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Observations at Didmarton Church, 1981

by R. Bryant
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which was previously said to have been of the 13th or early 14th century. It is, however, now apparent that this chancel was lengthened in the 19th century by 0.9 m (3 ft). The construction of the new east wall, partly over the foundation trench of the earliest and long demolished chancel, may have contributed to the problems of subsidence which led to this excavation.

Acknowledgements

The excavations were undertaken on behalf of the Department of the Environment. I am most grateful to A. B. Chatwin, F.R.I.B.A., architect to the church, for his help; to the Stoke Orchard parochial church council for granting permission to undertake the excavations; and to Dr W. J. Rodwell for his archaeological advice during and after the excavations. The plans and sections were drawn by Cecily Haines.

ROGER LEECH

OBSERVATIONS AT DIDMARTON CHURCH, 1981

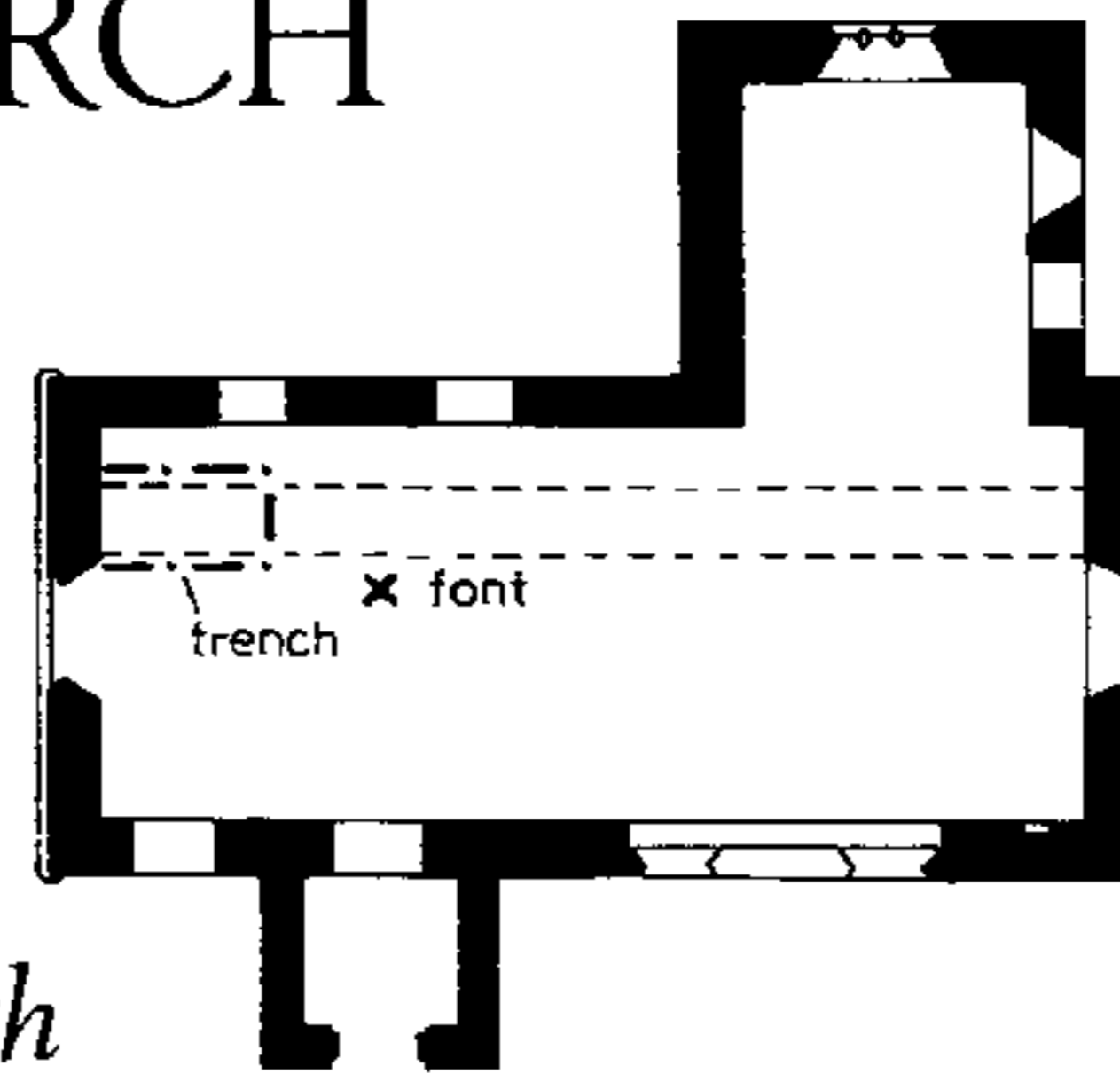
A watching brief was carried out by the writer during restoration work on the church of St Lawrence, Didmarton (ST 382187), early in 1981, in response to a request from the Redundant Churches Fund. In the limited time available it was possible to examine those areas where the floor had to be removed and all the internal wall stonework where the old plaster was stripped.

