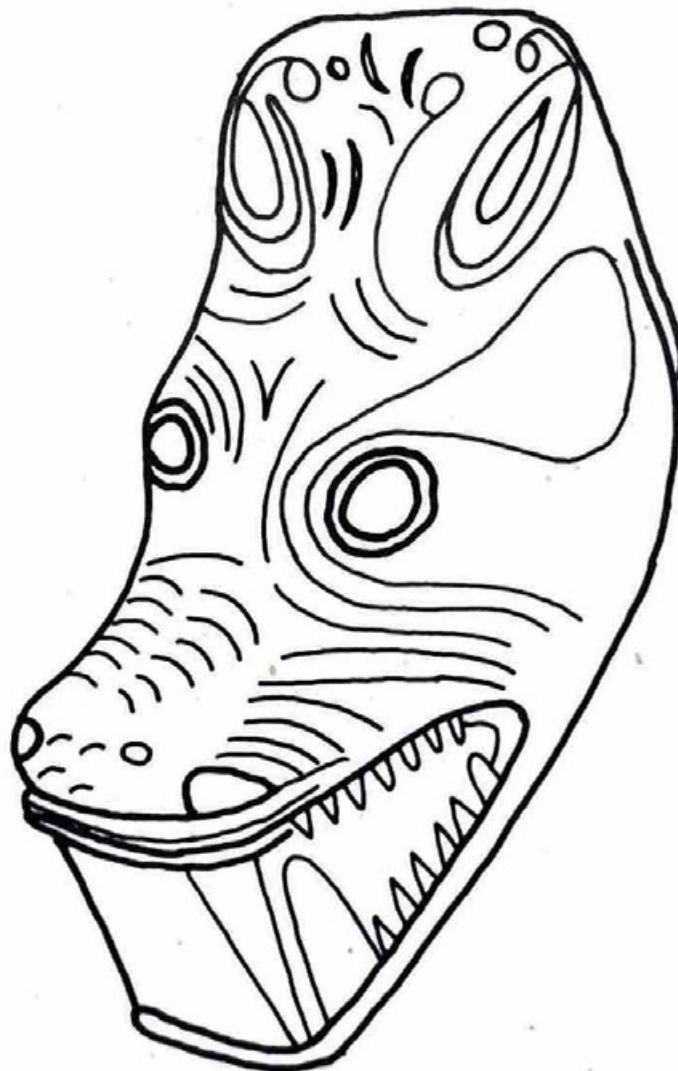


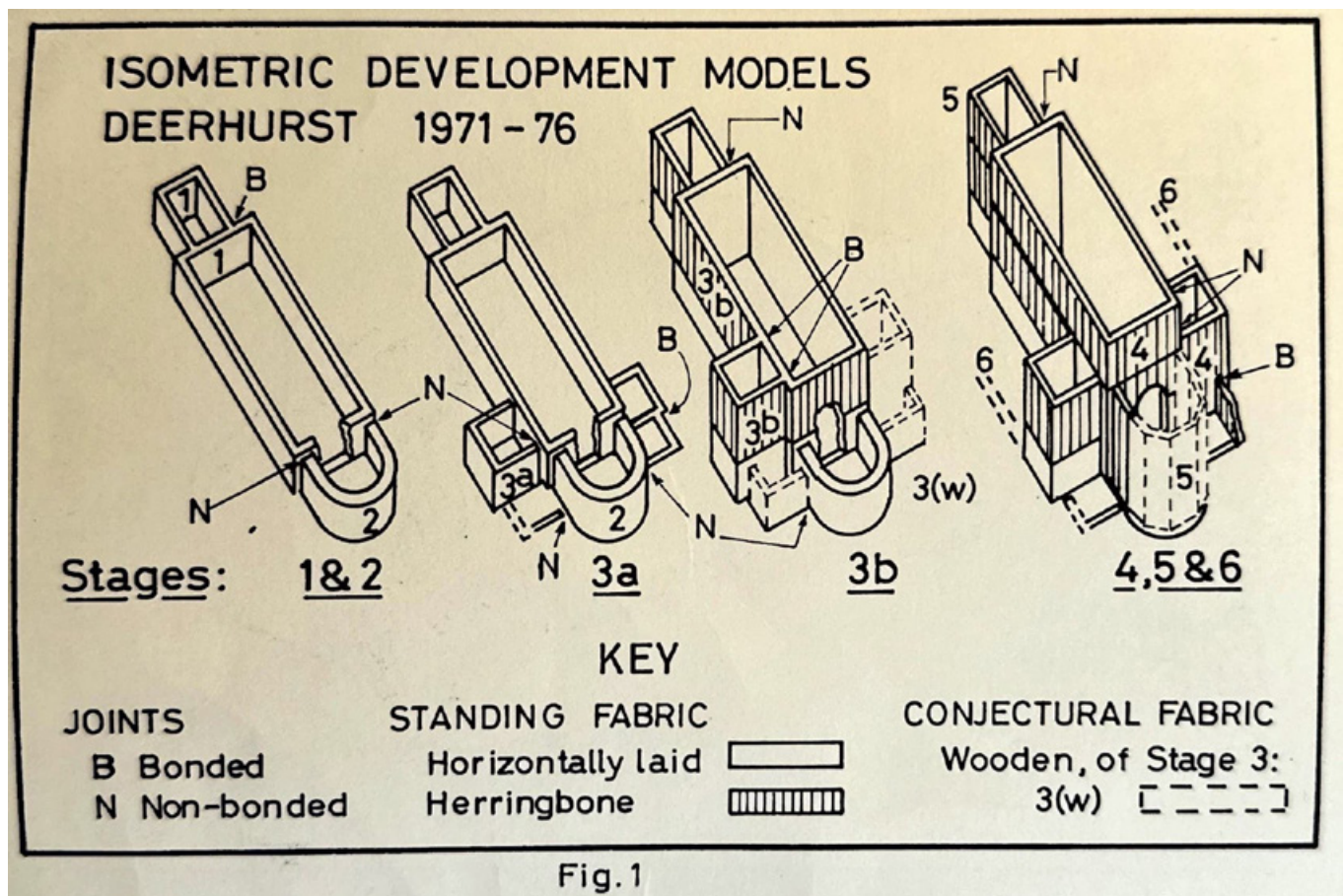
DEERHURST STUDIES I

THE ANGLO-SAXON FABRIC

1971-76

H. M. TAYLOR 1977





Introduction

The important early fabric of Deerhurst church has been studied for well over a century, by a succession of scholars; but full agreement has not yet been reached about the precise form of the first stone church or its date, or even about the sequence in which further cells were added to it. In the absence of contemporary written records it may well never be possible to be certain about the date of the first stone church; but careful study of the fabric and its surroundings should settle the sequence in which further cells were added, although it may not define all details of their form. Unfortunately much of the information latent in the fabric is hidden underground or beneath Victorian plaster.

The present studies

In 1971 archaeological excavations were begun in the area of the ruined apse as a research project of the University of Birmingham under the direction of Mr P. A. Rahtz, who also initiated a complete survey of the churchyard and its monuments. In 1973 the investigations were extended, as a research project of the Society of Antiquaries and the Council for British Archaeology, under the joint direction of Dr L. A. S. Butler, Mr Rahtz, and Dr Taylor; excavations have been made in the six areas shown in Fig. 2; and plaster has been stripped from two areas of the main walls at the E and W of the present N aisle.

The notes which follow are mainly concerned with the standing fabric of the church. A full report of all aspects of our investigation will be published at the conclusion of the work, which is still in progress; meanwhile, interim reports have been published as listed in the bibliography on p. 16.

Acknowledgements

For permission to carry out this work on the church we are indebted to the Chancellor of the Diocese and to the Parochial Church Council. To them and to the parishioners who gave us willing support we wish to record our deep gratitude. Funds to cover the cost have been provided in part by ourselves and in the main by the British Academy, the Society of Antiquaries, and the Universities of Birmingham and Leeds, to all of whom we are deeply grateful.

Evidence from the fabric

The sequence in which a building developed often shows itself in one or other of the following ways, or by combinations of them:

- By bonding of walls, as an indication that they were built at the same time; or by straight joints, as an indication of separate building phases.
- By marked changes in fabric, whether by different mortars, or by different sizes or shapes of stone or different modes of laying them.
- By changes in architectural style of features such as doorways or windows.
- Information under all these heads has been recorded both by photographs and also by plans and elevations at a large enough scale to show individual stones. This gives an immediate visual record of changes in fabric such as can be seen even at the much smaller scales of Figs. 4 and 5 where sporadic herringbone fabric can be seen above the level of 16 metres whereas all the lower masonry is horizontally coursed. Fig. 4 also shows very clear straight vertical joints on either side of the west porch. The original large-scale drawings also allow a visual record to be made of types of mortar and geological types of the stones.

