



Corhampton, Hampshire

Corhampton

Church, no known dedication

Grid ref SU 610 203

Church fabric

Sundial

Font

Date

c. 1035

Church guide

Chancel arch and part of chancel, most of nave including W and in part S doorway, pilasters and quoins. Rubble walls 2'6" thick of shelly stone from quarry in Isle of Wight

Fisher

Nave and chancel, the latter extended eastward in 1855 – period C3

Taylor

Nave

S wall interior 35'8½", N wall interior 35'11", E wall interior 17'2½", W wall interior 17'7½".

N wall exterior has three pilaster-strips about 6" wide projecting 2½"-3" from wall; one each side of blocked N doorway, and one rising from corbel above middle of arch-head. Strip work surrounding blocked N doorway 4½" wide with impost square-cut and moulded on N face only. Arch-head constructed of long segmental stones shaped on top and bottom.

W wall exterior has central pilaster-strip running up to string-course just below present pair of square-headed windows.

S wall has three pilaster-strips on irregular long-and-short and fragments of string-course just under eaves. E pilaster-strip now rises from corbel about 6' above ground.

Original NW, SW and SE quoins, upright-and-flat

Chancel

Width 13'11". Original chancel possibly had apsidal E end.

Only western part original, but sanctuary has altar stone in N wall with six consecration crosses, possibly original.

Anglo-Saxon chancel arch, slightly horse-shoed; surrounded on W face by square-cut strip about 3" wide, projecting about 1" round arch-head, touching segmental stones but cut back flush with

wall below imposts. Imposts square, 10" thick, projecting 2½" with outer ends cut back to wall so that outer face flush with outside edge of strip-work. Jambs upright-and-flat, but not through-stones. Arch-head of through-stones, segmented by not regular voussoirs. Strip-work around arch-head of long, segmented stones with square block in key-stone position, projecting about 2½".

Notes for Visitors

Welcome to this ancient Saxon church of Corhampton (dedication unknown). I hope that these brief notes may be of assistance to all who visit this Church, pending the writing of a fuller guide.

Early History: The Meon valley has long been a centre of living and not far away on Old Winchester Hill are the remains of an Iron Age Fort. The Romans were here, and what may be an old Roman sarcophagus has now been restored and put to use as an adornment to the churchyard between the magnificent yew tree, believed to be 1,000 years old, and the gate. The Jutes then penetrated up this valley and Christianity was first brought here by St Wilfrid in the C7. Nothing, however, survives from this early Church except possibly the very remarkable Saxon sundial (see *below*).

The mound on which the Church stands, however, could well be a pre-Christian site. The Church, as we see it today, constitutes one of the most complete examples of an almost untouched small hamlet Saxon Church to be found in the kingdom. Unfortunately, road widening (as early as 1855!) caused the collapse of the East End and its replacement by the rather debased brickwork that is there now.

Exterior: To get the best impression of how complete a Saxon church it is, it is best to start with the outside. All the nave and half the Chancel is almost untouched Saxon flintwork with stone quoins at the corners laid in the typical "long and short" fashion which characterises Saxon churches. Also of stone are the pilaster strips running

