

◆ West Chiltington church

STRUCTURE AND WALL PAINTINGS

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The parish church of St Mary, West Chiltington (near Pulborough, West Sussex) is of considerable architectural interest: largely of the late Saxon and Norman periods, it has an added south aisle and chantry, with various notable features including an immensely long 'squint'. Restoration in the 1880s also revealed a remarkable array of wall paintings. Neither the fabric nor the paintings have been closely studied before now. The three authors of this article approach the building from various points of view: a detailed examination of the structure; an account of the phases of the painting; an evocation of the cultural climate in which they were produced. Additionally we provide the first publication of a comprehensive set of colour photographs of them. Previous commentators have assigned them to two periods (late 12th and 13th centuries); our investigation points to a much greater periodic range.

INTRODUCTION

West Chiltington is an extensive village some three miles east of Pulborough, West Sussex, set in undulating countryside typical of the Lower Greensand. Its parish church (TQ 090184) is attractively located on a slight mound, closing the view down the oldest street (Fig.1). The church dedication to St Mary was established on the basis of a 1541 will, referring to 'the churchyard of Our Lady of Chiltington'. *Domesday Book* (1086) mentions a church here; customarily the church has been regarded as principally of the Norman period. Local stone predominates. Unusually, the church has a chunky, shingle-clad central tower with spire, 'like a French village church' (Nairn and Pevsner 1965, 367). A porch reconstructed of old timbers leads to the north door, which although Romanesque (with saw-tooth surround) was heavily restored in the 19th century, the only part of the church to have suffered noticeably in that way. Its ground plan is complicated by the early addition of a south aisle, with a later chantry chapel extending east, thus paralleling the chancel. Three arches on massive, rather stumpy Norman type piers dominate the interior space. Aisle and nave share a roof.

The whole church is of considerable interest from an architectural point of view. Once through the door, however, the visitor is immediately confronted by the feature which makes it remarkable and perhaps unique: its wall paintings. These stretch in two relatively well-preserved cycles along the length of the nave north and south walls; others

occur elsewhere, most strikingly at the east end of the south aisle. Sussex is rather well-endowed with remains of pre-Reformation mural painting: over 100 such sites were listed in a comprehensive report in *Sussex Archaeological Collections* over 100 years ago (Andre *et al.* 1900). But no parish church in the county (or to the best of our knowledge elsewhere) can match West Chiltington for the sheer number of periods of painting represented; its walls provide a whole lesson in the history of style.

Little documented information concerning the church's history seems to survive. The Royal Arms, engraved on the earliest tower bell, provide a date of between 1470 and 1486. Additionally, the date 1602 is inscribed on the oak beam which partially supports the church tower and spire at the east end of the nave, when possibly the church spire was added to the tower. Early photographs show galleries at the west end of both the nave and the south aisle. A trace of the entrance to the west gallery may be seen on the outside on the west nave wall. These 17th century galleries, as well as the original box pews, were removed during restoration in 1880.

Though the wall paintings have often been mentioned, even if not (before now) closely studied, since their discovery in 1882, there has been no comprehensive publication of them. The adequate photography of wall paintings, often faded, patchy or hard to access, is notoriously difficult; until recently such photographs – e.g. in Tristram's large and still-essential, if outdated, volumes (1944, 1950) – were normally black and white. All the more valuable here are watercolour sketches of the two nave walls (now in the library of the

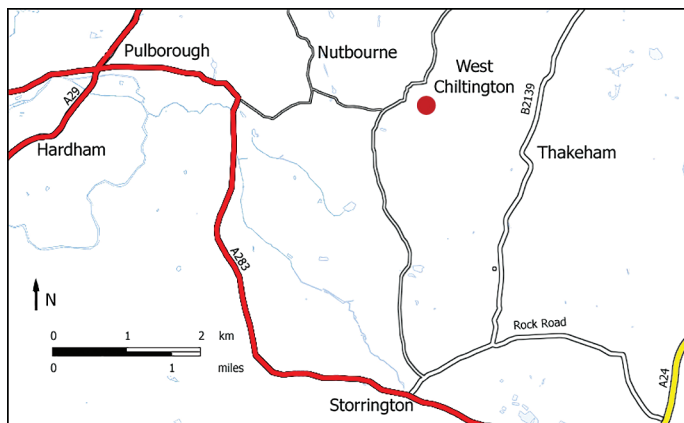


Fig. 1. The geographical location of West Chiltington, West Sussex

Sussex Archaeological Society), dating from soon after the paintings' discovery, when the colours were apparently still brilliant. The building itself has not received much attention. There is a useful Church Guide (revised 2007); Nairn and Pevsner (1965) provide a short account. A more extensive description of the church may be found on the website www.sussexparishchurches.com (author, John Allen).

Our purpose here is straightforward: for the first time to provide a photographic survey of the wall paintings, together with a concise commentary on them (by RM-G), an evocation of their place in the cultural scheme of the 13th century (PT-C), and first of all a description from detailed observation and measurement of the fabric of the building itself (JFP). With the welcome assistance of a grant from the Marc Fitch Fund, we engaged the Sussex-based photographer and archaeologist Lisa Fisher to undertake the primary task.

STRUCTURAL EVIDENCE

The church today consists of a nave and chancel onto which have been constructed both a lean-to south aisle and a chantry chapel; these are connected, and together extend to the full church length (Fig. 2). Unusually, the church nave together with the chancel arch supports a central bell tower (perhaps originally a bell-cote), to which the wooden broach spire is believed to have been added in 1602. The masonry of the earlier, smaller, single-bell turret supports the east side of the later

wooden spire (Fig. 3). The north nave doorway possesses a porch and there was once a porch (which was modified to become a vestry) to the doorway on the south of the south aisle. These doorways are not directly opposite each other. Modern additions and facilities, built as a millennium project, are accessed from the church via an early doorway in the south chapel wall. Older roofing, apart from the shingled spire, is constructed of reset, cement-bedded and graded, slabs of Horsham Stone. (A glossary of the technical terms used in this section appears before the references.)

Externally, the early church walls have in the past been rendered. Unfortunately, this means that the stone fabric of the church can be deciphered clearly only where the render has fallen or weathered away. Sufficient craftsmanship is, however, visible to ascertain that the nave and the chancel still display signs of construction in the Anglo-Saxon period. It should be explained that one of the authors, having examined all identified Anglo-Saxon churches in the British Isles, has shown that their structural stonework is laid to specific identifiable patterns (Potter 2005, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2015, 2016). These patterns involve the stones in many key structures being commonly placed with their bedding or lineation in a vertical orientation. At West Chiltington this patterning may be identified with difficulty in the quoins of the church (Fig. 4 illustrates an imaginary example of such a quoin and the nomenclature used to identify the stones involved).

