Investigations at Tackley Church, Oxfordshire, 1981–4: the Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque Phases

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SUMMARY

Tackley church (SP476202) lies near Akeman Street, on a manor held in 1066 by Hugolin, Edward the Confessor's chamberlain, and in 1086 by Hugh, Earl of Chester; Hugh gave the church to the Norman abbey of St. Sever, which held it until after 1158. It contains Romanesque features including a blocked north arcade; a monolithic Romanesque door-head is re-set in the churchyard wall. During 1981–4 the standing fabric was surveyed, and the site of the north aisle partly excavated. The layer underlying the church was rich in carbonised grain and produced one mid-Saxon potsherd. Later contexts produced 4 Romano-British and 13 mid-Saxon sherds. The earliest identified structures were an aisleless nave and a subsequent north porticus, *probably both pre-Conquest. At this date there was a cemetery on the north side of the nave. In the early 12th century a north aisle was added, its arcade and clerestory windows piercing the standing nave wall, and the north* porticus *was demolished; this phase probably also included a matching south aisle, shallow transepts and perhaps a crossing tower. Re-set beak-heads and other architectural details suggest later 12th-century additions, probably including the west half of the standing chancel. Finds sealed by the north aisle include a one-piece ivory comb and a possible fragment of a lead funerary chalice. The possibility that the church was once of minster status is discussed.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are most grateful to the Revd. Michael Hayter and the Revd. Michael Holland (successive rectors), and the Parochial Church Council, for permitting the excavation and survey; to Roger Ainslie for his invaluable help during the excavation; to the Tackley Local History Group, especially Gill Grant and Barbara Gribble, and all others who helped on site; to Tim Morgan for drawing Fig. 2; to Nicholas Palmer for drawing the sections; to Rachel Everett for drawing Fig. 7; to Maureen Mellor for her advice on the pottery; to Richard Gem, Arthur MacGregor and Mark Robinson for their specialist reports; to the County Museum for conserving the finds; to Mark Chamberlain and Brendan Grimley of Bradford University for conducting a resistivity survey before excavation; to A.P. Baggs and the staff of the Victoria History of Oxfordshire for help in analysing the building and for permission to use Fig. 1; and to Richard Gem, Warwick Rodwell and Janet Cooper for their comments.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT[1]

Tackley church is sited on the eastern edge of Wootton hundred, 1.5 km. west of the Cherwell and only 500 m. north of Akeman Street, the Roman road from Cirencester to St. Albans. It stands some 300 m. from Tackley village, all the houses in which are post-medieval. The field immediately east of the church has produced early medieval pottery and traces of buildings;[2] this, together with Anglo-Saxon settlement material from the church site itself (below, p. 40–1), suggests a shift of focus.

The Domesday manor (about two-thirds of the later parish)[3] was near two important royal estates. West and south-west lay the Woodstock/Wootton complex, frequented by kings from at least Æthelred II's reign.[4] Eastwards across the Cherwell was Kirtlington, Domesday royal demesne and mentioned as a royal vill in 943–7.[5] It is conceivable that the Cherwell became a boundary relatively late, and that Woodstock and Kirtlington are remnants of a much larger royal demesne spanning central Oxfordshire. Even discounting this conjecture, Tackley's location suggests the possibility that it may have split away from the Woodstock/Wootton group at some date not very long before 1066.

The Domesday entry gives this idea some support. In 1086 Tackley was held by Hugh, Earl of Chester, and under him by one Robert, but the 1066 lord had been 'Hugh the chamberlain'.[6] This was almost certainly Hugolin (a Frenchman to judge from his name), Edward the Confessor's chamberlain and one of his most important servants.[7] Westminster Abbey, where he was buried, remembered him as 'a thegn, the principal chamberlain of St. Edward the king, always devoted to God, and among all the magnates of this realm Edward's most loyal knight'. Tackley was the most valuable of Hugolin's recorded manors,[8] worth £8 p.a. in 1066. It seems very likely that he acquired it from his patron the king, by a grant out of royal demesne.

Tackley church and its glebe were separated from the manor shortly before 1086, when Earl Hugh re-founded the abbey of St. Sever (Vau-de-Vire, Calvados) and endowed it with the churches and tithes of numerous English manors, Tackley among them.[9] The absence of a separate Domesday entry is not surprising, for the Oxfordshire circuit rarely recorded churches. St. Sever was still holding the church in 1158, but by 1200 it had reverted to the manor.[10] In the later middle ages 'the living, comprising tithe and glebe (2 yardlands in 1634), was one of the richest in the deanery and was valued at £12 a year gross in 1254, at £16 in 1291, and at £19 9*s*. 4½*d*. in 1535'.[11]

[1] For unreferenced statements in this section and further information, see *V.C.H Oxon.* xi, 194–208.

[2] J. Bond in D. Hooke (ed.) *Medieval Villages* (O.U.C.A. Monograph 5, 1985), 121.

[3] Akeman Street was the late Anglo-Saxon boundary between Tackley and Whitehill: *V.C.H Oxon.* xi, 194–6, and above, pp. 16–17.

[4] Law-codes of 978 × 1008 and ?1008 × 1016 (I and IX Atr.) were issued at Woodstock. Wootton itself had been granted away by King Edgar in 958 (W. de G. Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, iii (1893), No. 1042), but was royal land again by the time of Domesday Book (*V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 400).

[5] *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 400; *The Will of Æthelgifu*, eds. D. Whitelock, N. Kerr and Lord Rennell (Roxburghe Club, 1968), 40–44. For Kirtlington as a royal vill in 977, see *English Historical Documents* I, ed. D. Whitelock (2nd edn., 1979), 230.

[6] *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 409.

[7] F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (1970), 165–6; F. Barlow, *The English Church 1000–1066* (2nd edn., 1979), 122–4; F.E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (1952), 324, 544, 564.

[8] The others are Dedworth at £4 (*V.C.H. Berks.* i, 365) and Pillerton Priors at £1 (*V.C.H. Warwicks.* i, 308). In King Edward's time Hugolin had also bought the ex-minster church of Huntington from two local priests (*V.C.H. Hunts.* i, 354). There seems to have been a Westminster tradition that he gave Deene (Northants.) to the Abbey (P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography* (1968), No. 1039).

[9] *Cal. Docs. France*, 216; D. Matthew, *The Norman Monasteries and their English Possessions* (1962), 12, 53–4.

[10] *Cal. Docs. France*, 216; *Rot. Cur. Reg.* (Rec. Comm.), ii, 200; *Rotuli Hugonis de Welles*, ii (Linc. Rec. Soc. vi, 1913), 4.

[11] *V.C.H. Oxon.* xi, 205.

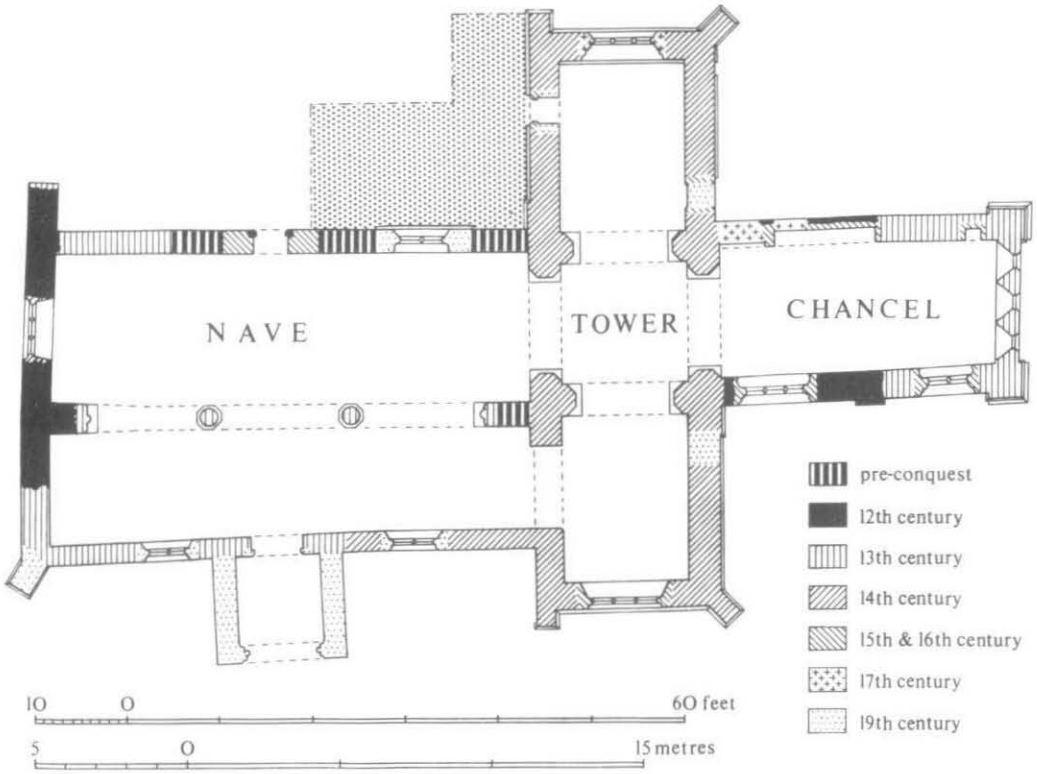


Fig. 1. Tackley parish church as existing, with interpretation of standing phases. (Reproduced with amendments from *V.C.H. Oxon.* xi, 207.) The excavated area, in the angle between the nave and north transept, is shown stippled. *Scale 1:250.*

THE STANDING FABRIC

The architectural development of Tackley church (Fig. 1) has been recently and fully discussed in the *Victoria County History*.[12] Features later than the 12th century will therefore only be described here when they are necessary for understanding the early phases.

