Church of St. Peter, Britford, Wilts.

Taylor's account of this church runs to a good two pages, but visible remains condense down to two side arches which originally led to their individual porticus, or side chapel, parts of the south doorway (much restored), and parts of the walls. Having been reopened in the restoration of 1873 the two nave arches were provided with small annexes into which they now open. Rickman saw the (then) blocked arches and dated them as Anglo-Saxon. Taylor puts a date (one of his standard bracketed dates) of 800-950. I would prefer a (tentative) date of c.850, in part because of the generous width of the nave. There remains part of the fabric of the nave and parts of the east walls of both porticus embedded in the medieval transepts. The south porch was built to protect the pre-conquest nave doorway which was reopened; it is however much altered. The porch dated to the 1873 restoration.

Pages 1 & 2 have been added/inserted in 2011 (and revised in 2019) and to avoid disturbing the original numbering the other pictures, those on these 2 pages are individually numbered. The topmost picture is of the church from the SW and it shows (red arrow) the south annexe built to protect the opened up south archway to its 'lost' porticus. The nave west wall is possibly a Georgian rebuild and with a new and larger west window dating to the Victorian restoration. At that time the west doorway was removed along with its plain porch, probably also Georgian in date.

The lower picture is taken from the north and shows the nave wall with annexe (to the left) sheltering the north archway. It can be seen that the walling above the red line is of a different makeup to the Anglo-Saxon walling below. Unfortunately this means there are no traces of any pre-conquest windows in the fabric, and the medieval tower and chancel have swept away every trace of any older work. The tower above eave level appears to be a Georgian rebuild.

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The photo below (numbered 1) of external walling is of part of the north wall of the nave with the north transept running out to the left. It shows the west wall of the north transept and part of the *19th century annexe built to shelter the north archway. The medieval transept wall importantly contains original Anglo-Saxon walling of the east wall of the north porticus and which is visible (shown inside the 'box.'). The walling now inside the 19th century protective extension is not visible being underneath the internal plaster.

H.Taylor, in volume I of his "Anglo-Saxon Architecture" (pages 105 to 108) gives the dimensions of the north porticus as 8 feet 9 inches from east to west internally and 10 ft north to south and with walls about the same thickness as the nave (2ft 5in). Nave dimensions are, internally from west wall to medieval west arch of the tower, 44ft 4in x 20ft 6in. The two Anglo-Saxon archway dimensions are given height to crown, and width between jambs. South arch H. 7ft 8in and W. 5ft 7in. The north arch H. 7ft 11in x W. 5ft 10in. I should state that the existing west wall of the nave may not be the full extent of the Anglo-Saxon nave, there is little or nothing to mark its length and bearing in mind that if the 'twin' porticus arches belong to a first build the nave may well have been lengthened at some later date. It has been written that the south nave doorway is Anglo-Saxon, but when the blocked opening was opened up during the *restoration a new doorway was built in the opening so only the stonework of the opening per se remains of the original doorway. The stone "stop" where the door shut home can be seen, however Anglo-Saxon doorways usually did not employ a stone stop and instead the door was housed in a frame which in turn was fitted and fixed in the stone opening. It seems perhaps there were medieval

alterations to construct a stone stop at some later date and if so they have been cleverly executed.
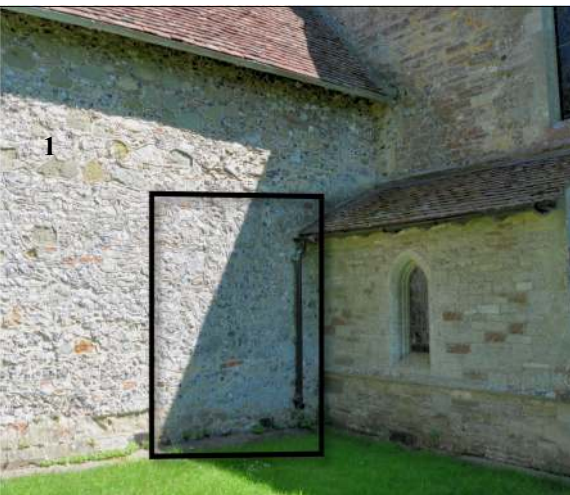
* Restoration of 1872-3.

Photo 2 shows a part of the archway of the "external" or porticus face of the north archway and its attendant pilaster strip. It shows well the (almost complete) remains of the pilaster strip which is common to all Anglo-Saxon archways and here it appears to be the same thickness as the Roman stone tiles. It can be seen a little lower down in photo 9 (page 4). The pilaster strips to this archway are closely set to the radius and the internal face of the archway and jambs. BUT this is not so with the south archway where the strips are set at least a foot distant from the inside archway face. It seems quite possible, if we are to assume both porticus were built at the same date then we have two builders each constructing an archway and each with their own ideas on construction details. In fact having a pilaster strip set so close in proximity to the archway face is not usual. As examples see the drawing of Brigstock tower archway and the archway in Sherborne Abbey, both on this website and reproduced here on page 6.