The north-east chancel quoin at West Chiltington clearly betrays its Anglo-Saxon origins (Fig. 5). The stones in the quoin rise from the brick gully at its foot as follows: Stone 1, Bedded Horizontally (**BH**) of Caen Stone; 2, **BH**, Caen Stone; Stone 3, **BH**, Caen Stone; Stone 4, Bedded Vertical with Face to the Left (**BVFL**), Pulborough Stone; Stone 5, Bedded Vertical with Face to the Right (**BVFR**), Pulborough Stone; Stone 6, **BH**, Pulborough Stone; Stone 7, **BH**, Pulborough Stone; Stone 8, **BVFL**, Pulborough Stone; Stone 9, **BH**, Pulborough Stone; Stone 10, orientation uncertain, Caen Stone; Stone 11, **BVFL**, Pulborough Stone;

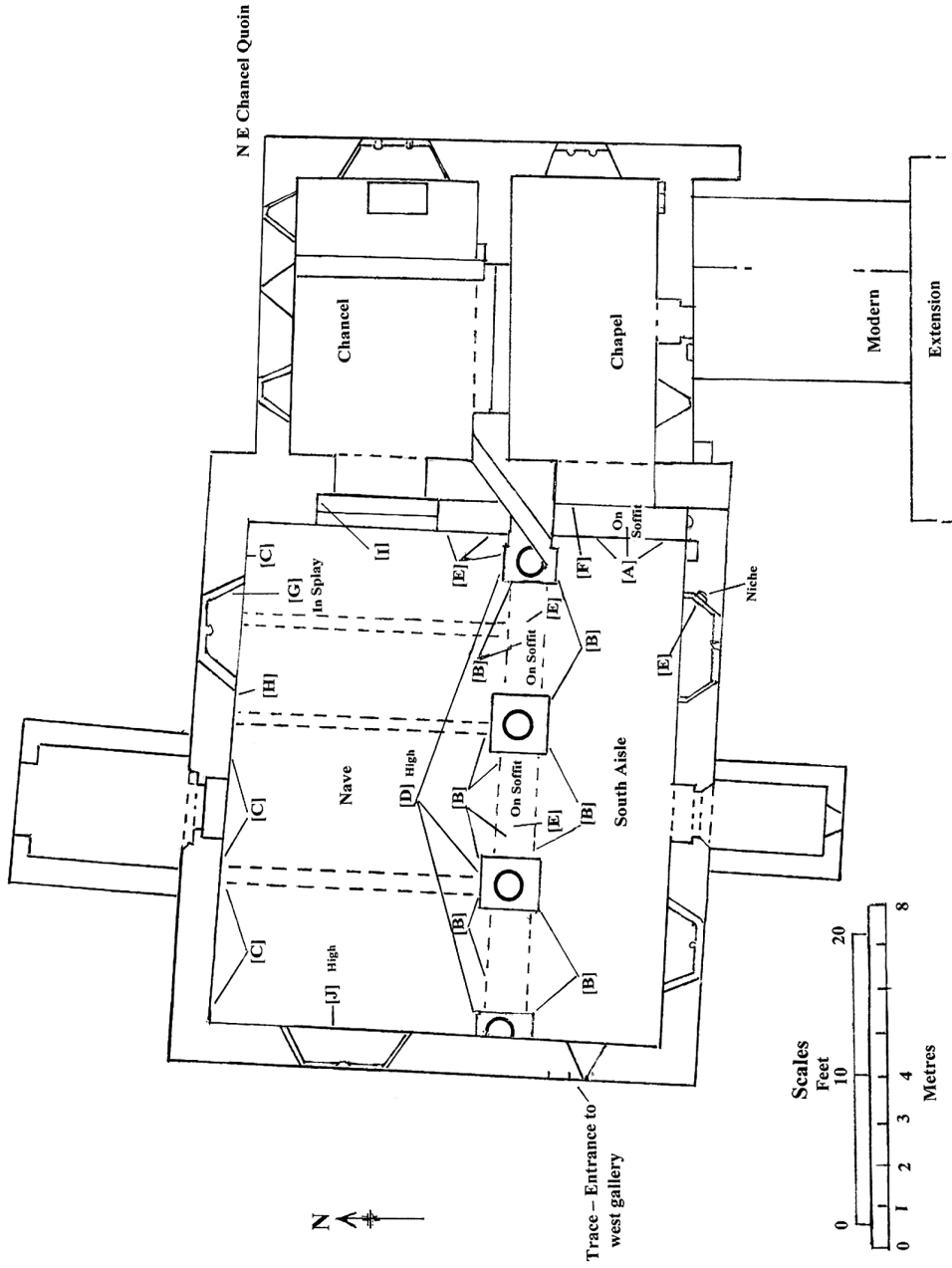


Fig. 2. A plan of West Chilton church, upon which the principal painted wall locations are shown. The church is built very nearly to the orthodox geographical orientation, but it possesses a marked weep. The justification for placing the east-west walls in the chancel more closely to (magnetic) geographical east-west is very limited and based only the knowledge that the chancel walls are one, or possibly two centuries, later than the walls of the nave.

Stone 12, **BH**, Pulborough Stone; Stone 13, **BVFL**, Pulborough Stone; Stones 14 to 19, all of Pulborough Stone but too high to determine bedding orientation. The Caen Stone in each instance is a later replacement.

Rather less evidence of the Anglo-Saxon church origins can be distinguished in the other five quoins of the original church. Their abbreviated details, where visible, may be presented as follows.

South-east chancel quoin (east face only visible): the quoin is variously covered in render (Fig. 6) with all obvious quoin stones of Pulborough Stone. The bedding orientation could be determined for the four stones apparent below the end of a sleeper timber beam of an earlier nave roof; they are placed in descending order **BVFR**, **BVFR**, **BVFR**, **BVFL**. There is rather more than two metres of render cover before the lowest, partially reset, quoin stones are perceptible.

North-east nave quoin (*see* Fig. 3): all discernible stones of Pulborough Stone; with stones 2, and possibly 10, **BVFR**, and stones 8, 9, and 12, **BVFL**.

North-west nave quoin: early stones occur in positions 5, 8 to 11, and 13 to 25; all being of Pulborough Stone. Of the readable stones, 10, and probably 17 (much weathered) are placed **BVFR**, and 22 and 24, **BVFL**. Caen Stone blocks fill positions 1 to 4 and 12. Small Pulborough Stone replacements (6 and 7) now occupy the position previously held by a single **BVFL** Pulborough Stone of which a small portion remains.

South-west nave quoin (West face only visible): only the top three stones below the original roof line could be distinguished (Fig. 7); each is of Pulborough Stone. In ascending order they are placed **BH**, **Bedded Vertical** (direction uncertain) and **BVFR**.

South-east nave quoin: inside the church, plaster covered and unreadable.



Fig. 3. View of West Chiltington church from the north-east: the central tower and spire are visible. The masonry on the east side once supported an earlier bell-turret. The north-east nave quoin created in Pulborough Stone is also visible and the slightly more pronounced, centrally placed, stones are set in Anglo-Saxon style.

