

Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire

Æτ Βραδανφορδα be Αρνε

Church of St Laurence

Church fabric
sculpture

Grid refST 824 609

Date

Chancel, nave with flanking porches, all complete save S porch – period A2, altered in periods C1–C3

Taylor

Strange though it may seem, this little church was until about 1856 entirely lost sight of. It was hemmed in by buildings, and the west front was much modernised by the insertion of ordinary house windows and a door, while ivy still further disguised it. Internally it had been quite as much altered. The Chancel Arch had been pulled down, and a chimney stack had been built in its place, the stones of the arch having been used for the purpose. This was, so far, fortunate, for it rendered the reconstruction of the Arch possible. A staircase had been erected in the Porch, giving access to a room in the upper part of the Nave, used since 1715 as a school, the position of the joists in the side walls is still to be seen. The Chancel belonged to a different owner, and had been turned into a cottage three stories high. During some repairs the two carved angels were discovered, built into the wall near where they have been replaced over the Chancel Arch. This discovery set the vicar, Canon Jones, a keen archæologist, thinking that the building might be an ancient church and this conjecture was strengthened by the outline of the Nave, Chancel, and Porch roofs. Time went on, until 1871, when searching for materials on other subjects in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Canon Jones came upon the following passage in the *Gesta Pontificum* of William of Malmesbury, written about 1125: "*Et est ad hunc diem eo loco Ecclesiola quam ad nomen beatissimi Laurentii fecisse predicatur Aldhelmus*", i.e. "to this day at that place there exists a little church which Aldhelm is said to have built to the name of the most blessed Laurence". This passage caused Canon Jones to believe this church to be Aldhelm's erection. But William of Malmesbury only records the opinions current in his day, for he says, "Moreover, a general opinion has grown up that a third Monastery was erected by Aldhelm at Bradford", and, if he somewhat doubted it himself,

he adds, "*Sed enim utraque monasterie, From et Bradford, in nichilum defecere, restatque tantum nomen inane*" (*sic*). "However, both the monasteries, Frome and Bradford, have altogether disappeared, and there remains only the empty name." It is scarcely probable then that the Church remains intact. William of Malmesbury adds, whether the Monasteries were destroyed by the Danes or by the English, he is unable to ascertain. In 1001, Ethelred bestowed the Manor of Bradford and its Monastery upon the Abbey of Shaftesbury (*q.v.*), that therein might be found a safe refuge "*impenetrabile confugium*" (referring probably to the dense woods then surrounding Bradford) against the insults of the Danes, and a hiding place also for the relics of the blessed martyr St Edward (d. 978) and the rest of the Saints, and as the Church from the style of building, appears to be about this date, it is possible that the original church founded by Aldhelm was rebuilt by Ethelred.

In 1871, through the energy of the Vicar, the late Canon Jones, the church was bought back from private owners, vested in Trustees for preservation as an ancient monument, and is kept in repair by gifts received from visitors.

No mention of the Monastery occurs in Domesday. it is called in the old deeds the "skull house", and it is possible that it was used as a charnel house during the middle ages, and to this fact owes its conservation in its original state.

The dimensions of the building are:

	Length	Width	Height
Nave	25'2"	13'2"	25'3"
Chnl	13'2"	10'	18'
Porch	9'11"	10'5"	15'

The dimensions of the Chancel Arch, 9'8" high by 3'6" wide, make it probably the smallest in the country.

