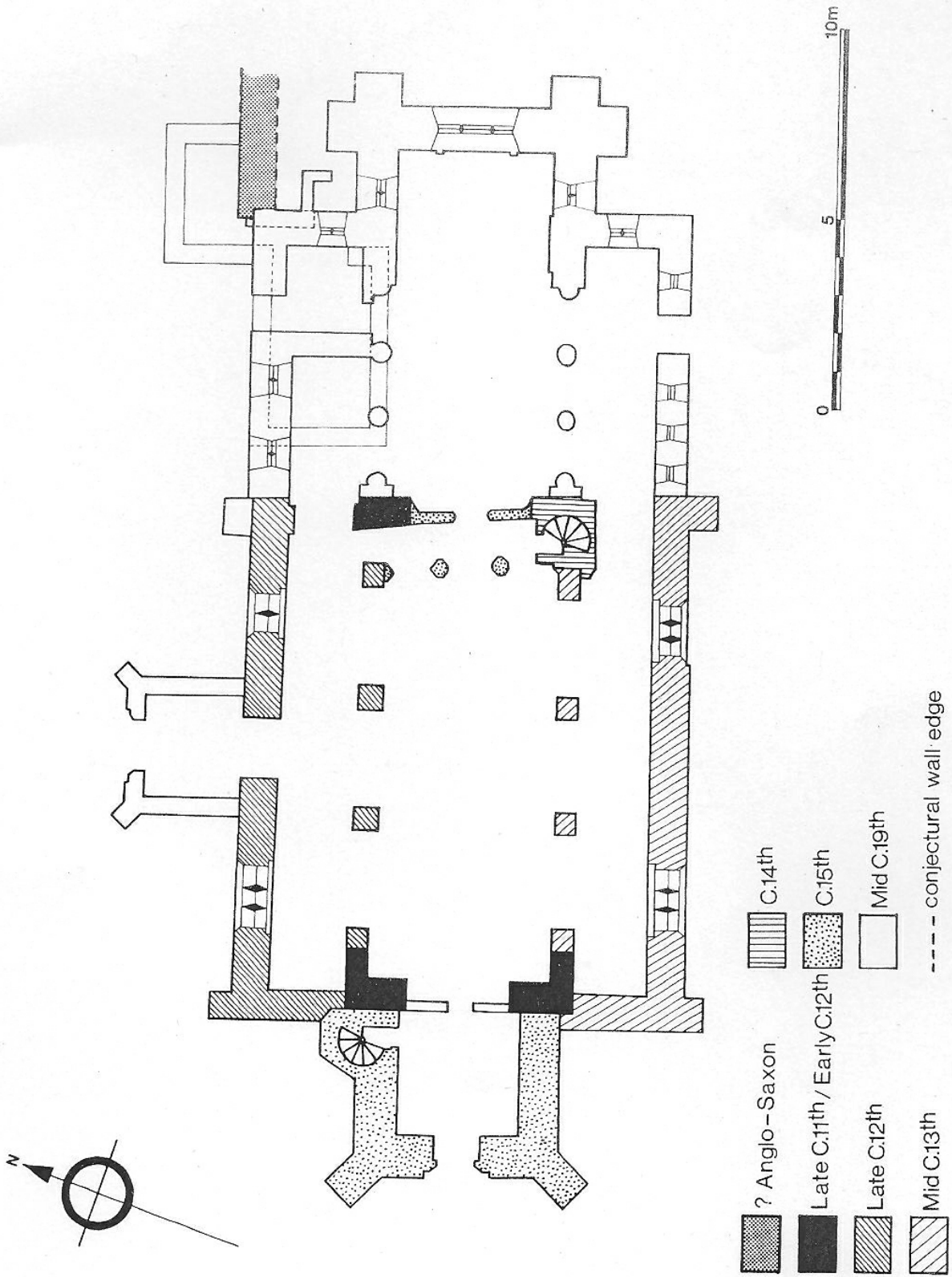


Figure 4. Composite plan of St Swithun's Church, Compton Bassett



Figure 5. View from the north-east showing Compton Bassett Church before restoration in 1866. (Reproduction of a watercolour by John Buckler, 1806, WANHS Library)

as its northern counterpart. The topography of the churchyard to the south of the nave necessitated the excavation of a quantity of subsoils so that level foundations could be dug. The capitals of the arcade are circular and are dated to the middle of the 13th century rather than earlier, by comparison with the Hilmarton capitals and the relative dating that these allow. The capitals at St Swithun's are similar in dimension and form but do not have trumpet scallops. The aisle itself has been rebuilt completely. Above ground, no masonry of this phase has survived *in situ*. The Buckler painting shows a single lancet in the north wall of the Phase 1 chancel which was probably installed during this period.

