

## CHAPTER V

### MONUMENT TYPES

#### GRAVE-MARKERS AND GRAVE-COVERS

The earliest grave-markers in the region are those which have been found in native British cemeteries and these are of a very simple type. Indeed it seems possible that such grave-markers may have been locally produced, perhaps even by the family of the deceased, in a type resembling the triangular stone from the sub-Roman cemetery of Cannington (Ill. 199), and, as a later development, the different forms of markers from Wareham (reused Roman shafts, copies of Roman shafts like Wareham 1, or small simply incised cross-marked slabs; see Ills. 114–31). Forms similar to this type of simple marker are to be found in Merovingian cemeteries and the pre-Viking cemeteries in the Isle of Man (see under Wareham 3, p. 117). Probably in the same tradition also are the grave-markers with runic inscriptions from Sandwich in Kent, which likewise have been given the wide date bracket ‘fifth to eighth century?’ (Tweddle *et al.* 1995, 168–71, ill. 151–7). A more complex problem is presented by the plausibly Roman shaft from St Mary’s Cricklade which may have been used as a grave-marker before it was recut as a stoup (Ills. 438–43). It is possible that if more British cemeteries were excavated then these types of simple grave-marker would appear in greater numbers. They are however quite distinct from the professionally cut, inscribed or carved stelae or columns erected by the elite in the Roman or post-Roman period. The shafts or slabs with inscriptions such as are found in Devon and parts of Somerset (see Appendix H, p. 245) appear to be more professionally cut and to mark more important graves, or the foundation of a burial ground. Such monuments however appear to die out by about the eighth century (Thomas 1978, 75).

There seems however to be a continuing tradition in Wessex for small columnar monuments, which is not necessarily related to the Viking-age round shaft derivatives of the Midlands and north (Bailey 1980, 186–9). This is well illustrated by the little rounded shaft from Yetminster, Dorset (Ills. 153–9), with its strange hump-shouldered figures, and which is perhaps of tenth-century date. It could be considered as part of a round shaft for a

standing cross, but may equally be an almost complete columnar marker, especially since its top appears to be finished with a band, and the ornamental section is complete. It was found embedded in the churchyard. Grander and more monumental columns possibly of the ninth/tenth centuries also are recorded in texts, probably of the type found at Reculver in Kent (Tweddle *et al.* 1995, ill. 108–20), or the complete column from Wolverhampton, Staffordshire (Cramp 1975, pls. XVI–XVII). This last has been seen as a royal monument, and it may be noted that William of Malmesbury recorded that King Edgar was originally buried *in capitulo*, translated by Scott as ‘in a column’, before the entrance of the church at Glastonbury (Scott 1981, 84–5). The use of the word ‘in’ raises the same difficulties as the record of the burial — also at Glastonbury — of those buried ‘in’ the pyramids (see below, p. 32). Glastonbury, which was traditionally a Celtic foundation, had a variety of recorded funerary monuments, and may well have kept the ancient tradition of marking graves with a column.

Simple round-headed upright markers with relief crosses, such as Puddletown 2, Dorset (Ill. 88), or the round-headed and rectangular upright markers (head- or foot-stones) from Shaftesbury (Ills. 92–4) are reasonably dated on stylistic grounds to the tenth/eleventh century, and it is possible that such markers were common in minster churchyards. They are a reasonably widespread type, and a comparable group from Sledham in Sussex (Tweddle *et al.* 1995, ill. 243–4) is of a similar date.

Much more elaborate recumbent grave-covers occur on important ecclesiastical sites from the late eighth to eleventh centuries, and plausibly indicate high status burials. What may have been originally the most elaborate in this region, Ramsbury 6, Wiltshire, is rectangular and flat-topped (Ills. 509–10); and, despite its worn condition, displays complex devotional imagery with a wide central cross, and an *Agnus Dei* flanked by symbols of the evangelists and other figures. The domed and flanged covers, Ramsbury 4 and 5, are also richly carved (Ills. 503–5, 508; 506–7), and no. 4 in particular is interesting in that its ornamental repertoire of interlace, rosettes and animals matches the shaft no. 1 (Ills. 488–91), and seems

to have formed a suite with this. Within this region, and indeed the whole of southern England, the form of these domed and flanged grave-covers is unique, and they must have marked important burials at a site which became an episcopal seat in AD 909. Other covers are decorated with variations of plant-scrolls (see Chapter VI below, under 'Acanthine Ornament', p. 51) and belong to a more wide-spread fashion of ornament, found also in the 'Wimchester style' manuscripts of southern England (West 1983 and 2001). In this region such covers are also found at important ecclesiastical sites: Braunton 1 in Devon, Bath 7 and Wells 1 in Somerset (Ills. 1, 185, 327), as well as outside the region at Gloucester (West 1984b, 43, ill. 24), and each is a uniquely designed high-status monument. Different again is the elegant fragmentary cover from Keynsham, Somerset (Ills. 295-7), decorated with panels of fine interlace and plants, which seems to be inspired by manuscript motifs of the eighth/ninth centuries. The fragment of grave-cover from Banwell, Somerset (Ill. 170), with its rows of pattern F knots, is an outlier from a type commonly found in the tenth/eleventh century in the east Midlands (Everson and Stocker 1999, 50-6), whilst the coped grave-cover from Cricklade, Wiltshire (Ill. 445), with its sharply-angled gable and panels of mangled interlace, reflects a different tradition (cf. Cramp 1984, pls. 49, 234-5; 50, 236).