At the west end of the nave, from the doorway westwards, a concrete and flagstone floor was removed, exposing a make-up layer. The aisle flagstones and those around the font were not lifted. Some plaster was stripped from the south wall. This revealed little but the rotten timber sill and blocking of a high-level doorway, also visible outside, to the west of the doorway. Plaster stripping on the west wall uncovered a vertical straight-joint 1.70 m from the north-west corner, and a shallow, curving recess (0.08 m deep at the centre) running from the straight-joint to the north-west corner. This recess can be best explained as the position of an internal staircase to the west gallery that was superseded by the external stairs which led to the doorway cut in the south wall. The straight-joint did not appear to be part of the recessed feature. A shallow trench, 2 m long, was dug through the make-up layer, at a right angle to the wall in line with the straight-joint. At a level of *c.* 0.3 m below the surface of the flagstone floor lay a redeposited layer of very dark, sticky loam with lumps of red clay (4 and 8 on FIG.), cut by an east-west linear feature (F4) and a grave (F6). On the assumption that F4 might be an earlier north wall, the trench was extended to the south and a large part of an intact foundation (15) of stones in mortary loam was found, partially sealed below a make-up layer (5) for floors of the widened church. The straight-joint in the west wall is thus explained as a wall-scar for the north wall of a narrower nave. This means that the external 15th-century face of the west wall is merely a facade applied to an earlier wall: The date of this narrower nave was not established by material from the excavation but by cross-referring to the standing structure. On the outside of the east wall of the chancel there is a chamfered plinth which runs from the south-east corner to a point approximately 1.5 m from the north-east corner. The rest of the wall is of a markedly different build at the plinth level. In the north-east quoin of the chancel there is a re-used architectural fragment which consists of the base of a jamb for an opening, either an arch or a doorway. The