Bonding or no bonding

Ground floor and foundations

The outside of the church is free of plaster, and there is little difficulty in seeing that from the ground upwards there is no bonding in the first storey between the side walls of the main rectangle and the E walls of the N and S porticus. The excavations of 1971–73 showed that the same was true for the foundations of these walls, and that there was likewise no bonding between the foundations of the apse and those of the E wall of the main rectangle or the E walls of the NE and SE porticus. Accordingly gaps have been shown at these places in the plan of Fig. 2; and in Fig. 1 the letter N has been used to show that there is no bonding. The excavations of 1971–73 showed that the foundations of the N and NE porticus are bonded where they meet, as shown by the letter B in Fig. 1, and the same can be seen above ground where the fragmentary survivals of the N wall of the NE porticus join the E wall of the N porticus. Beside the W wall of the nave, as is shown in Fig. 2, the side walls of the W porch have been cut away at ground level by later arches, and it has until recently been thought that no evidence could be found to show whether or not the lower storey of the porch had ever been bonded to the nave. But removal of an area of plaster from the W wall in 1976 disclosed a distinctive tear-away scar to show where the N wall of the porch had originally been bonded to the nave.

Deductions from this evidence

Fig. 1 shows how all this evidence suggests that Stage 1 of the present standing stone fabric consisted of the main rectangle and the W porch; only later was a stilted semicircular apse added as Stage 2, not bonded to the earlier E wall. A chancel-arch must have been broken through the E wall at this time, but it was most probably narrower than the present arch, and there is no evidence for its size or character. Still later the foundations of the N and NE porticus were added as a single unit, bonded together, but not bonded either to the main rectangle or to the

apse. These are shown as part of Stage 3a and so also (by inference from symmetry) are the standing walls of the lower storey of the S porticus and the surviving E foundation of the SE porticus. It should, however, be noted that we cannot be as certain about the sequence of foundations on the S side as on the N because the S wall of the SE porticus is inaccessible beneath the buildings of Priory Farm.

First-floor walls

The first-floor walls tell a different story. Those of the W porch could be seen in 1975 to be butted against the W wall of the nave, where the letter N shows them as not bonded in Stage 3b of Fig. 1. The E wall of the S porticus can be seen in the re-entrant external angle to be bonded to the S wall of the main rectangle up the whole height of the first storey as shown by the letter B, and in sharp contrast to the unbonded lower storey. It therefore follows that the first-floor walls of the S porticus were erected in the same phase of building as those of the main rectangle. The N porticus tells yet a different story: its E wall can be seen both outside and inside to be totally unbonded to the N wall of the main rectangle up the whole of its height (ground and upper storeys). The stone walls of the N porticus were therefore built later than the first-floor walls of the main rectangle; but these latter walls contain a large round-headed arch opening to the N porticus, and it is for this reason that the porticus is shown in Fig. 1 with wooden walls in Stage 3b and stone walls later in Stage 4.

The apse

There are two markedly different components forming the apse: a complete curved foundation, and a polygonal superstructure of which only a little more than one bay survives. Below the ground the stilted semicircular plan of the foundation is complete, in horizontally coursed masonry only a few courses high, set in very soft mortar. By contrast the surviving bay of the polygonal apse is set in very hard mortar with occasional areas of herringbone; and the top of the foundation on which it rests is not flat but irregular. All this evidence suggests that the polygonal apse was not built as a continuous operation which included its foundation, but that it is a separate and later feature which used for its foundation the partly ruined walls of the appreciably earlier curved apse.

Bonding of the apse to the main rectangle

We have already seen that no surviving part of the rounded apse is bonded to the main rectangle. Moreover for about two metres above the floor of the church there is no scar to indicate any tearing away of bonded walls either of the original rounded apse or of the later destroyed N wall of the polygonal apse. Up to that level, also, it can be seen that the standing S wall is not bonded to the main rectangle, but above that level it is bonded; and above the same level there is a clear tear-away scar of the N wall of the polygonal apse. All this evidence suggests, first, that the original rounded apse was not bonded to the main rectangle; and, secondly, that the taller and thinner walls of the polygonal apse were regarded as needing the support of bonding in their upper regions. The main rectangle would need some rebuilding as part of the operation of inserting the present tall and wide chancel-arch, and this could well have given opportunity for bonding the upper parts of the walls of the apse.