In the eleventh century, at a period for which it is difficult to say whether before or after the Conquest, large-scale grave or coffin covers are decorated with elaborate long-stemmed crosses, as at Muchelney (Ill. 370). Most of these have been discussed in Appendix A.

## CROSSES

There are early literary references to the raising of crosses in Wessex, in fact the earliest references in Anglo-Saxon England. In the *Life* of St Willibald (Holder-Egger 1887, 88; Talbot 1954, 154-5), who was born c. AD 700, there is the well-known statement, 'It is the custom of the Saxon race that, on many of the estates of nobles and good men, they are accustomed to have, not a church, but the standard of the Holy Cross, dedicated to our Lord and revered with great honour, lifted up on high' (trans. Clapham 1930, 62). It is not stated whether such crosses were of wood or stone, but stone crosses raised for a different purpose are recorded by William of Malmesbury as marking the seven resting places of Aldhelm's body on its last journey from Doulting to Malmesbury, in 709 (*Gesta Pontificum*, V.230: William of Malmesbury 1870, 383-4; id. 2002a, 261). Although these crosses were called 'bishop's stones', there is no certainty

that they were carved, and Bishop Browne's attempt to link existing crosses at Frome, Bradford-on-Avon, Bath, Colerne, and Littleton Drew (1903, 149-53) with this account is unconvincing since these monuments differ radically from one another in their ornament and likely date. Nevertheless the fact that the sites have produced sculptures is a signal of their pre-Conquest importance.

## PYRAMIDAL STELAE OR CROSS-SHAFTS

There are other references to commemorative monuments which could be shafts of crosses or another form of memorial, particularly in William of Malmesbury's account of the two 'pyramids' erected in the cemetery at Glastonbury and still standing in his day, the early twelfth century (Scott 1981, 84-5). These, located a few feet from the old church and on the edge of the monks' cemetery, he describes as 'a mystery to almost everyone'. The taller had *quinque tabulatus*, 'five panels', was 26 feet high and almost in ruins. 'On the highest panel was a figure in the likeness of a bishop, on the second an image displaying regal pomp and the words *Her, Sexi* and *Blisyer*, on the third the names *Wemcrest*, *Bantomp*, and *Winethegn*; on the fourth *Hate*, *Wulfred* and *Eanfled*; and on the fifth and lowest panel an image and this writing, *Logwor*, *Westlicas* and *Bregden*, *Swelwes*, *Hwingendes*, *Bern*. The other pyramid of 18 feet has four panels, on which may be read Bishop *Hedde*, *Bregored*, and *Beornward*. I will not rashly certify what these mean but hesitantly suggest that within these hollow stones are contained the bones of those whose names can be read on the outside' (Scott 1981, 85). Scott suggests that the text in William's *Gesta Regum* is to be preferred to this, although nearly identical, but in the G.R. text William puts *Centwine* before *Hedde*, and gives the names as *Bregored* and *Beornwald*, saying that they were 'abbots in this place in the time of the Britons' (ibid., 196). (These names are further discussed by Higgitt in Chapter VIII, p. 66, who notes that the names on the smaller pyramid could hardly be earlier than the eighth century.)

This passage has been the source of much comment from the seventeenth century, when Spelman produced a fanciful drawing of how he envisaged them (1639, I, 21; see Fig. 17). At that date he would probably have seen them in a cut-down and ruined state, since in 1777 John Whitaker was given an account of how they appeared before they were 'recently' removed for use as a gatepost and a prop for a cottage (Whitaker 1809, 19, 35-7). If they were the same monuments as William of Malmesbury saw, then there is some discrepancy in accounts which describe them in one case as ruined and

