

**St Marys Church, Bletchley
Buckinghamshire**

Report on Watching Brief

THE OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

January 1996

ST MARYS CHURCH, BLETCHLEY, BUCKS

Summary

A watching brief of rebuilding work in the chapel recorded the remnants of a blocked in splayed window in the north wall and an area of painted plaster was observed on one side of the straight joint which represented the remains of the window. In the area beneath the window a blocked in doorway was also partially exposed. A reused stone forming part of the blocking was inscribed with upside down graffiti depicting the initials D.P., and dated 1859, and therefore revealing that the blocking up of the doorway occurred after this date. The renovation work also included the excavation of new service trenches through the graveyard to the south and east of the church. The only significant feature observed during this work was the remains of a brick wall some 30m to the east of the church. This foundation is almost certainly the remains of an earlier church boundary wall and is most likely of a 19th century date.

Introduction

Oxford Archaeological Unit were commissioned by Clews Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief during renovation and building work in the chapel of ST. Marys Church, Bletchley and also during the excavation of new service trenches through the graveyard. The building work carried out in the chapel required the insertion of padstones into the walls to support steelwork, and this entailed cutting six holes in the walls, just over 2m above the present floor level. In addition two further holes were knocked through the thickness of the north wall, just above floor level, in order to feed service pipes into the chapel. The external work consisted of excavating a trench through the graveyard to the south of the church to lay a new water main and the construction of a foul weather sewer to the east of the church.

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record any evidence of earlier structures, or structural features, that might be revealed during the course of the renovation or groundwork and in particular to make a record of any archaeological deposits that might be disturbed or destroyed by the work. Apart from examining any structural evidence, it was also of particular interest to observe whether any traces survive of wall the paintings, and painted plaster work, known to have existed in the chapel.

The watching brief was undertaken by Robert Williams of the Oxford Archaeological Unit who visited the site during the course of the work, and recorded any archaeological deposits that were revealed by making scale drawing, and creating a written and photographic record. Mr. Williams also advised the architect and builders on the archaeological implications arising from the building work as it progressed.

Brief History

The church of St Marys contains some evidence of twelfth century work, but mainly dates from the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The building consists of a chancel with a north chapel, a nave with north and south aisles, a south porch and a west tower. The tower is a slightly later addition and dates from the fifteenth century. The chapel itself dates from the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, the two windows in the north wall have been inserted and these date from the end of the fifteenth century.

Results

The Chapel (see Fig. 2 for location of padstone and pipeholes)

The six holes created for the insertion of the padstones were cut into the walls just over 2m above the present floor level; one in each corner of the chapel and one on each side of the north and south walls. The holes were between 350mm x 400mm to 700mm x 600mm in size and up to 600mm deep. Two wall plaques had to be removed in order to create the padstone holes in the NE and SE corners and were relocated further along the wall.

Padstone hole 1

The creation of this hole revealed a straight joint between the north wall of the chapel, and the arch which forms part of the west wall, and that the north wall of the chapel continues straight through to become the north wall of the nave, therefore confirming that the arch has been inserted and is a later addition. No trace of any earlier plaster work or wall paintings were observed in this area, only a single layer of lime render.

Padstone hole 2 (Fig. 3)

This hole was positioned between the two existing windows in the north wall, and in addition to the actual padstone hole, an area of plaster was removed around it to exposed a surface area approximately 1.2m x 1.2m in size. The creation of this hole revealed the existence of an oak lintel built into the wall some 2.10m above the present floor level, and in the stonework beneath the lintel were two straight joints, 800mm apart. This features therefore appeared to be a blocked in doorway and it is noticeable that this feature is centrally located between the two existing windows. One of the stones used in the blocking was inscribed with graffiti depicting the inscription D.P. 1859 (Fig. 4). However, the inscription was upside down, and therefore the stone was obviously reused, revealing that the blocking up of the doorway must have occurred after this date.

In the area of wall exposed above the doorway another vertical straight joint was visible in the stonework, and in the gap between the straight joint it was just possible to observe an area of red, black and white plaster work covering the west facing section of the joint. This feature is almost certainly the remains of an earlier, splayed, window, a small remnants of which can also be seen in the stonework on the external face of the wall.

Examination of the external face of the chapel wall where the blocked in door was located

appears to show that most of the lower part of the external wall at this point must have been rebuilt or refaced, as there is no visible joints in the stonework where the doorway had existed.