The two elements of Romanesque or earlier date are the nave, retaining inserted north arcade arches and clerestory windows, and the west half of the chancel, retaining one pilaster-buttress on the south side. Probably in the early 12th century, when the north aisle was built, the nave was extended westwards by one bay; the thicker walling of this extension distinguishes it both from the original fabric and from later additions. At an unknown date the north aisle was demolished, leaving an abnormally long buttress, like the stub of a truncated wall, extending north from the west end of the nave. The north arcade was blocked, a doorway which probably derives from the outer aisle wall being re-set in the blocking. In the 13th century the south aisle was rebuilt, the new arcade destroying any older one though leaving the original walling above; at about the same time the chancel was extended eastwards. In the 14th century the central tower and transepts were rebuilt, with

[12] Ibid. 206–7.

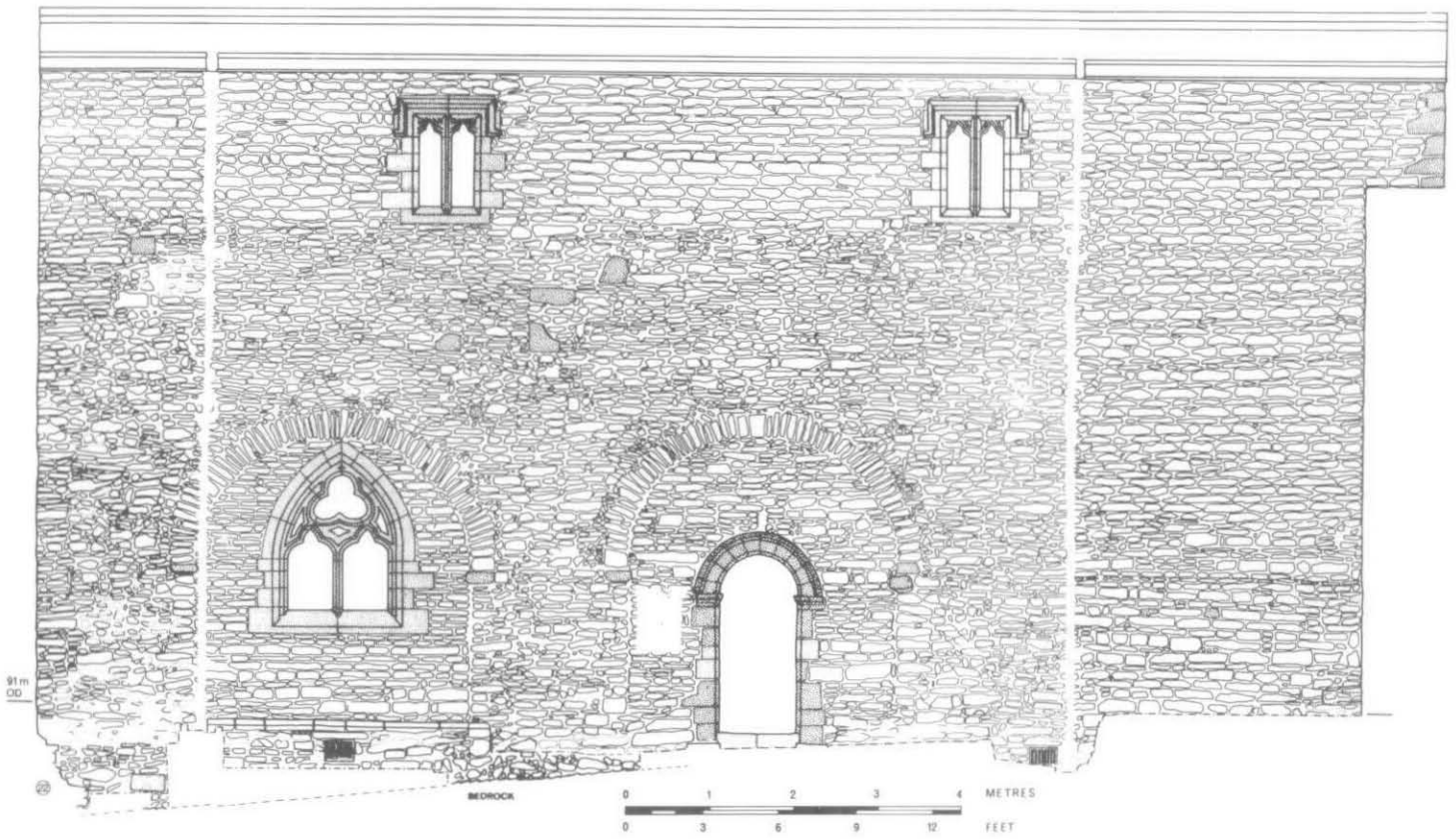


Fig. 2. North wall of nave: external elevation, drawn by T. Morgan. *Scale 1:90.*

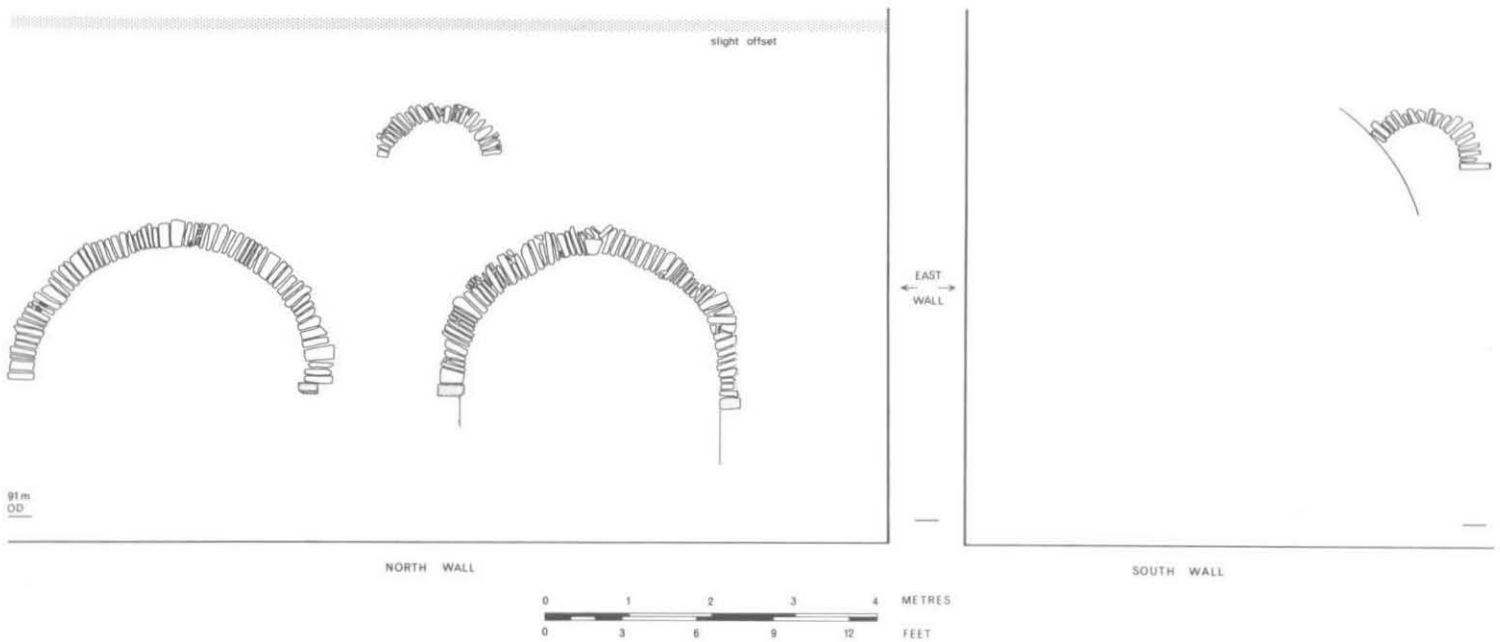


Fig. 3. North and south walls of nave: internal elevations, showing Romanesque features left exposed after Victorian plastering. Later features are not shown. *Scale 1:90.*

the new tower skilfully aligned to reduce the visual impact of a deflection between nave and chancel.

