

wall of the nave clearly show that the tower is the earlier feature. The barrel vault roof belongs to this phase, as do the carved corbels on which the wall-posts sit. Both aisles were rebuilt in Perpendicular style, the doorway into the church was replaced and a porch added, the roof line being visible above the roof of the present porch. Subsequent rebuilding of the aisles has limited *in situ* masonry to that surrounding the doorway in the north aisle and the eastern part of the south aisle. The octagonal font, decorated with quatrefoils in panels, is of this period.

The screen deserves further consideration as its origin is of primary significance regarding the division of Phases 4 and 5 of the church. As the screen has been illustrated and discussed elsewhere (e.g. Vallance 1936, pl. 72; Jones 1965, pl. 35, 4; Ponting 1912, 430–1) its architecture need not be explored here. It has been dated to the first half of the 15th century (Ponting 1912, 431) and, if made for the church, belongs to this phase. The perforation of the eastern stub of the north wall of the nave probably occurred at this point so as to allow more light to reach the screen. There are, however, a number of strong arguments for an alternative place of origin. The screen is constructed from Caen stone. The Box quarries, 20km to the west, provided first-rate building stone throughout the Middle Ages. When the difficulties and problems of long distance overland transport are considered, it seems perplexing that the oolitic freestones from Box were not used. The use of Caen stone is a characteristic of high status medieval buildings, mainly churches, along the south coast, where stone was brought in by ship in large quantities. Significantly, the screen does not fit perfectly in place at the east end of the nave. If it had been built for this church, a perfect fit should have been achieved. This situation supports the notion that the newel stair was constructed for an earlier loft. Work of this standard seems somewhat out of place in the church; it would be more comfortable in a cathedral side chapel or some other high status religious establishment. The suggestion of a Winchester origin was probably a local tradition recorded for the first time by Marsh (1903). There are parallels in style in Hampshire at, for example, Christchurch Priory. It is highly probable that the screen came from elsewhere, either as a gift or by purchase, possibly from a dissolved monastic house in which case it represents a 16th-century addition. It may be pure coincidence that both Winchester Cathedral and our church share the same dedication but a Winchester origin should not be ruled out. The necessary further research on this matter should start with a survey of Winchester Cathedral.

A Salisbury provenance for the screen has been proposed (Howkins 1969, 58) although no reference was given to support this claim. In the late 18th century, Salisbury Cathedral was restored by architect James Wyatt whose work has been much criticised for its severity (Vallance 1947, 80; Tatton-Brown 1989, 199). As part of this restoration, two 15th-century screened side chapels at the eastern end of the cathedral were demolished. Further screens were removed from the north-east and south-east transepts and the north and south arms of the great transepts (Vallance 1947, 80). It is therefore possible that the screen at Compton Bassett was installed in the late 18th century.

Limitations in time and resources have unfortunately meant that more comprehensive research into the origin of the screen has not been possible. It is intended that this will be rectified in a future paper.

Phase 6 (18th century)

The north aisle was largely rebuilt, as was the western part of the south aisle, where a break in the wall is visible. In both cases masonry and architectural detail from the preceding phase were reused. A date of 1767, inscribed on the exterior of the western end of the south aisle wall, may be related to its reconstruction. Round-headed windows were installed at the east end of the north aisle and at the west end of the clerestory. A new porch was built in classical style and is shown only on the Buckler painting. The painting also shows a rectangular two-light window in the east end wall of the chancel. This feature can only be dated as post 16th-century on stylistic grounds. It could have been put in before or after, but not during, the major work of this period as the style clashes with the round-headed windows.

Phase 7 (19th century)

In 1866 the church was restored by the architect Woodyer (Pevsner and Cherry 1975, 188). The Norman chancel was demolished and the present larger, aisled structure was built with the coal cellar below. The east end walls of the aisles of the nave were perforated to form continuous aisles. The tower arch was probably blocked at this point and the wooden screen taken from the rood loft and placed across the western end of the nave in front of a newly installed pew. The Buckler painting shows a diagonal buttress at the north-east corner of the north aisle. With the addition of the new chancel some rebuilding occurred at the western end of the north aisle, as the present buttress projects from the wall at an angle of ninety degrees. The study of relevant maps suggests

that the pathway to Compton House ceased to be used between 1828 and 1901. The newly installed pew was still accessible through the tower so it is probable that the pathway was blocked sometime after the major restoration. New windows, in Perpendicular style, were placed at the western ends of the aisles on the north and south side.

