

## Langford, Oxfordshire

Λαρχερονδ

Church of St Matthew

Grid ref ..... SP 249 025

Church fabric

Sundial

Crucifixion

### Church fabric

Original dedication unknown. Axial T – period C3  
*Taylor*

Central tower, walls of plastered rubble.

### W tower arch

Square-cut jambs and imposts of through stones, jambs resting on square-cut plinth. Square-cut hood-mould on W face of arch.

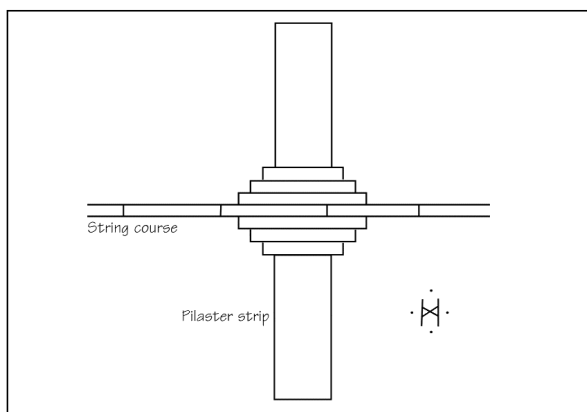
### E tower arch

W face has rounded moulding and impost on square cut arch. E face square-cut. Base of three members, each chamfered. Soffit roll moulding all the way up with impost continuing from capital of main arch.

Over each tower arch there is a square-head opening, now blocked, into second storey of tower.

### Tower exterior

Central pilaster strip on N and S faces, with long-and-short quoins. String course a little more than half way up. Pilaster widens in step pattern where it crosses string-course (see diagram). Second stage



N and S sides has two double-splay windows with transennæ cut in key-hole shape. Belfry openings round-head with roll mouldings.

String above belfry openings marks upper limit of Anglo-Saxon work.

### Sundial

On exterior S face of tower, just above string-course marking second stage, inserted in pilaster-strip, is a carving of two male figures underneath a tree with their hands raised. The type of figure is very reminiscent of Winchester school drawings and the carving is quite sophisticated. These figures support sundial. In 1886 a portion of the iron gnomon was observed in the stone, but this has since worn away, as have the "tide" marks.

### The Crucifixion

On S face of S porch.

The Crucifix and the figures of Our Lady and St John, all carved in limestone, have doubtless been reset and the frame altered and partly renewed. The arms of Christ have been transposed so that they are now inclined downwards and the hands reversed. If the arms were placed in their proper position they would not now fit into the space available because part of the frame above them has been lowered. The figures have been transposed because they now look away from the Cross, and the Virgin was always represented on our Saviour's right and St John on the left.

The principal figure is in high relief formed of four stones: the head and upper part of the body are on one stone, the lower part and legs are on another and each of the arms is on a separate slab, the four slabs forming the cross. The head, which has short wavy hair, is inclined to the right shoulder and bent forward. Behind it is a circular disc having a cross patée slightly relieved on it. The loins are covered by a kilt in folds reaching to the knees, which are slightly inclined to the right. The feet are separate, the toes pointing outwards on a sloped pedestal.

... the character of this Crucifixion ... is due ... to a definite iconographical tradition, that of the early church in Syria and Palestine, in which Christ was regarded as a suffering human being rather than a divine figure whom pain could not touch. This realistic conception by the Eastern church subsequently played a considerable role in sculpture in Ottonian Germany and Carolingian

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France on the one hand, and in Ireland on the other, so that it is not surprising that, at an early date, this rendering should be found in England.

### The Rood

E face of S porch

The figure, all of limestone, has lost its head and it seems that this would have fitted into the space now occupied by the broken stone above: it is uncertain therefore whether it was crowned or not. The legs are straight and the feet separate, resting on a sloped pedestal and apparently in shoes. No nails are to be seen in either the hands or feet. The sleeves, which extend to the wrists, where they widen and fall open, and the lower part of the robe down to the ankles, are carved in folds. On the breast immediately below the neck the stone is deeply pitted in a semi-circle; this may suggest enrichment in the form of a collar or it may be due either to weathering or to the blows of the instrument which destroyed the bearded face during the 'Great Pillage' in 1547 ordered by the Commissioners of Edward VI. Round the waist is a girdle crossed in front through a ring.

The two vertical pieces above and below the arms are rebated into the two horizontal pieces, which

themselves abut with a vertical joint central with the figure. This is clearly a carpentry technique applied to stone: it is paralleled elsewhere in pre-Conquest work, e.g. at BITTON in Gloucestershire, and at BRITFORD in Wiltshire.

Although the Anglo-Saxon sculptor may never be identified, it is interesting to attempt to relate the Langford Rood to other sculptures of the *Christus Regnans*. The figure of this type which exerted the most powerful and widespread influence in Europe was the Volto Santo in Lucca in Italy. A copy of it is known to have existed in the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds in the C11, but this has disappeared without trace. Other examples may be seen in Brunswick, in Rheims and in Amiens, and early C12 robed figures of Christ carved in wood are to be found in Barcelona and elsewhere in Catalonia. Clothed figures in the Celtic idiom dating from the C7 to the C12 are found in Ireland, the figure most closely resembling the Langford Rood occurring on one of the great sculptured piers at Cashel.

*Notes by MD,  
 supplemented by church guide book  
 by F. A. L. 1965.*