The two blocked arches of the north arcade are visible both externally and internally (Figs. 2 and 3). They are extremely simple, built of rough rubble voussoirs and with solid walling between them instead of a pier or column. The imposts have chamfered lower arrises and are finely cut, with a smooth, almost burnished finish. This contrast between the rough arches and the well-finished imposts suggests that the former were originally rendered. The wall west of the two remaining arches has been rebuilt, removing any evidence that may have existed for a third.

Two blocked clerestory windows, one on each side of the nave and both towards the east, can be seen internally (Fig. 3). The rough construction, with small rubble voussoirs, resembles that of the arcade arches. The north window appears externally as a blocked opening, as wide outside as in; re-used in its external quoins are two pieces from the dressed outer frame of a single-splayed round-headed window (Fig. 2). It is possible that the original opening was double-splayed, though it seems more likely that a single-splayed window was widened in the 13th or 14th century, and then blocked when the existing higher clerestory was added in the 15th century.

The two phases of the chancel can be distinguished from each other by a deflection in both walls (making the plan slightly 'boat-shaped'), and by the rougher walling of the western half. The pilaster-buttress in the middle of the south wall belongs to the earlier phase, for it lacks a string-course which runs around the eastern half including its two clasping-buttresses (Pl. 1). Originally the chancel may have comprised a square bay terminating in an eastern apse, the latter replaced in the 13th century by the square-ended extension. This arrangement, and the well-squared quoins of the buttress, suggest a date well into the 12th century and seem technically more sophisticated than the early work in the nave.

Some *ex situ* fragments should be mentioned here. Of these the most important is a monolithic semicircular door-head (Fig. 8), now re-set over a doorway in the west boundary wall of the churchyard. The technique is Anglo-Saxon but the mouldings are Romanesque and post-Conquest (below, p. 41–2); so elaborate a piece suggests patronage on a level unusual for ordinary village churches. The doorway re-set in the blocking of the north arcade (Fig. 2)[13] is by contrast pure Norman in its use of small, finely-cut voussoirs, though chronologically it need be scarcely later than the other. Three beak-heads re-set on the south face of the 14th-century tower are probably of *c.*1150–75; together with a strip of lozenge ornament (perhaps a generation or two earlier) built into the west wall of the south transept, and a chevron voussoir built into the chancel arch, they suggest later 12th-century work of some size and richness (Pl. 2).[14]

It was the blocked arches and windows in the nave which first suggested that Tackley church deserved closer study. Their rough construction seemed Anglo-Saxon rather than Norman in character, a suspicion strengthened by the thin (0.78 m.) and thus typically Anglo-Saxon nave walls. Aisled pre-Conquest churches are very rare, and the still more interesting possibility was open that this might be a complex plan with multiple *porticus*. The *V.C.H.* account, compiled at this stage of the inquiry, accordingly suggested that 'the Anglo-Saxon church had a north aisle, or perhaps porticuses'.[15]

In December 1982 the University of Bradford School of Physics and Archaeological

[13] Also illustrated by a photograph in Ibid., opp. p. 17.

[14] We are very grateful to Mr. Jeffrey West for his views on the date of these fragments, which have been adopted here.

[15] *V.C.H. Oxon.* xi, 206.

Plate 1. The external south wall of the chancel, showing the Romanesque walling and buttress (*centre*) abutted by the 13th-century eastwards extension with its string-course (*right*).

Plate 2. Romanesque architectural details, re-set in the external walls of the tower and south transept. *Scale approximately 1:7.*

Sciences conducted a resistivity survey over the site of the demolished north aisle, detecting a hard west-east strip later identified as the footing of the aisle wall. The outer face of the blocked arcade was drawn during the summer of 1983 (Fig. 2). Several small stones packed in around the tops of the voussoirs were now noticed, the first hint that the arches might be later than the wall containing them. The full story, however, was only elucidated by the excavation of part of the lost aisle during 12–18 August 1984. This proved that the aisle and its arcade were a Norman addition, albeit to a pre-Conquest nave, and revealed an intermediate phase: a *porticus* or transept later than the nave but demolished to make way for the aisle.

THE EXCAVATION (phase-plans Figs. 4–5, sections Fig. 6, Pls. 3–5)

An area of *c.* 35 square metres, in the angle between the nave and the north transept, was opened with the aim of finding the demolished north aisle and establishing its relationship with any earlier phases. Total area excavation proceeded until this aim was achieved; a 2-m. section was then cut across the site from north to south to investigate pre-aisle phases, but was itself curtailed through lack of time; otherwise these phases were only seen where cut by later disturbances, mainly in the eastern part of the site. Hence most of the soil-layer (L24) outside the early church, and the pre-aisle graves cut into it, remain unexcavated. The easternmost part of the area was much damaged by service-trenches (F4, F7), a large modern pit (F6) and a soakaway trench around the church walls (F5), all of which made it hard to follow relationships of layers across the site. Another problem was that the pottery groups recovered (which conform to the normal marketing patterns of the Oxford/Deddington area)[16] were very small, giving little scope for statistical analysis. The site records and finds are deposited with the Department of Museum Services at Woodstock.

Plate 3. General view of the excavation, showing the footings almost fully exposed and before the sectioning of the aisle wall footing (F10a). (*North at top of picture.*)

[16] Pers. comm. M. Mellor.

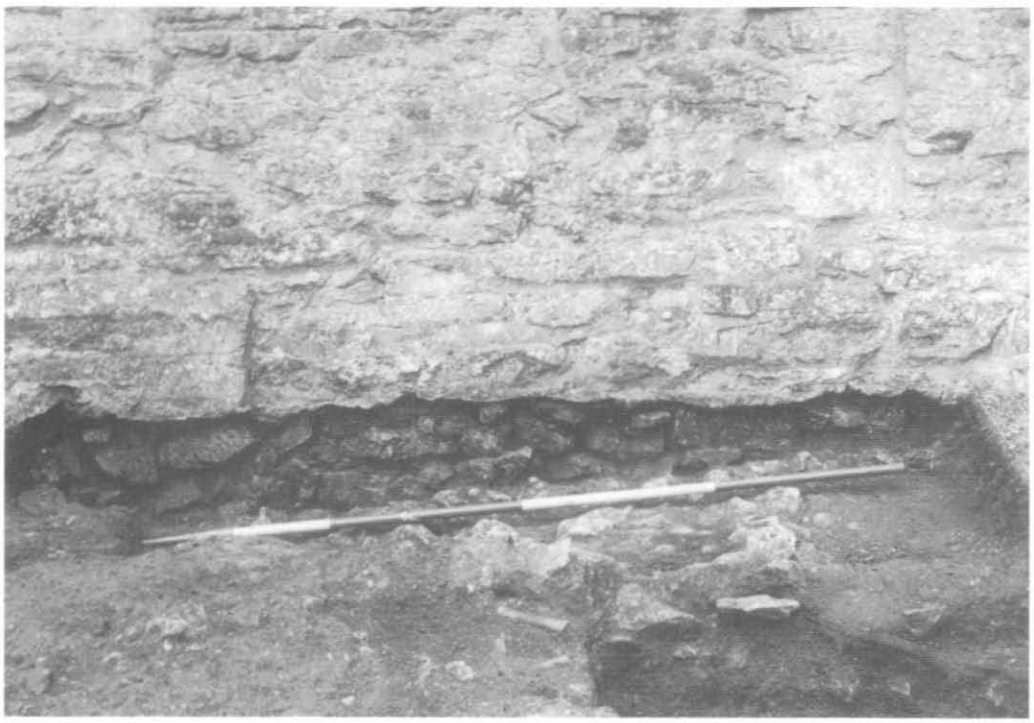


Plate 4. Detail of external north wall of nave during excavation, showing the rubble footing of the pre-Conquest wall continuous under both the central pier and the edges of the arcade arches on either side. Grave (F15) in foreground.