The quoin stone bedding orientations (particularly those orientated **BVFR** and **BVFL**) provide an Anglo-Saxon date for the quoins of the nave and chancel (and presumably much of the fabric between these quoins). The rock types also reveal certain information on the church history. Pulborough Stone, first described by Martin (1828), is a distinctive, bioturbated, coarse sandstone with wispy black inclusions. It occurs in the Hythe Beds Formation of the Cretaceous, Lower Greensand. It was used extensively for structural features in many Anglo-Saxon, Norman and Gothic Sussex churches (Potter 2007). Earlier, it provided the material for a quern manufacturing industry in both the Iron Age

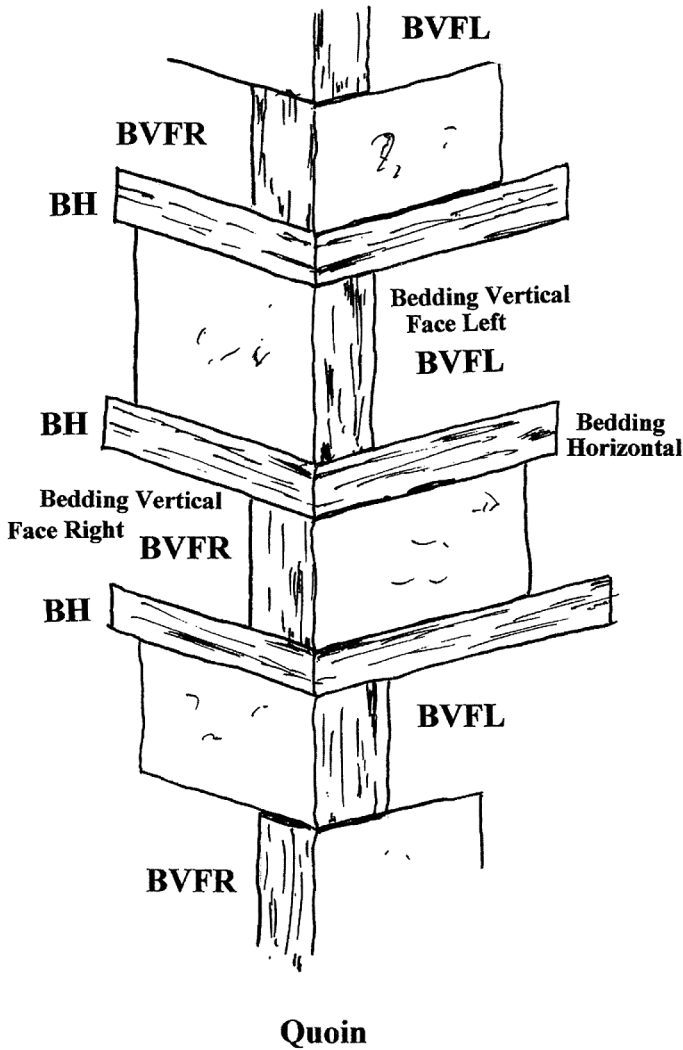


Fig. 4. Stone settings in quoins may be placed in three possible ways. Most frequently masons place the stones with the bedding or primary lineation in the rock horizontally, which can be described as Bedding Horizontal (**BH**). In Anglo-Saxon times, in particular, they used the stones to provide an element of ornamentation, choosing to set the stones also with the bedding vertically, either with the bedding when viewed facing towards the right, as Bedding Vertical Face Right (**BVFR**), or towards the left, as Bedding Vertical Face Left (**BVFL**). The figure shows an example of a typical Anglo-Saxon pattern, in this instance reading upwards as, **BVFR, BVFL, BH, BVFR, BH, BVFL, BH, BVFR, BVFL**.

and Roman times (Peacock 1987), when it is thought to have been extracted from the area of the village of Lodsworth about 12km west of Pulborough. The principal quoins at West Chiltington from their stone orientations incorporate original, Anglo-

Saxon inserted, Pulborough Stone. The same material, in quoins, when it is consistently set **BH**, and therefore later, was also used for repair purposes (see, for instance, the cited stones in positions 6 and 7 in the north-east nave quoin which appear to be replacements). The Caen Stone, quarried from the Middle Jurassic pelley limestones of Normandy, and first imported into England in the 11th century, where present in these same quoins, is also a replacement stone.

The early nave and chancel quoin stone orientations may be contrasted with those present in the three southern quoins of the south aisle and the chantry chapel (see Fig 2). These quoins are constructed again of Pulborough Stone but all blocks are set in the orthodox **BH** style, providing a post-Conquest building date.

The visible wall fabric seen in the north and west nave (Fig. 7), and north and east chancel walls is almost entirely constructed of a rubble of local, often bioturbated, Hythe Beds, which is softer than the Pulborough Stone. Up to 15 per cent. of the fabric consists of probably field-picked, irregular pieces of ironstone from higher horizons in the Lower Greensand such as the Folkestone Sands. This is particularly evident in the rebuilt east gable of the upper chancel wall. Disruption to the wall fabric may be observed particularly where 14th-century windows have been inserted.

The majority of the windows (west and north nave, east chancel and two in the north chancel) were probably all built of Pulborough

Stone at much the same time. They have been differently repaired, presumably at different times. For example, the west nave window has replacement stones of Caen Stone; for that in the east chancel wall, local Hythe Beds material has

been used extensively and probably much more recently, for repairs. There is a third, smaller window (Fig. 8) between the two 14th-century lancet style windows in the north chancel wall. This window is of Norman character, although it probably replaces an original Anglo-Saxon window which occupied the same position. In this, the sill and lintel stones are of Pulborough Stone (the single lintel stone being placed with its bedding vertically orientated but parallel to the wall surface) and the jambs are of Caen Stone (all **BH**). In the church interior, all the chancel windows have been repaired.

Measured on the south side, both the nave and chancel walls are about 780mm thick. Both the west nave wall and the original east nave wall are about 935mm in thickness. The wall including the chancel arch is now, however, 1.7m thick. This wall was extensively modified and thickened (by about 750mm) to support the weight of the tower. Although the date of construction of this small tower is normally suggested as around 1200, it seems likely that it was erected somewhat earlier, for it was present at a date before the south aisle was built. The additional thickness was provided by constructing a supplementary wall to the west of the eastern nave wall which contained the original chancel arch. The chancel arch, which now passes through both of these walls, is made of small, well-squared blocks of Caen and Pulborough stones, this mixture suggesting that when constructed, in typical Romanesque fashion it was originally plastered or painted. It is, of course, possible that the Pulborough Stone blocks were re-used from the original Anglo-Saxon arch. The double arch was heightened to permit vision of the altar from the much later 17th-century galleries, and any original ornamentation was then presumably lost (Church Guide 2007, 2). Externally, the tower which rises through the nave is covered with render or wooden shingles so that it is difficult to resolve the stone type(s) in its construction, or indeed any modifications over time to its structure.

The south arcade is typically recognised as being of late Anglo-Norman style (Nairn and Pevsner



Fig. 5. Stones 4 (top only), 5, 6, and 7 of the north-east chancel quoin are of Pulborough Stone, here sufficiently enlarged to read something of their Anglo-Saxon orientations as **BVFL**, **BVFR** (the most obvious), **BH**, **BH**.