Decorative panelling of the apse

The polygonal external walls of the apse carried a decorative panelling of pilaster-strips rising from a double plinth to a string-course, above which were gabled areas carrying sculptured panels of which only the well-known angel-slab survives. The lower areas of this decorative panelling are sufficiently elaborate to suggest that by the time the polygonal apse was built the NE and SE porticus had already been demolished. It is for this reason that in Fig. 1 the polygonal apse is shown as Stage 5, to allow time for the N and NE porticus to have been built in Stage 4 and for the latter to be demolished before Stage 5.

Horizontally coursed and herringbone fabric

The presence of considerable areas of diagonally-laid herringbone masonry has long been regarded as an important distinctive feature of the walls of Deerhurst church. But earlier studies have not defined the precise pattern of distribution of this distinctive masonry throughout the church; our studies show that, while it is distributed sporadically through about half the area of Anglo-Saxon walling, it does not occur in foundations, nor in the ground storey (except in the apse and the N and NE porticus), but it is used throughout the upper storeys of the W porch, of the N and S porticus, and of the main rectangle. These facts are shown in summary form in Stages 1 to 5 of Fig. 1. In that figure it should also be noted that Stage 6 is indicated by broken lines which show the later addition of further porticus to the W of the principal N and S porticus; there is no use of herringbone masonry in any of these later porticus.

Time-sequence

We therefore make the deduction that, so far as Deerhurst is concerned, herringbone masonry was not used in the earliest periods of the building, Stages 1, 2 and 3a; that it was used regularly throughout Stages 3b, 4 and 5; and that it had ceased to be used by the time the additional porticus of Stage 6 were added late in the Anglo-Saxon period.

