

[St. Georges Tower, Oxford.](#)

In Oxford and in the complex of buildings belonging to the Castle, there is, in the western part, a substantial tower built of rubble and having six offsets, none of which has a stringcourse.

The general construction of this tower is extremely similar to the nearby tower of the Anglo-Saxon church of St. Michael in Oxford. Both are built of coursed rubble, although at St. Michaels without offsets. The character/treatment of St. Georges tower may be regarded as being pre-conquest and certainly it has nothing in common with Norman building practice.

Of great interest is the crypt in the tower, and in particular the style of the capitals (see the first link below). The capitals are curious, rather simplistic in their style and the impostes are squared off, not chamfered and quirked in Norman style. Although rebuilt in the late 18th century the original capitals were reused. Therefore I am of the opinion that we have here a build of late Anglo-Saxon date, perhaps showing the beginnings of being influenced by Norman detail but executed by Anglo-Saxon masons very much in their own traditional 'house' style.

The windows in this tower are post conquest but it is highly likely that in due course earlier windows were replaced by larger insertions. However there is a round-headed window/doorway some twenty feet up in the west wall which looks suspect, it might be of A-Saxon date. Should the voussoirs be non-radial this would fix it as being pre-conquest. The tower 'vice' apparently houses a staircase and the type of construction of the stone stairs and newel would be of interest and aid dating to determine if it is contemporary or of later date. That this (large) tower does not sit upon the Norman constructed motte is a pointer to the distinct probability that it pre-dated the motte and does not constitute a part of the later Norman castle.

I should state that I have been asked by interested parties to comment upon the general build of this tower and am working from photographs and observations made available to me. After deliberation I put a date of on this castle tower and crypt of circa 1025 to 1050. I will in due course visit and hopefully expand my observations.

http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/city_wall/00_castle.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_Castle

Michael Shapland mentions the position of the tower being at or near the west gate of the city/burh walls (along with St. Michaels at the north gate) and that it was likely constructed under lordly patronage.

Description. St George's tower is 10.50 m east/west by 11.30 m north/south with walls 2.70 m thick, and survives to a height of 24.40 m. It is built of coursed rubble with rubble quoins, and has a stair-turret added to its southeast corner. The tower is wider at the base than the summit with six off-sets in its external walls, lending the appearance of a pronounced batter. It is presently divided into four stories internally. It has a round-headed window in its west wall at ground level and a number at its present, probably truncated, summit which may have served as belfry-openings. A Romanesque tower-arch survives in its east wall at ground level (RCHME 1939, 158-9). The architecture of the tower in keeping with late Anglo-Saxon practice, and construction of this date is suggested by the lack of alignment between the tower and the adjacent chapel of St George, founded in 1074 (Renn 1994, 179-81) (fig. 1.21.2).

Two burials radiocarbon dated to between 949 and 1028 adjacent to the tower indicate the presence of an Anglo-Saxon church on the site. Whilst it is unlikely that the extant tower is contemporary with these burials, this is further evidence that the tower is pre-Norman in date (Poore et al. 2009, 5-6). As with St Michael-at-the-Northgate, there is compelling circumstantial evidence for an aristocratic presence in the vicinity of St George's tower. The argument is rehearsed in appendix 1.20. Briefly, the defences of late Anglo-Saxon Oxford were unusual in being the responsibility of the aristocratic holders of the burh's urban manors, rather than falling to the townsmen. Oxford's four gates would clearly have been focal points in this arrangement, and indeed the burh's eastern gate seems to have been in the hands of an earl, and associated with his residence, shortly before the Conquest. This has been proposed by Stephen Baxter (2007, 102), who also reports the suggestion by Julian Munby and Julia Barrow that Earl Ralph of Mercia was in charge of St George's tower by 1066.

A general note on pre-conquest castles/fortifications.

See the file on my site for Rougemont Castle in Exeter where there stands a most rare example of a pre-conquest castle gateway. I am of the opinion that we must rethink the accepted view that Anglo-Saxon castles were almost unheard of and remember that not only did the Anglo-Saxons rebuild and strengthen existing Roman defences but doubtless built new castles during the period between the early 10th century and the mid 11th. Unfortunately with the advent of Norman castle building (and rebuilding) much fabric of pre-conquest date will have been 'built out' during the ensuing few hundred years.



www.anglo-saxon-churches.co.uk