Photo 3. The west face/jamb of the north archway. Here we have plain vertical jambs unlike its sister. The impost is again Roman stone but a plainer moulding. I have included this picture as it shows the pilaster strip intact (black arrows) and not defaced, at least until it reached the impost where both pilaster and impost are hacked back to the wall face. Here in a very similar way to the archway in Sheborne Abbey. It simply reflects the style of perhaps the 13th century where pilaster strips were perceived as archaic and to bring the archway into current thinking pilasters were removed and here completely to the inside faces of the nave but only partially (half-heartedly) to the porticus faces. The same treatment unfortunately was meted out to the archway remaining in nearby Breamore church, but there it was total removal.

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The arches are comprised, in my opinion, in the greater part of reused Roman pieces of stone, stone 'tiles', and baked/fired tiles, all put together as if in some strange jigsaw. The base mouldings (north archway) especially are pure Roman.

1

2

Pictures viewed clockwise from top left.
1.   North archway.
2.   East jamb of same; note that the vertical stones are of one piece, and this 'design' of grapes, or a vine, is found illustrated, albeit in more elaborate form, in Prof. Banister Fletcher's book "A History of Architecture" pg 67 illus. F. under the heading "Roman Ornament. 1."
3.   Detail of Roman mouldings of the east jamb (southernmost of the pair). Note this stone has been truncated/sawn off at the top to 'fit' its new site. Taylor gives both stones as being 4ft 1in high and 8 inches wide. In both cases the Roman base moulding is integral to the whole piece of the worked stone and not a separate piece.
4.   A detail of impost of north arch and its make up.   Above the impost is an undecorated (unfinished) animal 'head' and is Anglo-Saxon work.
5.   Base of the west jamb of the north archway, note the Roman mouldings, used like a skirting board; they are common to both jambs and are a part of that single stone. Note the "old" floor level some few inches above the present floor.
6.   South archway, which comprises an archway of Roman (baked) tile rather than stone.

It appears as if the builder has been presented with a pile of stone and asked to make two archways. An interesting assemblage all things considered! Both these archways, on both faces were originally outlined with traditional square pilaster strips but are now much cut away; importantly parts remain visible inside both porticus. The nearest source of Roan stonework it seems would be the Roman Villa discovered years ago at Downton, some 5 miles downriver (R.Avon). The stones would easiest be transported by water.

6

5

4

3

7. Here the west jamb of the <u>north</u> archway; the base mouldings (ringed in orange) are mentioned on page 3. They repeat on the east jamb. H.Taylor described them as being more like a skirting board, they are patently not Saxon, the vertical stones are reused and Roman in date/style. Here on the north face, you will see a traditional square section pilaster strip (blue arrow).

8. On the east jamb the Roman moulding seen again, ringed in orange. Note the decorated Roman stone occurs on both 'edges' on the east jamb but the uprights on picture 1 of the west jamb are plain. Perhaps the builders simply didn't have enough decorated stone? Note the square decorated tiles used quite separately. Blue arrow shows the distinctive A-Saxon type pilaster strip.

9. Looking at the north side of the east jambs with the archway springing from the impost, note the delicate square section pilaster strip running up from the blue arrow, it has simply been cut away below this point. Note the undecorated/not sculptured 'head' sitting above the impost (a tooled/moulded Roman stone reused here).

Picture 10 is described on page 5.

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10. Previous page, a beautifully executed Roman decorated stone seen in more detail, seen in its position in pic 7. It is decorated in an intertwined strap work design.

11. The south archway (top left this page) has a very different treatment that sets it apart from the north archway. This is the east jamb seen from the nave (north/interior face). Picked out by the blue arrow is the remains of the easterly pilaster strip which is not extant above the capital/impost. The impost also is hacked away on its north face. See how the east jamb uprights are 'notched/let in' to the impost (a timber technique). And see the coloured drawing illustrating this, where the jamb is in blue the impost in red, and the nave walling behind the impost in green. Observing picture 11, the jamb construction is similar to the north archway but importantly here all the uprights are plain and devoid of detail, the central part being set back in a similar manner to its sister is devoid of decorated tiles. Compare this to picture 1. The impost is not chamfered but is a square plain section. The archway is constructed wholly of Roman bricks, yet its sister uses stone where each has been carefully shaped to a radius.