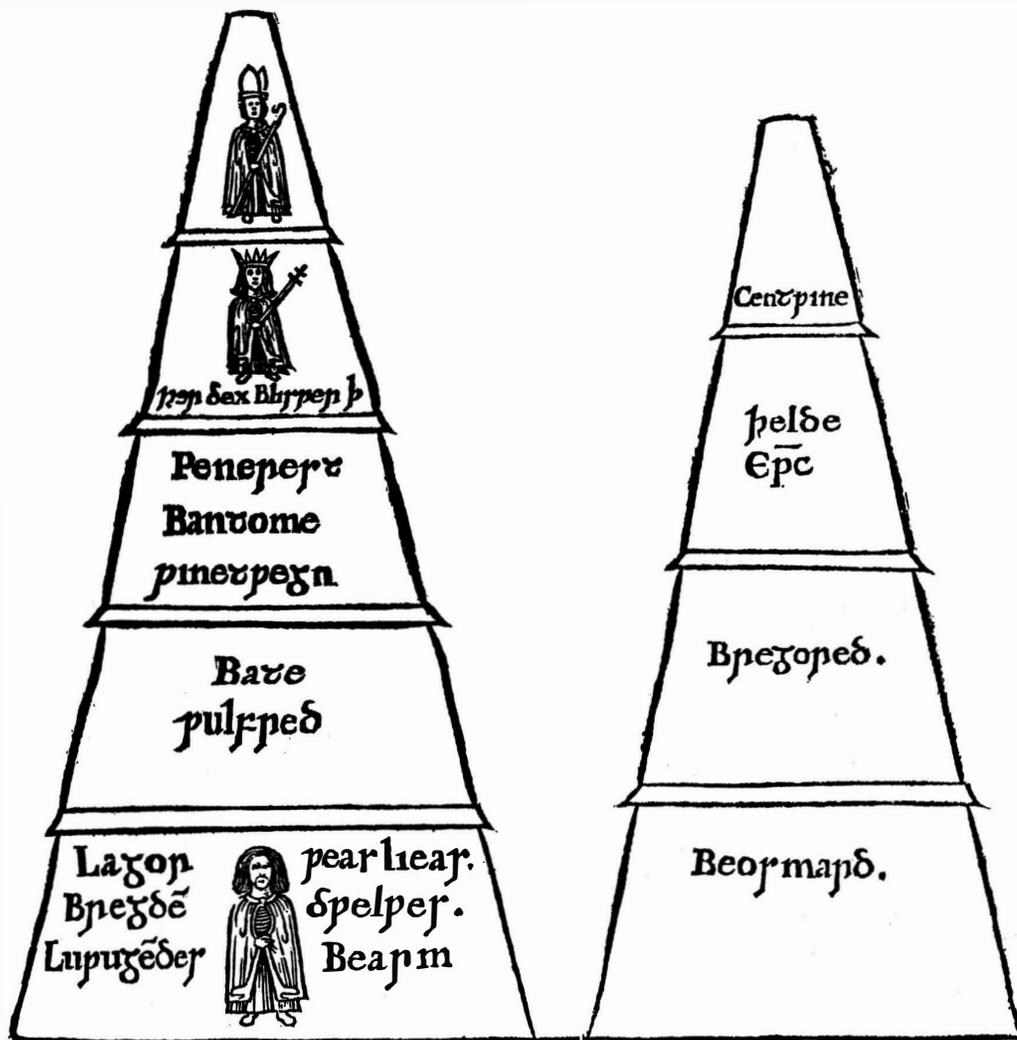


FIGURE 17

Drawing of the Glastonbury 'pyramids' as envisaged by Henry Spelman in 1639

hollow, and in another as strong enough in a cut-down version to prop a cottage or hang a gate. From the time of Clapham onwards commentators have suggested that these 'pyramids' could have resembled headless cross-shafts such as Bewcastle where the figural panels also bear inscriptions (Clapham 1930, 61–2; Dodwell 1982, 114), and Dodwell has made a convincing case that the term 'pyramid' was in the Anglo-Saxon period used to describe crosses functioning as memorials (1982, 113–18). Moreover the Taylors after a study of the antiquarian accounts concluded, 'From these accounts it seems clear that the pyramids (*pyramides*) recorded by William of Malmesbury were the same as the *anices* recorded by William of Worcester,<sup>1</sup> and that they must have been stone shafts or columns; otherwise it would be hard to understand how they could have been used as gate-posts, or how their removal could have left cavities in the ground' (1965, I, 255–7). Whether these 'pyramids' were however a distinctive type of monument based on Coptic stelae, or indeed the type of obelisks which the Romans had removed from Egypt to Rome and which still exist there to this day, is still a matter of debate. I have recently discussed the problem, and other types of stelae with cavities, concluding: 'There is nothing unlikely in seeing Gaulish or even Near Eastern influences in western Britain ... Certainly it is perfectly plausible to envisage a range of forms in the early monuments at Glastonbury, which could reflect its early traditions and its possible links with the British, Irish and continental churches. The fact that the bones of those commemorated are said to be in the pyramids may indicate that such monuments were used as a type of monumental reliquary, and in relation to this it is of interest that the shaft from Tenbury Wells [Worcestershire] ... has on one face a panel which has been hollowed into a cavity' (Cramp 2001, 152; see Ill. 546). It could also be noted that in the Irish church there are pyramidal slab-shrines in cemeteries which have been dated to the sixth or seventh centuries (Thomas 1973, 11, fig. 1), but these are simple structures and would not be carved and inscribed. The Glastonbury record of 'pyramids' over graves is however not however isolated: Eadmer, in his account of the cathedral church of Canterbury, describes the monument over the tomb of Dunstan (died 988) as 'in the form of a large and lofty pyramid' (Dodwell 1982, 113, 279). Another memorial at Canterbury, to Archbishop Oda (died 958), is also described as a pyramid. Although there are links between Glastonbury and Canterbury, notably in the career of

Archbishop Dunstan, it seems less possible that the records were influenced in one direction or another than that they were using a common term. Moreover Dodwell makes a good case for the interchangeability of the terms for cross and pyramid in the late Saxon period (1982, 113–14). In relation to the possible date of the Glastonbury pyramids, I have suggested that the image of the bishop could indicate a late Saxon date at a period when the recognizable modern form of the pointed mitre had become current (Cramp 2001, 154).

