

St Giles Church Imber Wiltshire

Phase One Repairs



**Historic Building Investigation
and Recording**



Oxford Archaeology

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SAINT GILES IMBER

HISTORIC BUILDING INVESTIGATION AND RECORDING (PHASE 1)

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SAINT GILES IMBER

HISTORIC BUILDING INVESTIGATION AND RECORDING (PHASE 1)

SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out archaeological and historical analysis of Saint Giles Church, Imber, Wilts. The church is the most substantial surviving element of the village which was taken over for military use in the 1940s. The phase one work was carried out in response to a restoration project carried out in 2005 and 2006. This project saw the replacement of stone work of the tower parapet and the re-roofing of the south aisle. An archaeological record was made both before and during these works.

The south aisle roof was stripped and rotten wallplates renewed and faulty guttering rebuilt. The roof consisting of five bays divided by moulded principal rafters with one order of moulded purlins appears to be late medieval in style and is probably the original 15th century roof of the aisle.

Two missing merlons from the 15th century tower parapet were replaced. The carved finial of the south-east tower pinnacle and a crocketed member from the south-west pinnacle were also replaced.

The replacements to roof and parapet were made of traditional materials and care was taken to preserve and protect the surviving historic fabric.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 LOCATION AND SCOPE OF WORK

- 1.1.1 Saint Giles Imber lies in the centre of the military training area of Salisbury plain. The village which it once served has been without a population since the Second World War and the remaining buildings are used as training facilities by the MOD. Only the church, its churchyard and the nearby Baptist churchyard remained unused by the MOD and the church is protected by a substantial fence.
- 1.1.2 The church is however used for occasional services and has not been allowed to fall into ruin. Most of its fixtures and fitting have been either removed to nearby churches, sold or lost but the basic structure remains untouched.

- 1.1.3 The church was listed at Grade II* for its architectural and historical significance in 1987 and this was amended to Grade I on December 19th 2001. Imber is now included in the parish of Heytesbury and the church is listed under that name.
- 1.1.4 By 2004 the church came into the care of the Churches Conservation Trust and a scheme of repairs and maintenance were initiated to combat decay and neglect. The most significant repairs were to the roof structure (particularly on the south aisle and the tower roof, both of which leaked and were allowing water to enter the church. OA recorded the roof prior to and during the restorations. It is envisaged that in phase two of the restoration work the north aisle will be repaired and areas of intrusive cementitious render will be removed from the church interior. A number of the merlons and sections of two crocketed pinnacles of the crenelated tower parapet were also replaced during restoration OA made a photographic record of these.

1.2 AIMS

The general aims of the investigation were:

- Investigate areas of fabric exposed by the renovations
- Relate the discoveries to existing knowledge
- Produce a report and archive.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 FIELDWORK METHODS AND RECORDING

2.1.1 *The Drawn Record and Survey*

2.1.2 Plans and sections were made of areas of roof which were exposed during restoration. This focused on the medieval roof of the south aisle.

2.1.3 *The Photographic Record*

2.1.4 Photographs were taken prior to and during the restoration work. The photographic survey used 35 mm film (colour slide and black and white prints) and consisted of general views and specific details (internal and external). Digital photography was also used to provide illustrations for the client report.

