

THE CHURCH OF ST PETER STANTONBURY, MILTON KEYNES

PAUL WOODFIELD

The church of St Peter, Stanton Low, Stantonbury parish, stands close to the River Great Ouse on the northern edge of Milton Keynes. It is now a desolate and atmospheric ruin. This article reviews the architectural evidence provided by historical photographs to which is now added evidence obtained by clearing out accumulated rubble from the interior. Five phases of evolution are now suggested, beginning in the Norman period, and the foundations outside the west end are now interpreted not as a tower, but a mausoleum for the Wittewronge family. A fine fourteenth-century carved stone head was found, and furnishings from the church still extant are noted.

INTRODUCTION

The deserted village of Stantonbury and its abandoned church at Stanton Low have figured from time to time in this Journal. The excuse for this, another article, is the results of an archaeological recording brief undertaken in August 2001 by P.Woodfield, ahead of the consolidation of the remains, plus a new analysis of the church's structure. This article is dedicated to the memory of Ray Bellchambers, local historian, ex-councillor and Board member of Milton Keynes Development Corporation. He died suddenly on 21 November 2007 before he could take this opportunity of adding his contribution, distilled from his memory and from his participation in excavations with Alfred Bullard, Keith Tull and others. However Ray was able to discuss some points and contribute to this new analysis of the evolution of the building.

The small former parish church of St Peter, Stantonbury, lies at NGR SP 83575 42725, north of New Bradwell, just above the flood plain of the River Great Ouse (Fig 1).

HISTORY

Until the twelfth century, the only significant structure known in this area was an extensive Roman 'villa' or trading centre on the banks of the Great Ouse, some half a mile north of the church.¹ The extensive range of buildings here may have stimulated the later settlement at Stantonbury, and indeed some Roman tile was built into the church

fabric. A watching brief in March 1966 recorded some Saxo-Norman pottery dating from the eighth century on, and a small arched stone, possibly a window-head was noted in this survey, built into the gable of the west wall of the nave. If this is so it may be of late-Saxon or early-Norman date.

There is little written material on the early history of the church; what is known has been summarised by Browne Willis (1740),² Lipscomb (1847),³ Sheahan,(1862),⁴ Ratcliff (1900),⁵ and restated with amplification by Mynard (1977);⁶ by Helen Bamford for English Heritage in 2004,⁷ and by others. The first mention of the church is in 1181 when it formed part of an endowment given by William and Ralph Barry to Goring Priory Oxfordshire, (Augustinian Nuns, after whom the settlement became known as Stanton Barry or Stanton Barré) after the Barry family who held the manor with the mill, dovecote, and 114 acres in 1326, until the late fourteenth century. According to Ratcliff, the village came within the holdings of the Vaux family of Lathbury, near Newport Pagnell, and Harrowden, Northants, until the Reformation. During this period its lands were enclosed, resulting in a serious depopulation. The decline continued under subsequent owners, including Thomas Cawarden, who granted it with lands to Sir Edmund Ashefield in 1551,⁸ and Sir John Temple who owned the manor from c.1577 up to his death in 1632. In 1653 the manor was sold to Sir John Wittewronge, the 1st baronet. Initially Wittewronge just maintained the gardens but, on the marriage of his eldest son, also John, he commenced the remodelling and enlarging of the 'Old Hall'. This

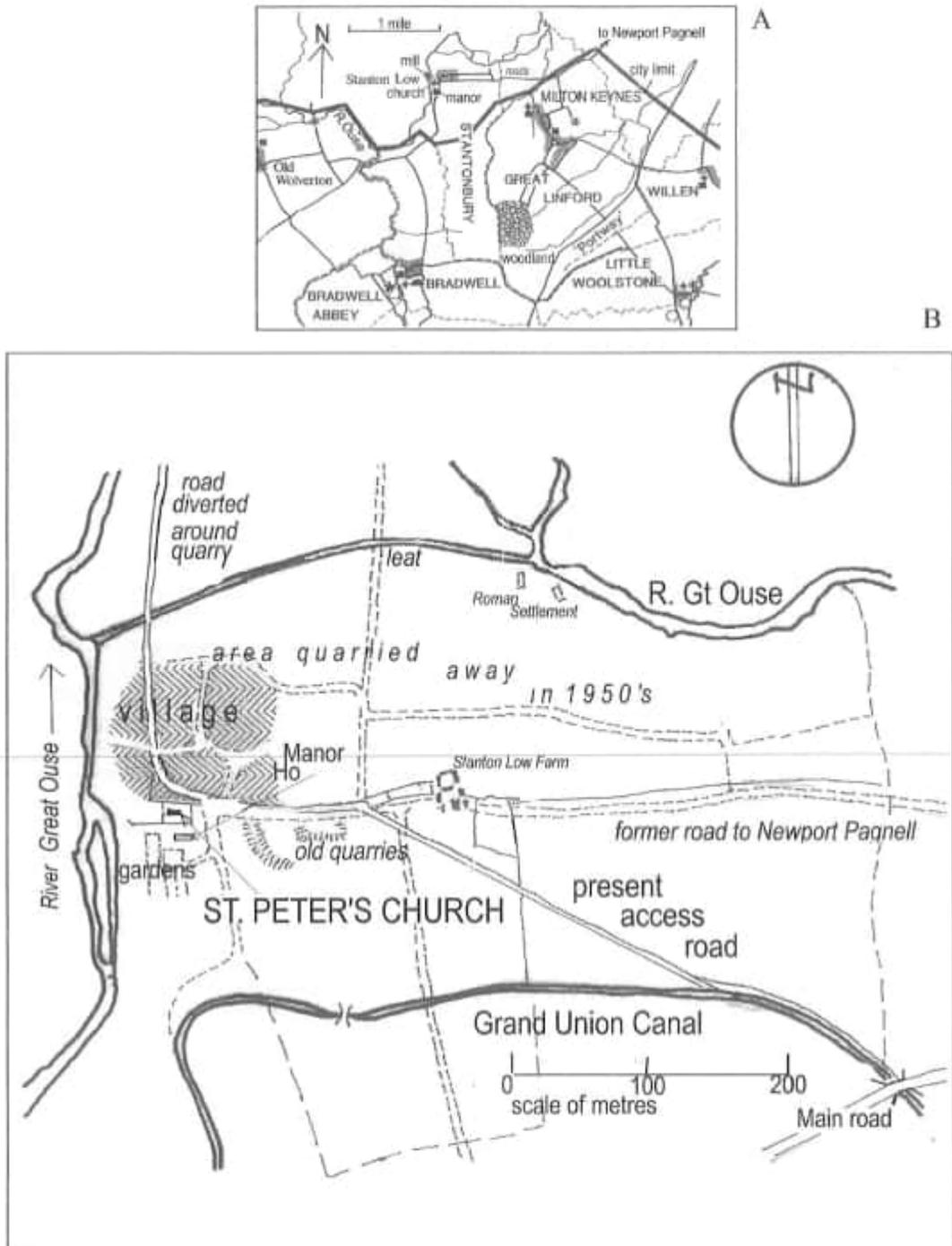


FIGURE 1 (A) Location of the site in relation to the medieval parish boundaries, and (B) the church and village with the known roads

work he undertook on a grand scale between the years 1662 and 1669, largely in brick, burnt on site, with stone mullioned windows and stone tile roofing, and he set it in some fine formal gardens, perhaps a new fashionable landscaping scheme, the remains of which are still visible south of the church.⁹ A cartouche with the family coat of arms from this house, dated 1665, is now reset on the west front of Rothamsted Manor, Hertfordshire. Stantonbury House appears to have declined after 1721 when Sir John, Wittewronge, the 3rd baronet, was interned in the Fleet for murder. In 1727 the property was sold to Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. The Duchess died in 1743 and the house passed to her grandson. Shortly after, Stantonbury House was destroyed by fire. However, some occupation of the site lasted, together with a few farmhouses, to the middle of the twentieth century. Stanton Low farmhouse, some 100m to the east of the church, and a large barn some 50m to the south, were demolished in the 1950s.