Phase 4 (14th century)

A new chancel arch was installed with mouldings in Perpendicular style. There are two orders of mouldings, the innermost of which rests on corbels considered by Ponting (1912, 429) to be 14th-century.

Shortly after this, a newel stair was constructed. Its absolute dating is difficult on purely architectural grounds, but it clearly post-dates the chancel arch while ante-dating the Phase 5 screen which butts onto it. Presumably a rood loft existed, supported by a beam. There is, however, no surviving evidence for either feature.

Phase 5 (15th century)

The alterations in this period were substantial. The tower was the first addition and again the removal of subsoil was necessary. Unusually, the west end wall of the nave forms much of the lower part of the tower, as opposed to the more usual rebuilding of the west end of a church that occurs when a tower is added (Rodwell 1981, 63). The double-chamfered arches of both arcades are of this period. A clerestory was added with three windows on each side. The butt joint on to the tower and the presence of the 'weathering' of the earlier roof-line on the west end

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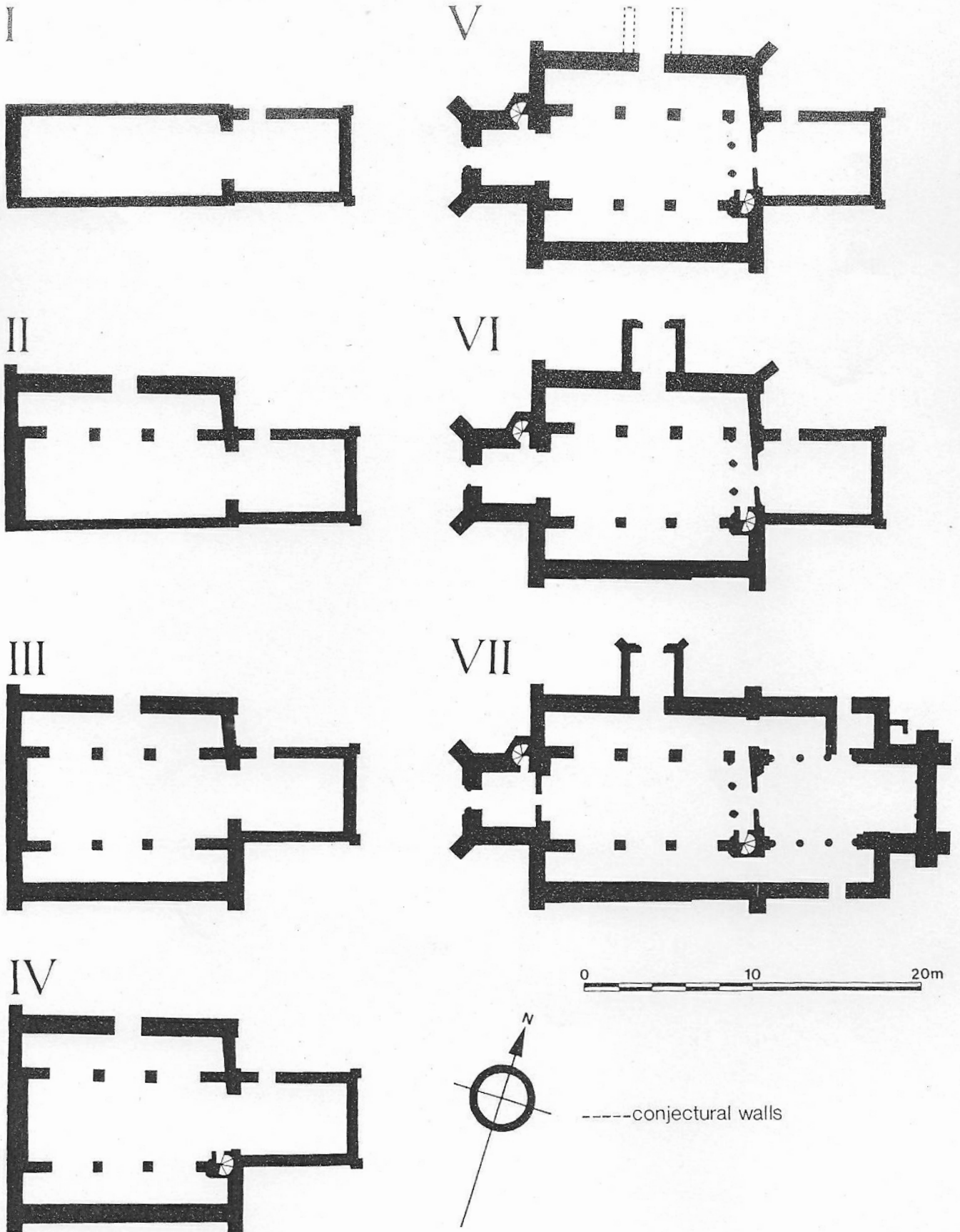


Figure 6. The historical development of St Swithun's Church, Compton Bassett