Fig. 6. The east face of the church is partially covered with render, largely removed to the north of the south-east chancel quoin (of which a few stones only are visible).



Fig. 7. The west faces of the nave and south aisle at West Chiltington. Only the top three quoin stones of the south-west nave quoin remain. The darker stones in the Hythe Beds walling are mainly of Folkestone iron-rich sandstone. The aisle west window is largely created in Caen Stone in Norman style, and the darker patch of iron-rich sandstones above and to the north of the window marks the position of the one-time gallery doorway.

1965). The arcade pillars are not equidistant and the capitals differ in ornamentation. They are constructed of Pulborough Stone with minor repairs in local Hythe Bed material. Evidence that the floors of the south aisle and nave were lowered to provide



Fig. 8. On the north wall of the chancel there are three windows. The smaller central window is of Norman character and probably replaces an earlier Anglo-Saxon window. There are traces of this earlier window where Pulborough Stone remains in use, but most of the window is now built of Caen Stone.

the necessary height for the 17th-century galleries can be observed from the exposed plinths to the arcade pillars. The west end wall to the aisle preserves a round-headed window of late Anglo-Norman style, constructed in Caen Stone (but partly replaced). Two massive (pre-Norman period?) stones occur high up in the south-west quoin.

The presence of a remarkably long (minimum 2.72m, south-east side; 2.91m, north-west side 3.24m) hagioscope, or squint, passing through both walls of the thickened chancel arch, as well as the arcade wall of the south nave aisle, indicates that it post-dates the construction of the early tower. The intervals between the erection of the thickened arch (and early tower), the building of the south aisle and the construction of the hagioscope may of course have been

only relatively short. The hagioscope is plastered internally, a difficult task in one so long. The east wall to the aisle (later to become the west wall to the chantry chapel) was erected to align with the original east nave wall and chancel arch.

The grey-green, Hythe Beds ragstone, which has weathered brown, on the exterior of the west end wall of the aisle (see Fig. 7), is somewhat different in appearance and age to the walls elsewhere. The south jamb of the blocked round arched external entry to the 17th-century galleries is still visible in this wall, to the north of the late Norman-period west window. It has been suggested (anonymously) that it is depicted, but as blocked, in a painting of 1892 by G. de Paris; we have not been able to locate this painting. Internally, there is now barely any evidence of the doorway. This single entry point may have been presumed to have also served the nave gallery. If it did, there is only very limited indication of the nave south arcade wall being

broken to provide this entrance. The unbroken wall paintings indicate that access to the nave gallery appears to have been through the west nave wall, largely behind the west arcade column. An alternative suggestion has also been offered: that the disrupted stonework in the west nave wall was related to a window and that steps for the galleries rose from the nave floor. This suggestion would not have permitted the steps to have made contact with the walls, for the paintings are not disrupted, nor would there have been any necessity to block a window when the galleries were removed.

The south chancel wall (780mm thick) was broken through to create a chantry chapel about the late 13th (Nairn and Pevsner 1965, 368), or early 14th century. This chapel was created to the same north–south width as the earlier aisle, so that its south wall is offset to the south wall of the aisle by about the thickness of the south wall. The arch to the chapel from the chancel is created in Pulborough Stone with a few blocks of Caen Stone as replacements. It seems likely that when this chapel was created it became necessary to provide more light in the chancel, and the two additional north chancel windows were formed (again of Pulborough Stone). The priest's door in the south chapel wall is built of Pulborough Stone, and has externally chamfered jambs. It has been altered, but, like the arch to the south chapel from the chancel, it is again probably of early 14th-century date. It now leads to the new buildings. A stoup outside this door (on the west side) is also constructed of Pulborough Stone, but it possesses what was probably an originally polished, now broken, 'Sussex Marble' basin.

The north nave porch is built in its lower portions of yet another lithology of Hythe Beds, this one being slightly muddier in character. It is roofed in Horsham Stone and partially floored with a (tomb) slab of Sussex ('Petworth') 'Marble', or strictly, *Viviparus* limestone, from the Weald Clay. Its woodwork has been attributed to the 13th century (Church Guide 2007, 3). The north doorway, drastically repaired in the 19th century, was originally of Caen Stone and is possibly of the same period as the south aisle. The south doorway to the south aisle leads to a locked vestry now occupying an earlier south porch. This doorway has again been repaired and rebuilt in Pulborough Stone and set into an earlier structure of Caen Stone (better seen from the vestry); much as the north doorway still preserves elements of its Norman origin in Caen Stone. The south porch has

been extended southwards by about 95mm during relatively modern times. It is now lit in the new south wall by a small lancet window, in Pulborough Stone, to serve as a subsidiary vestry. A similar modern window was probably created in the south wall of the chapel at the same time.

At the west end of the south wall of the chantry chapel the very doubtful outline of the west side of a (?13th–14th-century) blocked doorway exists. The remains are only visible internally and are plastered over to reveal nothing of the stonework. Externally this area of wall is covered with a short buttress. Although an early priest's doorway may have existed in this position, the presence of a supporting external buttress could equally suggest wall repair.

Several aspects of the church structure should be given particular mention as they influence the possible dating of certain wall paintings. Details in the south aisle are of special interest. Three corbels on the south side of (and above) the arcade may have supported the early Norman aisle roof which would then have to have been less steeply inclined. A piscina has been partially re-opened at the east end of the south wall. This was at some date covered by stonework and plaster, probably when the aisle ceased to possess a subsidiary altar and the entrance from the chantry chapel was created. Upon the covering plaster, painting is visible. This would suggest a date for this painting subsequent to the building of the chantry chapel (that is, after the late 13th–early 14th century). The rood stair rises from the north wall of the aisle arcade (above the hagnoscope) and the adjoining painting seems to post-date this feature.

The arches that connect the south aisle to the chantry chapel are of different dates and character, and difficult to interpret. It would appear that the earliest 'arch' is that on the east side of the pair. Only a very small portion of this is preserved adjoining the south chapel south wall. This supports a chapel roof rafter and, from its position, it seems likely that it served only as a shaped corbel which proved necessary when the archway was first formed. To its west, a full archway (between the original south-east nave quoin and a stub remnant of the south aisle east wall) was constructed through the original east wall of the south aisle. It can be conjectured that if the 'corbel' shaped outline was influenced by the archway, the present outline may not be the first. Adjoining, and to the west of this archway, a current 'bridge-like' structure, taking something of the form

of a flying buttress has been added. The centre of this arch has been determined by the original south nave wall and the south aisle wall. Above this structure the original east wall to the south aisle is visible and on this an unusual painted 'endless knot' motif was uncovered in 1967 (Church Guide 2007, 7). It is clear that this arched 'flying buttress' was constructed at a time that was subsequent to the painted motif, because to see this painting it is necessary to stand well back from the east aisle wall. It would seem probable that this 'buttress' was built to absorb some of the lateral pressures created by the tower and spire at, or shortly after, 1602 when the spire was added. A chamfer on the underside of the arched buttress and the absence of a string course corresponding to that on the south side, suggests that access to the rood stairs was still required at this time.