The church remained in use despite the completion in 1860 of a new church in New Bradwell by the eminent architect G.E. Street. Being much more conveniently situated, the majority of worshippers transferred their allegiance to St James although St Peter's continued as the *consecrated* parish church and was cared for and last restored in c.1911–2.

An unpublished pen and ink sketch of the church from the south-east survives in the Bodleian Library¹⁰ (Fig 2A). This is the earliest known illustration of the building and was made about 1860, perhaps in anticipation of its impending redundancy. The drawing is clearly labelled "*Stanton Barry, Bucks (destroyed)*". It shows a low chancel with a 3-light east window, (not like the c.1956 photograph on Fig 3C, probably a draughtsman's error), and two lancets in the chancel south wall. Gravestones obscure the lower part of the walling. The canopied south door of the nave and two high-set windows are clear, but of greater interest is the timber-framed tower over the western end of the nave, and carrying a pyramidal tiled roof. Had not the artist, 'FGD', so clearly named it, the sketch may be taken for elsewhere, for instance, Little Woolstone, 4 miles to the south-east. This church has a similar timber belltower of the fourteenth century, carried on tall timber posts internally. The chancel in the Stanton Barry sketch does not resemble the surviving structure and the depiction of a mysterious relieving arch, large and high on

the eastern nave wall, must raise doubts as to its accuracy, or indeed its identification. There are grave tablets on the sketch fixed to the south nave wall.

An application for St Peter's to be taken into care by the Redundant Churches Board was opposed by the then incumbent on the grounds that an annual service was still held there (although none could remember it!). An account of certain curious historical events said to have taken place in the parish was published by the incumbent, the Revd. A. Newman Guest in the *Northampton Mercury* in 1924; these are collected and published in '*Stantonbury Tales*'.¹¹

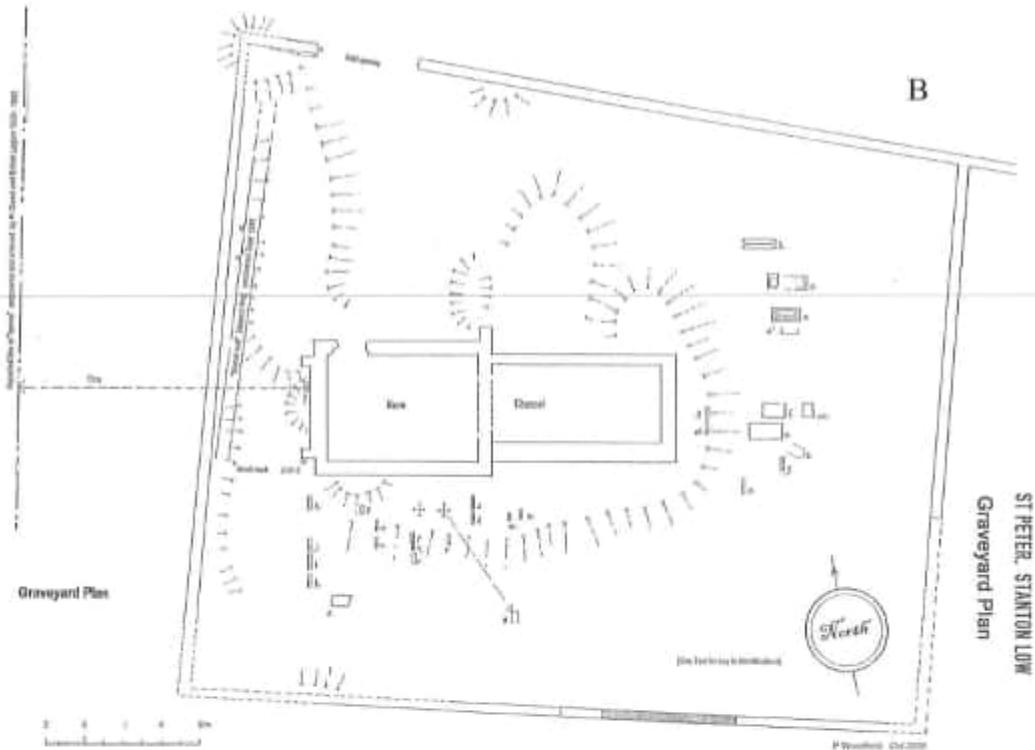
Later history, from 1947, is a chapter of ever increasing neglect, removal of fittings, vandalism and destruction. In 1948 the church was said to be leaking badly, and had lost its windows. The eighteenth century box pews were missing, and the handsome thirteenth century round font with trefoiled panels in the nave, and also the Jacobean pulpit from the south-east corner of the Nave had both been wrecked beyond repair, (Fig 3A and B). The church's decline was reported in successive *Records of Buckinghamshire* volumes. In volume 16 (1948) it is recorded that the north porch was semi-ruinous. A plan to salvage the chancel arch "one of the finest in Buckinghamshire" was initiated in the 1950s by the rector of St James, New Bradwell, Revd. H. Fellows, at the cost of £200. The stones were numbered, taken down and stored, temporary supports being installed in its place to prevent the collapse of the surrounding stonework. It seems that the arch was removed without proper consultation as local people complained. After the arch had been in store for some time, money was eventually found to complete Fellow's project. In 1954 the arch was re-erected against the interior face of the west door of St. James, New Bradwell, where it now remains.

THE INTERNAL FITTINGS

The rich collection of fittings at St. Peter's was described in Volume 2 of the Buckinghamshire Inventory, by the Royal Commission, published in 1913,¹² and in the *Victoria County History* Vol. 4, 1949. Many were either stolen, broken up by vandals (wall monuments and the pulpit), or removed for safe keeping (the parish chest and the crest of the Temple's funerary helm). The helm does not



A



B

FIGURE 2 The 2001 survey of the church and graveyard, and below, the 1860 sketch of the church. (Reproduced with permission of the Bodleian Library Oxford MS. Top Bucks c.1, fol. 148)

The Church of St Peter Stantonbury, Milton Keynes



A



B

C



FIGURE 3 (A) the pulpit and reading desk, and (B) a communion table and damaged font, and below, St Peter's church from the north-east, all from photographs taken c. 1956

seem to have survived; it had a ridged skullpiece, with visor and beaver, nor do the funerary gauntlets or rowel spur. A sword, apparently also part of the achievements, appears in an early (?1957) photograph (Fig 4A). The curiously heavy altar table, dedicated, according to a crudely incised inscription on the top, to the holding of the Mass, by Father A Newman Guest, and the oak crest, probably from above Sir John Temple's helm, together with the fine seventeenth-century parish chest, now reside in St. James's Church, New Bradwell, (Fig 5 a, b and c), but the dossal curtains and altar linen, which also appear in the Church inventory, cannot now be identified. The crest is in the form of a three-quarter Saracen's head set against cushioned strapwork. It is a fine piece of carving, dated by Dr. Eric Gee (RCHM York) to the second quarter of the seventeenth century.¹³ The form suggests that the Temples may have originally claimed ancestors in the crusades, but, by the later medieval period the Saracen's head had become no more than a stock-in-trade item of heralds. Panelling from the broken pulpit finally found reuse as the electricity meter cupboard in a house in Weston Underwood.

EXCAVATIONS OF 1955-6

From May to October 1955, Mr. G.K. Tull undertook limited excavation on the north side and at the west end of the church. The position of these trenches, taken from Tull's notes, is shown by chain lines on the plan, (Fig 6)). His comprehensive diary of these activities survives, but was not published in full, probably due to his untimely death in late 1977. The scaled plans are now missing, as are the finds, which included a variety of pottery including Potterspur type wares, the spur rowel, and some human skeletal remains which were respectfully reburied elsewhere. The results are briefly mentioned by D.C. Mynard in *Records of Bucks*, XIX, 1971. The impetus created by these excavations led to the formation of the Wolverton and District Archaeological Society.

