

Avebury, Wiltshire

Αρεβυφ

Church of St James

Grid refSU 100 699

Church fabric

Cross shaft

Date

Nave walls pierced by later arcades – period C1

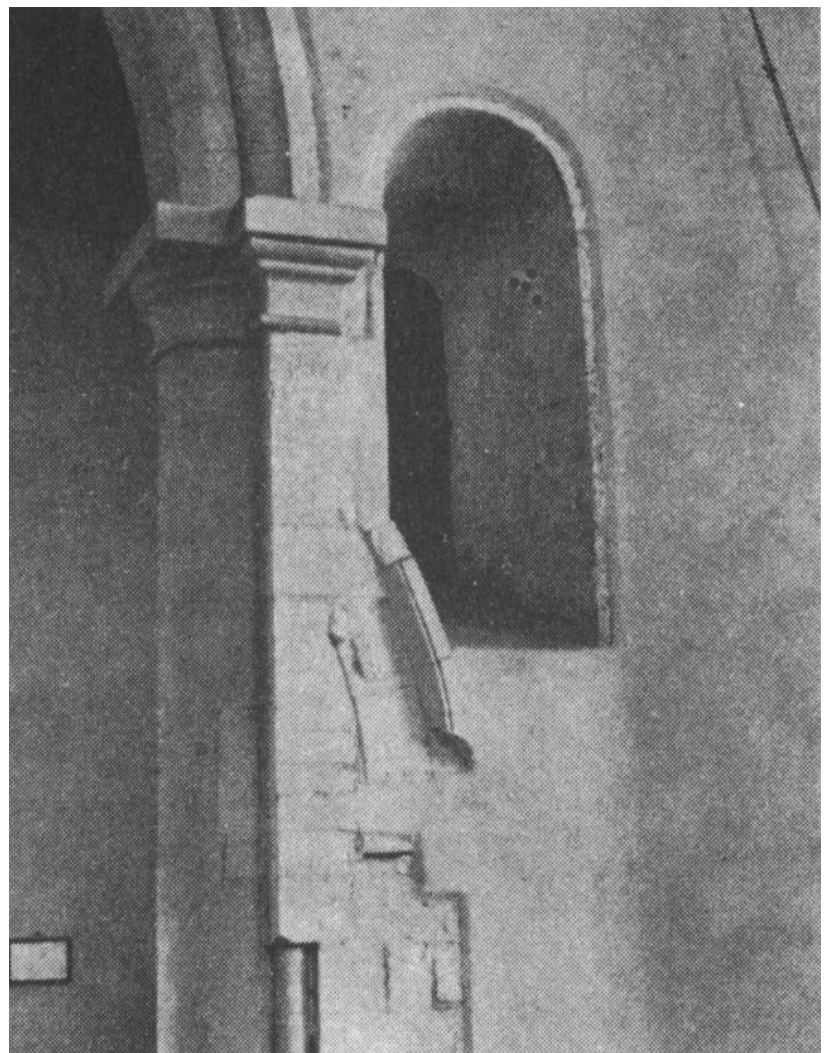
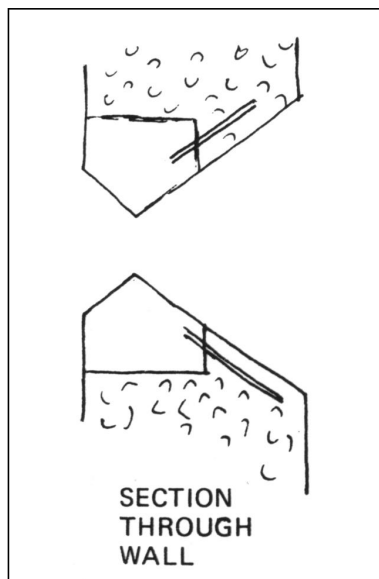
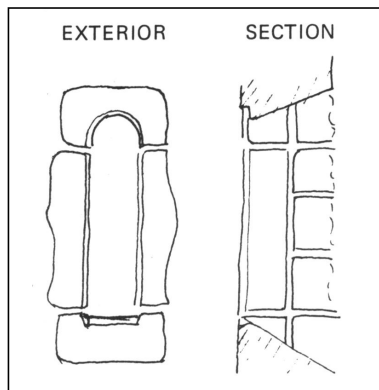
Taylor

Anglo-Saxon Features

So far as is at present known, there is no written history to show when a Christian church was first established at Avebury. But the fabric of the present nave shows clearly that a stone church had been built before the Norman Conquest and was altered by the Normans. Moreover the pre-Norman, i.e. Anglo-Saxon church was most probably of two

storeys because it has a lower range of round-headed windows of which two survive (one on the north and one on the south) and an upper range of circular windows of which three (out of an original total of four) survive high up in the north wall.