The chancel, together with the chantry chapel built alongside it, have a slight weep to the north (Fig. 8). In other churches displaying weep, the chancel typically exhibits evidence of having been rebuilt (much more rarely the nave is the component that has been rebuilt). It is suggested that weep occurs when, in order to maintain the use of the church as long as possible whilst the chancel (for instance) is being rebuilt, the nave would be sealed off. The new chancel rebuilding would then commence with its eastern extremity in order to delimit the size required. The subsequent building of the chancel's north and south walls to meet the nave may result in a weep. In the instance of West Chiltington this rebuilding of the chancel would have occurred during Anglo-Saxon times as shown by the stone emplacement in the quoins.

West Chiltington church certainly underwent extensive rebuilding in Norman times. This occurred when both the tower and the south aisle were built. As both events would have severely disrupted the use of the church, and particularly the nave, it may be tentatively suggested that both events were undertaken at the same time and when the church was temporarily out of use.

Table 1 offers a proposed order of the church's building and alteration.

THE PAINTINGS

Since the authors' primary purpose is to publish a first comprehensive record of the West Chiltington paintings and their architectural setting, these accompanying notes will be kept concise, without

attempting a technical or art historical analysis: we simply hope to place the pictorial work in context. As Clive Rouse, the doyen of 20th century wall painting restorers, put it: 'It must be realized that all medieval churches in England were more or less completely painted...paintings were constantly being replaced as they became dilapidated or unfashionable; and as the churches themselves were altered or enlarged, so the need for fresh murals grew' (Rouse 1991, 9). Why were they so necessary? For several reasons: for teaching (famously, Pope Gregory the Great called them 'the Bibles of the poor'); as the appropriate 'finish' to rubble walls – plain plaster would leave the feeling of something missing; and to evoke the presence of the Heavenly Host in the sacred place. And where have all these paintings gone? With the passage of time natural processes would lead to their deterioration or disappearance. In the Reformation nearly all such images would have been destroyed or obscured with lime wash (which might inadvertently lead to their preservation). Most destructively, restoration of churches in the Victorian age all too often involved the stripping of plaster from the walls, though in fairness one must add that towards the end of the 19th century, the value of the images the plaster might carry began to be recognized. It was such recognition that – even at a time when appreciation of these paintings was in its infancy, and restoration methods were primitive or even deleterious – led to the survival in Sussex of such precious and large-scale mural schemes as those of Hardham (found in 1866), Clayton (1893) and West Chiltington (1882). The first two of these schemes are each apparently of a single, very early, period (Milner-Gulland 1985); West Chiltington is quite different, and all the more unusual.

Tristram, who worked on cleaning these paintings in the 1930s, pronounced them as belonging to two periods, and split discussion of them between the first two volumes (1944 and 1950) of his massive and pioneering work on English medieval wall painting, with a further mention in the third (Tristram 1955). Nairn and Pevsner (1985) follow this. But it is a great oversimplification. There can be few if any churches where the 'constant replacement' of which Rouse spoke is so evident (it is interesting to note, incidentally, that the earliest identifiable paintings here are in the south aisle, which was an addition to the original church – the latter doubtless had still earlier paintings, now lost). At a conservative estimate, we believe ten stylistic



Fig. 9. Watercolour of nave N. wall [C, G, H] by Elizabeth Drake, 1902 (Sussex Archaeological Society).



Fig. 10. Watercolour of nave S. wall [B, D, E] by Elizabeth Drake, 1902 (Sussex Archaeological Society).

Table 1. Proposed order of church building and alteration.

Item	Church feature(s)	Evidence	Proposed date
a	Unicelled Nave and Chancel	Fabric and quoin stone orientations	Anglo-Saxon (possibly 10th c.)
b	Chancel added to create second cell	Chancel possesses a weep. Quoin stone orientations	Anglo-Saxon (about 11th c.)
c	Bell-cote tower for a single (sanctus?) bell built on east end of nave and chancel wall thickened on west side to provide support.	Features earlier than late Norman south aisle and hagioscope	Early 12th c.
d	New Norman chancel arch, north nave and south aisle doors. North Porch also suggested	Reused and existing remnant stonework Woodwork	Norman. Chancel arch, as c Nave door, c or e South aisle, as e
e	South Aisle constructed	Norman aisle window and arcade preserved	Later 12th c.
f	Hagioscope created (items c to f possibly almost at the same time)	Cuts thickened chancel wall and arcade wall	Later 12th c.
g	Rood stairs (and loft) constructed	Avoids e	?Late 13th c. (typical date; could be post h)
h	Creation of South Chapel to chancel. Priest's door to south chapel	Architectural styles of arch, doors and windows	Late 13th (possibly early 14th) c.
i	South Aisle and Chapel linked with archway, aisle piscina probably blocked as no longer used	h and i probably linked	As h
j	Various windows in nave and chancel replaced	Architectural style and displaced stonework	14th c.
k	Earliest dated single bell	Dated	About 1480
l	Broach Tower added. 'Flying buttress' created between chapel and aisle	Dated woodwork	1602
m	Rood and much of stairs removed	Historic period of removal	Early 17th c. (possibly with l)
n	West galleries and door constructed. Nave floor lowered and chancel arch rebuilt	Historic records	Late 17th c.
o	The same west galleries removed and door blocked	Historic records	1880
p	New south extension	Records	Modern

phases can be distinguished, though in the absence of documentary evidence any dates are conjectural, as we trust we have made clear. In a few places remains of paint are too indistinct to be usefully discussed; this applies particularly to traces visible low down along the nave north wall, the aisle south wall (including the door surround), possibly the chancel, and a dark patch within the splay of the east arch. We distinguish the following phases of painting (locations shown on Fig. 2):

[A] Ensemble at E. end of S. aisle (second half of 12th c.): see Figs 11, 12, 13, 14

[B] Masonry and other patterns on face of arches, nave S. wall, and underside of E. arch (late

12th c.): Figs 15, 11, 14

[C] Nativity cycle, nave N. wall (? early 13th c.): Figs 9, 16, 17, 18

[D] Passion cycle, nave S. wall (mid-13th c.): Figs 10, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23

[E] Foliage, masonry (etc.) patterning, E. end of nave, S. aisle niche and under two arches (? 14th c.): Figs 20, 24, 14

[F] 'Endless knot' (Guilloche) (? mid-14th c.): Figs 25, 26

[G] 'Warning to Sabbath-Breakers', N. nave window splay (14th c.): Fig. 27

[H] St Christopher, W. of N. nave window (? 15th c.): Fig. 28

[I] Angelic musician (fragment of 'Last Judgement'), chancel arch (14th or 15th c.): Fig. 29

[J] Text within cartouche, high on W. wall of nave (17th c.): Fig. 30

The figures are from modern photographs, with the exception of the two fine watercolours made by Elizabeth Drake in 1902, when the colours on the north and south walls of the nave were apparently still brilliant (Figs 9 and 10).

