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THE ANGLO-SAXON CHURCH AT YATELEY

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ABSTRACT

The rebuilding of the church at Yateley, Hants. after a fire provided an opportunity to record the standing Anglo-Saxon north wall and to excavate inside the nave.

INTRODUCTION

All who care for Hampshire churches were saddened to hear of the act of arson which burnt out the ancient fabric of St Peter's, Yateley in 1979. Although the fifteenth-century timber-framed tower – a fine example of this distinctive style – was left charred but intact, the interiors of the chancel, nave and aisle were totally destroyed, and of the roof only the tie-beams over the nave survived. The arcade of the south aisle, ascribed to the fourteenth century (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967, 727), had to be demolished, as did the south wall of the aisle. It was possible to save only the walls of the chancel, the north wall of the nave, the tower arch and the tower, and the south-west vestry. A new church and hall is now (1981–82) being constructed around these remains.

The north wall of the nave has for long been known to be the oldest part of the structure of St Peter's. When the exterior of the walls was stripped for repairs in 1952, a blocked window and door were observed (Loader nd, 11). The window was small, round-headed and slightly splayed, suggestive of an early period of English architecture. The outline of this window was preserved when the wall was re-rendered. The upper part of the door had been destroyed by a later window, so that it could not be dated on the basis of its style, but it had clearly been made obsolete by the construction of a new door and porch some five metres to its west. The decoration of these suggests a twelfth-century date (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967, 726) and it was observed in 1952 that they were part of what was clearly an extension westwards, and a heightening by *c*. 1m of the original nave; 'ferrells' (the local name for an iron-conglomerate heathstone) were used in the new work, and contrasted with the sarsen and flint of the wall containing the small window and the blocked door (Loader nd, 15). Loader was surely correct therefore to ascribe the original nave to a pre-Norman date, and thus to add Yateley to the list of Hampshire churches with Anglo-Saxon fabric partially surviving. The evidence provided by the blocked features was presumably not known to the compilers of the most important work on English architecture of the Anglo-Saxon period (Taylor and Taylor 1965; Taylor 1978), but was accepted by the authors of the Hampshire volume in the Penguin series on English buildings (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967, 726).

It was scarcely surprising that Taylor and Taylor should not have searched out an Anglo-Saxon church in north-east Hampshire, for it is an area notably devoid of such remains (see Fig 1). To the south one must travel to Hannington, on the Downs, before encounting another (Hare 1979), to the west to Wickham in Berkshire, and to the east as far as Guildford and Stoke d'Abernon in Surrey (Taylor and Taylor 1965, frontispiece map). Yateley is in what the Domesday Bood survey reveals to have been the poorest and least populated part of eleventh-century Hampshire, an area of heavily wooded infertile clays, sands and gravels (Welldon Finn 1962, 312, 360). Here there can have been little wealth to spare for church building, and timber would normally have been used in preference to sarsen and flint.

Why then should Yateley have been distinguished by an ecclesiastical stone building? The answer must lie in the eleventh-century ownership of the vill. Unfortunately, this is not altogether easy to establish. A vill named *Effelle* is recorded in Domesday Book and was owned