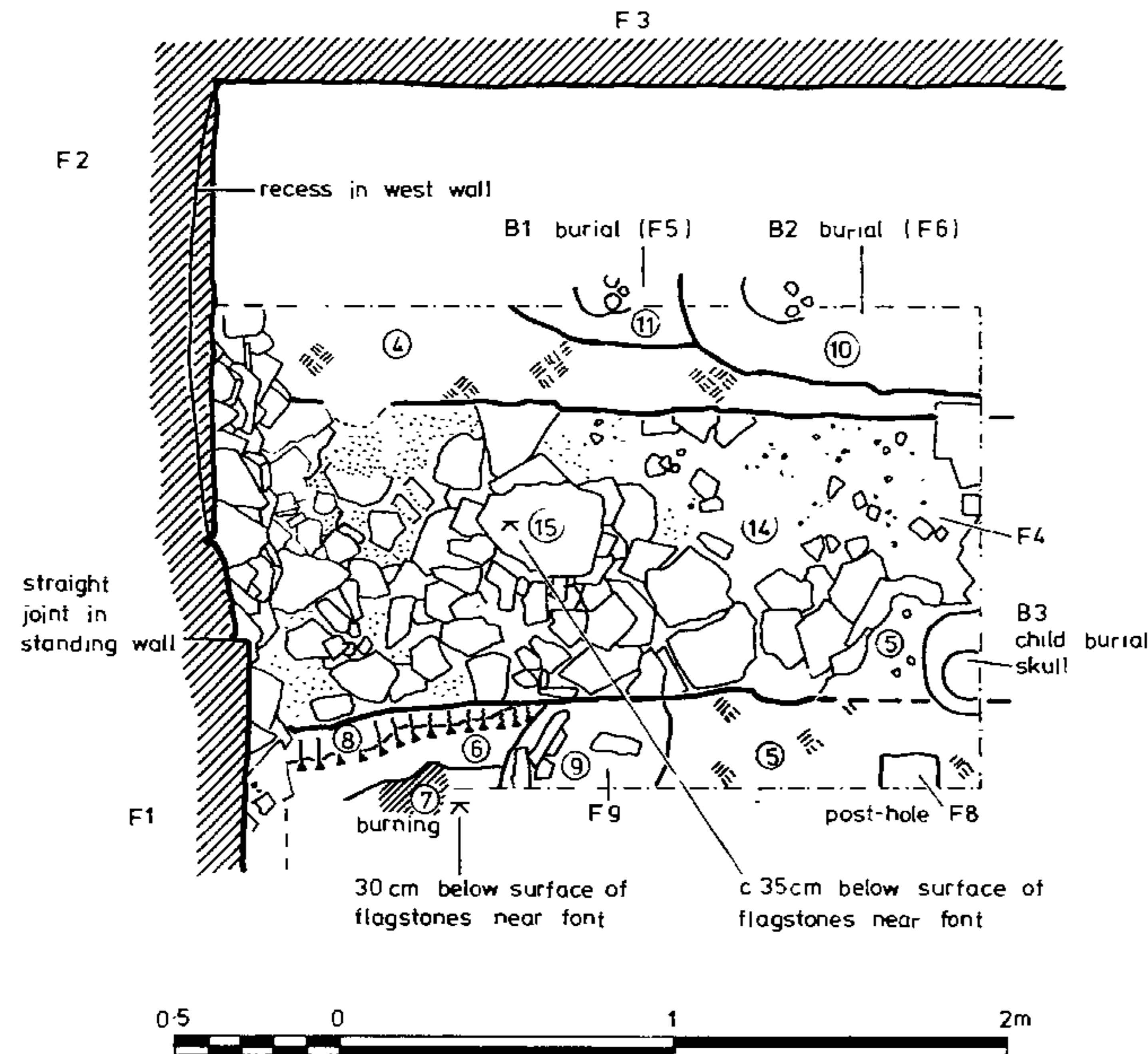
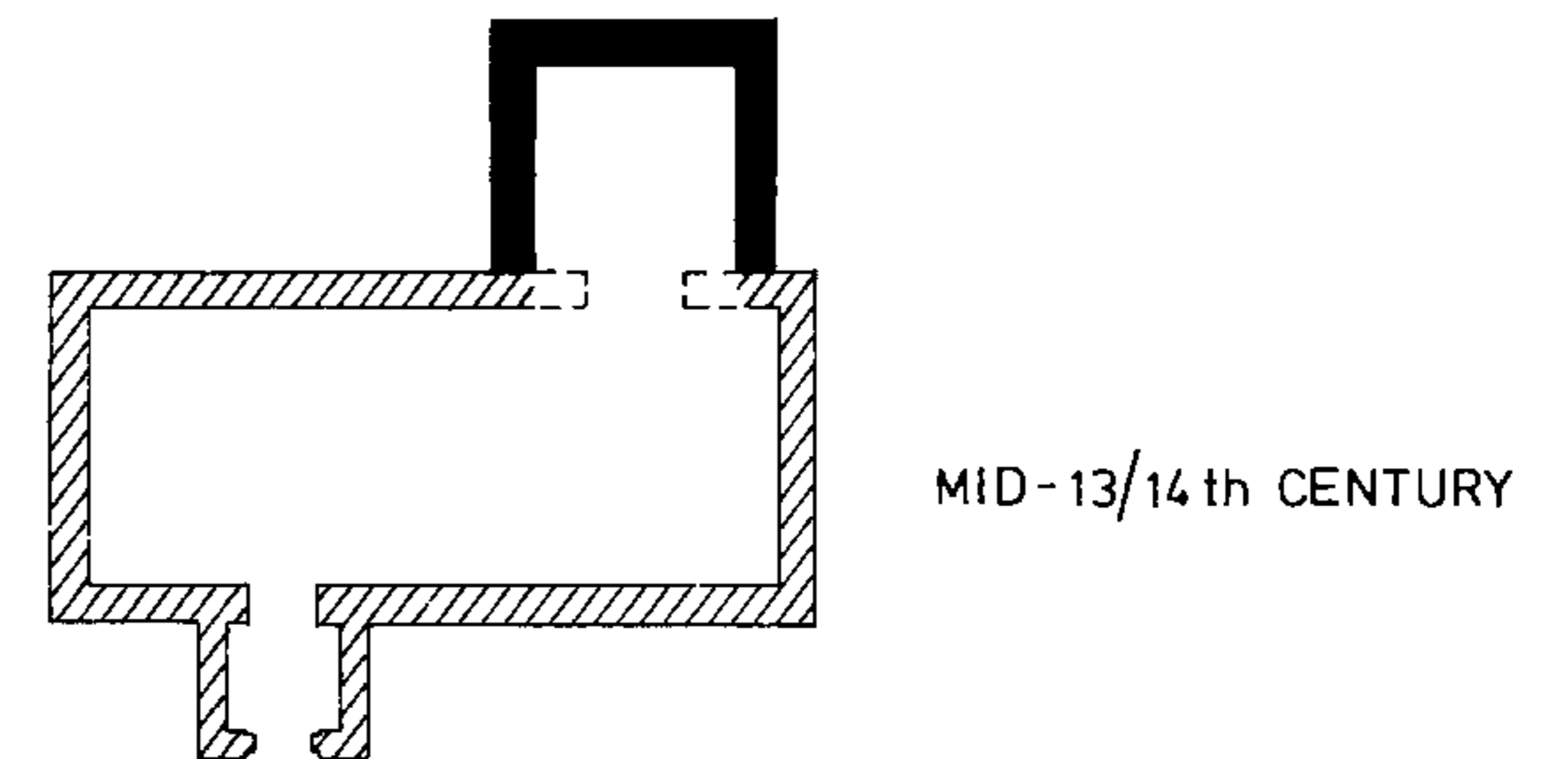