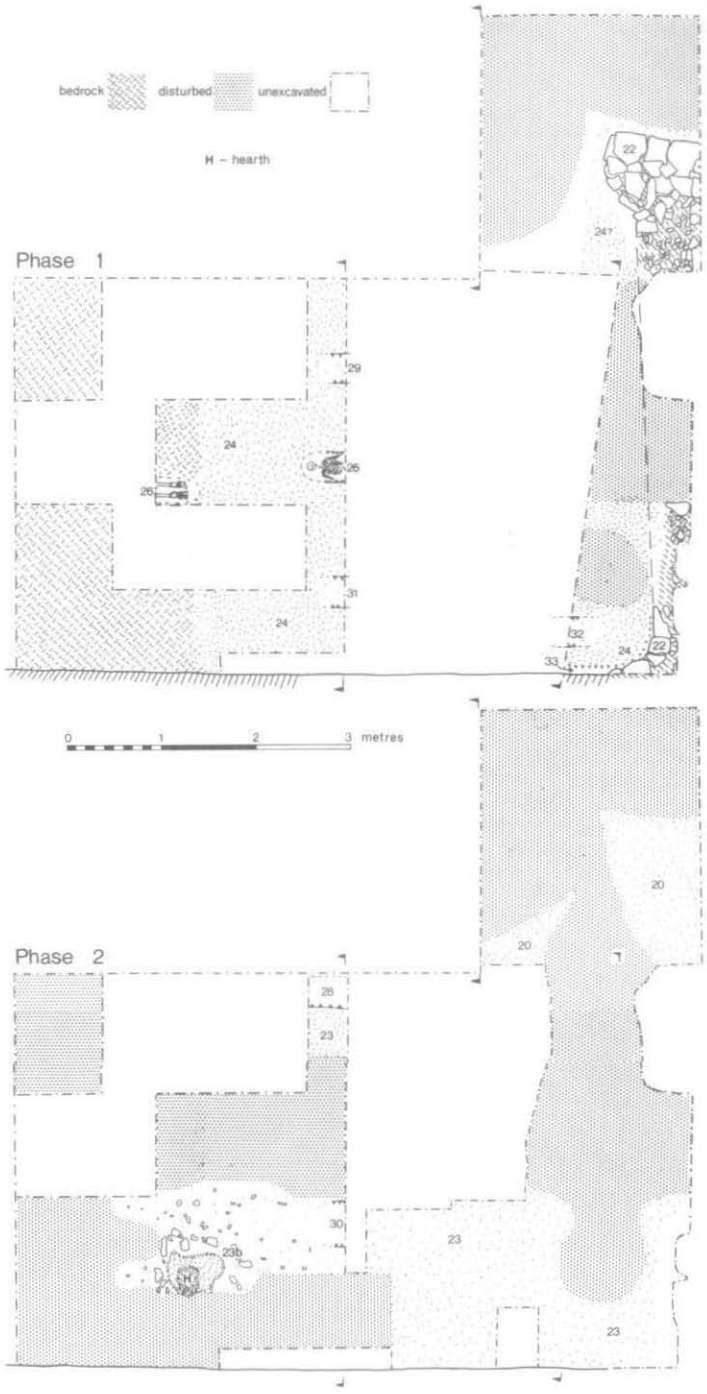
Phase 1: Features pre-dating the building of the north aisle

The ground-level drops naturally by 0.6 m. from west to east in the 7-m. length of the excavation (Fig. 2). The natural subsoil was observed as broken-up limestone rubble containing pockets of sticky green clay. On this lay the earliest man-made deposit (L24), a layer of dark grey-brown clay loam rich in carbonised grain (below, p. 40–1), which survived to a maximum thickness of 30 cm.; it produced one mid/late-Saxon sherd (Group IB/III).

The footing of the standing north wall of the nave cut L24 with a small construction-trench (F33). A section of this footing was cleaned and raked out (Fig. 2, Pl. 4); it consisted of roughly-laid rubble bonded with sandy yellow-brown mortar, and was evidently continuous under both the piers and the arches of the blocked arcade. This confirms the impression given by the standing masonry that the arches were cut through an existing wall.

A north–south footing (F22) on the eastern edge of the excavation, partly overlain by the west wall of the standing north transept, also cut L24. It was rubble-built, with slightly bigger edging stones, and had a pink-brown clayey bonding. This footing (which is interpreted as the west wall of a *porticus* or transept) survived as two disjointed sections, separated by the cut made through it by the aisle wall and its construction-trench (F10 and F11). The northern fragment showed the return of a north wall running off eastwards under the standing transept, with a buttressing protuberance on the corner. The southern fragment was bonded into the standing nave wall, the clayey bonding of F22 changing to the sandy bonding of the nave wall *c.* 40 cm. west of the junction (Fig. 4); at this point the standing wall was rebuilt from footing level upwards in the later middle ages, obscuring the sequence of the bondings.

The north–south section across the site revealed four early graves: F29 and F31 cut from the surface of L24, and F25 and F26 cut by the aisle wall-footing (F10). The contents of the graves were not lifted, and only one skeleton (F25, a child of *c.* 6–10 years old) was examined. An unexcavated feature (F32) near the east end of the nave wall, with a yellow-brown clay loam fill, was also cut from the surface of F24 and may have been another early grave. These graves indicate a cemetery, of unknown size but in at least three rows, on the north side of the pre-aisle church.



Figs. 4 and 5. The excavation: phase-plans. *Scale 1:80.*

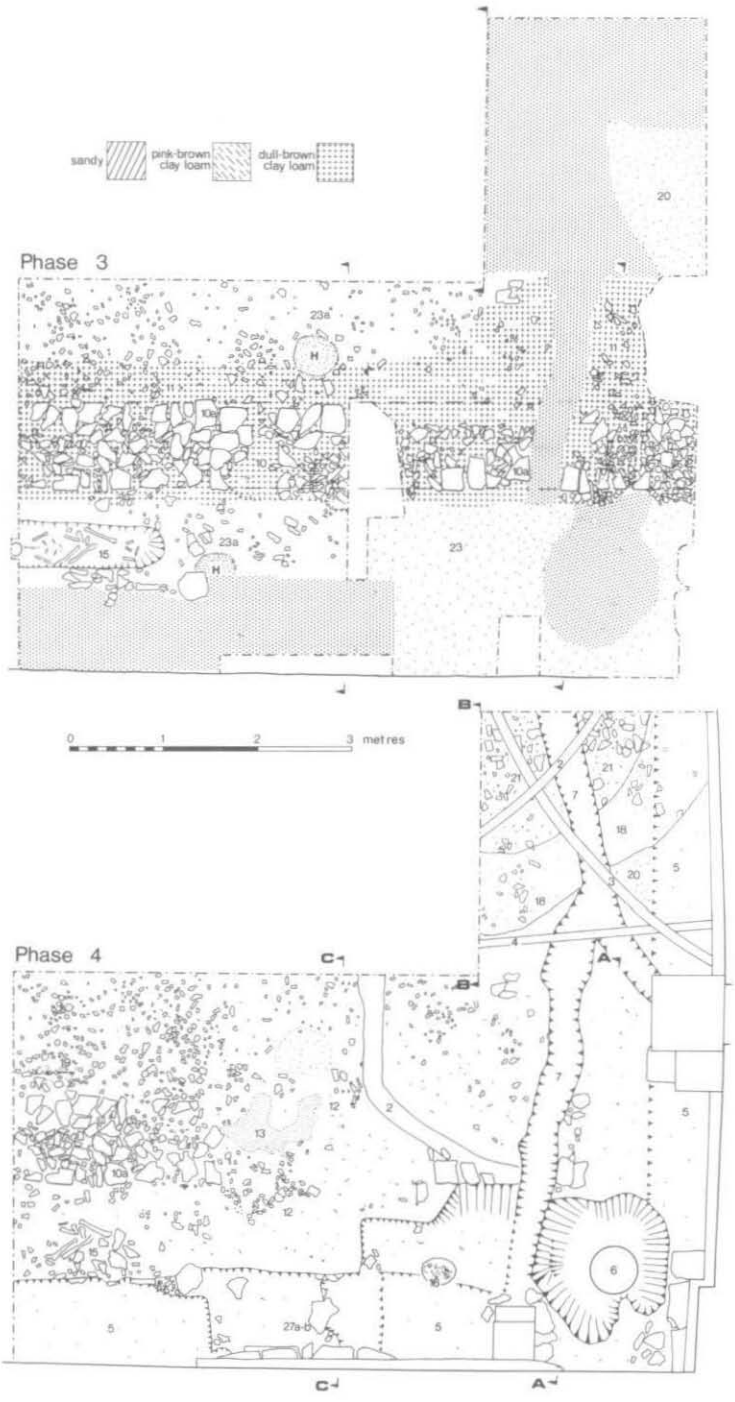

sandy
pink-brown clay loam
dull-brown clay loam
Phase 3
Phase 4
0 1 2 3 metres
A
B
C

Plate 5. The eastern part of the excavation, showing the fragments of the west wall of the former north *porticus* (F22) cut by the aisle wall (F10a).

Phase 2: Features immediately preceding the north aisle

A series of layers above L24 represent a levelling-up of the west–east slope; these deposits, which produced no pottery, should perhaps be interpreted as groundwork for the building of the aisle. L23, a layer of medium-brown clay loam with occasional limestone pieces, was observed overlying L24 in several parts of the site, and increased in thickness from west to east. It abutted the standing nave wall, and overlay graves F29 and F31. The northern section of footing F22 was sealed by a similar layer (L20), which may in fact have been identical with L23 though the relationship was destroyed by a deep service-trench (F7).

On the surface of L23 was a localised deposit of similar clay loam (L23b) containing a hearth; this was roughly circular, of *c.* 50 cm. diameter, and contained run-offs of melted lead and pockets of a silvery powder, probably lead oxide.[17]

Two graves (F28, F30) cut L23, but since they were overlain by rubble spread from footing F10 they may closely pre-date the aisle.