One quickly notices that these various phases or campaigns of painting differ widely from each other in quality of execution. However, a constant and touching feature is that none has the sophistication that might be seen in the great churches or cathedrals. One of the most noteworthy things about the wall paintings in parish churches is that it is possible to observe the art of the people, largely lost otherwise. The painters (perhaps monks, more likely laymen) were indeed fulfilling commissions to order, but doing so in their own way, building on their own traditions, using simple pigments – usually lime white, charcoal black, and shades of red and yellow ochre – available locally.

The paintings will be taken in this order, with brief comments on stylistic and other points.

[A] Figs 11–14. This, though much of it is lost or hard to decipher, is a rare and remarkable example of mature Romanesque art. The 'polished' quality and good preservation of the surviving paintwork makes one suspect that it is largely or wholly in true fresco, alone among the church's paintings (only laboratory testing could definitely confirm this). With true fresco, painting proceeds day-by-day on freshly-applied plaster; the pigment, suspended in lime water, bonds permanently with the wet plaster in a chemical process called carbonation (secco painting, on dry plaster, is less stable but more flexible – sometimes painters worked in secco on a frescoed background). Fresco technique died out in England during the 12th century, and would not have been employed after c. 1200. The wall paintings related to the arch at the aisle's east end would have surrounded and embellished the aisle's altar. This arch was later broken through to the chapel. It is pointed, in 'Transitional' manner, which would have been very unlikely before 1150 (probably, rather later). Whatever the scenes originally depicted, we can clearly make out figures of prophets or other holy figures on either side of the arch (on the north side, one, possibly St Paul,

holding a book), and a most elegant censuring or trumpeting angel on the south spandrel of the arch's face. The angel's garments, and modelling of the limbs, clearly betray the 'damp-fold' style of drapery that spread from Byzantine art across Europe during the 12th century (but is foreign to the earlier style of Clayton and Coombes churches). Opulent fictive wall-hangings are seen on the south side of the arch. The colours used are limited, largely red and yellow ochres; this is indicative, since true fresco cannot tolerate metal-based pigments (*cf.* Rosewell 2008, 135). It should be mentioned that Tristram's 12th-century volume discusses this scheme in some detail; some 80 years ago, he apparently saw in it more than is now visible (e.g. that 'the censuring angels were covered by others blowing trumpets', though his own drawing does not show this). He claims the pigments used were 'ochres and a blue which has turned grey', but this sounds less probable than the result of 'Rayleigh scattering', a phenomenon of light whereby a mixture of white and charcoal black produces a bluish effect (*see* Howard 1990, 195).

[B] Figs 11, 14, 15. When the (slightly irregular) arches were punched through the nave south wall, they were given hefty round Norman piers, with typical roughly-carved capitals in a variety of scalloped forms, but with pointed arches – all pinning down their date to the late 12th century. Their surrounds seem to have been decorated in a hurry, with simple red patterns (at some points overlaid by later painting) following the arches on both sides, and an almost incredibly crude masonry effect on the underside of the eastern arch. The painted interlocking round-headed arches, with simplified abaci, are typically Norman. There are faint remains of (red) colour on the piers themselves, and some indeterminate lines that could originate from this phase below the prophet with a book – see [A]. Tristram (1944, 80) tantalizingly reported 'in the case of some roughly executed patterns...the work is set out by lines similarly scored, but done while the plaster was still wet'; unfortunately, he did not specify the location.

[C] Figs 9, 16–18. Two splendid cycles representing the Nativity and the Passion occupy the nave north and south walls respectively, and are memorably described by Pamela Tudor-Craig (below). The Nativity cycle has somewhat deteriorated since it was discovered, as the 1902 watercolour held by the Sussex Archaeological

Society makes plain (Fig. 9). The scheme is interrupted by the rerearch of the entrance to the church, by the former positioning of a monument just to the east of this, and most of all by the insertion of a 14th-century window – it looks as if the whole scheme ends before this point (*cf.* also [H]), yet a fragment of painted arcade can be made out near the nave east end (indicating a one-time continuation). A lower tier of paintings has almost completely disappeared, though a figure of Christ with raised hands survives: it may represent the Reception of the Virgin's Soul by Christ (Church Guide 2007, 5). From west to east, the surviving upper scenes show, the Annunciation; the Visitation; the Nativity; Star, Shepherds and Angels (three scenes). All are enclosed within a round-headed, trefoil painted arcade with delicate columns between the scenes, and rather solemn angels in the imagined spandrels. There seems little doubt that the scheme dates from the early 13th century. The style is quite different from (and later than) that of the south aisle, but the spirit of Romanesque art still suffuses the poses, drapery, hand-gestures and facial types of the figures. There are rich borders above and below.

[D] Figs 19–23. The Passion cycle (to be followed from east to west, unlike the Nativity) is also damaged at its east end, but not to the point of complete illegibility. The scenes represented are: the Entry into Jerusalem; the Last Supper; the Washing of the Feet; the Kiss of Judas; the Flagellation; the Carrying of the Cross; the Crucifixion; the Angel at the Tomb. Below, in a spandrel between the central and west arches, almost opposite the doorway, is the figure of Christ bearing a banner, symbolic of the Resurrection. There is no doubt that the two cycles, [C] and [D], are intended to form a pair: trefoil arches with slim columns articulate the space of both (though the arches are of different profiles: curiously wide in the Passion cycle); each features an emphatic chevron-pattern, similarly coloured, on the lower border. Thus all the commentators treat them as if they are of a single period. Nevertheless



Fig. 11. E. end of S. aisle: Angel [A]; masonry pattern [B] on arch to nave (left); decorated niche in S. wall [E].



Fig. 12. E. arch of S. aisle: Angel [A], with indeterminate figures [A].



Fig. 13. E. end of S. aisle, soffit of arch: prophets or apostles, with fictive drapery below [A].



Fig. 14. E. end of nave arcade viewed from aisle, with patterning [B]; entrance to rood loft and squint; holy figures in soffit of aisle arch [A]; below, indeterminate lines [?E].

even the most cursory glance shows that they represent two phases. New pigments entered the palette of the Passion cycle painter: replacing the sober greyish green used in the Nativity (from 'terre verte', or even yellow ochre with charcoal), a brilliant leaf green dominates; as does a bright orange-red instead of deep red ochre. The figure style is dynamic and expressive, particularly in the intense, often-photographed scene of the Flagellation. This is high-Gothic art of at least a generation later, somewhere in the mid- or later 13th century. It is remarkable, and maybe unprecedented, that we see a process whereby the later artist was thus clearly ordered to continue and complete the work of his predecessor, though we know that in impoverished parishes work could easily be stopped and then resumed as funds became available.