It is of special interest to note the stone faces of these circular windows as seen inside the nave, where it will be seen that a ring of holes has been drilled around the actual aperture of the window. The architect, Mr C E Ponting, suggested in 1883 that these holes served to hold in place a conical array of wattle rods to serve as a frame upon which was woven a conical basketwork to support the



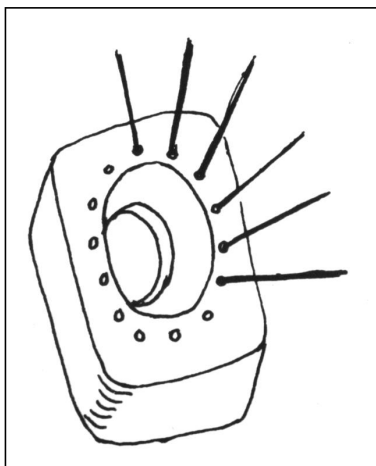
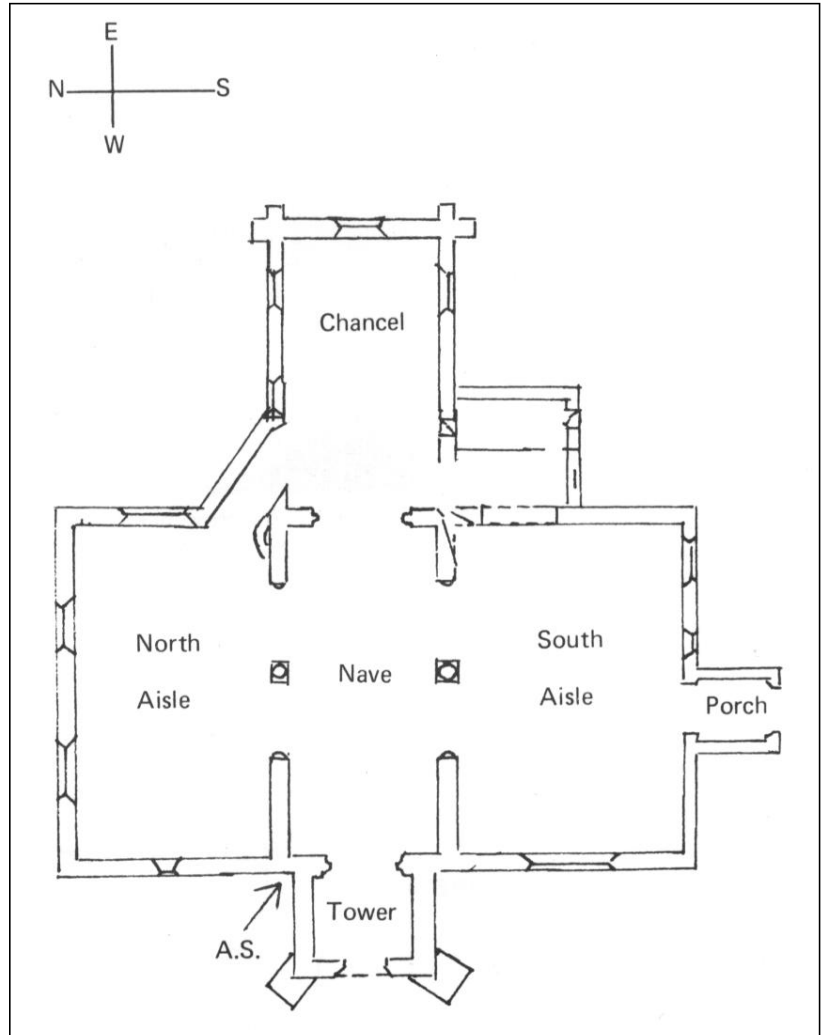


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concrete rubble of the inner splays of these windows. In 1927 basketwork frames of this sort were found in the circular windows of the tower of HALES church in Norfolk.

It is not yet possible to give precise dates for Anglo-Saxon churches even when they show distinctive stylistic features such as those at Avebury, but a date in the second half of the tenth century was suggested in 1925 for Avebury Church by Professor G. Baldwin Brown in his *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*. A piece of late Anglo-Saxon cross has been used by the builders close to the north-west corner of the church, about 4' above the ground (marked A.S. on plan) and this would suggest that the church is unlikely to have been built much before the end of the century. Perhaps the best estimate of date at present would be about AD1000.

There is now no visible evidence for the walls of the Anglo-Saxon chancel, but when the present chancel was being rebuilt in 1878 the walls of a short square-ended chancel were found with its floor about 2' below the present floor.





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There are two other Anglo-Saxon survivals that can be seen from within the north aisle. The first consists of considerable areas of the original plaster, above the head of the Anglo-Saxon window; and the second is the long string-course which runs along the wall, just below the roof of the aisle and just above the heads of the much later pointed arches.

The north-west corner of the nave at Avebury deserves a careful inspection from outside (marked A.S. on plan). It is clear that the corner of the Anglo-Saxon wall has been built with large stones, much taller than the separate courses of the main body of the wall. Moreover, the longer faces of successive stones of the corner are laid alternately along the north and west face of the nave, so that the quoin (or corner) can properly be described as

being built in the style that is called megalithic side-alternate quoining. Megalithic because large stones are used, and side-alternate because they are set on their sides and laid with their longer faces alternately along the north and west walls.

The Anglo-Saxon windows described by Dr Taylor were unglazed, and the two lower ones were closed in bad weather by wooden shutters wedged into a rabbet cut into the outer edge of the window. In the small church of St Peter BARTON-ON-HUMBER which is probably about the same date as Avebury, the foundations define a chancel of much the same size, and recent excavations have shown that the altar stood at some distance from the east wall, roughly in the centre of the chancel.

The Anglo-Saxon church was built without aisles; these were added in the C12.