In 1956-8, Margaret Jones, carried out limited excavations for the then Ministry of Works, to the north of the Church on the Iron Age and Roman settlement, ahead of gravel extraction.¹⁴ Those involved in the excavation heard and witnessed what appears to be the destruction of the remaining roof structure of the church on the 1st May 1956. The destruction was apparently deliberate, as a

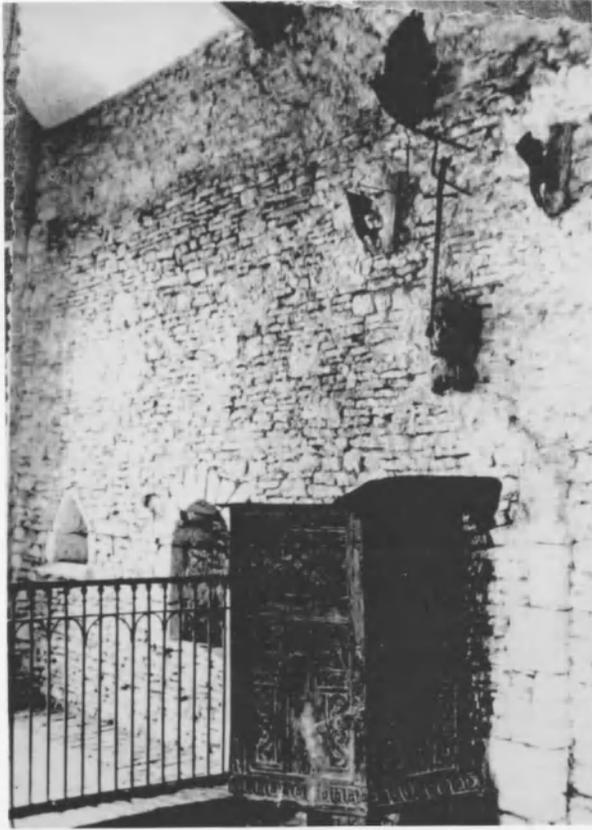
tractor trailing chains belonging to the local farmer was seen driving away, directly after a major and noisy collapse.

Notwithstanding the poor condition of the remains of St Peter's, the church, then a ruin, was listed at Grade II on 17 November 1966. A further application was made by the Advisory Board for Redundant Churches for permission to demolish and clear the remains in 1973-4, but this was refused by the Department of the Environment.

The local authority, now responsible for the care of the building and site, has attempted to consolidate and protect what remains of the walls by capping them with cement, and closing the openings to the graveyard garth, although the fencing surrounding the site was frequently damaged both by casual visitors, vandals, and by cattle. Up until October 2001, access was in effect unrestricted and the site was covered with nettles, elder and brambles. Further, weather had undermined the hard cement cappings, causing further deterioration in the stonework of the walls.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION (Figs 6, 7 and 8)

Architectural evidence for the parish church of Stantonbury was analysed by the Royal Commission and published in 1913, following a report by the local architect E. Swinfen Harris in 1910.¹⁵ At this time the building retained its late medieval or sixteenth-century roof. Harris reported that he had prepared a scheme for the restoration of the arcade and north aisle, but this had not been carried out. It was probably Harris who undertook the faculty restoration, in 1903, and perhaps the earlier restoration of 1892 when a faculty was also granted. The church had been largely disused for regular worship since the opening of St James, New Bradwell in 1857-60 which was better placed to serve the greatly enlarged congregation resulting from the development of the LNWR Locomotive and Carriage Works at Wolverton. St Peter's had struggled to serve this fast-growing community before the inauguration of the new church. The RCHM analysis must remain the basis for an architectural understanding of the fabric, as its subsequent decay, rapidly accelerated by the removal of the roof in 1956 inhibits a full reassessment. Tull's excavation in 1955 aimed specifically at elucidating the supposed north aisle, and an alleged under-



A



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D

FIGURE 4 The interior as in 1956, showing (a) the south chancel wall with the suspended achievements, (b) the north-west corner of the chancel, (c) the north-east corner of the chancel as seen through the removed chancel arch, and (d) the chancel arch position from the north arcade



A

B



C



FIGURE 5 (A) The Temple crest (B) the altar table, and (C) the parish chest, all now at St James' church, New Bradwell

St. Peter, Stanton Low

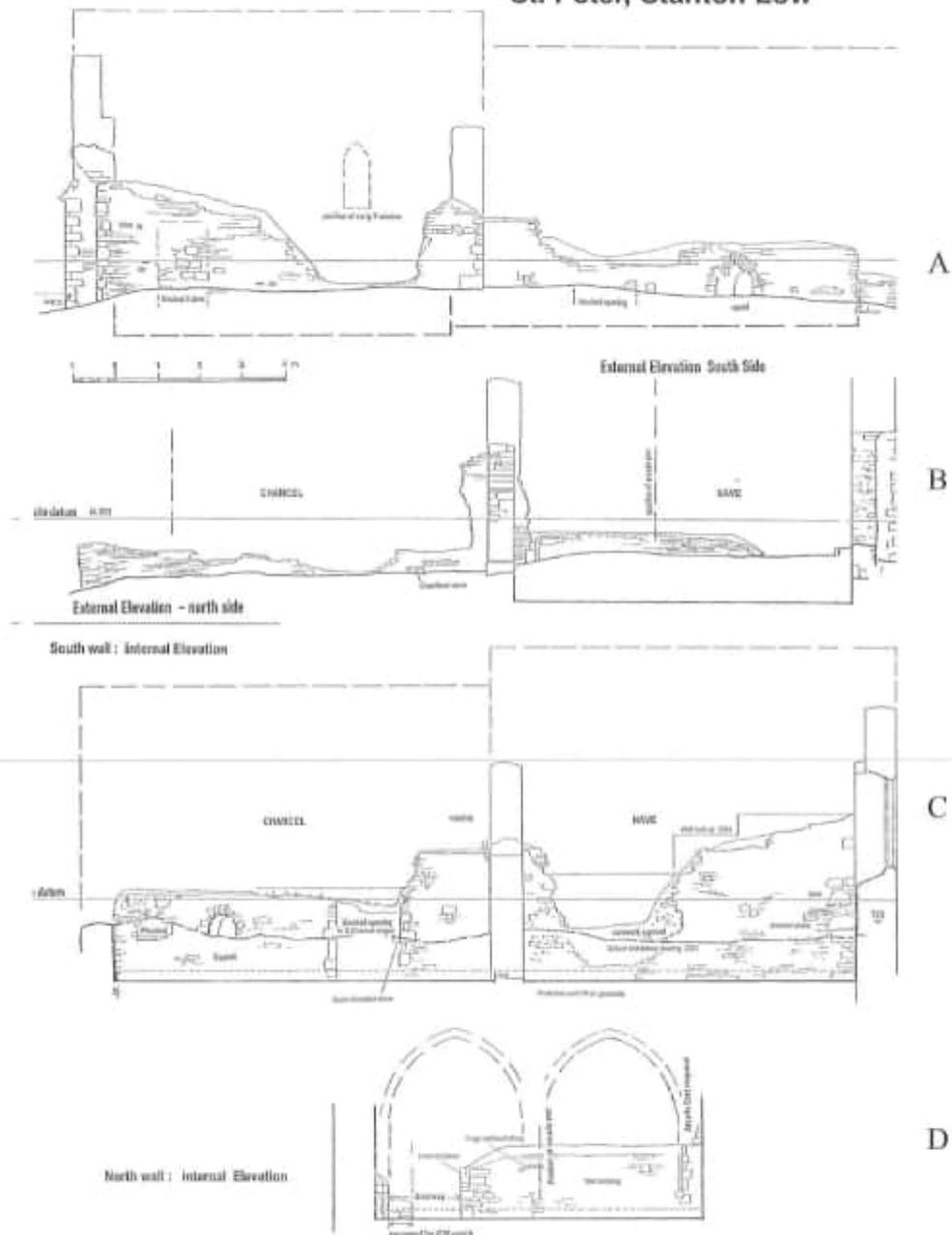


FIGURE 7 The standing walls as drawn at 2001. From the top (A) the exterior south wall, (B) the exterior of the north wall, (C) the interior of the south wall after the interior was cleared, and (D) the interior of the north nave wall, with the arcade outlined