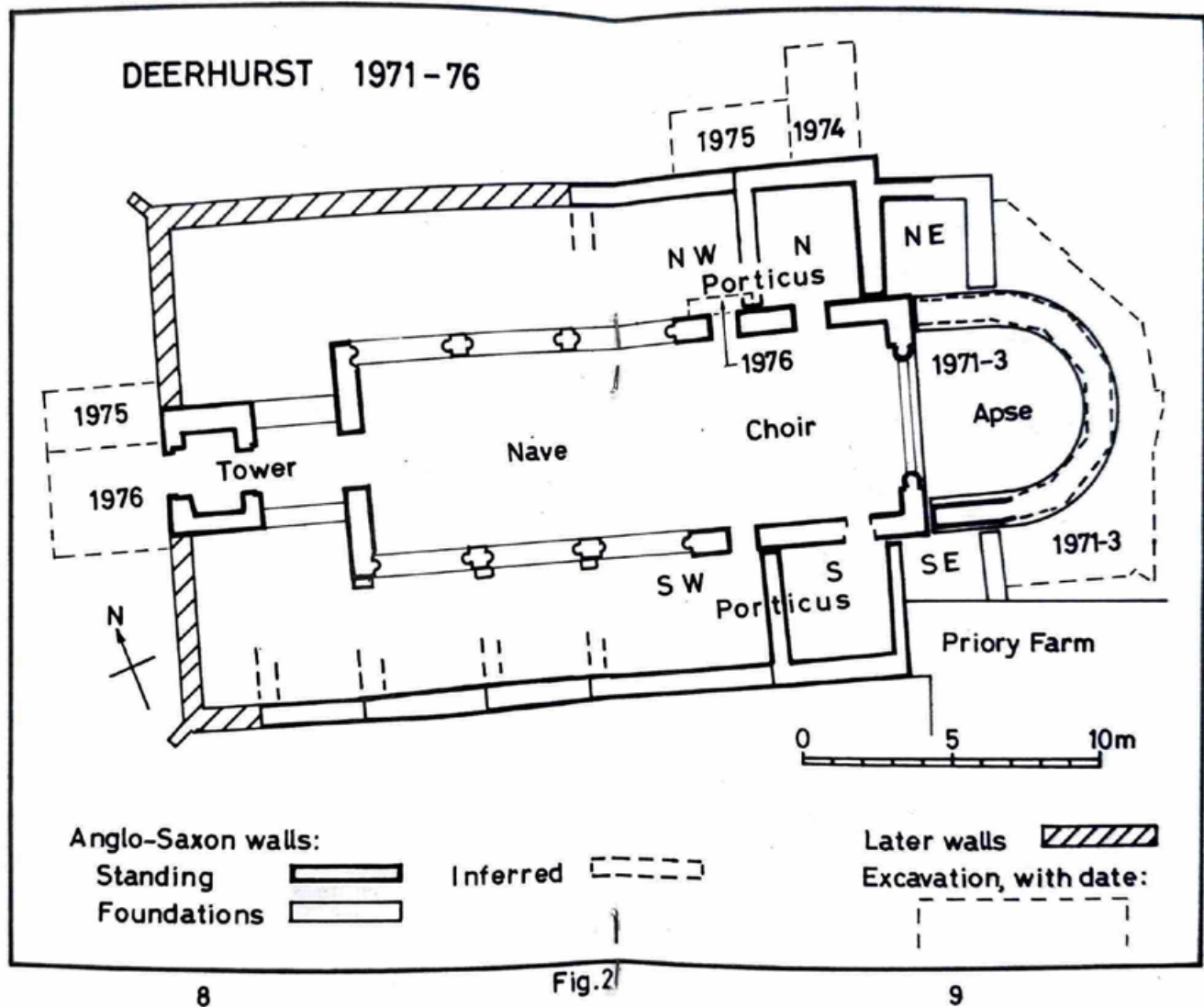
Plaster-stripping

The areas cleared of plaster in 1974 and 1975 confirmed the distribution-pattern of herringbone masonry as shown in Fig. 1, a pattern which had been only tentatively formulated until then because formerly so little of the walls of the main rectangle had been free of plaster. The area cleared in 1974 has been left bare so that these changing patterns of masonry are permanently available for study. Part of this area is shown in Fig. 5 together with the area below the floor, as exposed in the excavation of 1976. A closely similar change from horizontally coursed to sporadic herringbone masonry was shown in the areas cleared of plaster in 1975; these have been replastered, but the evidence is fully recorded in photographs and drawings.

It should particularly be noted that in all the internal areas, as also on the exterior of the W porch as shown in Fig. 4, the change from wholly horizontally coursed to sporadic herringbone fabric takes place at about the same level (16 metres above Ordnance datum), thus giving confirmation to our suggestion that the change was associated with a division between two separate building campaigns.

The great string-course

It might be asked why Fig. 1 shows the herringbone masonry of the main rectangle as having been built in two separate stages (3b and 4). The evidence is not at present decisive, but the great string-course which runs along the sides and W of the main rectangle is hard to explain except as an eaves-course at the top of Stage 3b. We hope that mortar analysis below and above this level will allow us to determine whether or not 3b and 4 represent two separate stages of building of the main rectangle.