It is possible that there were a range of influences which affected Anglo-Saxon funerary monuments, but there is no doubt that the carved stone cross is the most prevalent form, and it could have been inspired by late antique monuments, as well as metal processional or altar crosses. Dorothy Kelly's observation that Anglo-Saxon crosses, unlike their Irish counterparts (which do seem to be based on wooden prototypes), separate the shaft from the head (1993, 220–1) is relevant here; and in western Wessex there are several examples, such as Littleton Drew and Ramsbury 1 where it is clear that a head has been dowelled to the shaft (see pp. 221, 228). Moreover in very few cases do both head and shaft survive together but have obviously been knocked apart in their demolition. The head at Colyton, Devon, is reconstructible as the type attached to a column (Ill. 3), but the late cross from Plymstock, which is complete, is of a form (probably influenced by western British types) where, in the manner of the Irish or wooden crosses, the head and shaft are carved as one (Ils. 34–7). Crosses obviously differed in scale, and probably in decoration, according to their status and function. Large square-sectioned shafts with elaborate decoration, whether animals, plant-scrolls, or panels of interlace, were obviously major foci in the landscape, and as such were often built up to the height recorded for the Glastonbury 'pyramids' by dowelling several sections together, as occurs at Gillingham (Ill. 68), Whitcombe (Ils. 143, 146), and West Camel (Ill. 350), whereas others, such as Bradford-on-Avon 1 (Ils. 397–9), are smaller and may have been one of many memorials in a cemetery.

Some shafts like Codford St Peter (Ils. 425–8), Keynsham 1 (Ils. 272–3, 275–8) and Knook 1 (Ill. 459) could have been parts of openings or shrines, and not shafts of crosses (see below), whilst the plain rounded shaft above the decorated base at Cranborne (Ils. 50–1, 53–6) remains an anomaly which it has proved impossible to parallel.