Padstone holes 3, 4 , 5 and 6

Only a single layer of lime plaster containing horse hair was observed in these four holes and no architectural features other than rubble wall core were revealed. However, a reused architectural fragment was retrieved from the wall core in padstone hole 6.

The two holes created as inlets for service pipes into the chapel were knocked through the complete thickness of the north wall just above the internal floor level, and these were approximately 600mm wide and 250mm high. No significant structural evidence was observed in either of these holes. During the renovation work carried out in the chapel in 1984 the old plaster had been removed and the wall rerendered up to a height of 1.5m above the floor level, and it was therefore already known that none of the earlier plaster work survived at this level.

External Service Trenches (Fig. 2)

Water main trench

This trench ran through the graveyard to the south of the church, extending to the NE corner of the chancel. The trench was approximately 300mm wide and 700mm deep and was excavated using a mechanical mini digger. The only deposit other than topsoil observed in the trench was a gravelly loam much disturbed by roots. In the section of trench close to the church the ground had also been heavily disturbed by existing services. The only artefacts observed in this trench were occasional human bone and fragments of post-medieval gravestones.

Foul water sewer trench

This trench was excavated from the NE corner of the chancel to the eastern boundary of the graveyard, and was approximately 500mm wide and 600mm deep. The main deposit observed throughout this trench was the same gravelly loam disturbed by post-medieval grave digging and roots that was seen in the trench to the south of the church. However, the remains of a brick wall was located some 30m to the east of the church, running through the trench at right angles, and it was noticeable that the soil in the area to the east of the wall was slightly different in character and was much less disturbed. This foundation therefore appeared to represent the remains of an earlier boundary wall of the church, and its character and alignment were similar to the some of the surviving 19th century walls and structures in the churchyard, suggesting that it also dated from this period.

Discussion and Conclusions

The watching brief recorded significant evidence of earlier structural features, providing information relating to the fabric and architectural history of the church. It appears from the

observations that major structural changes have taken place to the layout of the doors and windows in the chapel, and it was established that the arch forming part of the west wall has been inserted and did not form part of the original design. The watching brief also appeared to be established that very little of the painted plaster work in the chapel survives on the main areas of the walls, with only a few small patches remaining around the edges of blocked in windows and other such features. The brick boundary wall discovered to the east of the church is obviously of no significant age, but is still of interest relating to the changing layout and character of the churchyard and demonstrates that the graveyard has been extended in recent times.

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January 1996

Bibliography

Maynard D.C. 1994 Excavations on medieval sites in Milton Keynes: Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, Monograph Series No 6

SUMMARY FOR RECORDS OF BUCKS

Bletchley - St Marys Church

SP 8630 3378

A watching brief was undertaken by Bob Williams of Oxford Archaeological Unit during renovation work at St Marys Church, Bletchley. The work consisted of rebuilding work in the chapel, which entailed cutting a number of holes into the walls for the insertion of padstones, and service pipes, and the excavation of service trenches through the graveyard to the south and east of the church, for a new water main and foul weather sewer. During the course of the work the remnants of an earlier splayed window was revealed in the north wall of the chapel and the remains of early painted plaster was visible in the gap between the straight joint which represented the remains of the window. An apparent blocked in doorway was also partially exposed in the area beneath the window. One of the stones forming part of the blocking was reused as it was inscribed with graffiti which was upsidedown and this inscription was dated 1859, signifying that the blocking in must have occurred after this date. The only notable deposit discovered during the external work was the foundation of a brick wall some 30m to the east of the church, which represented the remains of an earlier boundary wall, of a probable 19th century date.