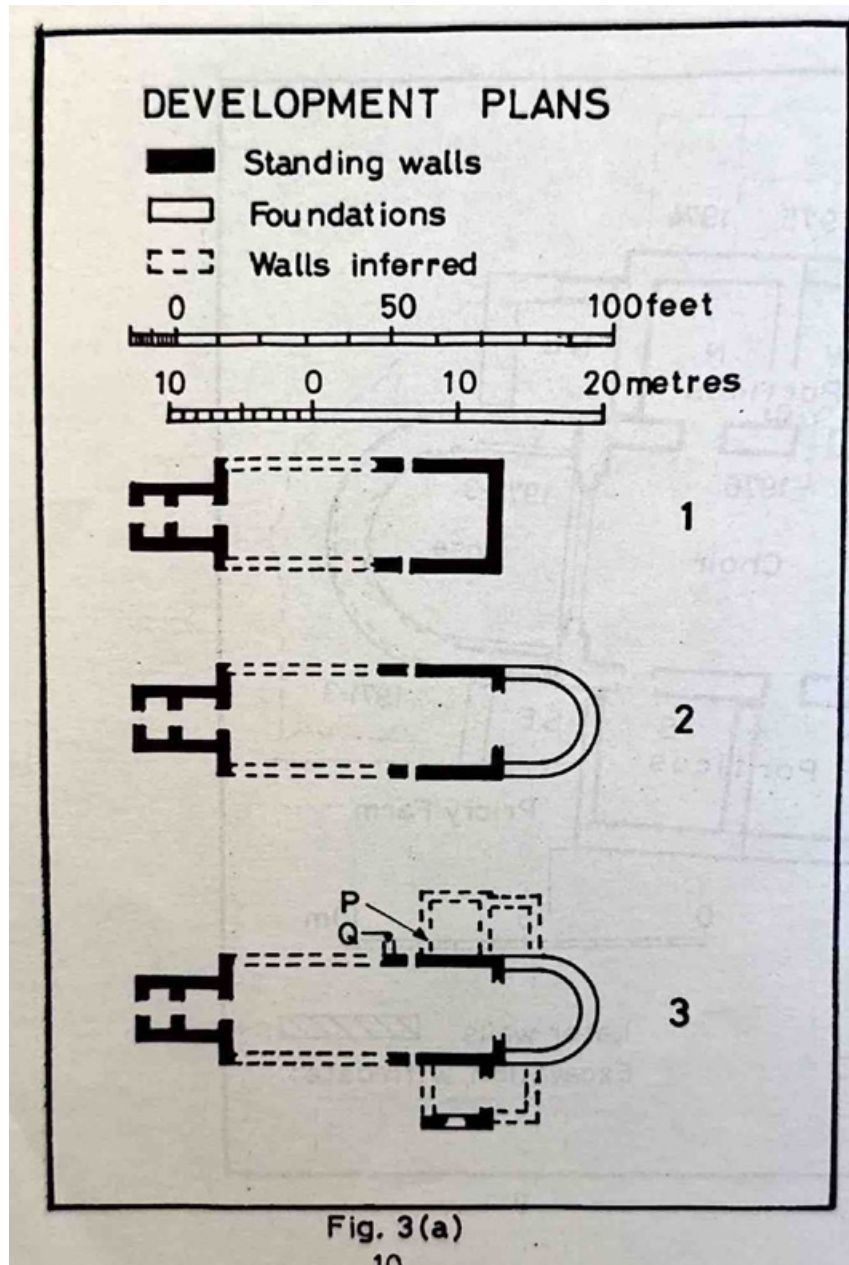
Later western porticus

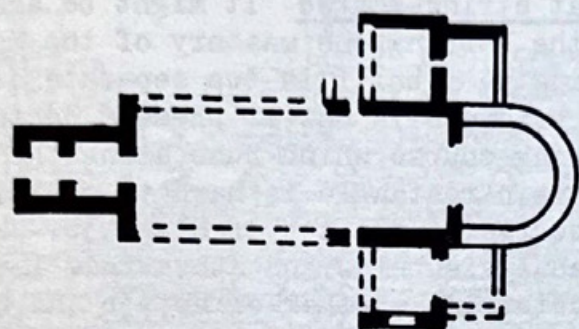
On the N of the church it is very clearly to be seen that a second porticus (of horizontally coursed masonry) was later added to the W of the herringbone walls of the N porticus. There is no straight joint to mark the junction, because the builders robbed the earlier quoin and made a roughly bonded junction; but the excavation of 1975 showed a clear straight joint below the ground, and a clear W quoin for the N porticus. The foundation of the dividing wall between these two porticus was found in the small excavation inside the church in 1976. The evidence of later porticus on the S side of the church is less easy to see externally, but the responds for transverse arches across the S aisle indicate the former existence of walls which probably represent the divisions between these porticus, as is shown in Fig. 2.

Evidence for architectural features

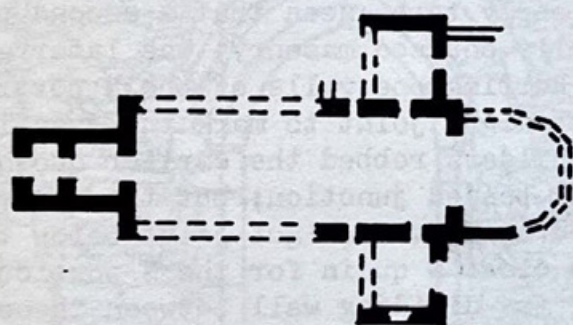
Fig. 5 shows the gabled lower doorway between the N porticus and the main rectangle, with the larger and much

more elaborate arched opening at first-floor level. The much more sophisticated technique of the latter has commonly been accepted as indicating a later date than that of the simple

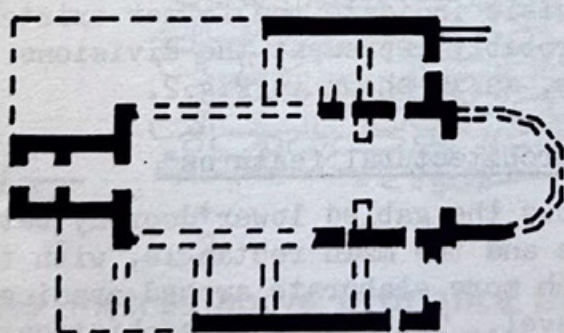




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Fig. 3 (b)