Holes or sockets are cut into the jambs of the Chancel Arch just below the Impost, possibly for the fixing of a gate or curtain. The paving of the Chancel should also be noticed. It was covered by a boarded floor when the Chancel was occupied as

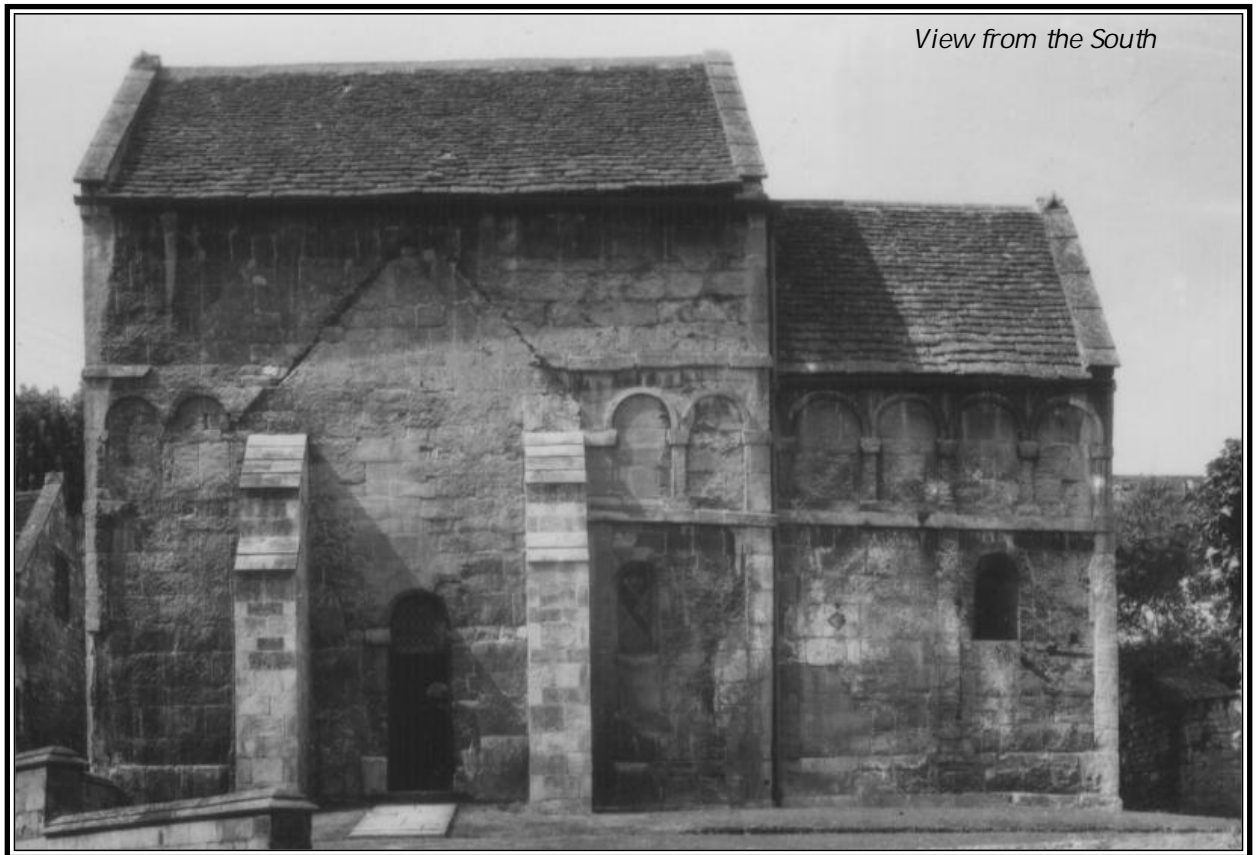
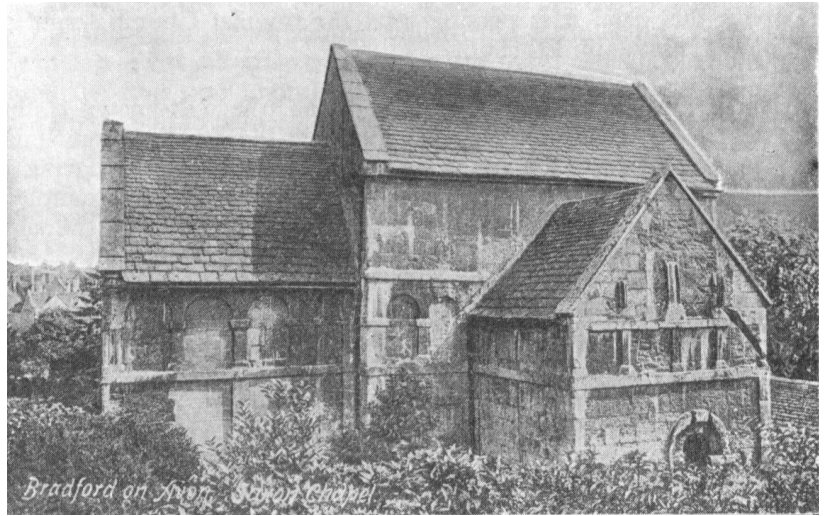
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a cottage, and if the church was used as a chancel house during the middle ages, it is improbable that the Saxon pavement would be disturbed, so that it may date back to a very early period.

