

## Anglo-Saxon church at Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

Excavations have been carried out at various times since the 1960's on the site centred on the area of the now vanished castle at Trowbridge. The foundations of an Anglo-Saxon church (described as "structure 17" in the excavations) have been found and largely excavated in 1977. This church would have dated to the late Anglo-Saxon era when the site was a fortified manor.

The top photograph shows a computer generated general view of the inner bailey, as it might have looked circa 1080, and with the pre-conquest church up against a timber palisade with a possible hall behind. To the right is the area of the outer bailey.

The bottom photo is the church "restored" as it may have looked, seen from the south-west. Note the cut-back pilaster strips and quoins which would be usual for the period when the church was built. For dimensions of the church see page 2.



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Dimensions compared, between Bradford-on-Avon, Escomb, and Trowbridge churches. The footings of the church at Trowbridge were generally one metre width, and I have assumed that the walling proper stood more or less centrally on the surviving footings with each course rising with set-backs, rather as in the style of the build of the church of St. Laurence at Bradford-on-Avon.

Internal dimensions of the naves (only) are shown below in metres. External dimensions are shown in brackets. H is the height of the walling to underside of tie beams.

	Bradford	Escomb	Trowbridge (1. calculated; 2. estimated)
L	7.577	11.05	9.75 (11) 1.
W	4.118	4.42	5.13 (6.5) 1.
H	8.001	7.01	8.96 (9.25) 2.

It is worth recording here that only a part of the chancel at Trowbridge was available to excavate, the eastern part being presumably destroyed and beneath the back of the Salvation Army building on Castle Street.

I am grateful to Matthew and Rachael, who are engaged with "Preserve Our Past", and in conjunction with Trowbridge Museum, for allowing me to reproduce the photos of the reconstruction (shown on pg 1). My sketches and dimensions (based on data extracted from excavation) with related notes were used to reconstruct the appearance of the church.

### The site of the Anglo-Saxon manor and which later used by the Norman Castle.

Today the site lays to the south of Fore Street. The next road to the south is Court Street and between the two was the outer bailey. Immediately south of the outer bailey (and the original sweep of Court Street) is the inner bailey and where, to the eastern side of it, stood the Anglo-Saxon church with its cemetery. To the western side was the Norman motte. The castle site is bounded on the east by Castle Street. Today modern Trowbridge has seen many decades of development, and the castle site, including Court Street, are not exactly as they were in the middle of the 20th century. The north sweep of Court Street has disappeared swallowed up by the present Shires shopping centre which lies behind the surviving houses fronting the south side of Fore Street. This modern spread of development effectively covers the outer bailey and the northern part of Court Street. To the west of the castle site the River Biss flows northwards. This tributary of the River Avon rises near Upton Scudamore and would have been the route for materials for the first stone church and then later the Norman Castle, as well as being the main route for travel in pre-medieval times.

*The following text is extracted from excavation reports (there are some references to pages or publications which do not appear here).*

The larger part of the church structure was excavated in 1977. The north and south walls of the nave and its internal sequence were found in Trench b, and the east wall of the nave and parts of the walls of the chancel in Trench d. Those parts of the nave that were not excavated had been destroyed by the substantial wall footings of the modern buildings which determined the location of the trenches. The east end of the chancel was and is inaccessible beneath the back of the Salvation Army building on Castle Street. In 1988 it was only the outer face of the west wall of the church that was found, beneath the eastern edge of Trench F and partly destroyed by a modern wall foundation (Plates 17 and 18). Details of its construction were recorded, as well as evidence of subsequent alterations to it. The wall footings had been built of unmortared Cornbrash rubble, with some fragments of a finer, Oolitic Limestone, packed into a continuous trench, just under 1 m wide, and c. 0.40 m deep (Plate 19). The base of the footing lay on the surface of the Cornbrash bedrock, and the footing material must therefore have been quarried from elsewhere, though probably nearby. The top of the footing had been levelled with mortar, which formed the bed upon which the walls themselves had been built. On the surface of the soils to the west of the church, a thin layer of fragments of Cornbrash, Oolitic Limestone and occasionally flint, 1649, may have been derived from the construction of the church. In Trenches d and b only fragments of the walls themselves survived, whereas in Trench F a length of c. 5 m of the west wall of the nave remain in situ, including the south-western corner stone. The wall was the full width of the foundation, and had been constructed with an external face of cut, Oolitic Limestone blocks, an internal face of rougher masonry, and a core of mortared rubble. The faces of the blocks varied from square to rectangular, and the in situ bottom course of the west wall of the nave was c. 0.26 m high, with a very substantial block forming the south-west corner (Fig. 13). There was no in situ plaster or rendering on any of the surviving wall faces, though stucco with pink and white washed surfaces was found in the 16th-century stone robbing trenches in Trench b (Chapter 6. I). That finely-cut stone had been used in the construction of the church was indicated by ashlar blocks, probably derived from the demolition or alteration of the building, found in the graveyard to the west of it. One of these may have been the key-stone of an arch. The overall dimensions of the nave were c. 12 m by c.7 m (internally c. 10 m by c. 5 m); the chancel was narrower, c. 6 m wide externally (3.8 m internally) and appeared to have been not quite symmetrical with the centre line of the nave, but offset to the south (these dimensions are very close to 2 poles by 1 pole, the significance of which is discussed below, Chapter 8). The east end of the nave was not found, but the overall length of the church was at least 14 m. The remaining parts of the structure provided no evidence of the location of the doors, nor the nature of the opening between the nave and the chancel. The internal sequence only remained in the area of the nave which was excavated in 1977 in Trench b. This whole area was covered by a layer of compact, yellow mortar, c. 0.06 m thick, b50 and b52. Though in places it overlay patches of mortar b53, which may have been spread during the construction of the walls, the consistency of the layer suggested that it was a deliberately laid floor. The earliest element of Period 4, the stone church, was indeed