Phase 3: Features contemporaneous with the north aisle

The aisle wall was identified as a rubble-built footing (F10a) with slightly bigger edging-stones, 88 cm. wide; this was founded on a rubble-filled trench (F10), itself cutting a wider, amorphous deposit of similar material (F11) which spread out on the north side of the wall. F10 produced 4 early/mid Saxon sherds (Group III), 6 of Fabric *AC* (Oxford Early Medieval Ware) and 2 of Fabric *Y* (Oxford Medieval Ware); F11 produced 3 early/mid-Saxon sherds (Groups IB and III). Also in F10 was a small ivory comb (below, p. 38–40), possibly disturbed from a grave, and two small lumps of iron-smithing slag. Both F10 and F11 cut L23 and L24; they had the same bonding of dark-brown clayey loam with mortar and gravel traces, and are interpreted as stages in the same building operation. At the east end of the site, F11 spread further north than elsewhere (compare section A with section C); possibly it here represents the sub-footing of a wall returning north from F10a and of the same build.

The crucial relationship of F10 and F11 with F22 was badly damaged by the soakaway trench (F5) around the standing transept, and the small rubble sub-footings of the two walls were practically identical in appearance. However, the difference between the dull-brown bonding of F10/11 (Fig. 5) and the pink-brown bonding of F22 (Fig. 4) demonstrated that F10/11 were cut through F22 (Pl. 5).

A surface spread of rubble from F10 and F11 extended for *c.* 50 cm. on either side of the footing itself. Overlying this spread, on both sides of F10a, was a thin layer of brown clay loam with sand and mortar traces (L23a), which produced 1 R-B greyware sherd, 1 grass-tempered, 1 mid/late-Saxon (Group IB), 2 of Fabric *AC*, 5 of Fabric *Y*, and 1 small sherd of a yellow-glazed tableware (Group III). On the surface of L23a were two hearths, each of *c.* 50 cm. diameter, which produced lead run-offs and a 0.25-kg. lump of melted lead; these were of a similar character to the hearth in L23b.

The absence of aisle floor-layers suggests a break in the stratigraphy, perhaps caused by a terracing-off of the ground-surface after the aisle was demolished. Cut into the rubble spread from F10 on the south side of F10a was a shallow grave (F15), containing a much-disturbed skeleton with 1 R-B sherd and 1 sherd of Fabric *Y*. This may have been a medieval burial within the aisle, though the terracing-off had removed all direct evidence for its context.

Phase 4: Features post-dating the destruction of the north aisle

Overlying the demolished footing F10a was a thin layer of brown clay loam with small stones and mortar (L12); on its surface lay a continuous sheet of thin white plaster (L13) which must have fallen directly from a wall.

Two infant burials (F16 and F19) were of unknown date. At the north-east end of the site was a large undefined feature (F18), cutting L20, which contained yellow-brown loam with mortar and many small limestone pieces; its fill produced fragments of lead window-came, a small bronze hinge (SF5) and an iron buckle (SF6). F18 was itself cut by another undefined feature (F21) containing brown sandy clay loam with limestone pieces. Layers and features 10 to 21 inclusive were sealed by a thin layer of dark-brown sandy clay loam (L9) which covered much of the site; this produced 1 R-B sherd and 8 of Fabrics *AC* and *Y*, but also a glazed mid-13th-century sherd from Brill.

Two thin sandy patches against the nave wall (L27a–b) were probably associated with the post-medieval plinth against the blocking of the easternmost arch. Prominent modern features in the eastern part of the area were service-trenches (F2, F3, F4, F7), the soakaway trench (F5), and a large pit (F6) in the angle of the building in which a copper cauldron had been placed to earth the lightning-conductor. In the north-east corner, a spread of small rubble (L8) overlay F7. The topsoil (L1) produced several pieces of lead window-came. Layers and features 1 to 7 contained a mixture of redeposited sherds, mainly of Fabrics *Y* and *AC* though with an R-B colour-coat fragment in F6 and 4 grass-tempered sherds in F5.

[17] We are grateful to Dr. Kevin Brown for commenting on this material.

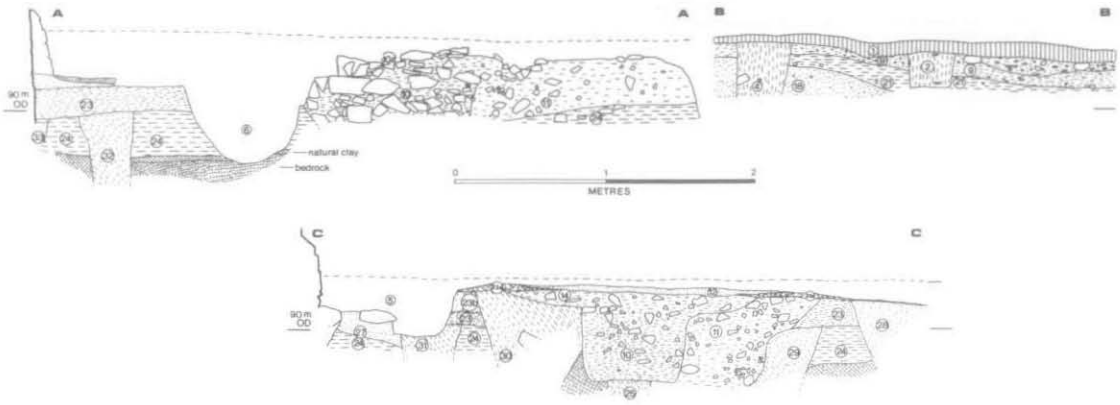


Fig. 6. The excavation: sections (both looking west). Section C-C is reversed. *Scale 1:50.*

SMALL FINDS (Fig. 7)

1. Ivory comb (see note by Mr. MacGregor below). (SF9; context F10, early 12th century.)
2. Small fragment from the rim of a thin-walled lead vessel (original diameter *c.* 8.5 cm.). The outer face is rough from a sandy casting, the inner smooth. The rim has a slightly recessed flange, and its top edge has been trimmed flat after casting. Possibly from a funerary chalice. (Context L23a, early 12th century.)
3. Fragment of cast pewter openwork cusping, presumably late medieval; probably from a ventilator or grille. Mr. Brian Spencer comments that this is probably not part of a pilgrim souvenir. (SF2; context topsoil.)
4. Hinge-plate of a book-clasp or very small buckle, copper-alloy with iron pin. (SF5; context F18, late- or post-medieval).
5. D-shaped iron buckle, pin missing. (SF6; context F18, late- or post-medieval.)
6. Tang of small iron knife, riveted for scale handle. (SF3; context F7, recent.)
7. Straight, flat-headed nail, probably a coffin-nail. (Context F10, early 12th century.) The same context produced the broken point of another; 9 similar nails, slightly shorter (*c.* 4–5 cm.) but with similar broad, flat heads, were found in later contexts (1 in L23a, 4 in F18 and 4 in the topsoil). This evidence suggests that burial in wooden coffins was practised in the 'pre-aisle' cemetery.

Not illustrated: 2 copper-alloy pins (SFF 4 and 7; contexts F18 and F7, late- or post-medieval and recent); 2 pieces of standard H-section lead window-came (SF1, topsoil); 13 lead offcuts and scraps (1 (SF8) in L12, 3 in F18, 9 in topsoil); 22 ordinary iron nails (topsoil); a piece of blue window-glass (F18).

NOTE ON THE IVORY COMB (Fig. 7.1, Pl. 6) By Arthur MacGregor

This object (from F10, the construction-trench of the early 12th-century aisle wall) is a diminutive one-piece comb of elephant ivory, with coarse teeth on one side and fine on the other, measuring 45 × 39 mm. It has been cut as a longitudinal section from the tusk to give maximum strength to the teeth; one of the flat sides is marked by a slight depression, seemingly the edge of the natural pulp cavity within the tusk. In section the comb is lentoid in outline. The teeth are cut at right-angles to the principal plane, and have been sawn at an angle from first one side and then the other, so that each has a pitched base. The reserve on either side is incised with double border lines at the top and bottom and with three ring-and-dot motifs.