[E] Fig. 24. The crude early decoration of the arches (see [B]) was supplemented at a later stage – probably 14th century – by a variety of patterns; in the soffits these look stencilled, despite slight unevenness. It is conjectural, but the rather elegant foliage patterning (which Tristram 1955, 29, calls 'oak-leaves') at the east end of the nave south wall, and the adjoining, rather neat masonry pattern on the south side of the chancel arch wall may belong to the same phase of decoration – if not, we could be lumping several phases together. The same applies to a sketchy representation in red ochre of a canopy or a building, surrounding a 14th century niche in a window-splay on the south aisle wall.

[F] Figs 25, 26. The most unusual and baffling element in the entire scheme of paintings was discovered only in 1967, when Eve Baker undertook the most recent restoration project. It is an 'endless' (or 'Solomonic') knot in red ochre, located obscurely, high above the east end of the south aisle, reachable from a small rood-screen passageway. The pattern, a type of guilloche, is known in several cultures from antiquity, and was often used in Roman mosaics. Here, though, there is a further odd feature: the 'knot' is surrounded by a sort of belt and surmounted by

what seems to be a large fleur-de-lis. Within the 'belt' are another four much-simplified versions of the latter. Although this is an old symbolic motif, and early Christian examples can be found in Rome (it was associated with the Virgin Mary; cf. Pritchard 1967), it is more generally considered as an emblem of the French monarchy; note Edward III's claim on the French throne (1348). At about the same time he instituted the Order of the Garter, of which the 'belt' might be emblematic. As for the 'endless knot', the Roman archaeologist John Manley (in Gosden *et al.* 2007) sees guilloche patterns as 'demon traps', ensnaring or warding off malign forces. Among other symbolic meanings for such a knot (strictly speaking, not a knot but a 'link') can be immortality or eternity, faith but also prestige. Was it in some way connected with the remarkably long hagioscope (providing a view of the main altar from the aisle) that goes through the walling below it? Though incised or scratched examples exist, it seems very rare in English wall painting; we know of only one such place: Stoke Orchard, Gloucestershire, whose idiosyncratic early 13th-century scheme of the Life of St James displays three such 'knots' on the sill of a single Romanesque window (Rouse and Baker 1966, plate XVIIc; thanks to Professor David Park for this reference). In the window splay, beneath a prominent band of guilloche, the sorcerer Hermogenes is shown disputing with Philetus, casting spells on him and thus imprisoning him – suggesting a further symbolic association of knots: with magic and occult powers.

[G] Fig. 27. 'Warning to Sabbath-Breakers' (or 'Sunday Christ'), in splay of N. nave window. The window is 14th century, and the painting doubtless dates from then. The suffering inflicted on Christ by those who work on the Sabbath was a frequent late-medieval subject, and this is a well-preserved



Fig. 15. Soffit of E. arch of S. nave wall, with masonry pattern [B] overlaid with later patterning [E].



Fig. 16. Nave N. wall, Nativity cycle [C], viewed through W. arch of nave S. wall.

example: Christ (standing on a wheel) is injured by implements of trade (tailor's shears, butcher's cleaver, carpenter's square, weaver's shuttle), and of gaming (a pair of dice) (Church Guide 2007, 5).

[H] Fig. 28. Little can be said about the large figure of St Christopher (typical of 14th or 15th century wall painting) to the west of the nave north window; it is very hard to make out. The saint was held to have a protective role, particularly of travellers, and generally occupies a prominent location, often (though not here) opposite a doorway.

[I] Fig. 29. A single small figure of an angel with

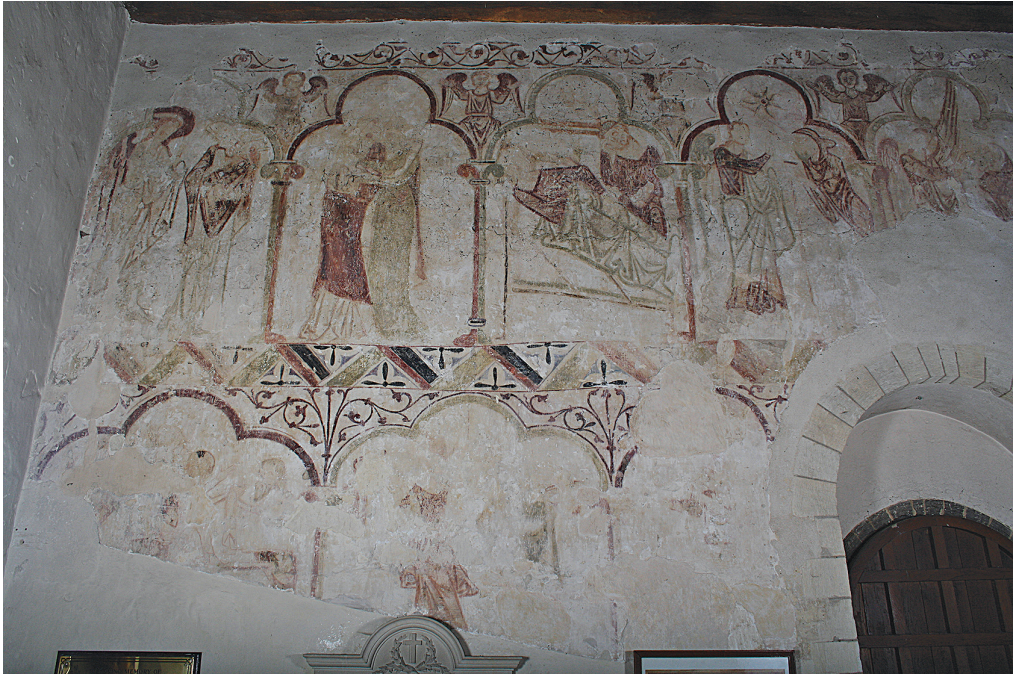


Fig. 17. Nave N. wall, start of Nativity cycle; figure of Christ below [C].



Fig. 18. Nave N. wall, continuation of Nativity cycle, with St Christopher, right [C, H].

fiddle (including fragment of text), now on the north respond of the chancel arch, but moved on its plaster to its present position from high under the roof of the nave east wall, where it was invisible from the ground. It formed part of a Last Judgement composition, much damaged presumably when the chancel arch was raised (in the 17th century, when the bell tower was strengthened). Tristram (1950, 310) reported this information as being derived 'from oral testimony now difficult to substantiate'. Although rather difficult to make out, the drawing is very delicate, and seems to belong to the last period of medieval art (15th century), rather than to that of [G], as suggested in the Church Guide (2007, 5).

[J] Fig. 30. A brief painted post-Reformation text in a cartouche, typical of the 17th century, now



Fig. 19. Nave interior from NW towards chancel arch.

virtually obliterated, can be seen high on the nave west wall, where it was presumably close to those of the congregation who were in the wooden gallery (dismantled in 1882).



Fig. 20. Nave S. wall arcade with Passion cycle [D] above, superimposed on pattering [B]; foliage design [E] to left.



Fig. 21. Passion cycle: Entry into Jerusalem [D].



Fig. 22. Passion cycle: Flagellation [D].