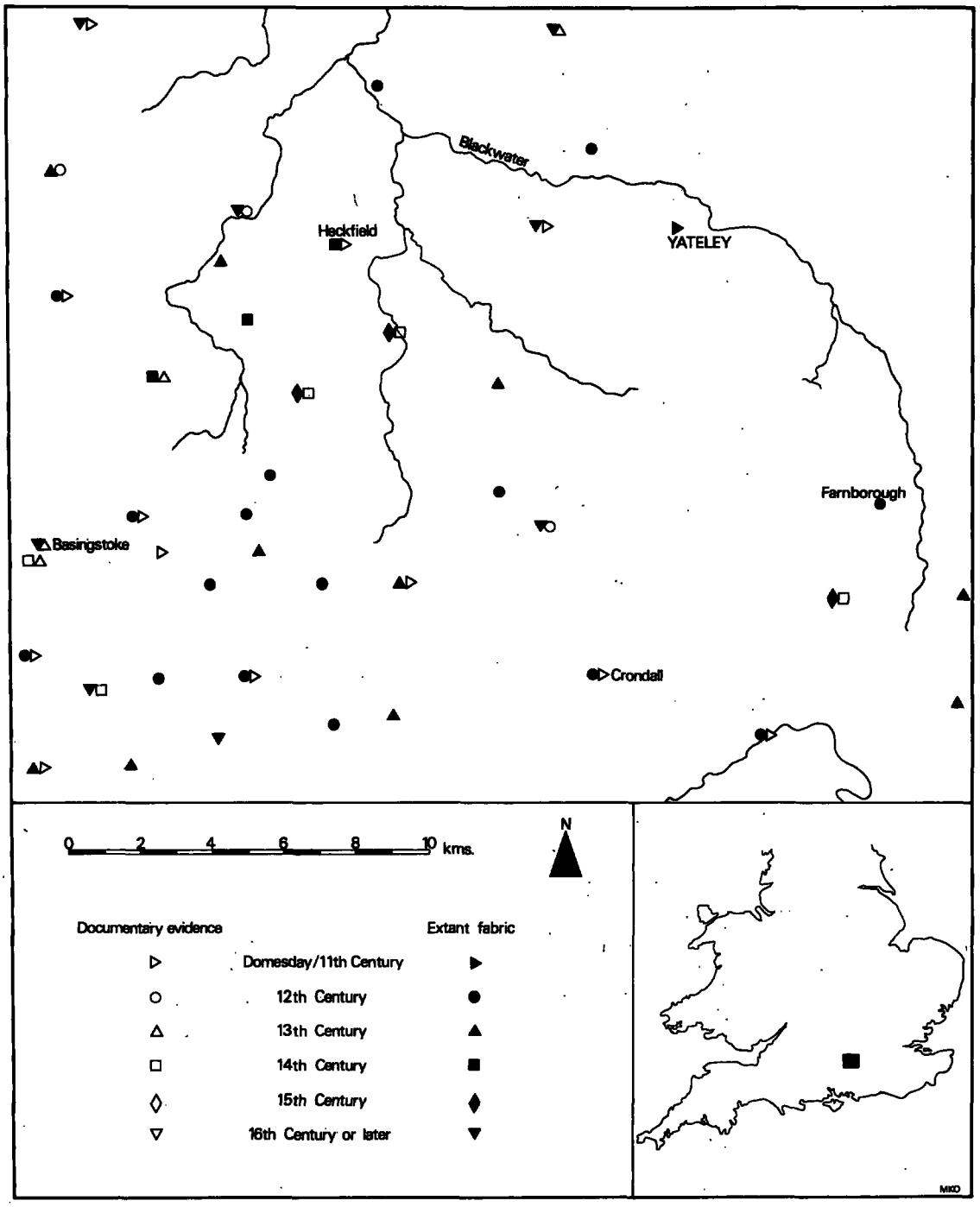

Fig 1. The church at Yateley in relation to other medieval churches and chapels in the area. Closed symbols indicate the date of the earliest part of the building's extant or recorded fabric; open symbols are used if there is documentary evidence to suggest an earlier date than that of the fabric. Sources: Pevsner and Lloyd 1967; VCH *Hampshire, Berkshire* and *Surrey*.