2.1.5 *The Written Record*

2.1.6 Written notes were taken and drawings annotated as appropriate.

2.2 REPORTING AND ARCHIVE

2.2.1 The site work was undertaken between December 2005 and February 2006. A project archive will be ordered and deposited with Wiltshire Museum Services (or other agreed body). It will include all site drawings, photographs (contact sheets), slides, photographic negatives, and a copy of this report and other site notes. A copy of this report will also be deposited with the Wiltshire Sites and Monuments Record or other appropriate body. Separate reports and archives will be prepared later for phase 2 of the historic building recording and the archaeological watching brief.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 OA undertook an Archaeological Assessment of St Giles Imber in January 2003 which examined a range of sources to determine the likely nature, extent and importance of any archaeological remains that may exist within the church and its immediate environs. The following historical summary is largely taken from the assessment report.
- 3.1.2 Imber was held by the Abbess of Romsey by the end of the 10th century and it is likely that a church was built there in the 10th or 11th century. The font was Norman, but there is little evidence for an early building. In 1280 a new church was built with nave, chancel and aisles. Traces of painted decoration on the arches, the arcade pillars and on the west end of the north wall were ascribed to this period by Tristram in 1931¹. There had been a chapel in the south aisle where an aumbry and raised floor area survive, but this may have been added at a later date.
- 3.1.3 During the 15th century the tower and north porch were added. The tower is embattled and has five pinnacles. During this same period the wagon roof in the nave, with mitred churchmen on the roundels, was constructed. Some internal alterations were carried out, including widening of the aisle windows. The painting on the north wall is also thought to be 15th century. Its subject is uncertain - Keyser and Tristram favoured 'The Seven Deadly Sins', but the vicar in the 1920s claimed it told the story of St Giles.
- 3.1.4 During the 15th century the local landowners were the Rous family, whose arms are above the porch. There were two Rous tombs in the south chapel with effigies of recumbent knights, one a figure of Walter, 1st Lord Hungerford.
- 3.1.5 Although no structural changes are recorded for that period, a number of fittings and decorations were added during the 17th century. The box pews removed in the 19th century were probably constructed then also. The font had a wooden cover, there was an Jacobean altar and a screen between the ringers and the nave. In 1635 a new set of five bells was installed, replacing a ring of three. The ringing changes painted on the wall of the ringing chamber has the date 1692. Elsewhere in the church was a Royal achievement of arms from 1639. Graffiti in the porch were also added in the 17th century.
- 3.1.6 The south aisle appears to have had some alteration in the 18th century. This included the insertion of an oval leaded window c 1714. In the north aisle painted texts, partly obscuring the earlier decoration, are thought to date from this period.
- 3.1.7 In 1849 the chancel was demolished and rebuilt in the Early English style for Lord Bath, whose Thynne family held the surrounding land. The north vestry is contemporary with it, although the royal heads around the window have been reused. The wall paintings in the north aisle were uncovered during this phase of restoration. Apart from the 'Squire's pew' in the south aisle, the box pews were removed. The restoration cost £630.10s.
- 3.1.8 A further phase of restoration was carried out in 1895, when the 'Squires pew' was removed this phase cost £1,000. A new harmonium was installed in the 19th century, following removal of a musicians' gallery. It is not known when the gallery was removed, or the date of its original construction.

¹ Tristram was an expert on wall painting. The Courtauld Institute holds copies of the Tristram Archive, a copy of which was made available by The Churches Conservation Trust.

- 3.1.9 In 1915, according to a Faculty in the Diocesan records, two bells were recast and all five were rehung after repair work to the belfry. No further changes to the church have been recorded until the village was taken over by the army. The building was boarded up and some valuables were removed for safekeeping during WWII, but most of the fittings were not removed until the early 1950s. The fabric of the church was damaged by wartime vandals and by a shell which pierced the chancel.
- 3.1.10 In 1961 repair work was carried out to cope with fallen masonry, an insecure roof, shattered windows and the damaged chancel. The south door has been blocked up. Since then only some routine maintenance has been carried out.
- 3.1.11 No attempt has been made to replicate the churchyard survey carried out by Romano in 2000. A number of the tombs and gravestones are in very bad condition and have been disturbed. Some are in danger of collapse.
- 3.1.12 The church is closed, but is reopened for services on one day a year in September.

4 DESCRIPTION

4.1 EXTERIOR AND GENERAL FORM

- 4.1.1 The church is almost entirely made of local limestone although in places brick and non local stones have been used. The roof is tiled with 19th and 20th century red ceramic tiles and has coped verges and cross finials.
- 4.1.2 The church is made up of a nave with north and south aisles and north porch, a chancel the same width as the nave with diagonal buttresses and north lean-to vestry and a square west tower with diagonal buttresses and an offset stair turret.
- 4.1.3 The gabled north porch has a moulded pointed doorway and hoodmould, diagonal buttresses carried up to crocketed corner pinnacles and a cornice to a shallow gabled battlemented parapet.
- 4.1.4 The north aisle has a 2-light square-headed window with cusped lights and hoodmould either side of the porch. There is a lean-to north vestry with shouldered chamfered doorway and chamfered window and a 2-light cusped east window.
- 4.1.5 The chancel has a window lancet to the north, diagonal buttresses and 3-light east window with interlaced tracery and a hoodmould with king and queen mask terminals. The south side of the chancel has three lancets windows.
- 4.1.6 The south aisle has a cornice to a plain stone parapet. There is a blocked pointed moulded doorway with a hoodmould with a square-headed 2-light window with ogee cusping and hoodmould to either side, and a leaded 18th century oeil de boeuf window to the east. There is a good 3-light Perpendicular window at the east end of aisle and the west end has been partly rebuilt in brick probably in the 18th century.
- 4.1.7 The two-stage Perpendicular tower has a heavy moulded plinth, diagonal buttresses and a moulded Tudor-arched west doorway with a 19th century door and a 3-light window over with a hoodmould.