An 11th-century date may be suggested on a combination of stratigraphic and typological grounds. Before this time the standard domestic comb was of composite construction, the teeth being cut on a series of antler plates riveted between two connecting plates. Exceptions to this rule are for the most part of the type termed 'liturgical combs' – normally large and elaborately carved prestige items, frequently in elephant or walrus ivory, or in cetacean (whale) bone. From around the beginning of the 11th century, small one-piece combs began to gain favour for everyday use over the composite variety, although a long period of overlap followed. The most commonly-used materials were now bone, boxwood or cattle horn. Numerous examples in bone are known from Scandinavia and from the Baltic coastal areas of Germany and Poland, reproducing all the formal and decorative

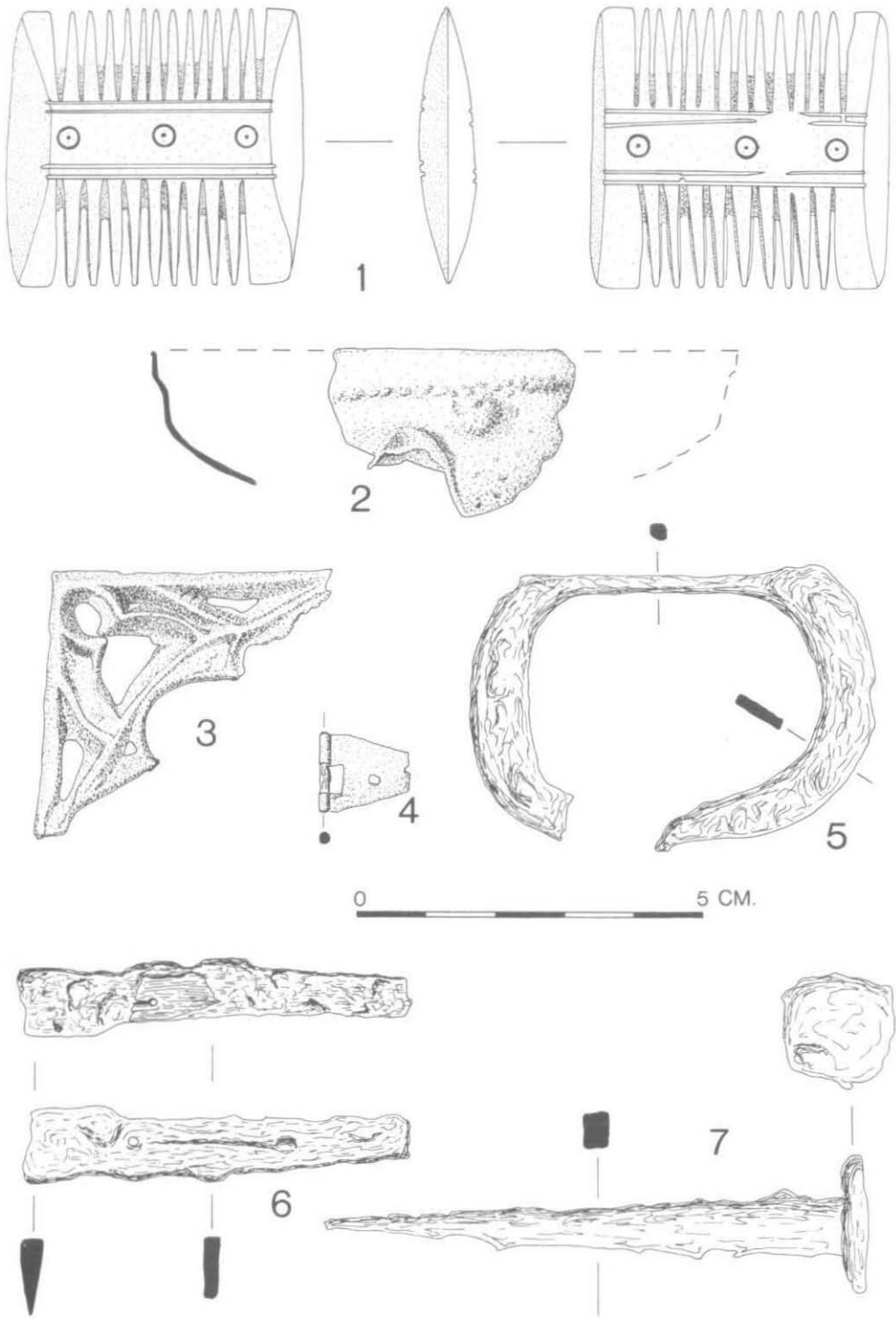


Fig. 7. Small finds. *Scale 1:1.*

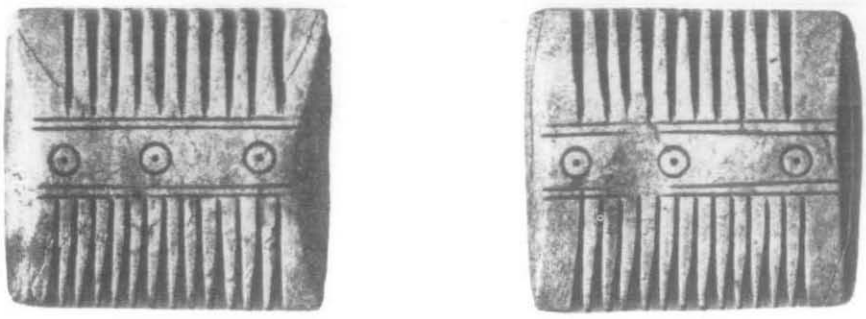


Plate 6. The ivory comb. *Scale 1:1.*

features encountered on the Tackley comb.[18] In England, however, only one such comb has been noted in bone from this period: another very small example found at Wallingford (old Berks., new Oxon.) in 1879. Although no firm stratigraphic relationship is recorded, this was said to have been found at a depth of about 4 feet; objects with it included the well-known walrus-ivory seal inscribed with the names of Godwin and Godgythe, currently dated to the first half of the 11th century.[19] Later in the medieval period, single-piece combs of bone and ivory became more common, tending to adopt a flatter and more slender cross-section with the passage of time and, in the case of ivory combs, exhibiting a more effective method of cutting the teeth in relation to the 'grain' of the ivory.[20]

The Tackley comb, therefore, for all its modest appearance, occupies a place of some importance at the beginning of the English series of medieval one-piece combs.

CARBONISED PLANT REMAINS FROM A PRE-CHURCH DEPOSIT (L24) By Mark Robinson

A 1 kg. sample of L24, brown silty clay loam with limestone fragments, was mixed with water and the flot poured onto a 0.5 mm. sieve. The carbonised plant remains identified from the flot are listed below:

TABLE 1
Carbonised Plant Remains

Cereal Grain		
Triticum aestivocompactum	Bread/Club Wheat	28
Triticum sp.		9
Secale cereale	Rye	4
Hordeum sp.	Hulled Barley	3
Cereals not further identified		27
Weed Seeds		
Brassica or *Sinapis* sp.	Mustard, Charlock etc.	1
Agrostemma githago	Corn Cockle	1
Vicia or *Lathyrus* sp.	Vetch or Tare	1
Anthemis cotula	Stinking Mayweed	1
Gramineae	Grass	2
Weeds not further identified		18
Other Remains		
Secale cereale rachis node	Rye	1
Quercus sp. charcoal	Oak	+

[18] For a discussion of these trends and for references to the Continental material, see A. MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn: the Technology of Skeletal Materials since the Roman Period* (1985), 78–81, Figs. 45–7.

[19] J.K. Hedges, *History of Wallingford*, i (1881), 184; *Proc. Soc. Antiq.* 2nd ser. viii (1879–81), 469.

[20] MacGregor loc. cit. note 18.

The sample was rich in carbonised grain and weed seeds. The range of remains is typical of the crop-processing debris that commonly occurs on rural occupation sites. Corn cockle and stinking mayweed seem, on present evidence, to have been introduced to Britain about 2,000 years ago. Although there is no reason why this deposit could not have been Roman, the predominance of a free-threshing variety of wheat and the complete absence of spelt wheat gives it more the character of an early-Saxon or later assemblage. The evidence from L24 thus suggests that a Saxon settlement probably preceded the late-Saxon church at Tackley.

A RE-SET ROMANESQUE DOOR-HEAD (Fig. 8) By Richard Gem

The arch is cut from a monolithic block of oolitic limestone. It is designed to span an opening of 912 mm. and this suggests a modest doorway, presumably of a single order. On its soffit the stone has been cut into at the back to receive a wooden frame for a secondary use. This leaves unclear whether there was an original internal rebate for a doorway; but it seems more likely, since the stone is only 250 mm. thick, that any door closed against the plain back of the stone itself.

The front of the stone has an elaborate series of Romanesque mouldings. Starting on the outer edge of the face there is a cavetto; then a plain rebate; then another larger cavetto, leading into a roll which turns the angle from the face to the soffit. The form of the mouldings is suggestive of the relative date of the arch. On the Continent, where such Romanesque mouldings developed, angle rolls start to appear in comparable contexts from around 1050, and cavetto mouldings from later in the third quarter of the 11th century: configurations as complex as Tackley, however, do not seem to be represented before *c.* 1080. A post-Conquest date is therefore certain (as it is for other examples of such mouldings in England for which a pre-Conquest date has sometimes been claimed). The feature of a cavetto running straight into a roll without an intervening quirk seems to be a specifically English development, and can be instantiated from the 1090s.