1. In the fifteenth century (William Worcester 1778, 294; id. 1969, 298–9).

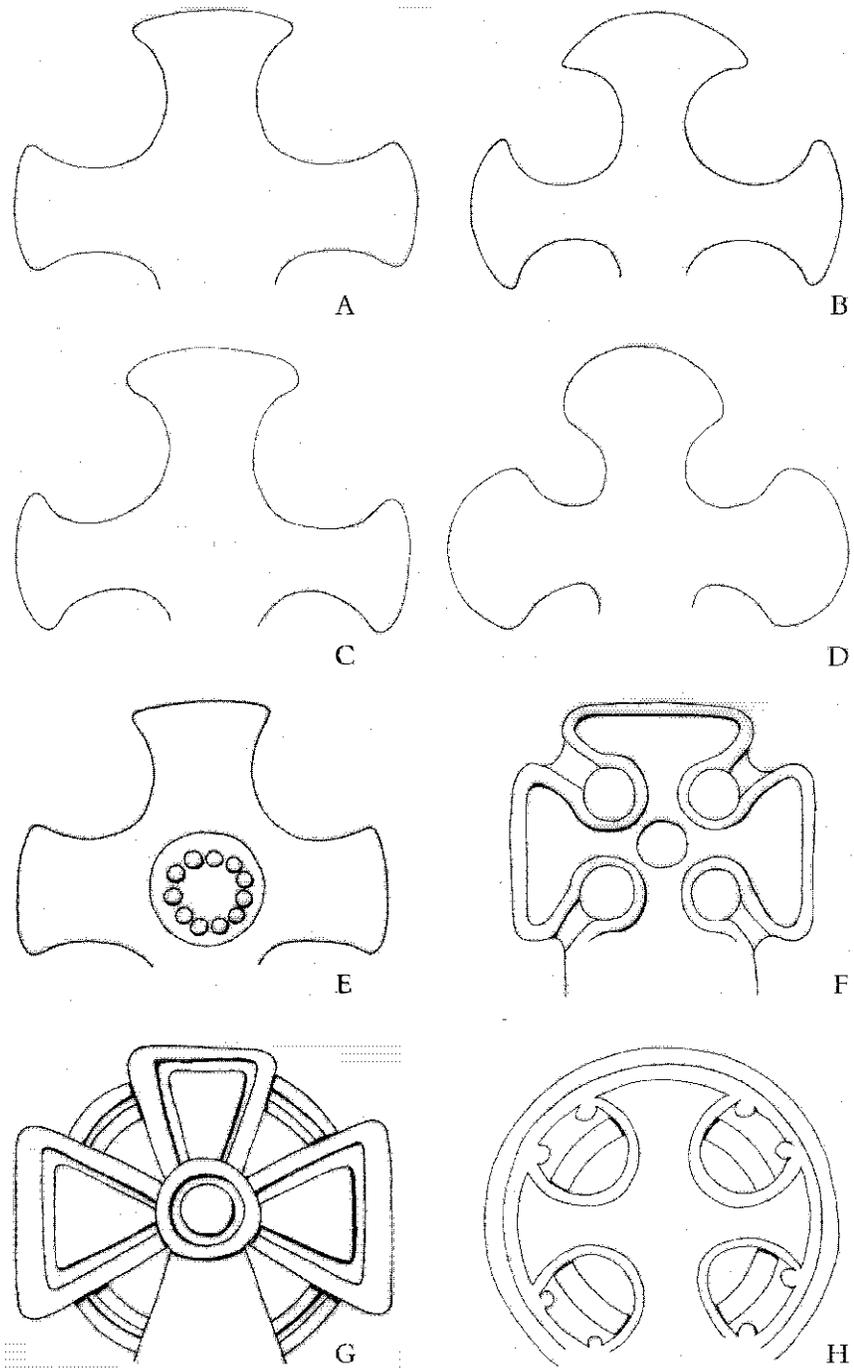


FIGURE 18  
Cross-head types in south-west England

## CROSS-HEADS

There are a range of types not necessarily chronological in their differences (see Fig. 18). The free-armed heads at Bath (nos. 3 and 6: Ills. 173, 177) are the type E10, which also occurs in the elaborately decorated arm from Cattistock (Ill. 45) and the simpler forms at Puddletown 1 and Amesbury 2 (Ills. 87, 389). But there is also a type of fan-armed head which is very distinctive of the region, which is found on Bath 4, Bradford-on-Avon 2 and Keynsham 6 (Ills. 175, 400, 289). The most elaborate surviving head is however the double-ringed head (E9) from Amesbury (no. 1, Ills. 383–7) which must have capped a very important monument. A fragment from Shaftesbury (Ill. 101) may have had a straight-ended arm (A10), but on the whole the distinctive feature of cross-heads from the region are the rounded ends to the arms. Only in what could be tenth/eleventh-century heads does one find the wedge-shaped arms with narrow curves (B10), as for example at Colerne 2 (Ills. 436–7), or the ring-heads from Plymstock and Glastonbury Tor (Ills. 34–7, 255–7).

## ARCHITECTURAL SCULPTURE

Very little decorated architectural sculpture survives from this region, and at the major sites and even at the extensively excavated site of Wells, Somerset, there is a disappointing lack of evidence. The most elaborate *in situ* decoration, and probably also the earliest surviving, is that of the opening into the north porticus at Britford, Wiltshire, in which the jambs of the eastern face, decorated with continuous plant-scrolls, frame a central sunken zone (probably painted) inset with square raised panels of interlace (Ills. 410–20). The same structural formula is used on the western face of the opening, but here the jambs are uncarved and there is only one carved panel, with interlace (Ills. 421–3). This odd framed-and-panelled construction may have been influenced by timber techniques, or possibly, as suggested in the catalogue (p. 207), it was inspired by depictions of elaborate openings in manuscripts. It seems clear that this opening marked an important porticus, since the entrance to the southern porticus is of the same construction but is not decorated (Ill. 424). In fact, other than the much restored door surround at Ledsham in Yorkshire (Butler 1987, pl. XLVIIIb), the opening at Britford is more elaborately decorated than any other surviving from Anglo-Saxon England. The only other possible highly decorated door jamb (though not *in situ*) is the slab from Holy Trinity, Bradford-on-Avon, with

Insular decoration (no. 5, Ills. 407–9), and this, if it was so used, would have covered the whole depth of the door like the famous interlaced beasts on the portal at Monkwearmouth (Cramp 1984, pl. 115, 616–17).

The outlining of doorways with plain rectangular or rounded mouldings, and breaking up of wall surfaces with round-headed or triangular blind arcading, is a common feature of later Saxon church buildings, and has often been compared with the panel framing of timber buildings. Nevertheless, by the time that this becomes a popular fashion of building, in the tenth/eleventh centuries, English masons were obviously accomplished in the use of ashlar. The small highly decorated chapel at Bradford-on-Avon well demonstrates this (Ills. 548–55), and is something of a phenomenon in this region where there is no surviving fabric of the major churches which must have existed at influential centres such as Ramsbury, Exeter, Bath, and Wells, not to mention important minsters such as Congresbury, Frome or Wimborne. Some significant features survive at Avebury (Ills. 393–6), Sherborne, Limply Stoke (Ills. 462–7) and Sidbury (p. 89) (see below, p. 37), and wall fabric at Alton Barnes, Burcombe, Inglesham, and a recently identified chapel at the hospital of St John the Baptist in Malmesbury (Yorke 1995, 232). Some simple windows such as those at Marston Magna, Somerset (p. 191), or loose uncarved heads are difficult to identify as either pre- or post-Conquest. It is obvious however that many later churches must overlie a simpler predecessor, as for example at Muchelney (Taylor and Taylor 1965, fig. 215).

Bradford-on-Avon is however such an important example of decorated Anglo-Saxon architecture that it deserves closer comment. Despite the fact that by the nineteenth century the nave of St Laurence's church had been adapted as a school and the chancel was converted into a two-storey cottage (Ill. 548; Taylor 1972, pls. IX–XV), a substantial amount of the original fabric has survived. During its domestic use, windows and a door were inserted into the west and south fronts, and the southern porticus removed to accommodate the schoolmaster's house (see Hinton 2001). The insertion of flues in the northern porticus and the wall between the nave and chancel did some damage (see catalogue, p. 203) but much of the highly decorated exterior and interior door jambs survived (Taylor 1973, figs. 1–12). The exterior walls were divided by pilasters, some with stepped bases, supported on a wide and shallow plinth, and capped by a deep frieze framed by square-sectioned string courses which contained round-headed blind arcading (Ills. 549, 552). This arcade is supported on trapezoidal bases, the short pilasters capped by trapezoidal

capitals. The east facade of the chancel and the gable of the north porticus were further enriched by reeded pilasters set above the frieze (Ill. 550). Turning from the north and south walls towards the east, the spandrels of the arcade have rounded features (Ill. 551). The variations could possibly be to emphasise the importance of these areas of the building, and it is interesting that the same reeded columns are found on the jambs of the internal entrance to the north porch (which like Britford may once have housed an important burial) and to the chancel (see Ill. 553). The entrance to the chancel (Ill. 555) was further enhanced by the large-scale carvings of angels which were part of a Crucifixion scene (Ill. 406; see below, p. 58).