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probably built within the late Saxon settlement in the middle or later part of the 10th century and it was this building that between c. AD 950 and 1200, was to be the one constant feature of a landscape that underwent rapid change, culminating in the construction of the castle in Period 5. The late Saxon church at Trowbridge (Structure 17) was a simple two-cell structure built of stone, with a nave measuring internally c. 10 m by 5 m and a slightly narrower chancel c. 3.3 m wide and at least 3 m long. Nave and chancel appear to have been built at the same time, but it is not known whether the east end of the chancel was apsidal; there was no evidence of porches or other ancillary structures. The internal dimensions of the nave are very close to 2 rods by 1 rod (10.06 m by 5.03 m) and it is likely therefore to have been built on a rod-based modular unit comparable to that used in St Martin's church, Wareham (Hinton and Webster L987, 47). The internal width of the chancel, at c. 3.3 m is also very close to two thirds of a rod, exactly as at Wareham. The evidence suggested that externally the church walls had been constructed of finely dressed ashlar; internally, rougher masonry had been finished with stucco, painted white and pink. In its architectural style and use of fine ashlar detail, it may have been similar to St Laurence's Chapel at Bradford-on-Avon (Taylor 1973, fig. 3), which is considered to have been constructed in the late Saxon period, perhaps just after AD 1001 (ibid, 159), and which was also constructed on a modular unit of measurement, though not rods (Ferne 1985). The two cell church is a form of church that was widespread in Europe by the 8th century (Cherry 1976, 160) and can be found on sites of widely different types in England. In dimensions and ground plan the Trowbridge church can be compared with the late 10th-century chapel at Cheddar (Rahtz 1979, figs 13 and 73), which served the royal palaces there; and with the 11th-century church at Raunds in Northamptonshire (Boddington and Cadman 1981, fig. 7.5), which was the church of a rural settlement perhaps similar in character to Trowbridge. There was no evidence of an earlier ecclesiastical structure on the site, though there might have been a predecessor in another part of the cemetery, as at Raunds. The endowment for the construction of such a church would have been considerable, and clearly connects the Trowbridge settlement with a family of some wealth, though the use of stone rather than timber in the 10th century could reflect the proximity of good local stone rather than above average expenditure. Its construction could also suggest that such a family was in residence at least for a part of the year. The Domesday Survey names the Saxon Brictric as the owner of the manor in 1086, and states that his father held it at the time of the Conquest.

A file is reproduced here with data extracted from excavations carried out. It shows the general area and with the pre-conquest church site picked out by a cross which fixes the centre of the building. The post-conquest motte is immediately to the SW of the church.

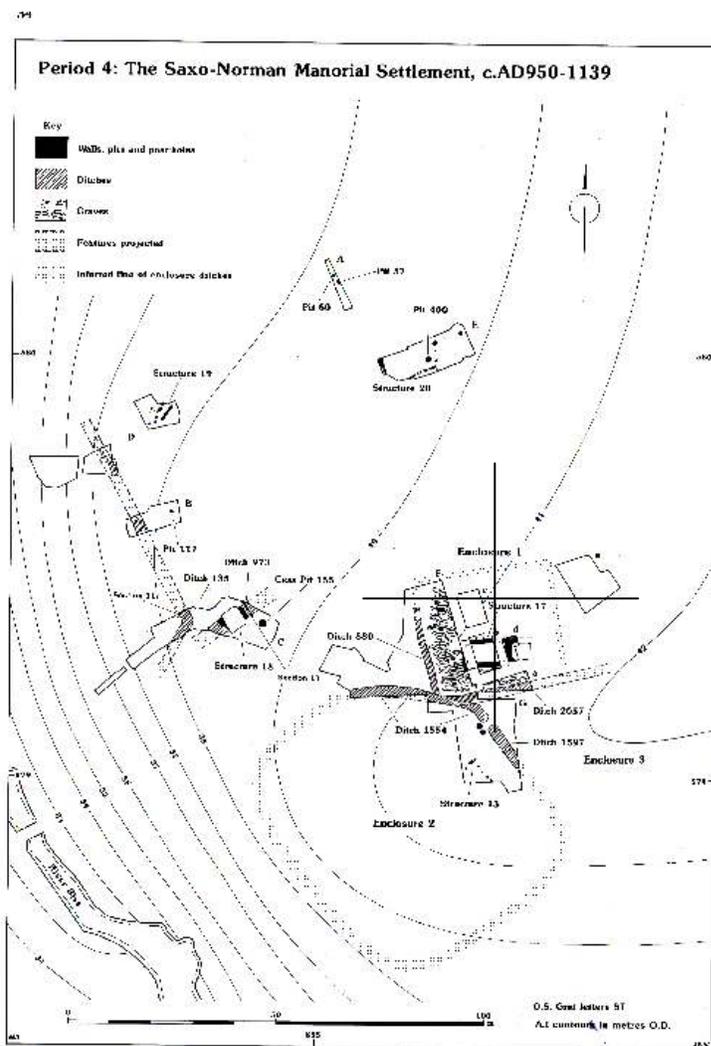


Figure 12 Period 4: the Saxo-Norman manorial settlement, c. AD 950-1139