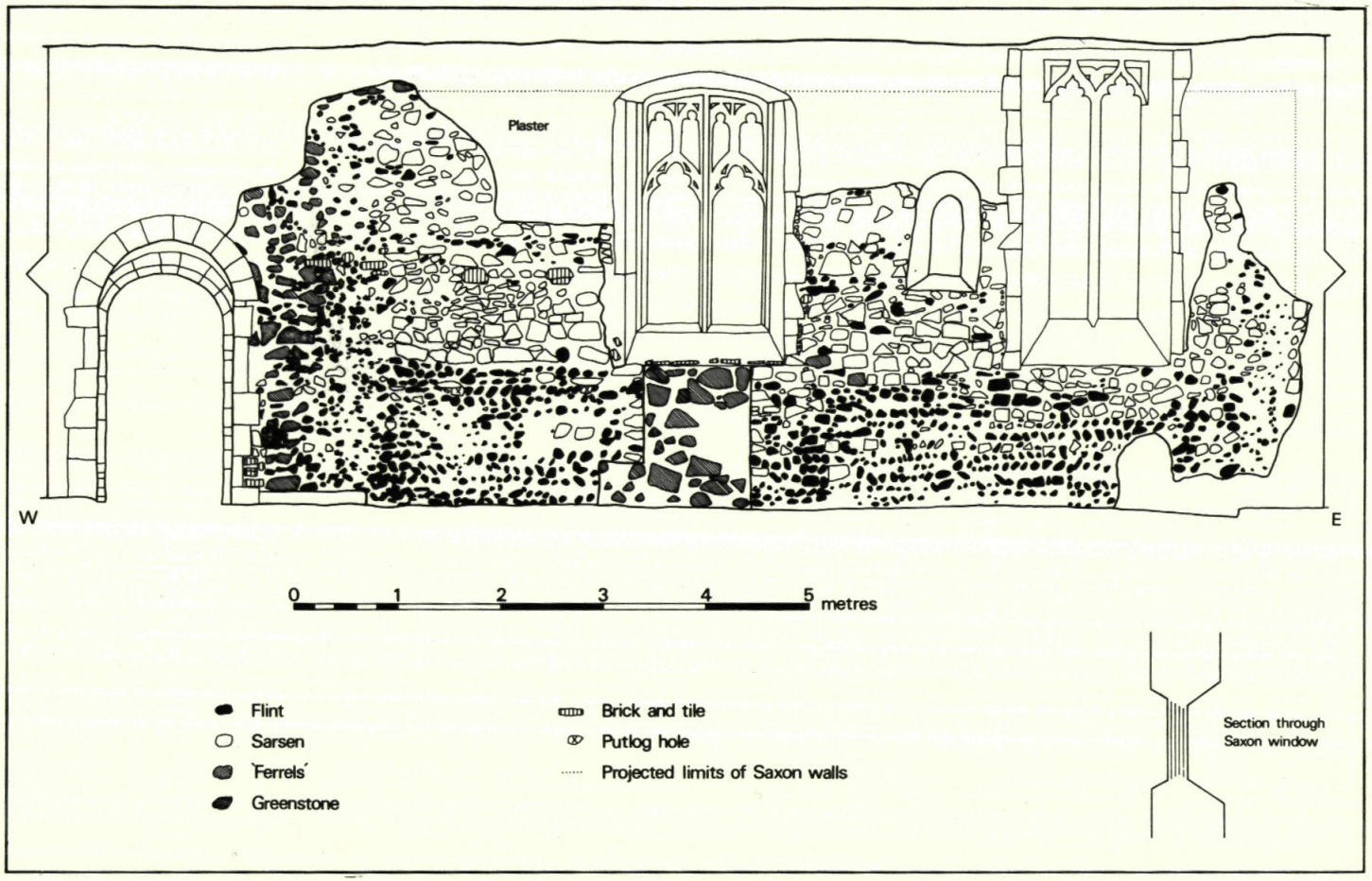

Fig 2. St Peter's, Yateley. Measured drawing of the interior face of the Anglo-Saxon part of the north wall, in the nave.