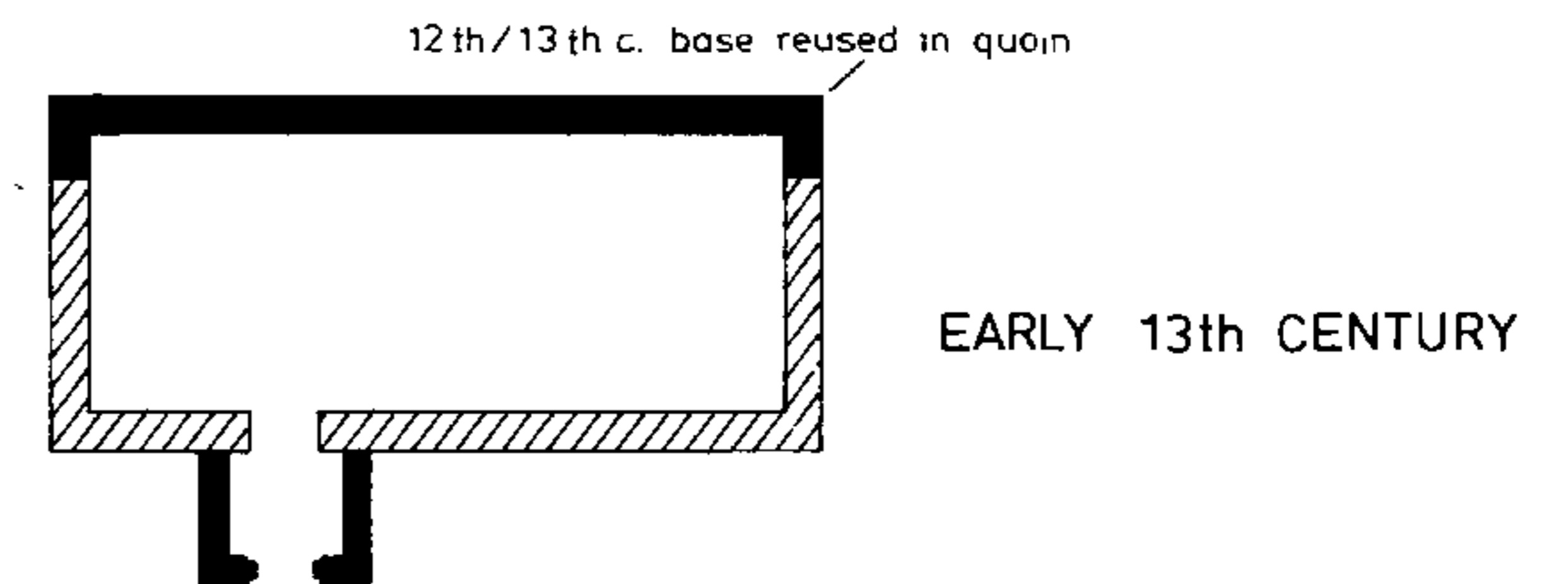
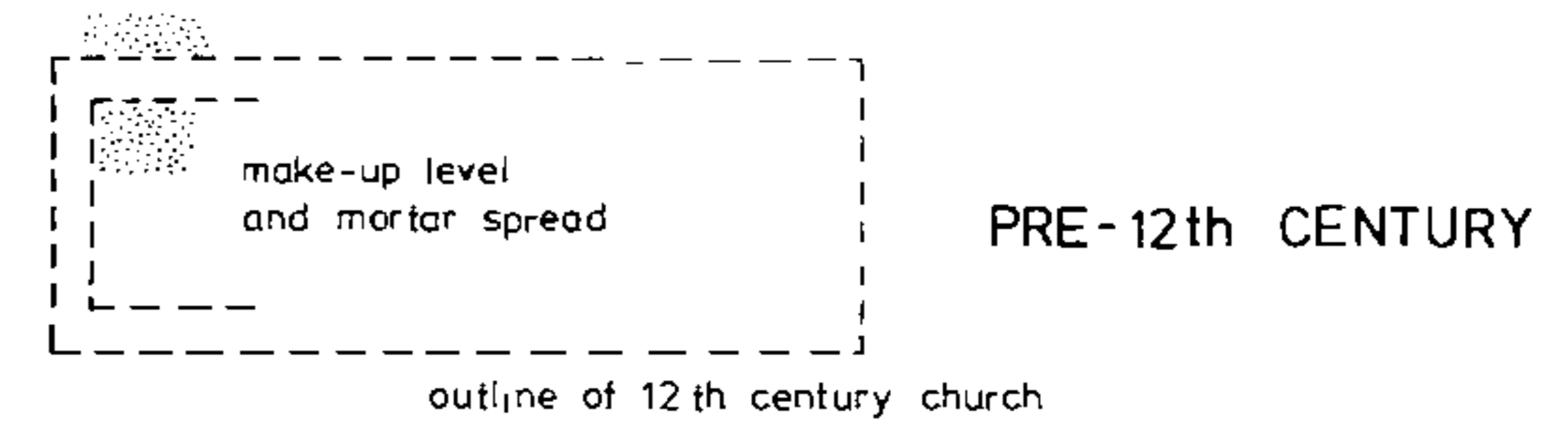
ST LAWRENCE CHURCH