12. This shows the west jamb viewed from the south (not easy to photograph as the 19th century annexe built to protect the then newly opened archways is very cramped). The single blue arrow indicates the square pilaster strip and above the double blue arrows show where the pilaster strip has been cut away. The red arrow shows how the jamb protrudes in a vertical plane thus in itself making a pilaster strip. The whole 'assembly' sits on a protruding plinth (green arrow) and in line with the face of the pilaster strip.
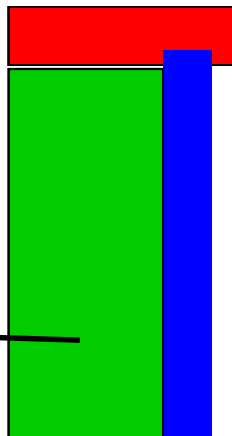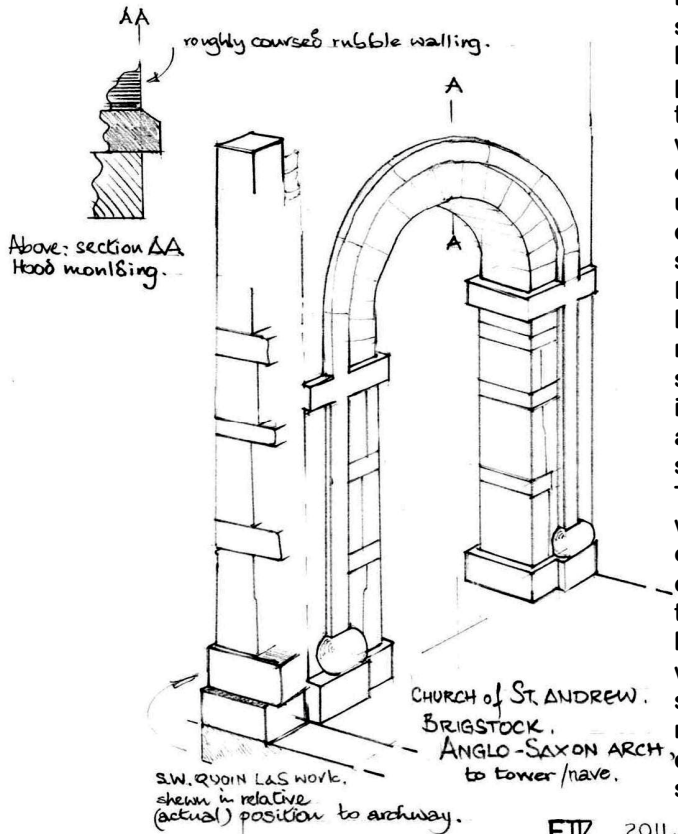
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Just as a comparison, I illustrate here two "typical" archways and which appear in their files elsewhere on this website.

Top drawing. Brigstock archway.

Below right. Sherborne Abbey archway which dates to c.900 when alterations and enlargement of the Abbey occurred with the introduction of the Benedictine Order.

Both these archway show the pilaster strips springing from a bulbous "stop" at the foot. This is also a feature of the massive bases at all four archways that constitute the crossing of Milborne Port church and which dates to circa 1000.

roughly coursed rubble walling.

Above: section AA
Hood moulding.

CHURCH of ST. ANDREW.
BRIGSTOCK.
ANGLO-SAXON ARCH
to tower/nave.

S.W. QUOIN L&S work.
shewn in relative
(actual) position to archway.

FJP 2011.

Markedly the archways at Britford do not exhibit pilaster strips springing from a bulbous stop, not even a stop of any shape, but from a linear base plinth that is a cohesive part of the pilaster detail and frames the whole assembly. We should note that the pilaster strip is simply a copy of how Roman arches were structured/designed, the Anglo-Saxon were simply copying the Roman style although in their own way as they understood it. The similarity between the two archways shown on this page is marked. But at Britford they are reusing Roman stone and it seems that is all they had available to them. At Escomb church the chancel arch is Roman, not a copy but lifted from the nearby Roman fort on Hadrians Wall. There are no pilaster strips, it was a military fort and details like that were superfluous. There the Roman imposts/capitals are virtually identical to that of the north archway at Britford. So are we to assume that in the case of Britford as there are no bulbous stops the archways do not date to the 9th or 10th centuries? This case is peculiar as they are solely reusing Roman stone which patently has not come from a Roman archway. There are carved Roman stones as well as Anglo-Saxon remaining in the east wall of Salisbury Close wall, it was sourced locally and there was no shortage of it. The Normans fortified the Iron Age hilltop but so did the Saxons before them. The Roman stone was originally lifted from a Roman site, the Roman fort being sited somewhere near the river Avon. At Hexham Abbey massive Roman stones were used by Wilfred in his cathedral dating to the 7th century. The reuse of Roman carved stone spanned some 400 years. It doesn't really help us in the case of

Britford. I assume these carved stones are 'delicate' enough to come not from a Roman fort but a Villa. The width of the nave is 20 feet and that almost identical to the nave at nearby Breamore church which dates circa 970 to 1015. The two arches here are low, not tall as at some locations in relation to their width (Bradford-on-Avon). I am inclined firstly to submit a tentative date of c.800 to 840 when Roman stone was still available, and in the south of England there was a fairly stable peace at home. A second more favoured option I consider would be during the reasonably stable period in the 10th century when Wessex and the south of England was effectively at peace and the absence of war allowed normal life to flourish.

www.anglo-saxon-churches.co.uk 2011
Revised with some new photographs 2019.

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