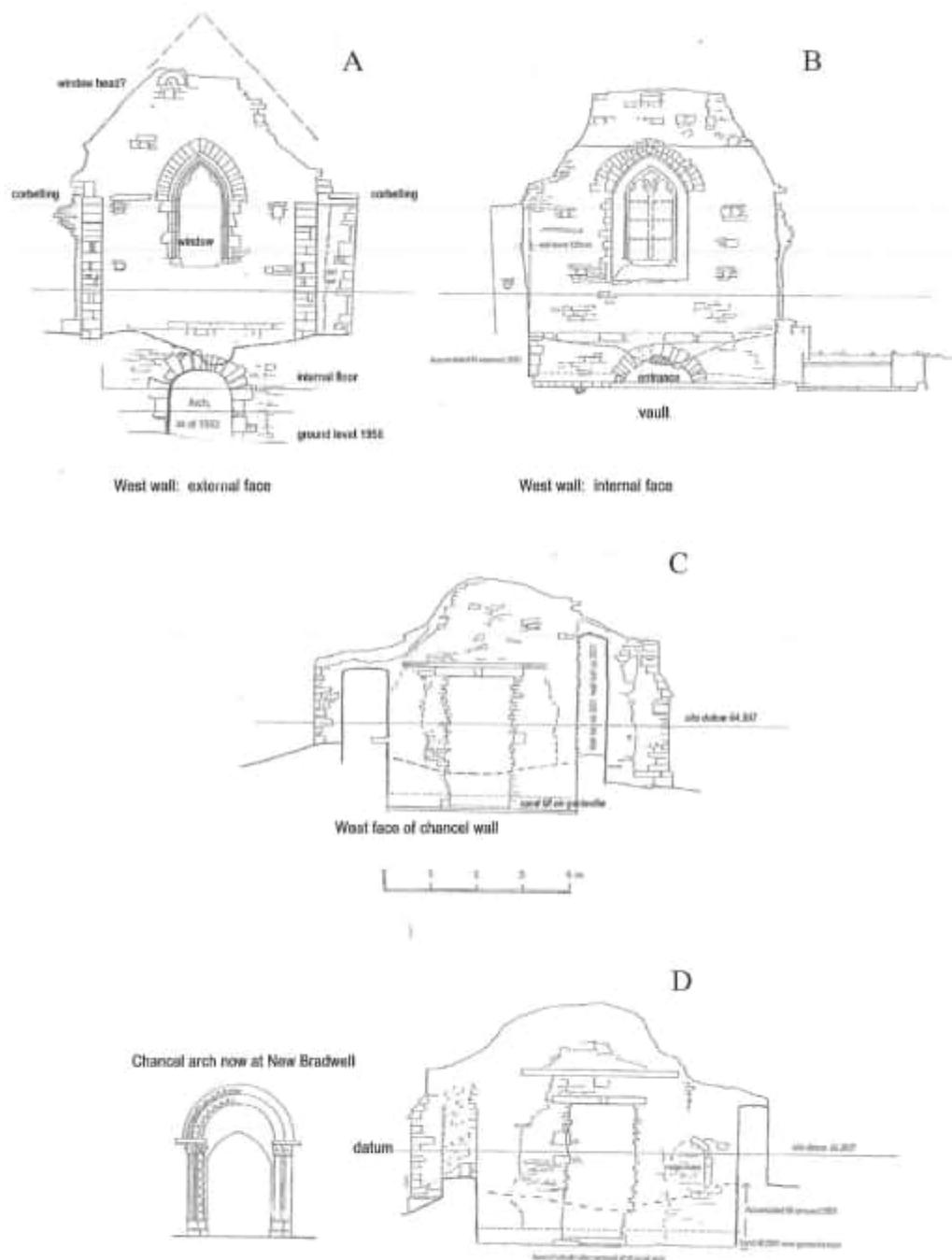


FIGURE 8 The cross walls, as drawn in 2001, (A) Exterior of the west wall; (B) the internal face of the west wall; (C) the west face of the chancel wall; and (D) the east face of the chancel wall, with the chancel arch at St James' to the same scale

ground tunnel at the west end of the church. Some results of this work were mentioned by Mynard in 1971.¹⁶ The final Redundancy Order was issued in 1975.

The present re-assessment follows the clearance of the accumulated debris inside the building by the writer under archaeological conditions, as a preliminary step towards a scheme of consolidation of the upstanding remains. No new investigative archaeological work was undertaken at the time of the internal clearance or the subsequent consolidation programme. Although handicapped by the loss of fabric since 1913, the reassessment is the result of detailed observations of the remaining fabric, together with a study of the records of the 1955 excavations, now to hand, plus early photographs. The interpretation advanced here thus differs in some respects from that suggested by the Royal Commission in 1913.

PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

A church, consisting of a simple nave with opposing lateral doors towards the W end and a narrower 2-bay chancel, was first erected in c.1170–90, as evidenced by the chancel arch. This is a somewhat later date than given by the RCHM, and followed by Pevsner and Williamson,¹⁷ and is suggested by the developed form of chevron ornament and beakheads on the chancel arch, with its three zoomorphic capitals, and one of trumpet-scallop form. Beakhead ornamentation, not common in this area, also appears, reset, at St Mary's, Bletchley. The arch has an internal chamfered pointed arch, which was present before its relocation, when it was much renewed. A similar pointed internal arch appears, for example, over the south door of St Peter's, Bromyard, Herefs,¹⁸ although here it is likely that this was a post-Norman modification. At the west end of Stantonbury the external face of the walls either side of what was interpreted as a tower has some corbelling, presumably for a bellcote, but not carried over the rebuilt west wall. On the east wall of the nave, south of the chancel arch, there was a simple shallow niche with two stones forming a pointed head. This is clearly seen in the published RCHM photograph. Now, only the south reveal, with one arch stone, remains after the rebuilding following the removal of the chancel arch. It was probably an aedicule for an image over a small nave altar.

Also of the first phase is the south wall of the nave, which had the same thickness (725mm). This is indicated by a photograph (Fig 4B) of the internal corner taken when the church was in ruins, probably in 1956. It shows a small blocked round-headed window cut away by a lancet window, also blocked, and its east jamb cut away by the insertion of a larger square-headed window. The small window may be an opening for a rood stair.

This phase was soon followed by a second phase, involving the addition of a north aisle with the creation of a two-bay arcade with a central quatrefoil column and a high moulded base. Harris reported that the column was set on a dwarf wall, no doubt the earlier north wall. This work, of c.1200–1230, may have also included a lengthening or rebuilding of the first chancel. This was now longer than the nave and furnished with one or more tall single-light lancets with cinquefoil cusped heads in deep reveals, one of which survived until the 1950s on the north wall. An aumbrey was positioned on this wall close to the Altar, and a larger cupboard or locker directly below the eastern window (Fig 4c). This latter feature may be a later insertion. There is slight photographic evidence of a central buttress on the north side related to the central roof truss, but this may have been removed when the building to the north was erected.

Some detail of the nave arcade can be seen in the published RCHM photograph. It had a short quatrefoil column with a circular capital set on a high plinth, supporting two pointed arches of two orders, each arch having a label moulding decorated with nailheads, all consistent with this date. A semi-circular respond corbel, probably from the arcade respond, appears in an early photograph, was found in the 1955 excavations, (Fig 12, No 23). The corbel was decorated on the short drum below the circular head mouldings. The western respond of the arcade is suspiciously close to the present west wall. The Royal Commission assumed the west wall was thickened and the south nave door was remodelled at the same time; it had a pointed arch set in a square headed internal reveal. There is now no evidence to add to this.