DIDMARTON, GLOS.

*Plan of Church
with location of trench*



Early Development (a provisional sequence)



base has a double half-round moulding on the arris below a stopped-chamfer. Such mouldings are usually considered to be of the late 12th or early 13th century. The width of the narrower chancel is the same as the narrower nave. If they are contemporary, this may indicate a unitary plan, a scheme that appears to have been retained in the widened church.

Earlier observations, by Dr Warwick Rodwell, during trenching around the outside of the church showed that the north transept was straight-jointed onto the wall of the widened nave; the transept has a contemporary window with geometric tracery (mid 13th/early 14th century) in its north wall, thus dating the widening of the church to the mid 13th century or earlier, and, since the chancel quoin incorporates the 12th/13th-century architectural fragment, the most likely date is early in the 13th century. This means that the narrower church must belong to the 12th century or earlier.

Because of the wall scar, the west wall (F1) must be contemporary with the robbed north wall (F4) of the 12th-century church. The foundations for F1 cut a dark, sticky loam (8) and a layer of orange-brown sandy mortar (6). These layers therefore belong to an earlier building phase, of the early 12th century or before.

The south doorway of the nave, with its semi-circular head and heavy-roll moulding, seems to be of Norman date, adapted or rebuilt during the Georgian remodelling of the church. Observations inside the nave have shown that the threshold has been raised by approximately 0.35 m to the present floor level of the nave and south porch. Since the floor level of the porch is correct in relation to the bases of the porch arch, the lower threshold seems to be related to a lower, pre-porch ground surface.

The Council for Places of Worship has produced a full report on the standing structure of the church. A note in that report suggests that in the 18th century there would have been box-pews along both sides of the nave and the north transept. The discovery of pew cavities in the nave and against the transept's west wall confirms this.

I am grateful to the architect and to the builders who cheerfully put up with a certain amount of disturbance; to Carolyn Heighway and Dr W. J. Rodwell for comments on this report; and to Michael Hare for providing reference material and historical information. The plans and drawing are by Cecily Haines. In 1981 the writer was on the staff of the Western Archaeological Trust (formerly C.R.A.A.G.S.).

RICHARD BRYANT

EARTHWORKS AND REMAINS AT OLVESTON COURT

In June 1977 a survey was made by the writer of the earthworks and building remains at Olveston Court (ST 598811), relating them to the standing buildings. Conversion of a 15th-century barn to domestic use, involving drainage and levelling works, the prospect of further similar works, and the development for housing of land to the north-east of Olveston Court provided the impetus for the survey. Between 1977 and 1979 watching briefs were undertaken on those works.

Olveston Court occupies the north-east slopes of a hill to the south-west of Olveston village, with marshy ground between the Court and village. The present standing buildings include a massive embattled curtain wall, a gatehouse at its eastern end, and a further stretch of wall east of