- 4.1.8 There is a string course to the bellstage with a cinquefoiled single light below a 2-light louvred Perpendicular opening on the west and the same on other three sides. The battlemented parapet has a moulded string course and corner pinnacles. There is a stair turret on the north side with chamfered arrow loops and a battlemented parapet with crocketed pinnacles.
- 4.2 **INTERIOR**
- 4.2.1 The porch has fixed stone benches and a heavily-moulded 15th century Tudor-arched inner doorway with a square hoodmould featuring large lozenge terminals with a shield to left and a quatrefoiled rosette to right. There is a 19th century door with a cusped stoup to the west.
- 4.2.2 The nave has 3-bay late medieval arch-braced collar rafter roof with two tie-beams and a runner with carved bosses. The roof was previously ceiled and plastered but with the runner and bosses exposed. There are late 13th century three-bay north and south arcades with double chamfered pointed arches on cylindrical piers with moulded capitals and traces of red-coloured painted decoration on the arches and wall above. There is a tall moulded tower arch and a depressed arch doorway to stone newel stairs.
- 4.2.3 The aisles have lean-to roofs with chamfered beams, previously plastered. South aisle has a trefoil-headed piscina and a blocked doorway with depressed arch and inverted arch over. There is a late medieval wall painting of St Giles on the north wall of the north aisle.
- 4.2.4 There is a late 19th century double chamfered chancel arch on short shafts. The Chancel has a polychrome tiled floor and a braced rafter roof with diagonal ribs. There is a double chamfered arch to the vestry with a 19th century wooden screen. The east vestry window has a hoodmould with reset king and bishop mask terminals.
- 4.2.5 There is an unusual painted bell-ringing mural on the north wall of the tower which is dated 1692 on the west panel. This was originally of seven panels and designed for a peal of 5 bells. There are red-painted figures on the panels with gabled tops although some of these are partly erased.
- 4.2.6 *Furnishings and memorials in the church*
- 4.2.7 Most of the fittings and memorials have been removed from the church and relocated in other parishes. The Norman font went to Brixton Deverill and the pulpit first to an army chapel and now Winterbourne Earls, while much of the woodwork was used in a military chapel in Bratton. The pews were dispersed. The parish of Imber was combined with that of Erdington, to the north, and the Rous tombs, stained glass and royal arms have all found new homes there.
- 4.2.8 A modern wooden chest altar has been placed in the chancel. The main altar went to Bratton and the 17th century altar from the south aisle chapel is now at Edington.
- 4.2.9 The fate of Imber's bells is uncertain. They and their ropes were still *in situ* in 1947, but all that remains is a bell frame in the tower. The intention was that they should go to St Francis Church in Salisbury. The ringing screen is still in the tower leaning against the wall.

- 4.2.10 There are a few ledger slabs in the nave floor, but no information was available about possible burial vaults there or at other locations.
- 4.2.11 On the wall of the south aisle are three worn memorials, one above the blocked south door. These include an early 18th century stone and slate tablet with a broken pediment in to Thomas Aycliffe and a white marble classical tablet with shaped apron to Elizabeth Ballard who died in 1786.
- 4.2.12 On the east wall of the north aisle is a white marble tablet to John Wadman who died in 1745, this has an urn and cartouche on a dentilled cornice with a carved scroll below. Classical white marble Over the north door is a Classical white marble to Johannis(sic) Offer who in died 1822, signed by Reeves of Bath.
- 4.2.13 Close to the chancel is a plaque recording the rededication of the church in 1896. In the north aisle there is a tablet above the door and a virtually illegible memorial on the east wall. On the west wall is the metal plaque from the WW I memorial, giving the names of the three who died and those who served. The oak memorial, which was originally in the village, now stands by the side of the path up to the church, with the names painted.