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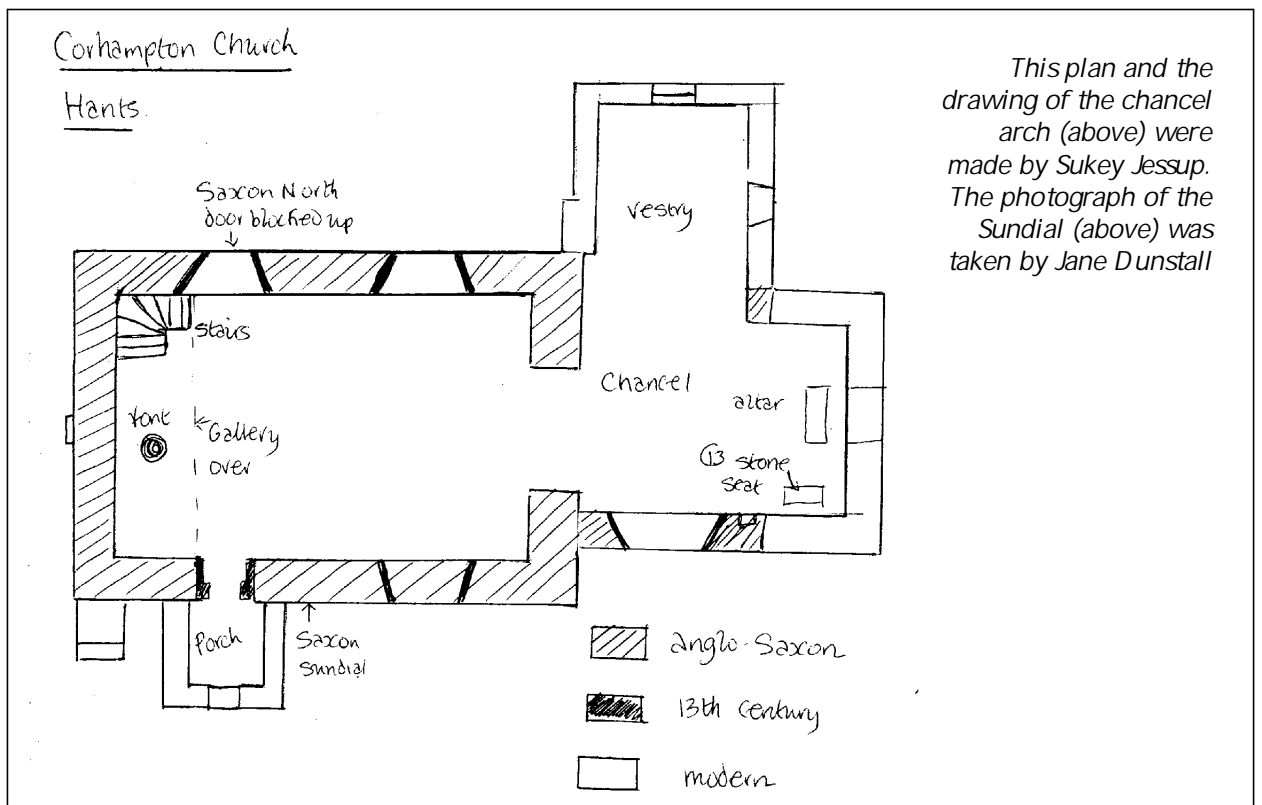
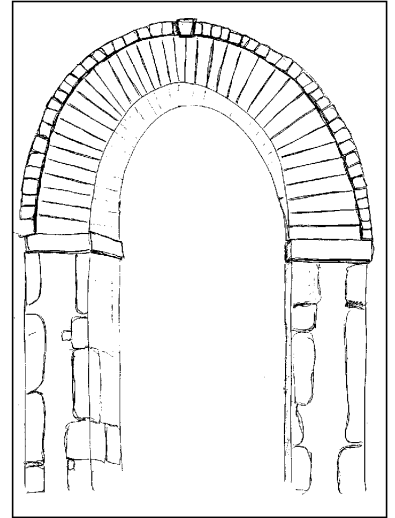
vertically down the walls (no less than eight in all) and, in certain places, e.g. the west wall and above the South porch, a string course. The best overall view is from the North West corner from where the fine and rather unusual blocked North doorway can be seen. Note the elaborate bases and the remarkable impostes which give the impression of being built from a number of horizontal slabs, but is in fact cut from a single stone. High on the West wall may be seen two bell openings which may once have been original (the actual bell turret, better seen from the inside, is thought to be about 1600) but was unfortunately rebuilt in brick in the last century. The vestry and porch are modern additions

Before returning into the Church, do not miss the very

remarkable Saxon dial mentioned earlier. It is to the East (i.e., right hand side) of the porch on the South wall. (Mind your head on the rather low guttering of the porch). You will notice that it is divided into eight, not twelve periods. This is because the Saxons divided the whole day into eight tides. Notice too the bulbous objects which mark the terminations.