by Hugh de Port. It is sometimes said that this vill is Yateley (Welldon Finn 1962, 312; Loader nd, 6); but Hugh de Port's descendants are not recorded in subsequent documents as having any connection with Yateley, whereas they did hold the manor of near-by Heckfield in the twelfth century, and had the advowson of that church until 1202 (VCH IV 1911, 45, 50). Yateley's name does not appear in a recognisable form until 1236 (Gover 1961, 112), when 'Roger the chaplain' appears in the Assize Rolls (Loader nd, 20). In 1316, Yateley was a hamlet of Crondall, owned by St Swithun's Priory, Winchester, and it remained as a chaplaincy under the Crondall vicarage until the Dissolution (*ibid*, 5). There can be little doubt, therefore, that Yateley is not *Effelle*, but was regarded by the Domesday commissioners as part of the estate of Crondall, then held by the bishop of Winchester for the support of the monks of the Old Minster – later of course to become St Swithun's Priory (VCH I 1900, 465). Recent research has shown that the bishop's lands were relatively more likely to have substantial churches on them than those of other owners: of Hampshire's twenty-one churches known to have Anglo-Saxon workmanship, at least nine were on his estates or those of the Old Minster, as were 37% of the 126 churches mentioned in Domesday, whereas they owned only 11½% of all the vills recorded in the survey (Myers 1982, table 1 and pp 18–21).

RECORDING AND EXCAVATION

All the plaster was stripped from the interior of the north wall of the nave, except for some small areas near the top which were difficult to reach because of a tent of polythene sheets that had been hung over the wall to reduce weather deterioration. These areas are shown blank on the measured drawing (Fig 2), but were observed during subsequent rebuilding, and did not contain any features.

The lower part of the wall was built of flint, with an occasional piece of sarsen. The flint was sometimes laid in rather irregular bands, with some rough attempts at herring-bone coursing being apparent. In contrast, the upper part of the wall consisted mainly of roughly dressed sarsens. 'Ferrells' were virtually absent, but had been used in the blocking of the door, as was observed in 1952 on the exterior (see above). They were also used for the top metre, and for the wall continuing the nave to the west, in which is the present, Norman door. The different stones used give a very clear indication therefore of the original size of the wall. The difference between the flint of the lower part, and the sarsens of the upper, led to the suggestion that the two parts were of different dates (Loader nd, 11), but no difference could be observed in the mortar, nor was there any offset. Occasional put-log holes near the top of the flints provide evidence that this was planned as a point of constructional change. It can therefore be concluded that the wall was built in a single campaign.

This conclusion was confirmed by the scars of the west and east walls of the nave, since in neither could a building line be seen at the flint/sarsen junction. The rubble of the walls does not provide very clear vertical divisions, and the east face of the east wall had been disturbed by the construction of the chancel in the thirteenth century. The west wall was *c* 700mm wide, and the interior length of the nave was *c* 8.3m.

The blocked window was found to be round-headed and splayed – a good example of an Anglo-Saxon double-splayed window. Its sides were plastered, and there were very faint traces of painting, probably medieval. The fire had briefly revealed other patches of painting on the wall, but these were lost to rain before they could be covered. As it was decided to preserve this window plaster *in situ*, it was not possible to hazard whether it was the original pre-Conquest material or resulted from a post-Conquest restoration. At the level of the window, the north wall is 720mm wide, including the modern pebble-dash finish on the outside.

The blocked door was found to have had but rudimentary quoins, being occasional sarsens. What may have been a bigger sarsen had been removed from one corner.

A small trench was excavated on the outside of the north wall, to expose a patch of its footings. These proved surprisingly slight: only