The third phase seems to have involved the rebuilding of the south wall of the chancel with a much more substantial wall, over a metre thick, not bonded in to the west wall of the chancel, nor apparently at the east end. It is not easy to see why this was done, unless the significant outward lean



B



C



FIGURE 9 (A) The 'tunnel' as seen from the exterior in c.1956. (B) and (C) the carved head, found in 2001 built in to the north wall doorway, front and side view

St. Peter, Stanton Low
Unfixed Stonework

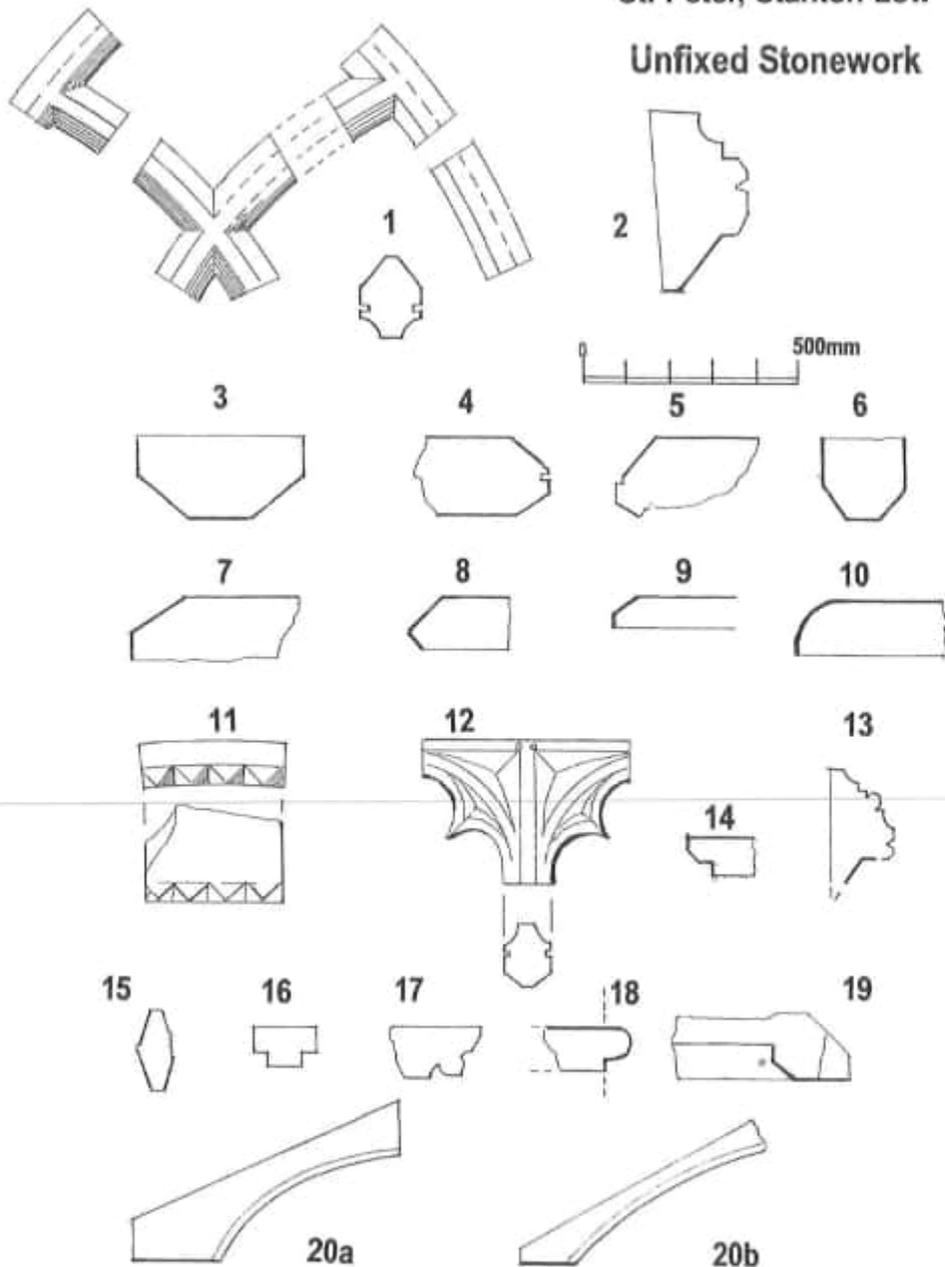
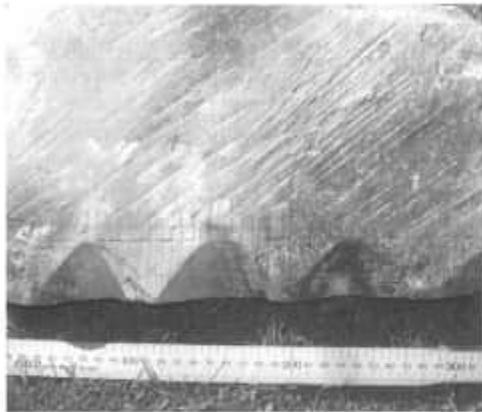


FIGURE 10 Drawings of the more significant pieces of stonework found in 2001. (1) east window tracery with section of mullion; (2) a door jamb, (3) chamfered voussoir, probably the arcade arch, (4–10) other moulded stones, (11) section of nailhead string; (12) head of a pair of late medieval windows; (13) Window jamb; (15–19) various other moulded stones of uncertain original location; (20a and b) rebated door heads



A



B



C



D



E

FIGURE 11 Photographs of some items of stone. (A) Nailhead string, (B) Stone No 12 showing two perforations of unknown purpose; (C) Stone with ?mason's mark; (D) joining faces of tracery showing grooving probably to take molten lead run in to provide a good key, and (E) fragment of a marble wall tablet probably of the Tyrrell family

on the present thick wall represents a continuation of a movement which had caused the second phase chancel wall to fail. It seems that a south chancel chapel was indeed erected in the fourteenth century. The evidence for this is the remarkably large and low-set round-headed squint in the rebuilt south wall, presumably directed from a chapel towards the high main altar position to allow the Elevation to be seen from the chapel, or less likely, from outside. Squints of this type are usually a feature inserted in the fourteenth century, which may be the date of this rebuilding.

The chancel south wall also had a wide opening towards its western end, subsequently blocked. This was probably the access door to a south chapel, or an adaptation of an earlier priest's door to the exterior. The RCHM also records a recess in the wall at the altar end, presumably the double bowled piscina, of which an under-chamfered sill remains *in situ* plus a displaced arched stone of its head. There are no features to date this particular phase, but it probably was during the fourteenth century when the presumed south chancel chapel was added. The E window, with its plain intersecting tracery, is clearly of the first decades of the fourteenth century, as may be the large oculus in the gable over. This appears in a mid-later nineteenth century photograph of the church, reproduced in Hill (1998)¹⁹ taken when it was still standing almost complete at the time the building was listed on 17 November 1966.

The fourth phase appears to be an all-round reduction in the size of the building involving the removal of the south chancel chapel and the north aisle, and the blocking of the two bay arcade, perhaps the direct consequence of the Vaux depopulation of the parish. The resultant north wall is not exactly parallel to the south nave wall, but encapsulated the quatrefoil pier and the two-order pointed arcade arches, now without their label mouldings. Towards the E end the blocking wall was provided with a new large window opening, which itself was later blocked up. At the present day the wall is reduced to about 800mm high, and is capped off, so the arcade bases cannot be identified. The building in this reduced state was described in the early eighteenth century by Browne Willis.