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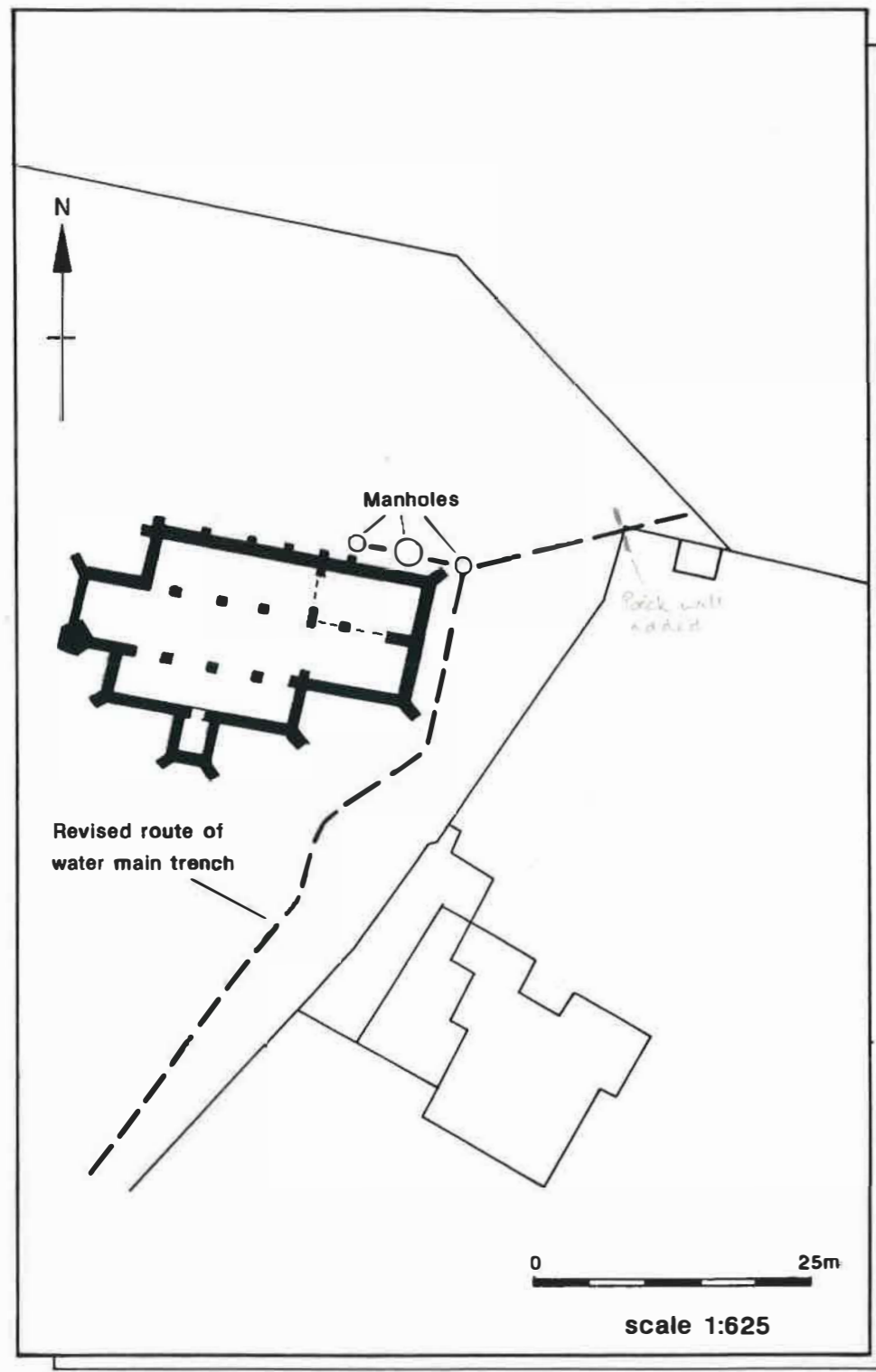
January 1996