MEDIEVAL WEST CHILTINGTON: CHRISTMAS, EASTER AND THE PAINTED SCHEME

This section has been adapted by RM-G from an address to the Friends of the Sussex Historic Churches Trust in St Mary's Church by the chairman, Dr Pamela Tudor-Craig [Lady Wedgwood], in 2008.

The well-known phrase, 'a Christmas and Easter Christian' could well have been used in the later 13th century of the people of West Chilton. The whole length of their chunky Romanesque nave had recently been painted in two long strips of pictures, one on either side. On the north wall

there were arranged from west to east a cycle of pictures of the story of the birth of Christ, the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Nativity itself, followed by three scenes of the three shepherds, each meeting his own individual angel bearing the good news. The scenes are disposed under delicate three-lobed painted arches springing from slender colonettes, and in the spandrels above are half-length angels. Along the south arcade in the opposite direction there were arranged the Entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper (two bays), the Betrayal, Christ before Pilate, the Flagellation, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross and the Crucifixion. Below is the faint trace of the Angel at the Tomb, and in the triangle of wall below the Passion cycle the Resurrection is placed immediately opposite the north door, the main entrance to the church.

The preacher is, I believe, the key to understanding the choice of paintings in the nave. The most popular surviving written collection of medieval sermons is over a century later than these paintings, the 'Festial' by John Mirk, an Augustinian Canon of Lilleshall in Shropshire. The Augustinians had a brief to help in parish preaching, and Mirk was clearly aware of those

parish priests in charge of souls, but 'by default of books and simpleness of letters' in difficulties. What was true in the later 14th century had been even more so in the mid-13th century. While thinking about the somewhat unbalanced selection at West Chilton – and elsewhere at this date – of scenes only from the birth and death of Christ, we could bear in mind the pattern of preaching as available in a little village like this. Not only are Christmas and Easter major feasts of the Church, but both are preceded by substantial periods of preparation. In the case of Christmas it is Advent, a month; with the Passion, Death and Resurrection it is more, the whole of Lent. These would be times when



Fig. 23. Passion cycle: W. part of cycle, with Risen Christ below [D].



Fig. 24. Nave S. wall and part of chancel arch wall, with masonry pattern and foliage scrollwork [E].



Fig. 25. Above E. arch of S. aisle: 'Solomonic knot' with fleurs-de-lis [F].

parishioners were encouraged to make a special effort to deepen their understanding of the faith. In 1215, at the fourth Lateran Council, Pope Innocent III required the church to expand the pastoral tenets of the Church in preaching. Thus on the ninth Sunday before Easter the topic should be the Seven Deadly Sins, on the eighth Sunday, the Seven Deeds of Mercy, on the seventh, the Articles of Faith, and so on.

Unfortunately records of the incumbents of West Chiltington do not go back further than 1274, and I suspect these murals were already here by then. Who was in charge when these striking pictures were painted? Between 1274 and 1329 there was only one priest named here, John la Zouche. Perhaps he was a long-lived man, or perhaps at some point a son named after him succeeded. In 1264 the feast of Corpus Christi had been instituted. Its purpose was to focus on the sacred nature of the Bread and Wine consecrated at the Eucharist or Mass. Here the scene of the Last Supper, to which the feast owes its origin, occupies two bays of the south wall. There are few important feasts in high summer, so Corpus Christi, celebrated in June, was popular for outdoor processions and from the 14th century for the



Fig. 26. Fishbourne Roman Palace, mosaic, room 14: 'Solomonic knot' in guilloche pattern.



Fig. 27. Warning to Sabbath-Breakers in N. window splay [G].

performance of Mystery plays; it became one of the High Feasts of the Church.

What if John la Zouche's predecessor had not been an eloquent or learned man? How would he have tackled those complicated programmes of preaching/teaching prescribed for the two major seasons of Advent and Lent? Almost certainly by calling in a friar from one of the Orders who were fast spreading around the country. He might have enlisted an Augustinian, but more likely a Dominican, or most likely of all a Franciscan.

The Dominicans majored on learning, but the Franciscans, who preached in the vernacular, who told vivid stories, quoted poems and sang songs from the pulpit, were the popular favourites. Innocent III and his successor Honorius had after 1210 founded the Franciscan Order, whose lightening success all over Europe was undoubtedly in part due to their brilliance at simple, unwritten, passionate preaching. They had reached England in 1224, and their homely but vivid touch may well be discerned in the telling details of the joyful scenes on the north wall.

We can only guess, for there are very few recorded Franciscan sermons of this date – they preached off the cuff anyway; but the unprecedented idea described here of three angels addressing three shepherds individually begs for some lively invention of three characters and their different responses to the Good News. The Three Kings, normally so prominent, do not get a mention in the cycle as we have it. No doubt West Chiltington was largely sheep-rearing country, and many parishioners would have been reassured by the important role of the shepherds at the crib. At Corby Glen (Lincolnshire.), linked with Dominicans, they strode the length of the south arcade, a dog with them, occupying as much space and consequence as the Kings opposite. After all, they got there first.

The Nativity painting at West Chiltington, by contrast, is strictly traditional. Joseph hovers behind the recumbent Virgin, head in hands, pondering the responsibility that has just fallen on his elderly shoulders. The baby, swaddled and laid in a crib in the bottom left corner, is entirely missing, but we know from countless other renderings across Europe at this date that it must have been thus. The focus of the scene would have been Mary, leaning across and tenderly adjusting the swaddling bands, while she and her Child gazed at one another. The Christ Child was certainly among those infants who can focus from birth.

All this is conveyed in the simplest and cheapest colours: earth reds, and a touch of yellow, formed from iron oxides naturally present in the ground, supplemented by charcoal blacks, the best of them made from fine-grained woods and nutshells. The more expensive blues and greens do not feature in the Nativity cycle. These artists of several generations were more at home with vigorous patterns and zigzags, where one scheme tends to be overlaid by another.



Fig. 28. Nave N. wall, St Christopher [H].



Fig. 29. N. respond of chancel arch (formerly above): Angel with fiddle [I].



Fig. 30. W. wall of nave, with text above window [J].

GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS USED

ARGILLACEOUS	a rock somewhat richer in clay minerals
BIOTURBATED	much burrowed by animal action
GLAUCONITIC	glauconite is a green silicate mineral found in certain sediments that have been created in the sea; hence glauconitic
GUILLOCHE	a repeated pattern of interlocking forms, often rope-like
HAGIOSCOPE or SQUINT	opening in a wall affording an oblique view of the principal altar. This enabled the priests in the main body of the church and the aisle to coordinate proceedings
LITHOLOGICAL	the lithology of a rock involves all aspects of the detail of its mineral

QUOIN

and other composition. Hence, lithological the external angle or corner of a building or built structure, and the rocks or bricks of which it is constituted

RERE ARCH

an inner arch (usually taller) of a door or window

RESPOND

that part of an arch where one side bonds into an end wall, usually with a half column.

SOFFIT

the underside or interior surface of an arch

SPANDREL

the facing wall surface between two adjacent arches

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