DISCUSSION

St Swithun's probably originated as a proprietary church, although, as Morris (1983, 64) reminds us, this term 'embraces a wide variety of types and circumstances'. The probability that three manors existed at Compton Bassett in the Late Anglo-Saxon period and the earlier Middle Ages suggests a complex system of patronage although the principal landowner was most likely to have had greatest interest in the church.

The dedication to St Swithun (d. A.D. 862) is supportive of an Anglo-Saxon foundation at Compton Bassett. Dedications to Anglo-Saxon saints have been considered by Butler (1986, 44) who places St Swithun in his first group, defined by the comparatively high frequency of their occurrence. A total of fifty-eight churches nationwide are dedicated to St Swithun, whose feast day, 15 July, was celebrated widely in the medieval period (Smith 1987, 58). Only three of these occur in Wiltshire, at Compton Bassett, Little Hinton and Patney.

In general terms it has been suggested that a church should reflect the economic status of its proprietors at a given time. Addyman, when describing the work of Hurst and Beresford at Wharram, noted their recognition that the church constituted a microcosm of the history of its associated settlement (Addyman 1976, 1). There are some flaws in these views, namely that the economic status of a church's patrons may not be directly related to the settlement itself and that the reasons for the expansion of a church may be attributable to the expression of individual status. The use of historical development as an indicator of population growth or decline should be approached with caution. Structural failure is a frequently overlooked factor which may explain replacement of structural elements or contraction in plan.

The imprecise orientation of the church can be explained in a number of ways. To some extent, topographical features may account for this. As the site is on a slope, a suitable location for the first church may have been selected for convenience. Certainly in later periods the slope was modified to accommodate the south aisle and the tower, but these

structures were additions to an existing building and the creation of a level platform would have been unavoidable.

The time of year at which the first church was set out would have affected the orientation if the solar arc was used as a measure. Features in the landscape which were traditionally held to mark a specific orientation may have been used, although simple errors in setting out may be responsible. For all the importance attached to orientation, it can be seen that deviant churches are common and it is probably the case that alignment on a general east/west line was acceptable. At St Helen-on-the-Walls, Aldwark, York the church was orientated south-west/north-east, forty-five degrees out of precise alignment (Magilton 1980). In fact, very few of York's churches are precisely aligned (Cave 1950, 50). Precise orientation does not seem to have been a stringent liturgical requirement.

The church is entered by a doorway on the north side, an uncommon arrangement. The reasons for this were almost certainly dictated by the layout of the early settlement. As discussed above, the area to the south of the church does not seem to have been occupied. If the site of Compton House represents the position of an early manor, then settlement to the north, east and west of the church can be envisaged.

Although seven phases of alteration have been identified at St Swithun's, the limitations of purely above ground study of churches should be considered. Excavations at St Martin's, Wharram Percy, North Yorkshire and at St Lawrence's, Asheldham, Essex have clearly shown that the structural history of a church may be considerably more complex than that suggested by analysis of the standing building only (Bell and Beresford 1987; Drury and Rodwell 1978).

Most frequently, phases recognised by excavation belong to the Anglo-Saxon or Early Norman periods. In this light, the sequence at St Swithun's is fortunate in that the structural history can be traced from at least the Early Norman period and possibly the Late Anglo-Saxon period. There are a number of churches in Wiltshire that have surviving Anglo-Saxon fabric and architectural features. High status buildings, such as St Lawrence's at Bradford-on-Avon, represent the upper end of the scale for small churches. Settlements of lesser importance, however, could have had stone churches at an early date. Close to Compton Bassett such a church can be found at Bremhill.

From the construction of the Phase 1 building onward, the church follows a line of development common to many other churches. The addition of

aisles in the late 12th and 13th centuries is widely paralleled, as is the installation of a rood loft and newel stair in the 14th century. The large scale rebuilding and additions of the 15th century are probably best attributed to the wool boom which was responsible for funding much of the fine church architecture of Perpendicular style in south-western England. The cruck-framed building to the north of the church may have served as a priest's house in the later medieval period as it has two diagonal stone buttresses, one at each corner on the northern side. It, too, may be attributed to the economic growth that many rural parishes experienced in the 15th century. The development of the majority of parish churches ceased at this point and only really began again in the 19th century, and often then only because of their poor condition.

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