SP 83/93

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Figure 1



Detail of N. Chapel

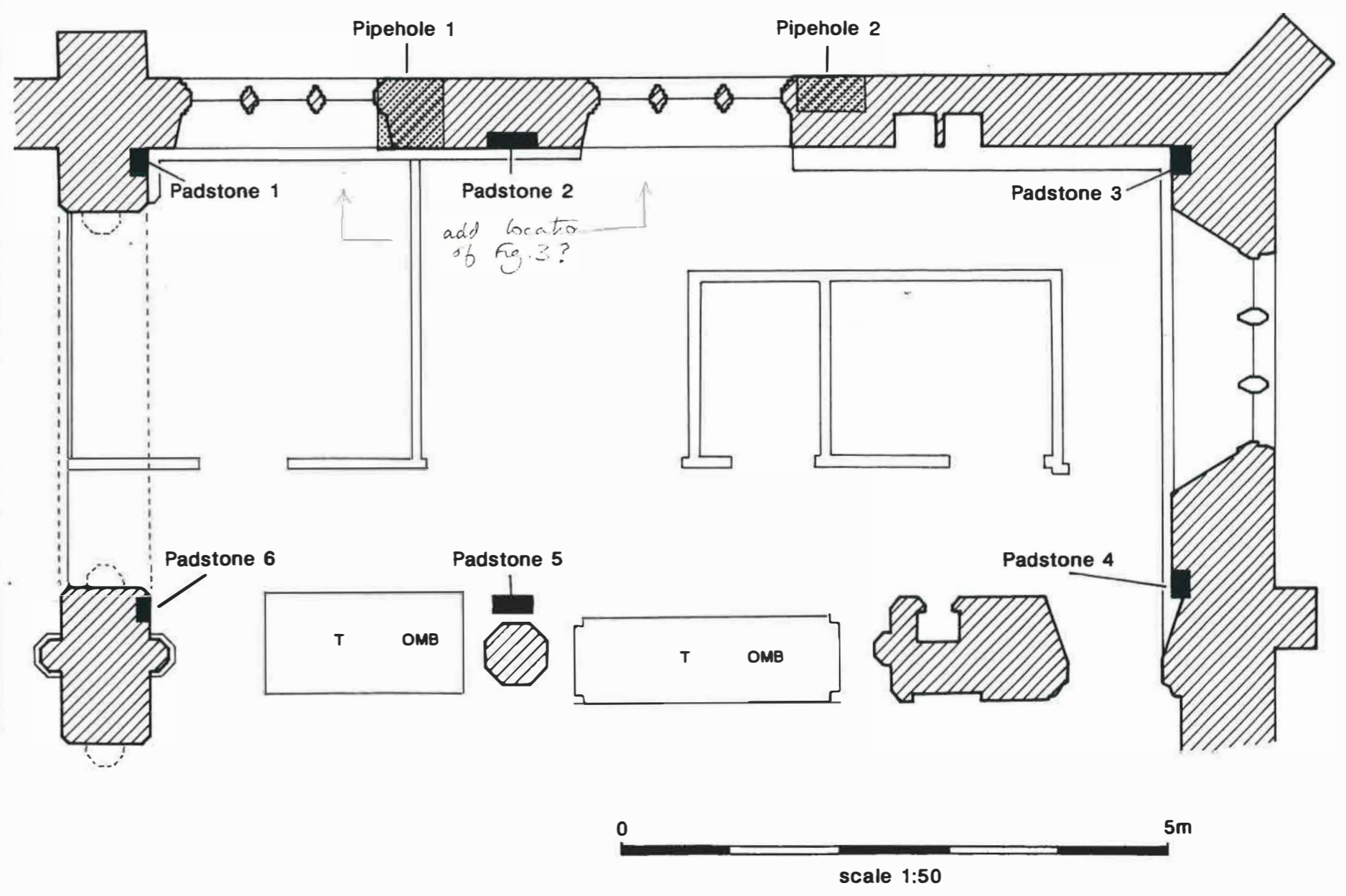


Figure 2

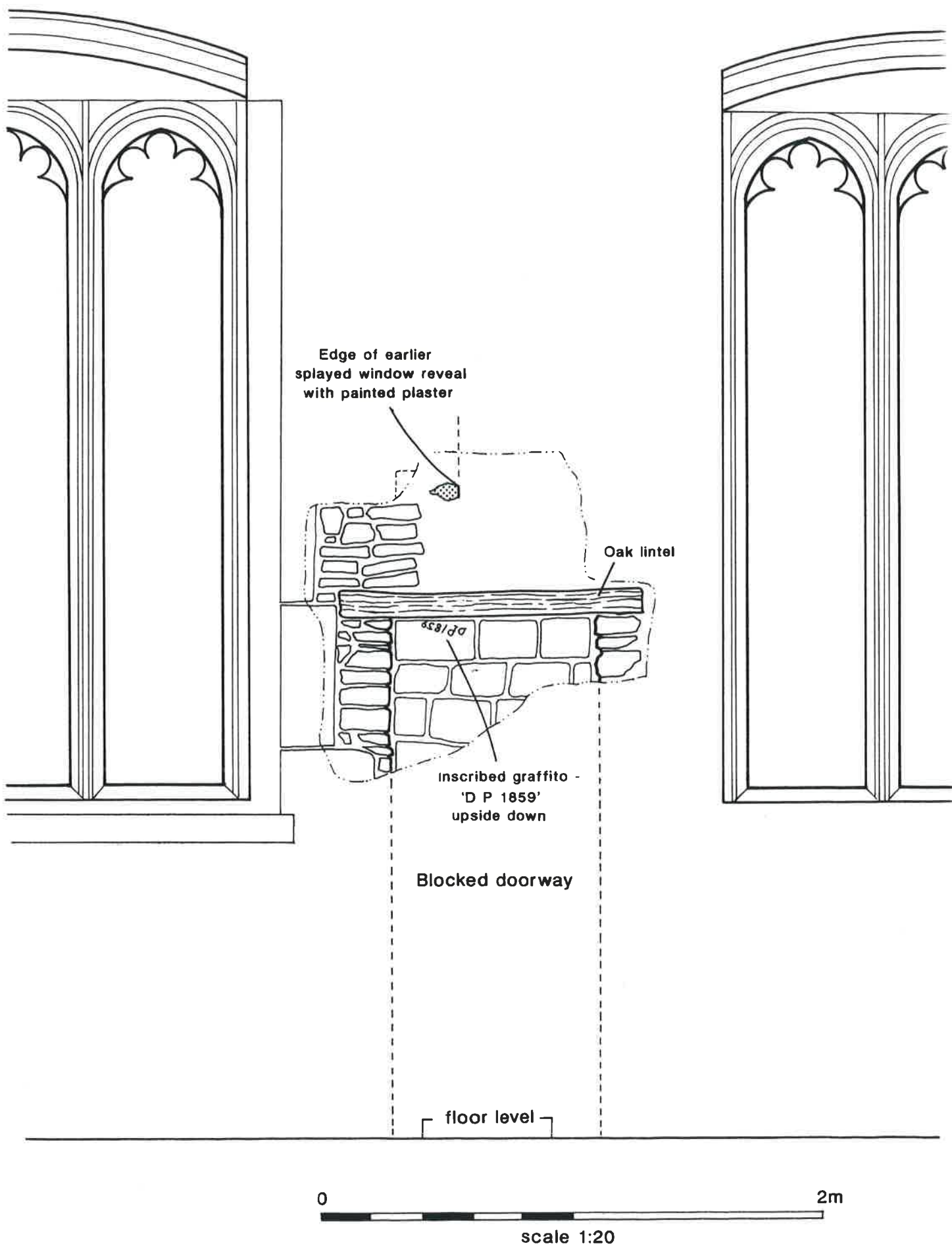
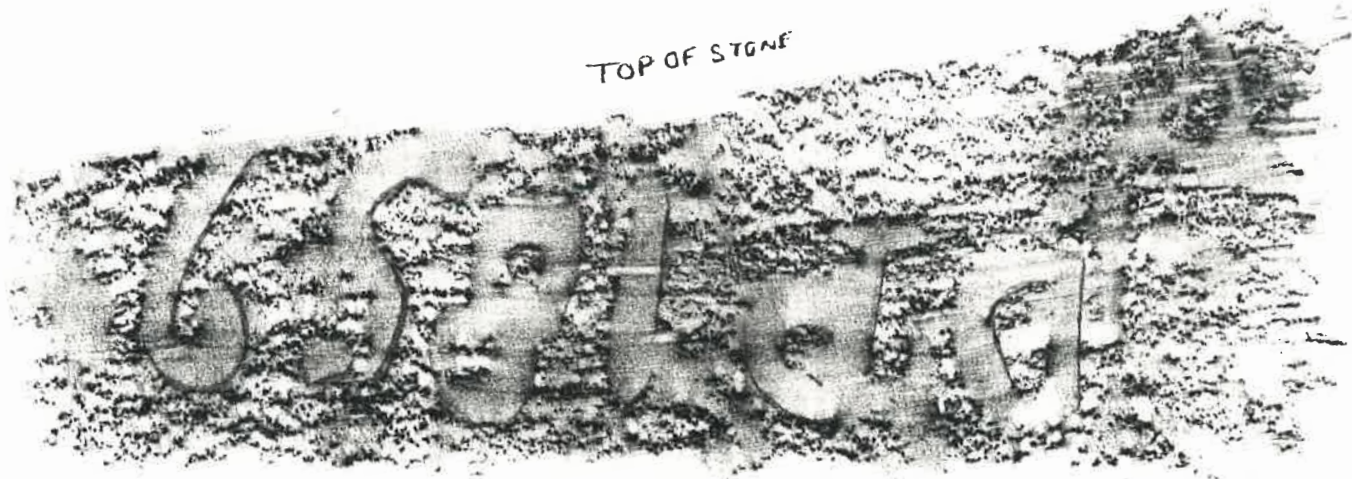


Figure 3

TOP OF STONE



RIGHT SIDE
OF STONE

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Handwritten text on a stone surface, possibly a wall or block. The text is faint and appears to be "D.P. 1852".