In contrast to the style of the mouldings must be placed the technology of the manufacture. An orthodox Romanesque moulded archway would normally be turned with a ring of voussoirs, and would not be cut from a monolithic block. The use of large blocks of stone is characteristic, on the other hand, of various pre-Romanesque traditions, including the Anglo-Saxon. This suggests that the Tackley piece was worked by a mason who was trained in, or familiar with, Anglo-Saxon traditions; and this in turn makes a date much after 1100 decreasingly likely. The weathering of the exposed surfaces of the stone makes it difficult to observe how it was originally dressed – and hence whether the tooling approximated more to pre-Conquest or post-Conquest techniques.

The cutting of this elaborately moulded arch from a single block of stone is something of a virtuoso performance, and indicates a man capable of synthesizing the best of Anglo-Saxon and Norman traditions to achieve the effect he desired. Such a synthesis would find its place convincingly in the fertile years of the 1090s: but

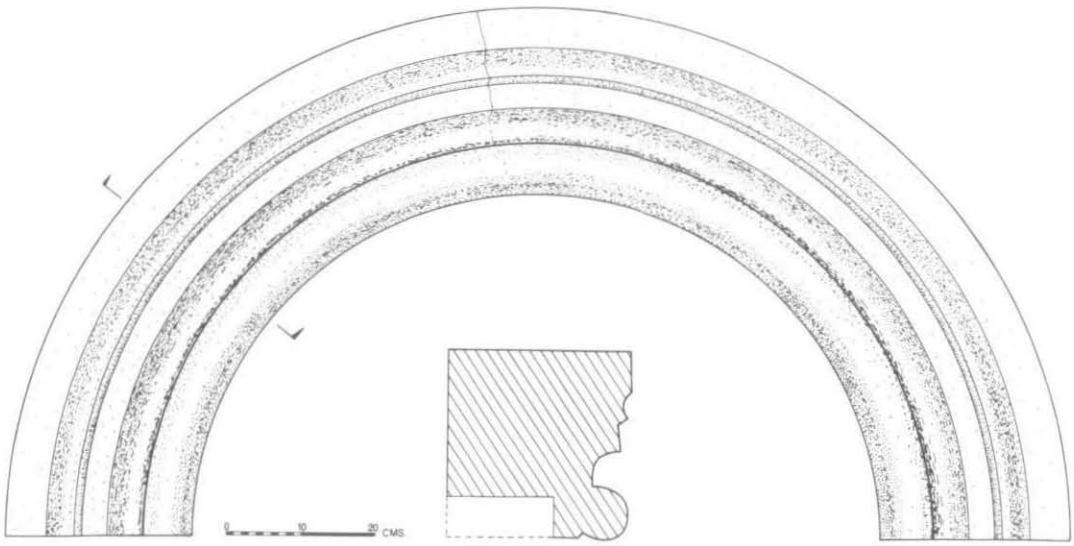


Fig. 8. Re-set Romanesque door-head. *Scale 1:10.*

it is always dangerous to assume that stylistic dates necessarily correspond with absolute dates, and the latter in this case might be some ten or twenty years later than the 1090s.

INTERPRETATION OF THE EXCAVATION AND THE STRUCTURAL PHASES

The site is interesting for the presence of residual early- to mid-Saxon pottery: 5 grass-marked sherds (L23a, F5) and 9 thick-walled sherds in limestone- and sand-tempered fabrics Groups IB and III (L24, F11, F10, L23a). There were also 4 residual Romano-British sherds. The carbonised grain in L24 suggests pre-church settlement on the site. Given that only a small area was excavated and the pre-church deposits barely touched, this material is evidence for a human presence between the 6th and 9th centuries.

The pre-Conquest church (Fig. 9A) had an aisleless nave (substantially still standing), its walls 0.78 m. thick, at least 6 m. high and built of coursed rubble with a sandy bonding. To this was added a north *porticus* or transept, its west wall represented by the excavated footing F22, which can be identified as a subsequent phase by its different bonding (assuming that the transept was added to the nave rather than *vice versa*). At this stage the church would probably have comprised a nave, two *porticus* or transepts and a chancel. It stood in a graveyard which sloped gently downwards to the east, and which contained rows of burials on the north side of the nave by the early 12th century. As the building of the Norman aisle involved piercing arches through the nave wall and demolishing the north transept, it seems likely that one and perhaps both of these early phases are pre-Conquest.The monolithic door-head (so different in technique from the re-set north door of the aisle) is, however, evidence for activity around 1100.

The next major change was the levelling-up of the ground north of the nave, the building of the north aisle over the cemetery and the piercing of its arcade through the nave wall. The plain, unmoulded arches had previously been dated to the pre-Conquest or very early Norman period. It was therefore a surprise to find 12th-century pottery in the construction-trench of the aisle wall (F10) and in an over-lying but probably associated layer (L23a). The crucial sherds are in Oxford Medieval Ware (Fabric *Y*), a sandy ware which began to replace the coarser Fabric *AC* shortly before 1100. Fabric *Y* is a minority component (2 sherds) in F10 but predominates in L23a; L23a is unlikely to be significantly later than F10, for like the pre-footing L23b it contained lead-melting hearths best assigned to the building of the aisle. Although relatively thick, and thus perhaps early in the Fabric *Y* range, the sherds make it difficult to date the aisle earlier than the 12th century.[21]

Tackley church thus shows that plain arches with rough rubble voussoirs may be later than they seem. To leave sections of wall standing as piers may simply be a cheap and easy way of adding aisles to an existing nave. Whether the two clerestorey windows are contemporary with the arches is uncertain, and could only be determined by plaster-stripping. Their rubble voussoirs are certainly very similar, but it remains possible that these are high-level windows integral with the pre-Conquest aisleless nave.

A matching south aisle may reasonably be inferred, especially if the blocked window over the south arcade is indeed from a clerestory of this phase. The wall-thicknesses suggest that the nave was extended westwards in the 12th century (presumably when the aisles were added) rather than in the 13th, which would give the arcades an extra bay. The re-set Norman north door is consistent with an aisle of *c.*1120. The western half of the chancel, as described above, is Romanesque and could have had an eastern apse. Between nave and

[21] Cf. B.G. Durham, 'Archaeological Investigations in St. Aldate's, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlii (1977), 138 and Fig. 14 (Phase 7), where the dominance of Fabric *Y* post-dates a coin of Stephen in Phase 6B.

chancel there were probably, though not certainly, a crossing-tower and transepts integral with the aisle: the widening of F11 towards its eastern end may reflect the north-west corner of the Norman north transept, aligned very slightly west of its predecessor. This would give wide, shallow transepts of a kind found in other 12th-century aisled and cruciform parish churches.

A composite plan is attempted in Fig. 9B, and sectional elevations in Fig. 10, assuming the 'maximum' interpretation of the completed Romanesque church: chancel, crossing-tower, transepts and three-bay aisled nave. There must have been at least two 12th-century phases. On the one hand, the monolithic door-head probably pre-dates the aisle. On the other hand, the beak-heads are unlikely to be earlier than 1150; with the remains of the chancel, they suggest something more sophisticated than the nave arches. A later date for the chancel is also supported by its deflection northwards from the line of the nave. It seems likely, then, that the early 12th-century enlargements allowed an existing chancel to remain for some decades.

One grave (F15), which could not be dated, may possibly be a medieval burial within the aisle. It unfortunately remains uncertain when the north aisle was demolished. From the standing fabric it may be inferred that it no longer existed in the 13th and 14th centuries, both because it was not rebuilt like the south aisle and because there is no sign of communication between it and the present north transept. It is certain that by *c.* 1350 the existing tower and transepts had entirely replaced the Romanesque crossing.

Subsequently the site of the aisle remained open ground. It is interesting that no post-demolition adult burials were found (with the possible exception of the doubtful F15, already mentioned), and only two burials of infants (F16, F19). The popular dislike of burial on the north side was evidently observed in late- and post-medieval Tackley.

CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

From the first phase there is only an aisleless nave, indistinguishable from scores of late-Saxon churches. But with the addition of large *porticus* or transepts at some date before *c.*1100, Tackley becomes slightly unusual. These are not a normal feature of manorial churches, and usually denote superior status. The early church at Tackley was smaller than known minsters, except Norton (co. Durham) where the 11th-century collegiate church is of much the same size and proportions.[22] The best parallel is in fact a town church: at St Pancras, Winchester, a small 9th-century two-cell church acquired first small and then large *porticus*, attaining by *c.*1000 a form strikingly close to Tackley.[23]

So Tackley is exceptional when compared with ordinary manorial churches, but not on a scale to show clearly that it was something grander. A possible context is suggested by Edward the Confessor's habit of endowing his clerical servants with the assets of old royal minsters. Could Tackley manor have supported a small minster, previously attached to Woodstock, which was given to Hugolin as so many such churches were given to his colleagues in the king's household? We know that he was interested in this sort of property, for Domesday Book shows him buying Huntingdon minster from two local priests.[24] Other

[22] H.M. and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, i (1965), 465–70.

[23] D. Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester*, ii (1985), 741–3.