4.3 **PHASE ONE REPAIRS**

4.3.1 *The South Aisle Roof*

- 4.3.2 The major focus of the 2005/2006 work was the repair of the roof of the south aisle. This roof had been leaking badly for some time and the ingress of water had begun to present a threat to the wallpaintings of the arcade (Plate 1). The work involved the removal of tiles from the aisle, the replacement of rotten wallplates and the rebuilding of guttering to improve rainwater run off.
- 4.3.3 During restoration a large hole was found in the roof, this had been inexpertly repaired with wood and painted sacking (Plate 2). The splintering of the common rafter beneath the repair and the size of the hole strongly suggests that some form of military projectile had hit the roof at some point.
- 4.3.4 The roof is all of one build and in detail and construction it appears to be late medieval and is presumably the aisles original 15th century roof. The roof is divided into five bays by large moulded principal rafters all joined by a moulded purlin (Fig. 2, Plates 3 & 4). Above this lie the common rafters. It is clear that there was once a ceiling nailed to the common rafters with the moulded timbers projecting downwards from its surface. Above the rafters was a planking roof made of stained pine (1950s?). The planking was clad in lead sheeting and this was in turn covered in clay peg tiles fixed on battens.
- 4.3.5 The main elements of the structure rested on a wallplate on the south wall; this was hidden from the interior of the church by a 19th century wooden moulding (Plate 5). When the moulding was removed the wallplate itself was seen to be very rotten in several places and detailed examination and recording was not possible. The state of the timber was so poor that in places it fell away to the touch.
- 4.3.6 The main rafters extended to a wallplate sitting on the south side of the aisle wall (Plate 6) they were jointed into this plate and then extended to join the backs of the nave rafters which are also seated on this plate. The common rafters of the aisle sit on this plate and also extend to join the nave rafters (Fig. 3, Plate 7). Separate

timbers making up the wallplate are joined with edge-halved scarf joints which are known from the 14th century onwards and are consistent with a 15th century date for the roof (see Plate 6).

- 4.3.7 During the work the roof was stripped and the common rafters removed from the main framework. Nothing was seen that suggested any major rebuilding or replacement of the roof had ever been undertaken apart from the 19th century applied moulding and the modern planking covering and tiles.
- 4.3.8 There had formerly been a lath and plaster ceiling attached to the common rafters. The date of this is not known but as the moulded purlins and rafters create attractive panel framing it does appear as though a ceiling was intended originally rather than leaving the rougher common rafters on show. The existing roof frame is of one phase and it is probably the primary phase, however if the entire roof had been replaced it might be impossible to identify that fact.
- 4.3.9 *The Tower Parapet*
- 4.3.10 The tower is a square 15th century Perpendicular stone structure with diagonal buttresses and a battlemented parapet with crocketed pinnacles. The parapet is above a moulded string course and the upper surface of the parapet is also moulded.
- 4.3.11 Two merlons were completely missing from the tower parapet, one from the west side and one from the south side. The south-west and the south-east pinnacles were in poor condition having suffered heavily from weathering and required repair (Plate 8).
- 4.3.12 The existing merlons were each carved from one block of stone with moulded upper and side faces chamfered at the rear. The two missing examples were replaced with identical newly carved blocks matching the existing mouldings. These were bonded to the existing parapet using lime mortar (Plate 9).
- 4.3.13 The existing stonework of the pinnacles was repointed and a new carved finial was fitted to the south-east pinnacle. The south-west pinnacle had the crocketed member immediately below the finial renewed and the existing finial was refitted on the new block (Plate 10)