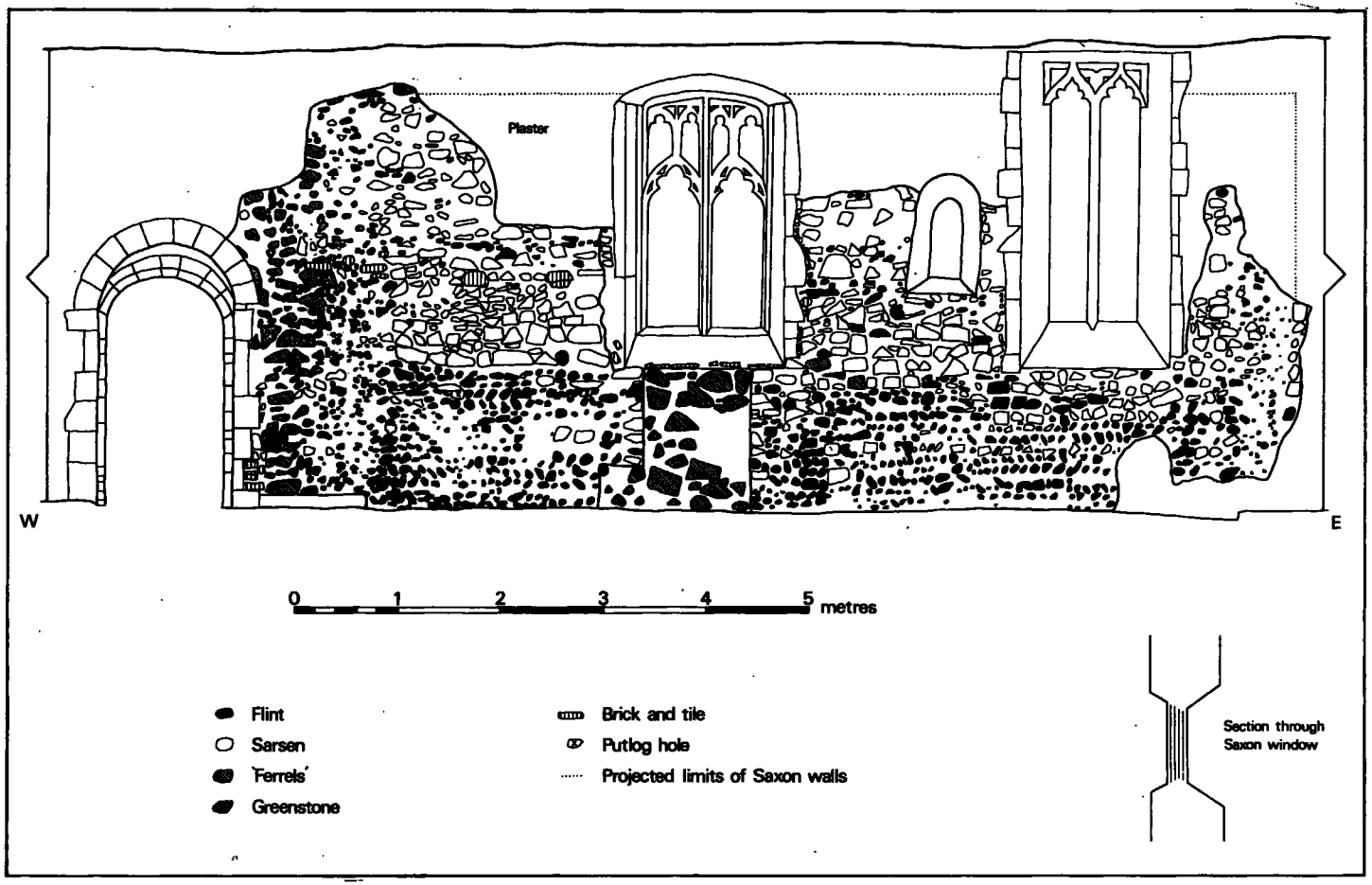

Fig 2. St Peter's, Yateley. Measured drawing of the interior face of the Anglo-Saxon part of the north wall, in the nave.

a layer of earth mixed with flints, *c* 400mm deep, underlay the wall. If the door had ever had a sill, it had been removed, for the 'ferrells' of the blocking came down to meet the earth. At the base of the wall was a large sarsen block, also resting on the earth. Presumably the whole wall has a base of such blocks, for a particularly large one can still be seen at what would have been the north-west corner angle of the Anglo-Saxon church. There was no trace of a foundation trench for the footings, for the ground had been much disturbed by burials.

It was not possible to remove the internal floor adjacent to the north wall at the time of excavation, but the subsequent contractors' work showed that the internal footings were also, except below the door, of large sarsens. These were photographed, but not drawn. Their tops were *c* 100mm below the line shown on Fig 2.