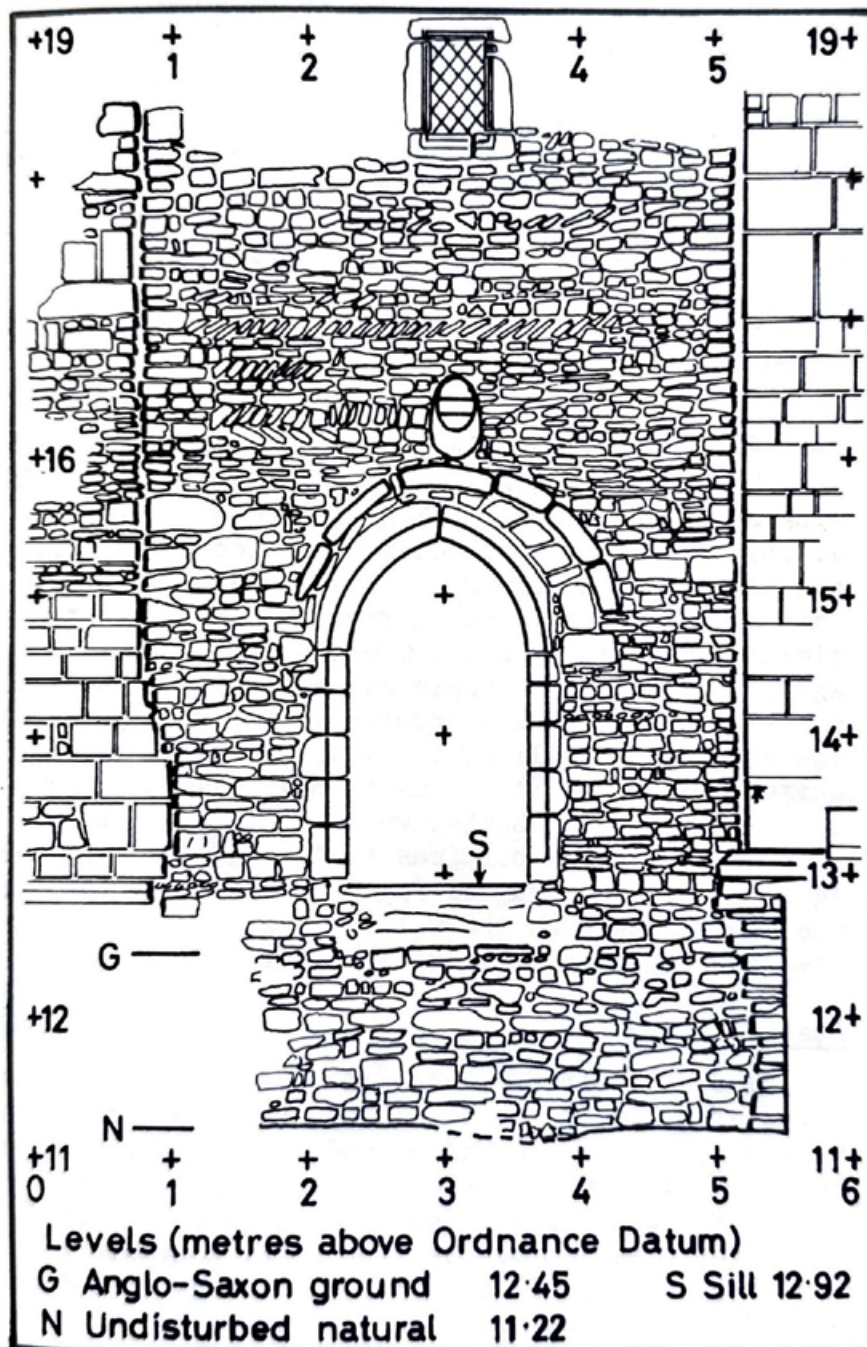


Fig. 4

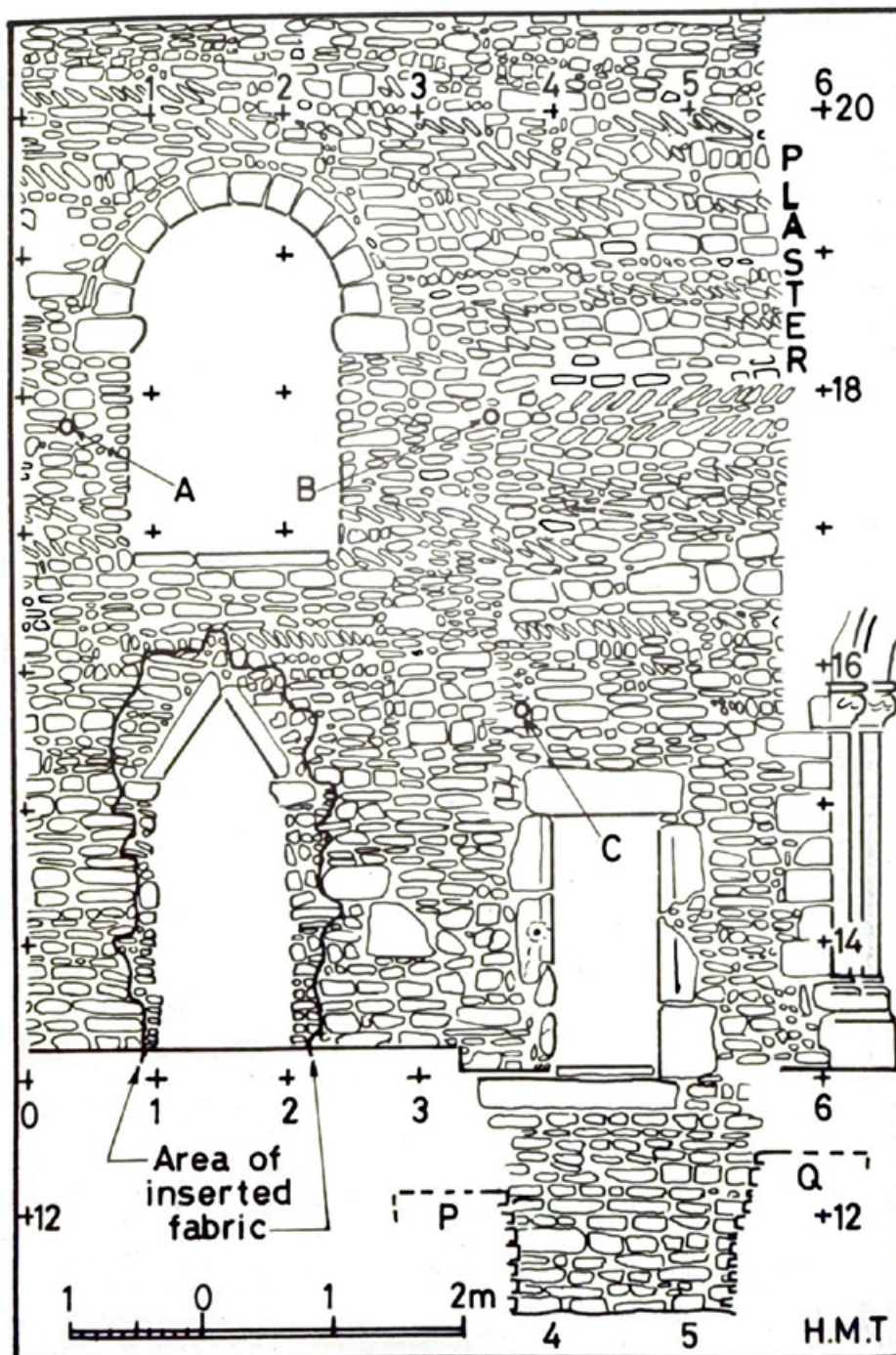


Fig. 5

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(in chronological order)

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L. A. S. Butler, P. A. Rahtz and H. M. Taylor, Deerhurst 1971–74, Antiquaries Journal, 55 (1975), 346–65

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ILLUSTRATIONS ON THE COVER

The somewhat mutilated animal head on the back cover stands above the W doorway as shown in Fig. 4, probably in its original position. The well preserved animal head on the front cover is one of two which were placed in their present positions inside the W porch by the Rev. George Butterworth during the restorations of 1860–62. There is good reason to believe that they originally served as label-stops at the ends A and B of the hoodmoulding which still survives over the W doorway. (See H. M. and Joan Taylor, Anglo-Saxon Architecture, 1965, p. 196).