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

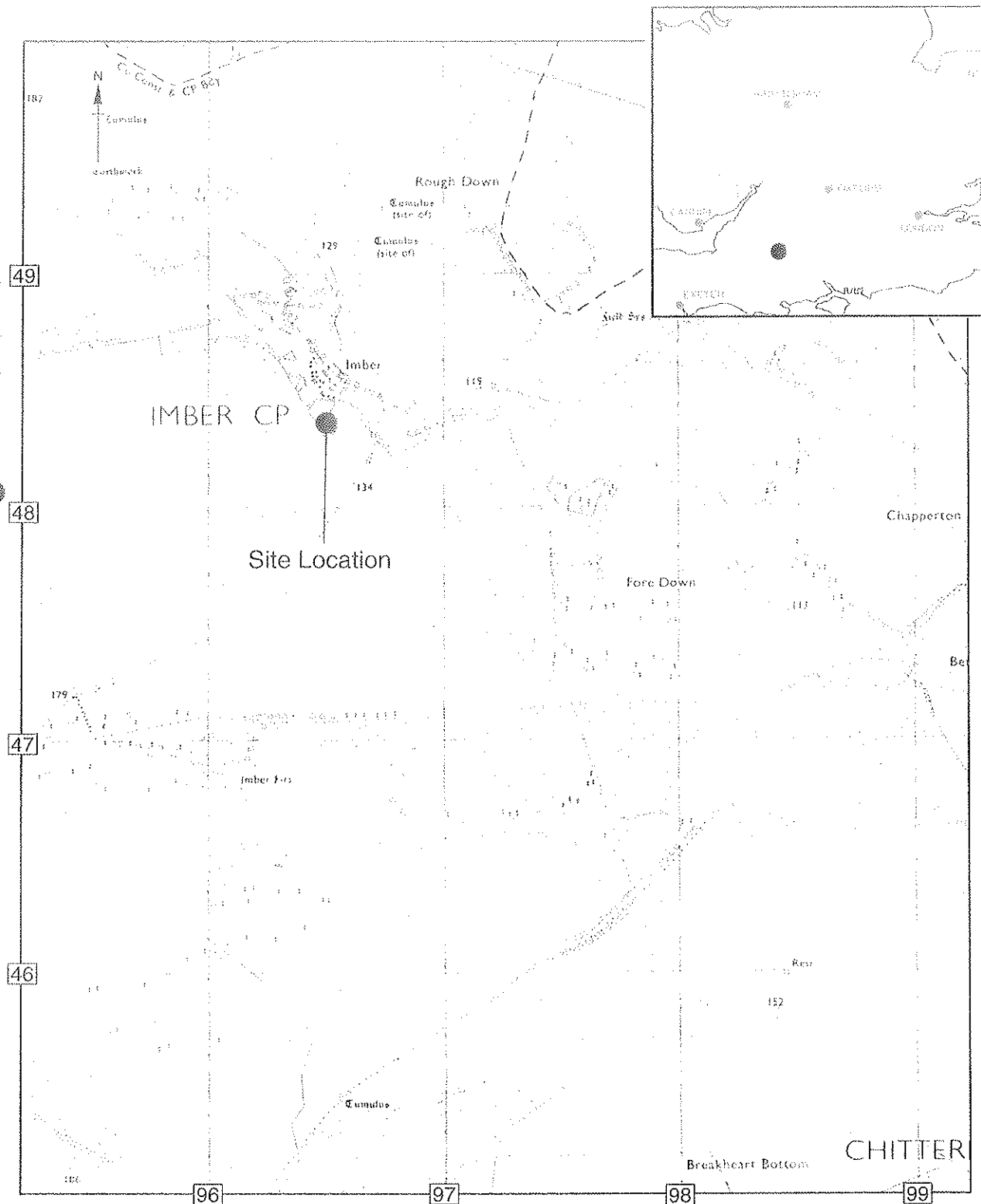
- 5.1.1 Phase one of repairs to the church consisted of repairs to the south aisle roof and the tower parapet.
- 5.1.2 The south aisle roof was stripped and rotten wallplates were replaced. The guttering was rebuilt to improve rainwater run off as leakage of water through the roof was posing a threat to wallpaintings on the south arcade.
- 5.1.3 The roof appeared to be of one phase, it is a lean-to roof of five bays consisting of wallplates, moulded principal rafters and one order of moulded purlins and plain common rafters. There was formerly a lath and plaster ceiling attached to the common rafters which would have left the moulded elements exposed dividing the ceiling into five panels.