Heating ducts and the polythene covers prevented excavation of the whole of the nave area, so only the south side was investigated (Fig 3). No internal floor levels survived below the Victorian wooden joists, and there had in any case been much disturbance by graves and large brick vaults. Wall footings were found, though they were far from complete, especially at the east end.

Much of the west wall had been lost to a brick vault, but a small area that survived revealed a trench containing flints set in soil, 880m wide and 440mm deep. This corresponded to the external footings of the north wall. Above were set mortared flints, in a band 600mm wide. As this is a narrower measurement than that of this wall's scar in the nave wall, it may be that at least one side had been faced with sarsens which had been removed.

A line of sarsens did survive on the external face of the west end of the south wall. These were smaller than those of the north wall, although a single larger one survived further east. These sarsens, in places two deep, were backed against mortared flints, a single layer of which partly underlay them. There were no sarsens surviving on the internal face. The mortared flints were much wider, at *c* 1.60m where they could be measured, than the 720mm thickness of the standing north wall, so it may be assumed that the south wall would have been narrower than its foundations. The footings had been removed at the east end, except that they could be seen below the chancel steps. The trench was widened as far as rubble debris permitted at this point, to establish whether there had been a south porticus. The area had been much disturbed, but no trace of a porticus was encountered.

At the time of excavation, it was hoped that the chancel floor would be preserved in the rebuilding. In the event this did not happen, but no record was made when the steps were removed. Consequently the arrangement of the east end is unknown. In 1952, an apsidal end was observed, which was thought to be part of the twelfth-century enlargement of the building (Loader nd, 15). It is frustrating that we do not know if the original church had a nave with a narrow, square- or apsidal-ended chancel, or was a single-cell structure.

The only other feature worthy of mention concerns the octagonal pillars of the south arcade, which rested on the footings of the Anglo-Saxon nave wall. These were narrower than the old wall would have been, and the nave must have been re-roofed to take account of this; the reduced width of the new arcade wall would have affected the central axis line of the church, bringing it somewhat to the south. The effect of this can still be seen in the wall of the tower, in which the twelfth-century window, its lower part destroyed by the inserted tower-arch, is slightly off-centre in relation to the keystone of the arch below it. The window is on the original axis line, the arch on the new one.

THE FINDS

It could not be expected that many objects would be found in such an excavation, and fortunately it was not necessary to disturb any graves. The finds are all from effectively unstratified contexts, no pottery or other debris being found within those parts of the wall footings which were removed during the work in the vain hope of finding further evidence for dating.