[24] Barlow, *English Church 1000–1066*, 124. For minsters in the hands of royal clerks see J. Campbell, 'The Church in Anglo-Saxon Towns', in D. Baker (ed.), *The Church in Town and Countryside: Studies in Church History*, xvi (1979), 130–1; J. Blair, 'Secular Minster Churches in Domesday Book', in P.H. Sawyer (ed.), *Domesday Book: a Reassessment* (1985), 124.

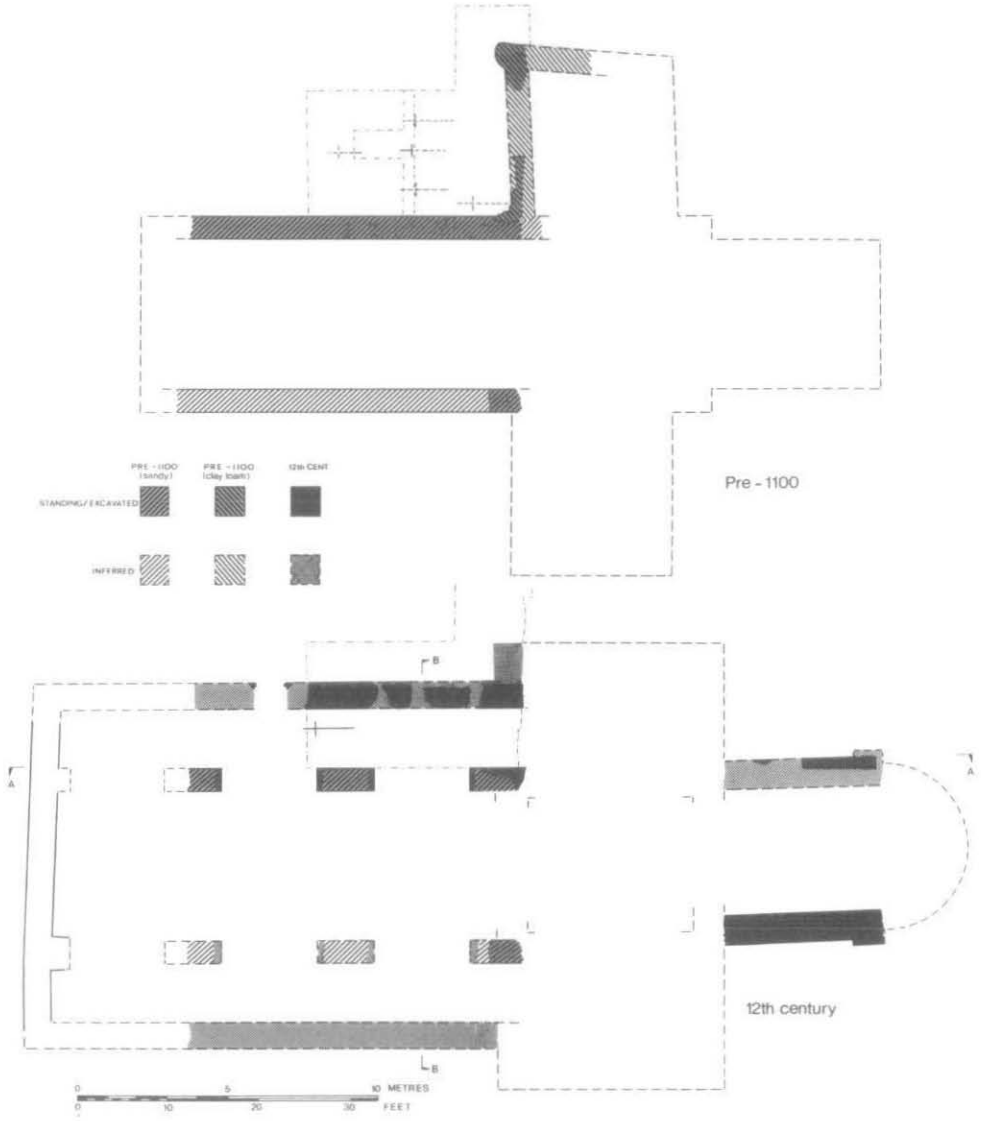


Fig. 9. Interpretation plans of the Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque phases. (For sections on lower figure see Fig. 10.) *Scale 1:250.*

possible signs of minster status are the high value of the church in the later middle ages, and the fact that its parish included Whitehill and Weaveley as well as Tackley (cf. above, p. 15–20, 26). On the other hand, Hugolin may simply have found a small church on his manor and enlarged it as befitted a great man; or the *porticus* may have been added by Earl Hugh or the monks of St. Sever. There seems to be no way of choosing between these alternatives, though if the monolithic door-head derives from the *porticus* it would place them early in the St. Sever period.

As the French monks were proprietors of Tackley church from *c.* 1085 until after 1158, the two or more 12th-century phases are presumably their work. The aisled and transeptal

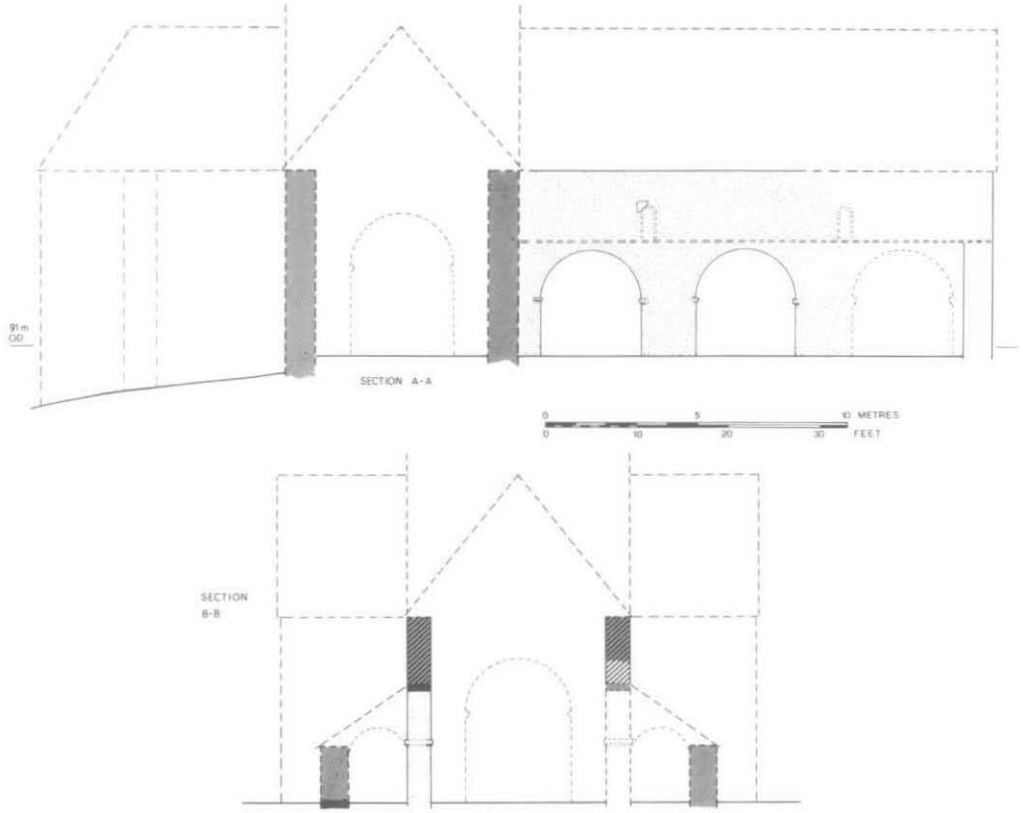


Fig. 10. Reconstructed sectional elevations of the Romanesque phases (corresponding to section lines A-A and B-B on Fig. 9, lower), assuming the 'maximum' interpretation. *Scale 1:250.*

church was, like its predecessor, grander than its context seems to warrant: aisled parish churches are uncommon before the 1150s. One possibility, mere speculation but worth suggesting, is that St Sever may briefly have established Tackley as a monastic cell. English 'alien priories' seem often to have been reorganised, and sometimes reduced, in the mid to late 12th century; some may have disappeared completely.[25] If the church had indeed been a minster, the fact would strengthen this idea. The Normans annexed English clerical minsters for various new purposes, and some (Wing, Wootton Wawen, Minster Lovell and probably others) reappear as alien priories.[26]

These are tenuous historical explanations for what is, architecturally, an abnormal building. Such investigations emphasise how little we really know about the complexities of English church life in the 11th and early 12th centuries. A church could be important at this date, yet leave no written record of its importance. Archaeology may help to fill the gap, but only when better criteria are established for inferring status from size and plan.

The Society is grateful to the W.A. Pantin Trust for a grant towards the publication of this paper.

[25] For a discussion of this problem in relation to Cogges see J. Blair and J.M. Steane, 'Investigations at Cogges, Oxfordshire, 1978–81', *Oxoniensia*, xlvii (1982), 43–4, 103–4.

[26] See Blair, 'Secular Minster Churches in Domesday Book', 133.