



St Swithun's Church, Combe

St Swithun's Church in Combe, West Berkshire, is a charming Grade 1 Norman church situated at the south-west end of the village, adjacent to Combe Manor, where there is a switchback bend in the road.

The church dates from the second half of the 12th century. The chancel was rebuilt and widened in the 13th century, and there were further alterations in later centuries, the most notable being in the 17th century when additions were made to the interior. There is a plaque bearing the date 1652 above the entrance to the porch at the south entrance which was added at that time. The arch above the south entrance is made up of 12th century stones, evidence that material from the original building was re-used in this refurbishment.

The rural character of the church is enhanced by its exterior of flint, with its square two-stage tower clad in oak shingles over the flint; a tiled pyramidal roof crowns the tower. Inside, little of its earlier centuries now remains. The east window, slightly offset, dates from the 13th century. The base of the circular-bowl font is mid-14th century. In the bell tower are three bells: the treble bell dates from the pre-Reformation and bears the inscription *Sancte Laurenti* (St Lawrence was a famous martyr of Rome who cared for the poor and needy and is among the saints mentioned in the First Eucharistic Prayer at Mass); the tenor bell was founded in 1616 and bears the inscription *Give thanks to God*; and the third bell was added in 1831. The simplicity of the interior adds to the charm of this small country church. A guide inside the church provides further details of its architecture,

The church takes its name from an Anglo-Saxon bishop of Winchester who after his death was revered for miracles. The feast day of St Swithun (his name is spelt variously) is 15th July, and according to English folklore if it rains or is dry on St Swithun's Day determines whether it will rain or stay dry for the next 40 days.

The footpath which passes the entrance to the churchyard leads to spectacular bluebell woods in the spring.