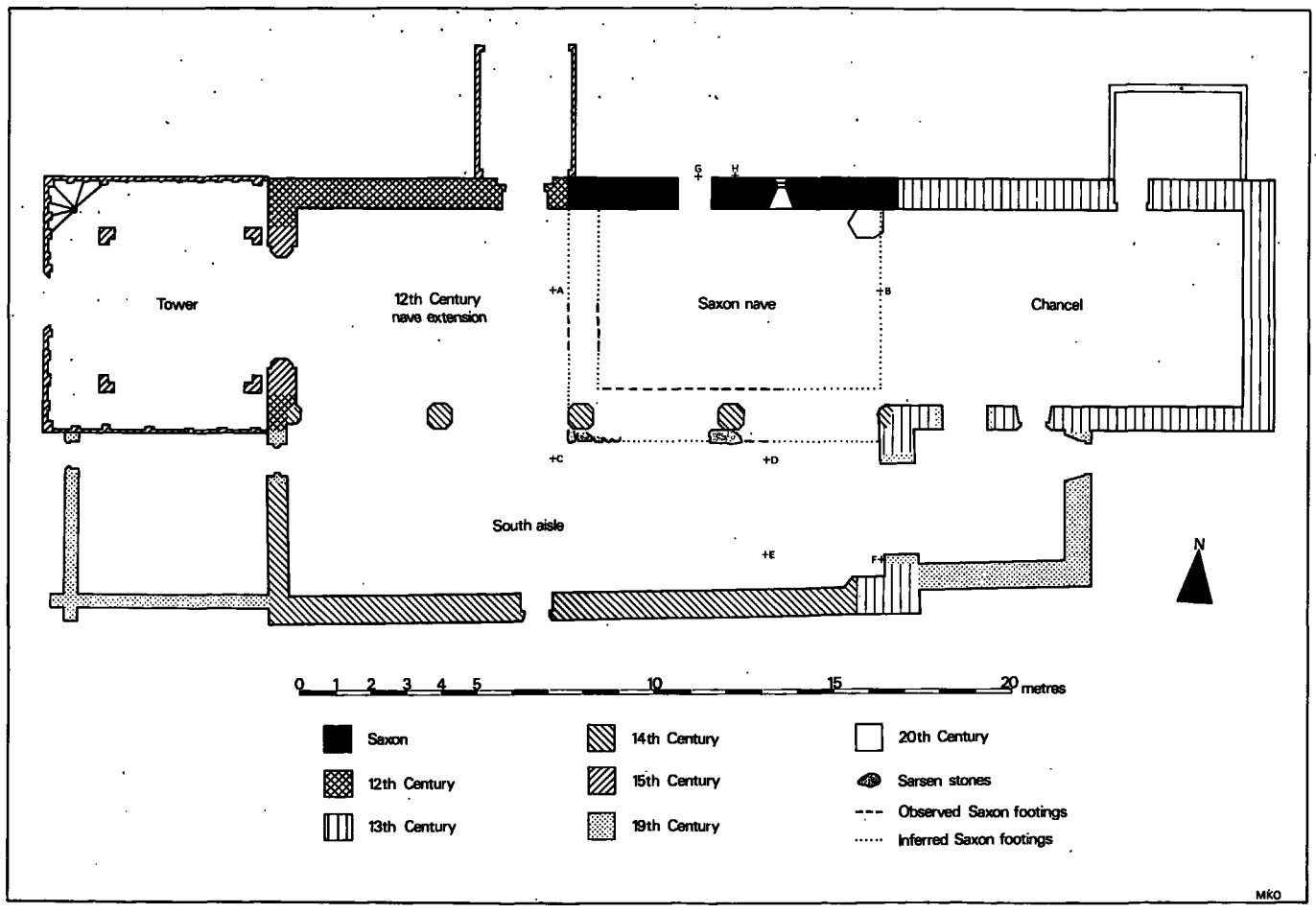

Fig 3. St Peter's, Yateley. Plan of the church. The areas excavated inside the nave are outlined by the letters A–F; G–H mark the position of the trench on the exterior.

Numismata

Two twelfth-/thirteenth-century coins were found, the first in the interior of the nave in soil disturbed by grave-digging, the second in the soil outside the north wall. We are grateful to Mr N J Mayhew, of the Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for his identification of the former as a Short Cross penny of Class IV (1194–1205), minted Ricard on Lun (= London), the latter as a Long Cross cut halfpenny, of Class II–III (1248–50), minted Roger on Glou (= Gloucester). It is interesting that such a small excavation should yield two medieval coins, relatively many more than an occupation site of the same period could be expected to produce. Presumably people took coins to church for offerings, and inevitably some of these gifts and taxes were mislaid (cf Rigold 1977, 60). Also found were a Token Copper Farthing of Charles I (1635–49), and a copper token halfpenny inscribed James York of/Turnam Green 1669: his halfpenny.

Floor-Tiles

An interesting collection of medieval floor-tiles was kept in Yateley church before the fire. Some of these were rescued and removed for safe-keeping, and we have not examined them. They have been recorded previously, however, and attributed to the great fourteenth-century factory at Penn, Bucks (Hohler 1942, designs P 11, P 13–P 16, P 32–P 35, P 40, P 98: also recorded at other sites, mostly in Bucks, eg at Hitcham, and in Berks at Hurley Priory). To this list can now be added an example of Hohler design p 7 (which is also Eames 1980, design 1717; Fig 4, no 1). Perhaps also from Penn is a design recorded at Hurley Priory (Ward-Perkins and Williams-Hunt 1938, design 32; Fig 4, no 2). Both of these were produced by either the 'stamp-on-slip' or 'slip-over-impression' method (Drury and Pratt 1975, 139–40), and have unkeyed backs. Similarly produced, though on a larger quarry and in a redder fabric, is the fleur-de-lys design (Fig 4, no 3), for which we have found no parallel, even at near-by Reading Abbey. It is probably not a Penn product.