Externally the upper arcade seems to have been carved out of the finished surface of the walling, but despite the fact that in the past there has been an effort to demonstrate that this decorated upper wall is secondary and that the lower walling incorporated an eighth-century building (Jackson and Fletcher 1953, 41–58; Taylor and Taylor 1965, I, 86–9), current architectural opinion (Fernie 1983, 145–51; Hinton 2001; and Richard Gem pers. comm.) would support the view as set out by Baldwin Brown (1925, 298–301) that the church was of one build and possibly constructed for the burial of Edward the Martyr. It could have been used by the community of Shaftesbury nuns who had been moved there in 1001 (see Chapter I, p. 9), but who would not necessarily have used the minster church, Holy Trinity, existing to the south (see Ill. 554). Nevertheless the trapezoidal caps and the reeded columns are unusual in Anglo-Saxon architecture; but if this was a royal foundation, like Britford, the wealth of ornament could be explained.

Fragments such as the friezes and string-courses at Cricklade (Ills. 444, 447) remind us of what has been lost at other churches, but the few later pre-Conquest openings which survive have little ornament. The outlining of the opening at Limpley Stoke, Wiltshire (Ills. 463–7), with a square-sectioned hood moulding and what Taylor saw as animal-headed label stops, such as those existing at Deerhurst in Gloucestershire (Taylor and Taylor 1965, I, 390; Bailey 2005, pls. 1–2), is very eroded, and it is difficult today to be certain of the form. It is perhaps significant that the acute eye of Baldwin Brown did not note the animal heads, but they can be seen with the eye of faith (Ill. 465). The chamfered and moulded block capitals at Limpley Stoke (Ills. 466–7) are also found in the doorway into the north aisle of the church at Sherborne, which is universally accepted as Anglo-Saxon. More controversially Gibb claimed that the ground level arcade in the north wall of the north transept at the same church is pre-Conquest (Gibb with

Gem 1975, 92–5, figs. 9, 10), and here the pilasters are chamfered and set on chamfered bases (like the decoration on the Wells font: see Ills. 329–34, 337–9), but have no capitals, unlike those at Bradford-on-Avon (Ills. 549, 551–2). The arcades are recessed more deeply than Bradford's and it has been suggested that they were not simply decorative but used as seating.

'Loose' impostes and capitals are rare in the region, and most must have been plain and like those *in situ*, either stepped, chamfered or of rectangular block form. A few fragments are more decorated, comprising the stiff-leaf acanthus capital fragments from Avebury (Ills. 395–6), a block capital with curling tendrils from Muchelney (Ills. 309–11), and the strange rounded piece with interlace decoration from Henstridge (Ills. 258–66) for which one interpretation would be a capital. Although other capitals such as those from Milborne Port were included in the Anglo-Saxon corpus by Taylor and Taylor (1966, 39–40), these are seen here as post-Conquest (Ills. 563–5), but, like those at Knook (*ibid.*, 36–7; Ills. 557–62), reflecting a continuing tradition of Anglo-Saxon ornament (see below, p. 55).

Wall panels, whether decorative or iconographic, are a phenomenon which occurs in architecture from the seventh century onwards in other kingdoms (see for example Monkwearmouth, co. Durham: Cramp 1984, pls. 121, 656; 124, 677–683). The earliest in this region seem to be the fragments of wall panels or parts of screens, with Insular animal ornament, key patterns and interlace, that occur at Glastonbury (Ills. 234, 239, 241, 246, 247, 250, 251) and which could date to the early eighth century; and a little later the two fragments of panels with delicate interlace and pointed flowers from Keynsham (Ills. 298, 302), which could be c. 800. These are relatively small-scale, but the tenth- to eleventh-century panels and roods in this area are on a much grander scale, and must often have decorated much larger churches in the post-reform period (p. 10). The Bradford-on-Avon angels (Ills. 404–6), which plausibly formed part of a Crucifixion composition; the base of a crucified figure from Muchelney (Ills. 306–7); the attendant angel from Winterbourne Steepleton (Ills. 149–52); St Michael and the dragon at Stinsford (Ill. 100); the Virgin and Child figures at Inglesham and Langridge (Ills. 453 and 305); the Bristol Christ Victor (Ill. 198); and the problematic figure of St Peter from Dowlish Wake (Unknown Provenance 1, Ill. 380), are all on a large scale. Similarly large scale are the figures of Christ and St Peter on the column from Congresbury (Ills. 204–20), which seems to have been freestanding within the church and may have surrounded an altar or shrine.

Although there are documentary references to

elaborately carved shrines in churches, for instance in the churches at Glastonbury (Scott 1981, 68–9, 84–5), few traces exist, and those that do are ambiguous in form. The slab decorated with interlace, fret and spirals which now is used as a frontispiece to the altar in St Laurence's church, Bradford-on-Avon (Ills. 407–9), could have been part of a tomb shrine, but a plausible case can also be made for it to have framed an opening as at Britford (see above). Unfortunately, since only the face is visible and no record seems to have been made of its back and sides, clues to its function are unavailable. Finally, the unique *fenestella* from Bath (Ills. 186–7) may have provided access to a large shrine, but is big enough to have provided a view into a crypt.