So much for the outside. All this leaves one in no doubt at all that this is a Saxon church, though strangely enough it is not mentioned in the Domesday Book. However, we can date it with a fair amount of certainty to the early C11. The nave inside is 36' long and 17'3" wide. The walls are 2'4" thick and about 16' high.

Interior: Internally, apart from mediæval windows, little of the fabric has been altered apart, of



This plan and the drawing of the chancel arch (above) were made by Sukey Jessup. The photograph of the Sundial (above) was taken by Jane Dunstall

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course, from the East End. The most dominant feature is the perfect and untouched Saxon chancel arch. The font poses an interesting problem. It looks Saxon with its roll moulding, but many experts say it is too big to be a Saxon font. The interior of the Church gives a delightful unrestored impression with its old roof, uncovered in 1906 and probably dating from about 1600. The West gallery with its Victorian organ (which has a nice tone and is still hand pumped!) adds to the charm of the interior. Some panelling immediately to the East of the entrance and also the pulpit are very early Jacobean. Between the two monuments on the North wall are the remains of wall painting. Mrs Eve Baker has identified an Agony in the Garden in poor condition as part of a series on the Passion which once covered the whole wall, the rest of which has, alas, disappeared. Each side of the Chancel arch bears traces of other wall paintings, with that on the South side being possibly an Expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Finally the interior of the Chancel. Inside the Victorian sanctuary, divided from the rest of the Chancel by some C18 altar rails, are two survivals from the earlier sanctuary. On the north an old altar stone with six consecration crosses clearly visible (five on the top and one on the front), which is probably Saxon, and on the South an old priest's stone seat, possibly contemporary but whose age is uncertain. I feel it must have been extremely uncomfortable!

The great glory of the Chancel, however, are the wall paintings, generously restored by the Pilgrim Trust. You will find a time switch on the North side to turn on the lights. Unfortunately, rather poor repairs in the past, probably when the sanctuary was rebuilt in 1855 and also possibly during the restoration of 1906 when the paintings were uncovered, have led to much being lost. The paintings could be co-æval with the Church, i.e. Saxon, but it is more likely that they date from the C12, though they could be as late as 1225. Professor Wormald has said "the real importance of the Chancel Scheme is that it is the most elaborate decorative scheme that survives in English Romanesque painting". They are true fresco with a very smooth finish. The principal theme in the top layer is the legend of St Swithin, a

very rare subject in mediæval wall paintings. I have not yet been able to identify all the subjects, but at the Eastern end of the South wall is the story of St Swithin and the woman with the basket of eggs. St Swithin, dressed as a bishop, on the left, can be seen returning the eggs to her basket. One day, a widow whose livelihood was selling eggs, was at the bottom of Winchester High Street when, as the result of an accident, all her eggs crashed to the ground and broke. St Swithin, seeing her plight, restored them whole to her basket again.

In the next panel Westwards, two men can be seen carrying an object slumped from a pole. This is thought to be either a child or an animal that was drowned and St Swithin brought him back to life again. The paintings are bordered by bands of colour and a lozenge riband pattern. Undemeath, are elaborately painted representations of loose hangings and veils, very rare indeed for so early a period, some patterned with medallions enclosing such subjects as lions couchant (on the North side) and two adorsed (*sic*) doves (on the South side).

The Church was restored in 1906, and from this time date the pews and the wooden platform on the floor all made by local craftsmen. With the aid of a grant from the Historic Churches Preservation Trust we have had all the woodwork and the roof timbers treated against woodworm, deathwatch beetle, etc.

However, we are a very small parish, being united for over 100 years with Meonstoke, having a total population of only 600. Consequently, the upkeep of two churches is a great financial burden. We feel that this Church is too valuable a part of our heritage to be closed, but we do need your support

*C. J. I. Maxse, Kings Paddock, Meonstoke,
Droxford, Hampshire. (Pro-Warden)*

Sundial

Good example of Anglo-Saxon sundial built into exterior S wall of nave just E of porch.

Font

Tapered cylindrical font with band of cable pattern around middle. Possibly Anglo-Saxon but could be Norman.