Three designs were produced by the inlaying method. Fig 4, no 4 has two variations of flowers in a circle: it would be suitable for use in smaller units, but none of the fragments has been scored to facilitate sub-division. They have three or four trowel-scooped keys on the back. Fig 4, no 5 appears to be part of a dragon or griffon: it also has trowel-scooped keys. For neither of these can we find a parallel. There is a parallel for Fig 4, no 6, which is a small piece of the design of Eames 1980 design 2384; but the catalogue numbers (Eames 1980, nos 7743–7746) ascribe the British Museum's titles to '?Combermere church, Cheshire', so the similarity must be coincidence if that provenance is correct. The fabric is similar to that of no 5.

Perhaps the most interesting of all are nos 6 and 7 on Fig 4. The first is a design from a category of tiles which by great good fortune were published by Mr Mark Horton just as we were completing the preparation of our report. The tiles were made in the Low Countries and seem to have been produced and imported for a short period in the 1550s; they have a limited distribution in the south of England (Horton 1981, 235–36). No 6 is a border tile, and has been found in Southampton (*ibid* 241, Fig 55, 13); it was produced by the slip-over-impression method and has a nail-hole in one corner of the upper face, a characteristic trait of the Low Countries tiles. No 7 is inlaid and there is no nail-hole in the one extant corner. Dr David Williams has very kindly examined the fabrics of nos 6 and 7 for us, however, and has found them to be very similar (and unlike the fabric of no 3). We therefore consider it to be another in the Low Countries series.

The design of no 7 is interesting, being part of an inscription in Roman capital letters. There are inscriptions on other tiles in the Low Countries series (Horton 1981, 237), though none is arranged like no 7 in straight lines, and none has letters with such distinctively seriffed capitals and with the stems of 'I's and 'T's divided in the middle. Although this latter feature seems to have been practised by French printers in the 1490s–1520s (Silvestre 1853), one of whom at least came to England (William Faques, 1504; Plomer 1900, 44), it seems to have been used subsequently in Antwerp; this 'Antwerp textura' type was used in England by

Fig 4. Floor-tiles from the excavations at St Peter's Yateley. Thickness: 1, 25mm; 2, 27mm; 3, 27mm; 4, 24mm; 5, 29mm; 6, 27mm; 7, 23mm; 8, 29mm; Nos 4–6 and 8 are inlaid, the rest stamp-on-slip or slip-over-impression. Scale 1:3.

printers such as R Jugge and N Hill, in the decades 1545/55 (Isaac 1936, 21 and pls 46a, 49a). These dates correspond very interestingly with those for the currency of the tiles suggested by Horton.

It was no little surprise to us to discover that two of the Yateley tiles were likely to belong to the 1550s, whereas the dates usually ascribable to tiles in English parish churches long predate the onset of the Henrician Reformation. Horton has ingeniously suggested that the Low Countries tiles may more often have been supplied to houses being built or rebuilt in the period, rather than to churches (1981, 243–44). It is therefore worth observing that Hall Place, Yateley, later the manor house, which was sited close to the church, may well have been demolished and rebuilt by the Allen family at this period; there seems to be no definitive description of it, although it was remembered that it had a 'fine large oak staircase' when demolished in 1828, and that the ground floor was panelled (Loader nd, 41–42). We cannot but wonder if it did not also have a tiled floor.

Acknowledgements

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We should like to thank Yateley residents for their assistance, and Mr Gordon Peake for his support and that of members of the North-East Hampshire Archaeological Society. Students of the Department of Archaeology worked hard despite thunderstorms and other impediments, and we are grateful to them, and to Mr Paul Stamper who supervised the recording of the standing wall.

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