The fifth phase seems to be the demolition of the west end of the church, and the rebuilding of the west wall within the stub ends of the north and

south walls, some 10ft, or one bay, further to the east. The construction of this wall is different from walling elsewhere; it is better built, constructed in four lifts, each of approximately 1m (3ft) with integral diminutive W buttresses, and is diminished in thickness above the tie beam level. The wall is recorded as rising to a small bellcote, of which the outstepping corbelling on the south side is probably the remains. Some re-used ashlar stonework is indicated on the drawings, and there is a voussoir with Norman chevron ornament visible at the bottom of one of the putlog holes in the west wall. The wall incorporates a west window, which was dated to the fifteenth century by the Royal Commission on the basis of the detail (although the stubs of the tracery point to a rather earlier date). It has hollow-chamfered external jambs, with a chamfered internal reveal arch, and had external ferramenta. There is no evidence that the window was inserted later into the west wall; – it was probably reclaimed from the original western gable wall and incorporated in this rebuilding. The small buttresses externally are bonded in, and inset from the line of the north and south walls, consistent with the west wall being built between the cut-off side walls. This new west wall also has a low arch at the centre, opening from the nave, of which only the rough relieving arch can be still be seen both internally and externally. It was suggested that this connected to an underground tunnel, known to run north-south beyond the masonry foundations at the west end, but this seems unlikely. An early photograph of the exterior shows the arch more clearly (Fig 9A). The tunnel, which is not simply the product of the widespread and fond belief in such phenomena, was photographed internally, and is probably an arched culvert of the type known at Tudor and later houses, such as Wolf Hall, Burbage, Wiltshire, or Kirby Hall, Northants., and would relate to the Witewronge mansion. The low arch must have led via a flight of steps directly down from the nave into the west-end feature identified by G.K.Tull in his 1955 excavation. This was a large rectangular raft of masonry, hollow inside, found outside the west end. Being unaware of the c.1860 sketch of a timber tower, Tull interpreted this as the foundations of a hitherto unsuspected early west tower, but, taking into account the low arched entrance, it seems more likely that this represented a semi-underground vault. This can only be for a significant local family, with perhaps an oratory or chapel above ground

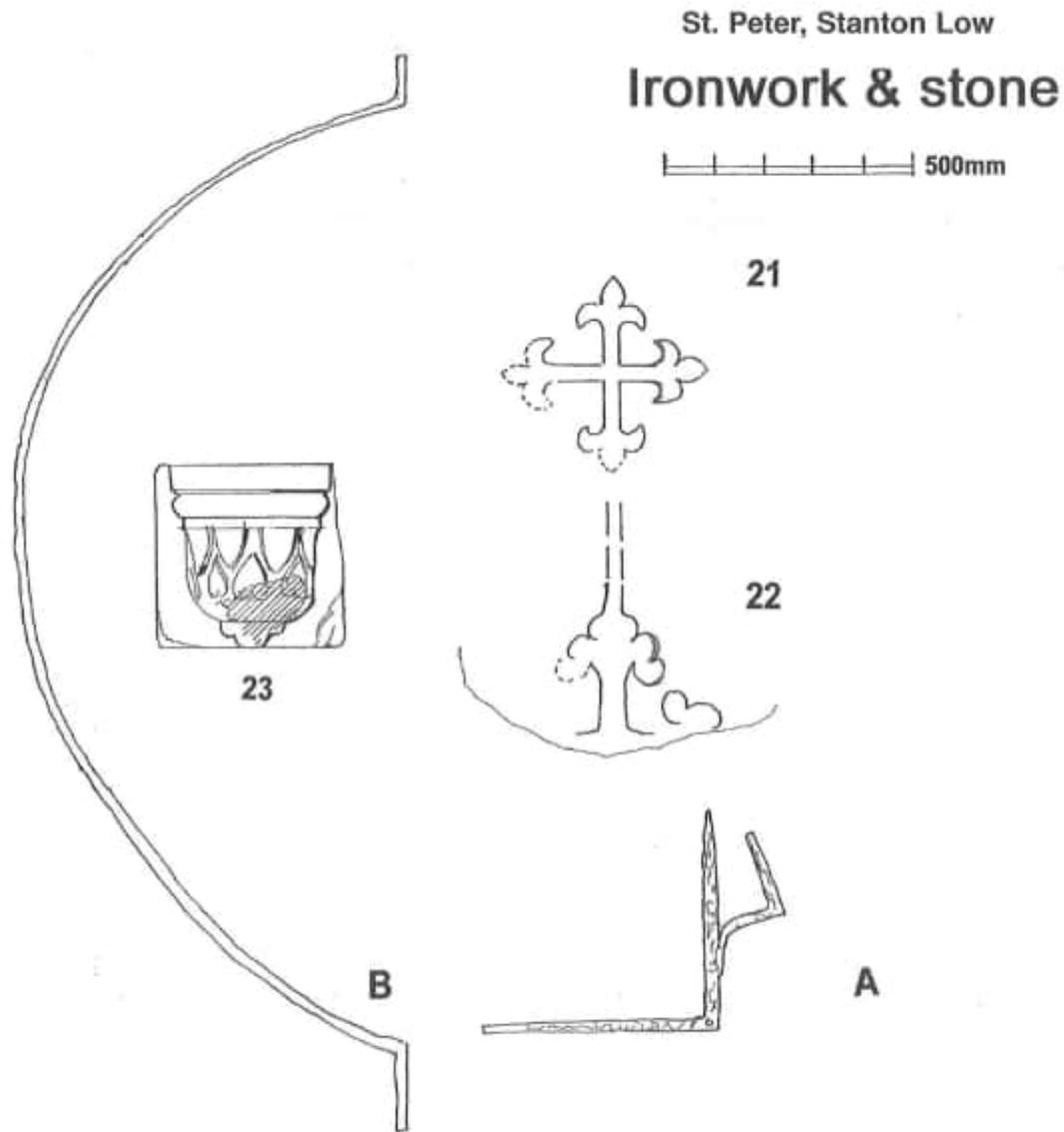


FIGURE 12 Finds of iron: (A) wall hook for the Temple achievements; (B) iron binding probably for the helm; and stone items (23) the respond corbel found in 1956 (drawn from a photograph), and (21-22) inscribed crosses on the two graveslabs re-used as side benches in the porch

level. If, as argued above, the west wall of the church was rebuilt to shorten the nave, the most probable date for this structure outside the west end was in the 1660s, when the courtyard of the new house was extended across the west end of the church.²⁰ There is no evidence for any structure

adjoining the rebuilt west wall, so it must have been freestanding. Thus it is probable that the vault was that of the Wittewronge family. The chancel of St Peter's contained fine black marble ledger slabs to Sir John Temple and Dame Dorothy, dd. 1632 and 1625 respectively, and to 'Dame Elianor Kingsmill

(née Tempel)' of Oakley, and are now reset in the same relationship in the chancel of St James, New Bradwell. As these two tomb slabs of the Temples occupied the east end of the church, and their arms, sword and helm were suspended on the chancel S wall, this part of the building must have seemed especially dedicated to the Temples. The new manorial family, the Wittewronges, probably felt the need for a dedicated family vault or mausoleum; what better place for it than on, or adjacent to, what was now their own land against the west end of the church?²¹ The Clare Wittewronge ledger which survives in the chancel would thus be simply a memorial stone set in front of the altar. The existence of a Wittewronge vault seems to be corroborated by a record of a payment to Thomas Gilbert & Gunn for "ye vault at Stantonbury £13. 6s 8d" dated about 1665/6, and for 24 May 1666 "ye disbursements thus far (on building Stantonbury Manor) £1919 - 2 - 12d."²²

The walls uncovered in the 1955 excavation were very thick, at 1.45m, enclosing a space 2.6m across in one dimension, and probably square. The thickness may be explained by their being retaining walls, and they would have diminished above ground level, whether they be for a tower or mausoleum. The western wall thickness could not be ascertained because it was overlain by another wall approximately 600mm thick, close to the present graveyard wall but diverging in alignment from the graveyard wall to the north. This wall was apparently traced for over 15m approaching the north corner of the graveyard. It was not dated in the excavation but may be a predecessor of the west graveyard wall, and probably relates to the extension of the Wittewronge manor courtyard across the west end.