### FONTS

Fonts are rare in pre-Conquest England, and since they have not occurred in this series before, some extended consideration is given to them here. There are two generally accepted pre-Conquest fonts in this region: Potterne 1, Wiltshire (Ills. 472–84) which is assigned to the pre-Conquest period by reason of its inscription (Okasha 1983, 96–7; see p. 224), and Wells 4, Somerset (Ills. 328–45) which has been assigned to the pre-Conquest period by reason of its original ornament (Rodwell and West 2001). I have also suggested the possibility that the shaft which makes up the current font at Melbury Bubb, Dorset (Ills. 71–81), of eleventh-century date, might originally have been part of a font rather than a round-shafted cross, as normally considered (see p. 104). It is possible that some of the plain tub fonts in the region such as Shepton Mallet 2, Somerset (Ill. 373) may also be of pre-Conquest date, but the rounded bowl shape continues into the post-Conquest period, whilst the straighter sided form as at Potterne is also found in the earliest fonts in the Celtic west, such as Boscastle, Trethevy and Tintagel (pers. comm. Ann Preston-Jones).

The paucity of fonts of the pre-Conquest period throughout Britain has often been contrasted with the plethora of Romanesque fonts. Each is an individual conception, although all are what Bond describes as 'tub-shaped' (1908, 31). Potterne has a more bucket-like form, with a sharply cut overhanging rim bearing an inscription, and a plain, smooth, almost polished surface reminiscent of metalwork. The surface of the Wells font was also smoothly finished but it was decorated with a sequence of figures under arcades (Rodwell and West 2001, 152–4, fig. 129), a type which is more common in Romanesque fonts. The only other Anglo-Saxon font

in the west of England, at Deerhurst in Gloucestershire, is entirely covered with decoration — fine plant-scroll around the rim, and linked spiraliform ornament covering the bowl, whilst the base has similar spirals alternating with zoomorphic interlace (Clapham 1930, pl. 55; Rice 1952, pl. 30a; Bailey 2005, pls. 6–8). It has been suggested that this font was not original, but that a pre-Conquest shaft was later turned over and hollowed out for baptism (Foot 1992, 182–3); Richard Bailey however has recently discussed the Deerhurst sculptures in considerable detail, and reached the conclusion that the font could be ninth century in date (Bailey 2005). The only other inscribed font which has been assigned to the pre-Conquest period is from Little Billing in Northamptonshire (Okasha 1971, 97–8, pl. 85). This has a smooth, more rounded bowl, and the inscription is not biblical as at Potterne but a maker formula (see p. 226).

The reason why so few pre-Conquest fonts have survived may be partly explained by the fact that there could have been a continuation of use of lead or other metal forms, like the so-called lead tanks of the Roman period (Thomas 1981, 220–5), most of which may have been melted down, but some could remain unrecognised if plain, like the large round lead troughs from Flixborough, Lincolnshire (Leahy 1995, 352; Loveluck 2001, 103) or Whithorn in Galloway (Hill 1997, 390, fig. 10.74). The tradition of burying earlier fonts when a new one was made is also a factor, and this applies to Potterne (Stocker 1997, 19). Alternatively baptisms could have utilised wooden tubs, and the separately formed base at Potterne would support this theory if it were copying a wooden form, such as might well have existed in the timber baptistery on the site (see p. 224). Continental manuscripts tend to show the rite administered in an open context rather than a building, for example a ninth-century manuscript in the Barvarian State Library depicts a tub with bands and so possibly wooden (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 22053, fol. 16r: Stiegemann and Wemhoff 1999, 429, Abb. 5). The font, in which the person to be baptised is standing, shown in the Fulda Sacramentary, c. AD 1000, is flared at the base and rim like Melbury Bubb and could be of wood or stone (Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Cod. lit. I, fol. 126v: Stiegemann and Wemhoff 1999, 425, Abb. 3). The third option is that natural streams or wells could have been used, and a significant number of wells and springs in churches have been noted: as well as those listed in the catalogue entry (p. 227), Richard Morris cites Aspatia and Kirkoswald in Cumbria and the tenth-century encapsulation of a well into the church at Barton-upon-Humber (1989, 87). A similar encapsulation of a well into the porticus of a chapel is

also found at Maughold, Isle of Man. Morris has also suggested that Roman structures such as survived in the bath building at Leicester could have served as a baptistery (1991, 20, n. 32), and it has recently been suggested that a Roman octagonal fountain near to a double church at Lincoln could also have served as a baptistery (Jones 2004, 109, fig. 8). The same function is also possible for the Roman baths at Bath.

It is worth considering whether one would expect to find more fonts, perhaps of the plain type which are so difficult to date. To do this the significance and ritual development of baptism should be briefly considered. Baptism was the most significant rite of passage for any Christian in the early church, especially since it was for many centuries directly linked with confirmation (see Cramer 1993, 179–84), and for this reason the anointing with the chrism and the laying-on of hands to invoke the Holy Spirit was a function of a bishop, usually in his own church. In baptism the Christian went down into the tomb and emerged with a new life, washed clean of original sin. Salvation begins at this point and the baptised becomes a member of the church, both earthly and heavenly, as Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs makes clear (*Cant.*, III.iv.9: Bede 1983, 256–7). The washing of the body is the washing of the soul, and immersion in water not only re-enacts the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, but also his passion and resurrection.

In periods of mass adult conversion, as for example in Paulinus' mission to Northumbria, immersion in rivers of the whole body could have been a true re-enactment, but Bede explains the mass baptisms in the Glen and the Swale as a necessity 'because they were not yet able to build chapels or baptisteries there in the earliest days of the church' (*H.E.*, II.14: Bede 1969, 188–9). Very early in the history of the church specially designed buildings — baptisteries — were built usually near to the bishop's house, and these emphasised by their architectural forms the importance of the rite and the link with entry into the tomb and the resurrection. The water in the central font was entered by several steps, but it is a matter of debate as to whether the baptised were totally immersed. Even in the most elaborate early baptisteries, as for example in the Lateran in Rome, it is probable that the person to be baptised went down the steps into the water only up to about the waist.