- 5.1.4 The principal rafters are joined to a wallplate on the south edge of the top of the south arcade wall on which the nave rafters are also seated. The common rafters of the aisle also sit on this plate and these and the principal rafters extend to abut the nave rafters above the plate.
- 5.1.5 The aisles were added in the 15th century and the existing roof is probably the primary structure from that date. The wallplate above the south arcade has edge-halved scarf joints and although this type of joint was in use in the previous century and in the post-medieval period it was in common use in the 15th century and is thoroughly consistent with a roof of that date.
- 5.1.6 Later additions to the roof include more complex 19th century moulded facing to the plain wallplate on the south wall of the aisle.
- 5.1.7 The 15th century perpendicular tower required repair to various elements of the battlemented parapet. The existing parapet and crocketed pinnacles appeared to consist of largely of primary fabric.
- 5.1.8 Two merlons were completely missing from the tower parapet, one from the west side and one from the south side. The south-west and the south-east pinnacles were in poor condition having suffered heavily from weathering, and required repair.
- 5.1.9 The two missing examples were replaced with identical newly carved blocks matching the existing mouldings. These were bonded to the existing parapet using lime mortar.
- 5.1.10 The existing stonework of the pinnacles was repointed and a new carved finial was fitted to the south-east pinnacle. The south-west pinnacle had the crocketed member immediately below the finial renewed and the existing finial was refitted on the new block .
- 5.1.11 The replacements to roof and parapet were made of traditional materials and care was taken to preserve and protect the surviving historic fabric.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

Oxford Archaeology 2003 *St Giles Church, Imber, Wiltshire, Archaeological Assessment Report*



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location.