Returning to the church, further evidence of the rebuilding of the west wall is manifested in a straight construction joint to the south nave wall, but not enough of the north wall remains to confirm the same situation here. As noted above, the north door to the church is extremely close to the west end – its location would be more intelligible if it is concluded that the nave originally extended further to the west, and that the rebuilding of the west wall further in also necessitated the remodeling of the north door and the erection of a new, simple, open external porch.

The porch was inaccurately set out in relationship to the church walls, but had, within, coeval

stone benches either side of the entrance. Each seat was provided with a reused black stone graveslab, each engraved with a different floriated cross. The remnants of these floriated crosses were recovered and recorded, (Fig 12, No 21 and 22). The porch's outer Tudor arch, possibly of timber with sunk spandrels, had no rebated reveals. It was thus probably always intended to be open, simply providing shelter to the door on this side. In a sketch reproduced by Ratcliff, it seems to have had a small feature, a datestone(?), directly over the arch. According to Ratcliff, also within the porch was a 'sedilia', presumably a stoup, which did not survive.

The rebuilding of the west wall might also explain the presence of the curved stone incorporated near the top of the W wall outer face. As noted above, this could be a monolithic head of a small early window of Saxo-Norman character. Mynard's report on the excavation of the deserted village of Stantonbury contains illustrations of Saxo-Norman pottery, so the appearance here of a stone of early type need be no surprise.

In summary, it is suggested that the considerable reductions in the size of the church, including the rebuilding of the west wall, is related to the Wittewronge expansion in the mid-seventeenth century, directly after the end of the Civil War, the parish congregation having already been drastically reduced initially by the Vaux and, more so, under the Temples.

THE STRUCTURE ON THE NORTH SIDE

Tull's excavation on the north side in 1955, revealed what appears to be a stone raft to the north of the nave north-east buttress. This continued as a wall to the north, returning east parallel to the chancel wall, and approximately 2.8m from it. Tull interpreted this as a transept. This seems too narrow, and on the whole an unlikely attribute for such a modest building, but there may be a further chapel on this side. Surprisingly, the excavators did not record any sign of the east wall of this supposed north transept.

THE ROOFS

The roofs, as recorded in early photographs, are of relatively simple construction and probably date to a very late medieval or sixteen-seventeenth century

period. RCHM records the walls were lowered at the same time. There were three tie-beams across the nave, the centre tie-beam braced down to the walls. Rough queen-posts rise to collars tying the principal rafters, which had two tiers of threaded purlins, the upper horizontally braced. No wind braces are seen. The chancel seems to have had a single central tie-beam truss, relating to the missing external buttresses, the scars of which can be identified in early photographs.

MOULDINGS

Apart from the re-used Norman chevron stone incorporated in the west wall, mentioned above, the only mouldings *in situ* are those of the W nave window, a hollow external chamfer, and chamfered reveals to the external north porch door. There are also chamfers to the large blocked window further east within the same north wall. Elsewhere, there are some chamfered stones re-set in blocking masonry, including some reset into the chancel opening in masonry built up after removal of the chancel arch. There is also a broken reserved-ovolo moulding built into the jamb *ex-situ* of the blocked doorway in the chancel south wall, a type that does not appear elsewhere. The work in 2001 recovered a quantity of worked stones built in to the walls; a chamfered block from a door or window jamb, and what may be part of a very small window head with plain unglazed intrados, reminiscent of the stone built high into the west gable. The appearance of a second such stone is perhaps a slight indication that more early Saxo-Norman fabric might appear if the tumbled masonry externally were cleared. It was commonplace to re-use earlier worked stones set back-to-front in later building phases.

Some fragments of brick and tile were noted built into reset masonry and blocking walls. These are indicated on the record drawings. Fire-reddening is notable on some stones built into the external W corner of the S nave wall. This is not particularly stong, and obviously happened before the stones were used for the wall. As this is an early wall, it is just possible that we have slight evidence of destruction by fire of a structure of the earliest phase on site.

Today the east wall of the chancel, and north walls of nave and chancel have been reduced to low level and capped off with cement-mortar. The south-east nave buttress, clearly observed in the

1912 RCHM survey, is not distinguishable at all. Within the building, some of the surviving floor monuments, including some mentioned by Ratcliff, were revealed in the 2001 excavation, and are shown on the plan, (Fig 6), but have been covered by a breathable membrane and layers of sand for their safekeeping.

THE MEASURED SURVEY OF 2001

The whole of the building and its garth were resurveyed in October 2001 on behalf of Milton Keynes Borough Council, which now administers the site. The remains had suffered severely from the weather, breaking up and undermining the capping of the walls, and from damage from other sources, deliberate and otherwise. One main tie beam of the late medieval roof remained on the irregular nave floor.

The walls of the graveyard were surveyed and drawn to a scale of 1:100, there being little detail to show, and the identifiable graves triangulated in. The walls are undateable, and in many sections have been reduced to ground level by weather and the action of farm animals, and the fallen material largely grassed over. However the south wall is of 15-in thick brickwork, reducing to 9-in above an internal offset of up to 17 courses high, coped with a brick soldier course. Again much of this has disappeared, but it is noted that the material includes many narrow bricks, probably of seventeenth century date, no doubt reclaimed from the ruins of Sir John Wittewronge's manor house. Some tumbled brickwork has been stacked on top of the surviving wall in one section.

The grave markers in the churchyard around the church are in poor condition, although the better preserved were photographed and submitted with the original report to the Council. Many more are no doubt concealed under the vegetation and the accumulation of earth. An earlier survey of the graves was undertaken by A.R.Russell for Rev'd Chris Drummond in August 1975, adding to the list of gravestones prepared in 1916 by Major J.L.Coales of Newport Pagnell, now lodged in Bucks County Record Office under reference AR4/96.

Although much of St Peter's has been lost since the 1950s, it still remains an early medieval church of some significance, for it retains the simple Norman two-cell form, rare in Buckinghamshire and

adjacent counties. The exact nature of the remains excavated at the west end and north side of the church remains to be elucidated, as do various other factors in its evolution, questions which can only be resolved by a proper archaeological excavation.

THE INTERNAL EXCAVATION

Initially, two 1m square trial trenches, one in the nave and one in the chancel were excavated by Dr. R. Ivens for the writer to establish whether any floor levels survived. In each base, a brick floor was noted, probably of nineteenth century date.

Work proceeded in 1 August 2001 on clearing the interior under a watching brief issued by Milton Keynes Council. As anticipated by the trial trenches, the interior contained accumulated layers of early, tumbled rubble, plant remains etc. of no archaeological significance. Excavation took place by machine and all worked or carved stone was recovered, either for recording or for future use in consolidation. The exposed walls were surveyed in, recorded, and in due course consolidated by the Council, including some limited rebuilding to secure unsafe areas.

FINDS IN 2001

One handsome piece of sculpture, a carved head was recovered, built in loosely to the east internal angle of the porch door, within the church, (Fig 9B and C). It was found built into the inner, east corner of the doorway from the nave to the north porch. This position cannot be its original location. The form is an elongated oval, with wavy hair falling to either side down to the shoulders. The neck is short, and the shoulders simply indicated, without any detail. It has been seriously defaced, but one eye survives sufficiently to judge that it is a very competent piece of sculpture, the eye set in a sharply defined socket, and the eyeball is drilled, with the eyelid draped over. Only the deep cutting for the second eye remains. The cheekbones are gently pronounced, and the chin is prominent, though badly damaged.

This realistic treatment of the eyes appears in the fourteenth century, a useful parallel being the figure seated on the south side of the Percy Tomb at Beverley, dated to c.1340.²³ Similarities can be found in the elongated face, and the wavy treatment

of the long hair, which at Beverley is restrained from falling forward over the face by a plaited head band. Damage on our piece has obliterated the treatment of the hair. There is no beard, without which it cannot have represented a prophet or elder of the church. Altogether it is a youthful face, but one without any obvious religious connotation.