For some time past a number of stones of various periods which had been found buried near the church have been stored in the North Porch. Those with Anglo-Saxon decorations have now been used to make a stone altar. The largest of the stones and its matching portions could well be part of the original altar; it will be seen how well they "fit".

However, some authorities have suggested that they might be part of the shrine of St Edward the Martyr, half brother of King Ethelred. There is no direct evidence for either opinion.

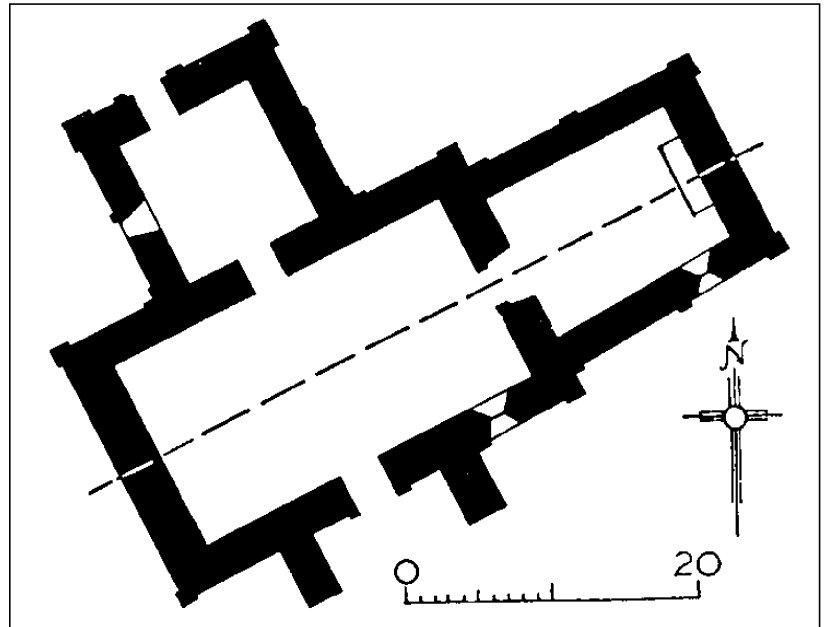
The smaller group placed above the altar are the remains of a Saxon cross. It is likely that this cross was set up by order of Ecwin (Ecwin), Bishop of Worcester. On St Aldhelm's death his body was carried from Doulting, where he had died, to Malmesbury, and the Bishop ordered crosses to be set up at each place of resting on route. (Bradford was one of these). There were seven such crosses and William of Malmesbury recorded in 1125 that all seven were standing "without decay".



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The orientation of the church is remarkable being 27° North of East. It has a "skew" Chancel deflected a further 3° North. The entrance to the North Porch is 2' out of centre.

*From the Guide bk.
pub by Dotesias (Printers) Ltd.,
Bradford-on-Avon.*



*Above:
Plan of church*

*Below:
Chancel arch, viewed from the nave*