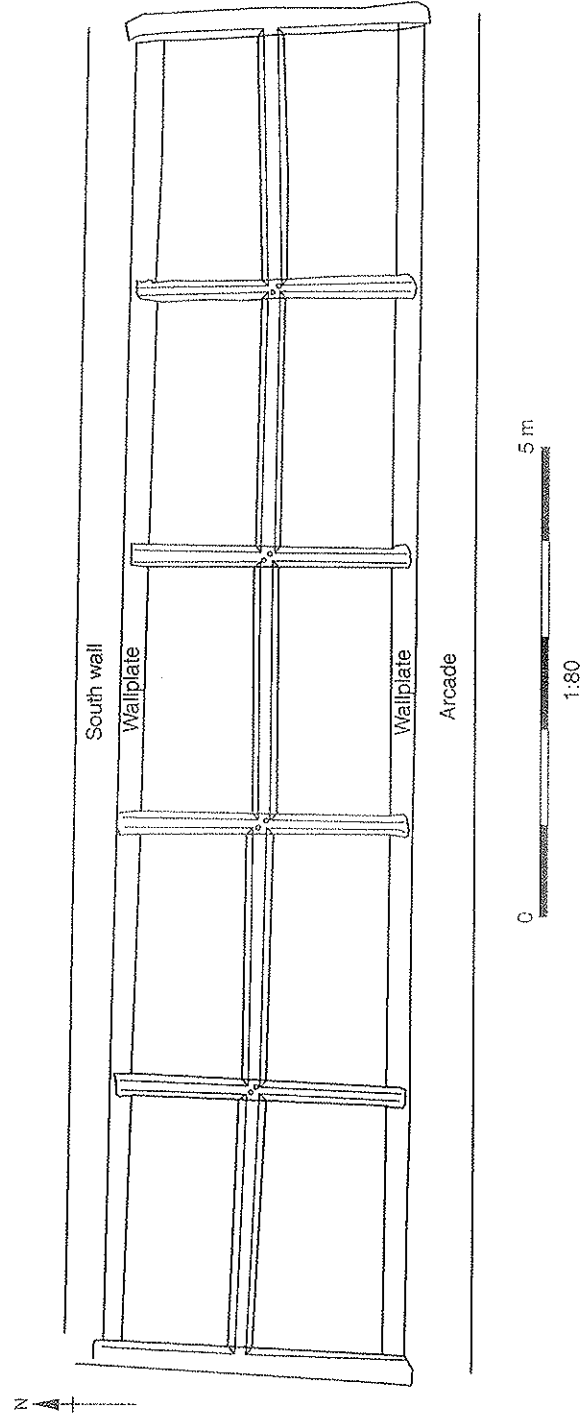


Figure 2: Plan of South Aisle roof omitting common rafters

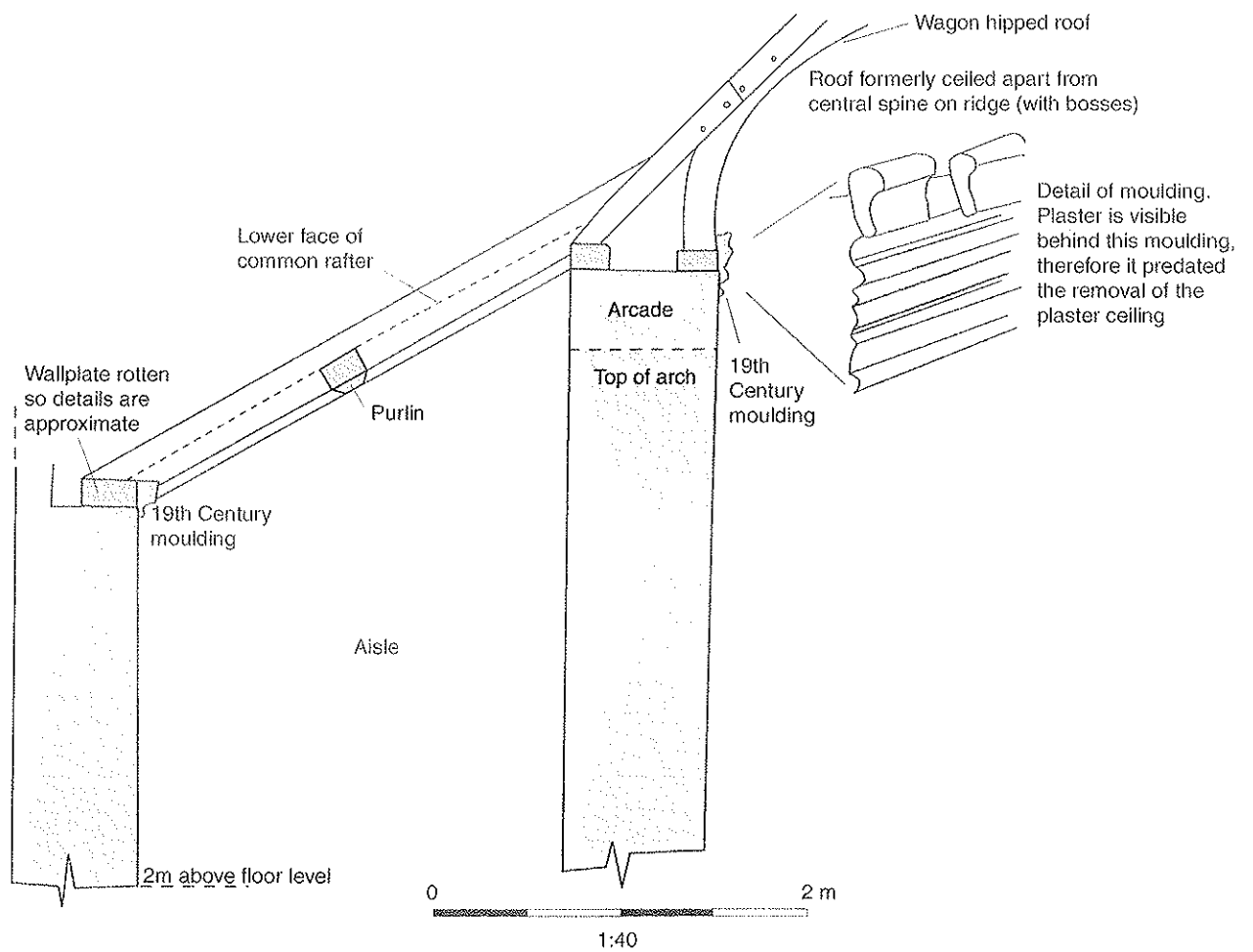


Figure 3: Section through South Aisle showing roof construction



Plate 1: General view of south aisle



Plate 3: General interior view of south aisle roof



Plate 2: Hole in south aisle roof



Plate 4: Detail of main rafter and purlin



Plate 5 :19th century moulding at top of aisle wall



Plate 7: Nave roof showing aisle rafters attached to nave rafters (on right)



Plate 6: Wallplate on south arcade wall



Plate 8: South tower pinnacles during repair



Plate 9: Rear view of replaced merlon



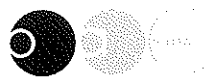
Plate 10: Upper south side of tower showing repaired pinnacles and merlon



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