The significance of baptism was often also emphasised by images and inscriptions round the font, the most constant being a reminiscence of Psalm 42, as inscribed at Potterne (p. 225), either by the text or by the depiction of a hart or two harts drinking. A commentary by Augustine makes the point clear that the verse is to be understood as '... the cry of those who, being as yet

catechumens, are hastening to the grace of the holy font. Wherefore this psalm is usually chanted on these occasions' (Davies 1962, 34). A further symbolic reference to the struggle of the hart with the serpent is depicted on a mosaic in the baptistery at Henchir Messaouda (*ibid.*, 35, fig. 4). In this story, which is contained in the Bestiary literature of the west, the hart, in order to destroy his old enemy, the serpent, would blow water at him through a fissure in rock, then having victoriously driven him from his hiding place was consumed with thirst, but having slaked it in a stream was rejuvenated. This story with its reference to the obligation of the baptised to fight the forces of evil was obviously known to the Anglo-Saxon carver of the Melbury Bubb font (see catalogue p. 105).

Although originally baptism was solely administered by bishops and only at Easter and Pentecost, as Cramer says, 'The Easter–Pentecost ruling remained in force until the twelfth century and beyond, but certainly from the sixth century, we begin to see signs in the legislative documents of the competing desire to baptize children, and especially sickly babies, as early as possible (*quamprimum* ...)' (Cramer 1993, 138). This was certainly the case in England: the Laws of Ine (688–726) specify there must be baptism within thirty days (Whitelock 1979, 399); the Canons of Edgar (1005–8) dictate baptism within seven days of birth (Whitelock *et al.* 1981, 319, ch. 15); and Ælfric's pastoral letter for Wulfsig III, bishop of Sherborne (dated 993–5) states that the priest must baptize an unbaptized child 'in haste, so that it does not die heathen' (*ibid.*, 210, ch. 71); see also Morris 1991, 15–16. Children could hardly have been taken quickly to the few widely dispersed episcopal centres, and in western Wessex before the beginning of the tenth century, Malmesbury was the only episcopal seat; so that, even if the head minsters were baptismal centres also, travel within the specified time could have been difficult. In Ælfric of Winchester's letter to Wulfstan (Whitelock *et al.* 1981, 250, ch. X) in the first decade of the eleventh century, he says: 'And I believe that if you see a child about to die and, taking up some water, you say, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit may this water be blessed for baptism", and, taking up the child, you say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", and if the child comes up out of the water alive, he is saved' (Cramer 1993, 139). It is clear from this and other references that baptism by immersion was still practised, at least for infants, but even if the water could be blessed for immediate use, as today, only bishops could bless the chrism for the anointing and this would be passed on from the major to the subordinate churches. So King Edgar's privilege for Glastonbury states: 'At Easter the

latter [the abbot of Glastonbury] shall receive the chrism of sanctification and holy oil from the Bishop of Wells, as is the custom, and distribute them to his churches' (Scott 1981, 125). Royal monasteries such as Glastonbury or Bath were places for assemblies and lay meetings (see Chapter I above) and in this function did not differ from the *villae regales*, so they would be suitable 'baptismal places' in the terms Richard Morris suggested (Morris 1991, 20–4).

Despite the continuance of the edict that only bishops could administer baptism, the splitting-off of the rite from that of confirmation by the eighth century could have distanced it from the bishop; and the fact that, once mass conversions were over, the most pressing pastoral need was the baptism of children, may explain the lack of static fonts even in the major churches of Anglo-Saxon England. Nevertheless the provision of fonts may have become more frequent by the late tenth/early eleventh century. C. A. Jones has noted that usages of the Old English word *fant*, font, 'cluster in the later Old English period, with a majority in the writings of Ælfric (d. ca. 1010), followed by Wulfstan (d. 1023)'; and that as a translation of the Latin *fons* and *fons baptismi* or in a new context, 'it is clear that a loan-word *fant* does not appear among the alternatives adopted in translations or glosses from the Alfredian and earlier periods' (Jones 2001, 190).

On the Continent, where there had been large early Christian baptisteries, these continued to be used, but in England the construction of separate buildings and even adjuncts to churches may have been rare, and as simple as the Potterne wooden building which has been interpreted as a baptistery (Davey 1964). There is no actual link between that building and the surviving font from the church however, and indeed it has been recently suggested by John Blair that neither the building nor the mark of the font base in it 'is much earlier than c. 1100' (Blair 2005, 460–1). Here the stone font is accepted as pre-Conquest (see catalogue entry p. 224), and the survival of a font with an inscription which is in the mainstream of the ancient tradition of baptismal theology, in a church of unknown status such as Potterne, as well as a font in the bishop's church of Wells, is reasonably an indication of the increasing numbers of such monuments in Anglo-Saxon England. This may have come about, as Morris suggested, partly as a by-product of a more regularised parish system; noting that by the eleventh century there were more resident parish clergy, although the superior churches 'retained control over the provision of chrism to lesser churches' (Morris 1991, 18). This is illustrated by the reference above to the hierarchy of power whereby Glastonbury obtained the chrism from the bishop of Wells to distribute to its own dependencies.