Commoners, merchants and the like, usually wear appropriate headdresses; twisted head bands are sometimes worn by angels or even Christ himself, *viz* in the Angel Choir of Lincoln Cathedral (1256–80).²⁴ Bare shoulders occur frequently, at Coventry Whitefriars Lincoln Angel Choir, and especially often on misericords. The sculpture from Stanton Low has a hole drilled down from the top, not precisely vertical. This is unexplained and is probably later in date. It is concluded that the Stanton Low piece is of the fourteenth century, and probably from early in that century.

Few other finds of significance were made. The iron bracket on which the Temple helm was suspended was recovered, and fragments of grave slabs. Most significant of these were fragments of two white Cararra type marble, (Fig 11E) one 34mm thick, and from its worn surface, is clearly a fragment of a floor ledger, bearing the partial inscription:

]night / 1694 & / Jar.

This seems to be the memorial of Charles Tyrell, 4th son of Sir Timothy of Oakley, who died in 1694. (Fig 7b). The second, a wall tablet 16.5mm thick, carried the fragmentary inscription

]R,AN[/]SION OF /]GHAM

There were also six smaller fragments]OF[]AT[]RTO[and one in 3 lines, line 1 unintelligible, 2nd line]UIT[, 3rd line]AND[. A further large fragment of the same tablet had an unrelated inscription S4. This tablet has not been identified, although the legend suggests a Buckingham connection. In addition to these fragments, there were pieces of white marble 'slips' 8.5mm thick, and a piece of what was probably a raking cornice. Also, there was a large number of fragments of a grey and white veined marble, 9mm thick mortared at the back, which was presumably the background field for a Cararra tablet. The majority of these were from the south wall of the chancel. Also recovered from the

fill were various fragments of clear window glass, a lead calme, and an iron spearhead, presumably from the window ferramenta.

THE LOOSE STONEMWORK. (Figs 10 and 11)

A large number of unfixed worked ashlar limestone blocks were recovered during the internal clearance, and a few items of ironwork. These were all catalogued and retained. They consisted of lengths of window mullions, jambs and sills, plus some tracery, moulded door jambs, and many simply chamfered stones. Among them were a number of lengths of hood mouldings for the arcade arches with nail-head decoration; some additional pieces were identified built into the structure itself. Some of the more important stonework items recovered are listed in Appendix 1 and illustrated on Figs 10 and 11. Also, in the bottom of the putlog hole in the interior of the west wall, left of the window sill, is a piece of chevron decoration – this cannot be from the chancel arch which is complete in itself, thus may be from the original north or south doors.

APPENDIX 1

Schedule of unfixed moulded and carved stones.

The following list is of worked stones recovered from the internal clearance of accumulated material within the church building, plus a few others from around the site. There is little doubt that they all come from St Peter's Church, and together shed a little more light on its architectural form. They are all of local limestone except for Nos. 29 and 30 which are in an alien siltstone. Some additional stones remain built in to the fabric, in particular two in the left lower putlog hole of the inner west wall (a) Norman chevron angle with central button, as removed chancel arch, and (b) what may be part of a turned base. There are also three sections of the nailhead moulding positioned where shown on the drawn elevations.

One moulded stone formed part of the south jamb of the external low arch at the west end, visible on early photographs; this has a roll, flanked by a hollow chamfer, and is like no other moulding on site. The moulded capitals and the solitary carved corbel, also appearing on the early photographs, are not included in this schedule.

The west window is the most complete, being a Decorated, two-light window with its quatrefoil head (missing), as is its central mullion and ironstone sill. Three external saddle bars survive for the missing glazing. The window mouldings consist of: external and internal chamfers, with additional external hollow chamfer. There is a chamfered sub-arch internally, and well-constructed radial half dome behind. There is a masonry relieving arch above the ashlar of the internal sub-arch – this is also reflected where the wall has been diminished in thickness above the tie beam.

The majority of the unfixed stonework has now been moved to store at the Hanson Centre, Great Linford.

The more significant stones are illustrated on Figs 10 and 11.

From the CHANCEL area:-

1. Four sections of intersecting window tracery, from the CHANCEL east window. The section is plain chamfered externally and hollow chamfered internally – overall depth 85mm, width 60mm. (Fig 10, No 1) Lead runnels are visible on the joining faces, Fig 11D.
2. Jamb moulding of window. Chamfered either side of glazing groove, with check and internal hollow chamfer. Probably the E window. 315mm run. (Fig 10, No 2)
3. Two light window mullion developing trilobed cusping. Depth 145mm. (Fig 10, No 12 and Fig 11B).
4. Window jamb, cut to a radius, 180mm deep, flat 80mm with glazing groove, chamfer each side 110 and 80. Chancel: Window head arch. Seven sections totalling 1m 659mm run.
5. Door jamb, 190mm overall, with two hollow chamfers. Probably the north door. (Fig 10 No 13). 4 lengths, 175,170,145, and 205mm run.
6. Intrados of arch, the intrados face itself 150mm, with plain chamfers, 150mm. 11 lengths, totalling 2m 835mm. Probably the north nave arcade. (Fig 10, No 3)
7. Intrados voussoirs. 250 and 205mm 2 stones, 310 and 260mm run.
8. Hood moulding with nailheads 85mm wide, 215mm to 205mm deep, each 11 lengths, totalling 3m 795mm. (Fig 10 and Fig. 11A). These are parts of the north aisle arcade hood mouldings.

9. Flat of 155mm, with equal 155mm chamfers each side. 6 sections totalling 893mm run. Chancel area. (Fig 10, No 3).
10. Flat 145, with unequal chamfer each side 90 and 70+. 1 section, 350mm run.
11. Single chamfer of 210mm, on a stone 180mm thick: 8 lengths, totalling 1,375mm.
12. Small chamfer, of 75mm, whitewashed. 2 lengths totalling 440mm run
13. Chamfered stone, 135 chamfer, 230mm horizontally. With vertical drilling at top of chamfer.
14. Small chamfered stone, 72 thick, 600mm chamfer. 1 section 295mm run.
15. Undersquinted chamfered stone, 129mm deep, chamfer 115, undersquint 50mm One section 210mm run.
16. Flat bull nose mounded stone, 120mm deep, 2 sections totalling 470mm run. (Fig 10 No 18).
17. Small piece 145 wide, with 2 square rebates. 1 section 145mm run. (Fig 10 No 16)
18. Indeterminate piece, 170mm deep, roughly chamfered, with V-cut.

From the NAVE area:-

19. Window mullion, 185mm deep, 85mm wide, plain chamfers each side. Glazing groove. 1 section 300mm run. (Fig 10 No 4)
20. Window jamb, section as last. One section of 255mm run.
21. Window jamb, section as last, with additional external hollow chamfer, and start of internal splayed reveal. (Fig 10 No 2). 1 section of 250mm
22. Flat of 155mm flanked by equal chamfers each of 155mm 16 sections, totalling 2m 668mm.
23. Unilateral chamfer of 150mm top up to 360mm. 19 sections, totalling 3,626mm run. Average run of one piece is 190mm.
24. Unequal chamfered section, with small rebate. 1 section, 200mm run. (Fig 10 No 5)
25. Intrados 150mm, with chamfer 150, and part chamfer of 80+. 11 sections, totalling 2m.835mm.
26. Rebated door head, with small chamfer. 1 section. (Fig 10 No 20a)
27. Plain rebated section. 260mm run.

Other finds:

28. Elaborate moulding, ?for window head.

Weathered top and drip.

29. Section of siltstone, with curved chamfered soffit, total length 600mm and 260mm wide. From the area of the chancel.
30. Section of similar stone, slightly curved soffit. 510mm long 260 wide.

These last two may be from some fitting within the church.

Recovered from the machined spoil tip:

31. Four sections of nailhead, totalling 820mm run.
32. Section of window sill, chamfered, with return chamfer stool for jamb. This has a drilling with remains of an iron peg.
33. Mullion section, 185mm deep, equally chamfered both sides. 190mm run.

These stones were initially stored on site, in a small enclosed paddock east of the church, until moved to the Hanson Centre in Great Linford.

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