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St. Michael's, Gloucester, 1956

by M. D. Cra'ster
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St Michael's, Gloucester, 1956

By MARY D. CRA'STER, M.A.

IN the summer of 1956, the demolition of the Victorian church of St Michael provided an opportunity to excavate at the Cross. When the older church was replaced in 1850, mention was made of Roman masonry on the site; the Cross being the centre of the *colonia*, it was hoped that further investigation would yield useful evidence.

The excavation was undertaken by the City Museum and the Roman Research Committee. A generous grant was received from the Ancient Monuments branch of the Ministry of Works, together with further aid from the City Corporation.

We are most grateful to the Corporation for their good offices, and particular thanks are due to the City Surveyor, Mr J. H. Goodridge, and members of his staff, for constant help with organization and equipment during the excavation. We are also much indebted to the incumbent, the Rev. E. C. Prichard, for his co-operation, and for his kindness in depositing the material from the site on permanent loan at the City Museum.

THE SITE

The site included the body of the church on the south-east corner of Eastgate Street and the Cross, and the small churchyard behind it to the south. The tower of the church, standing on the actual corner of the Cross, was left standing.

The entire area had been heavily used for burials, so that older features were much disturbed. Many alterations and rebuildings had also been undertaken on the church itself in the course of its history, thus adding to the confusion. In view of this, it is relevant to include a brief history of the church, gained in the main from a manuscript by C. H. Dancey, now in the City Library.

It is presumed that there must have been an early Norman or possibly even Saxon church, since St Michael's was one of the 'ten churches in the King's own soke' mentioned in the 1096-1101 Domesday rental of houses in Gloucester; of this church no trace remains.

The first definite mention is the sale of the church to St Peter's Abbey (that is to say, the cathedral) by the Bishop of Exeter in 1285. Six years later the Abbey presented the first chaplain, and we assume that it was about this time that the original church was built anew; certainly the basic structure of the church demolished in 1850 was of late 13th-century style.

In 1366 the burial ground behind the church was acquired, burials having previously been made in the Abbey ground. But there were no burials here for two years, the St Michael's ground having been placed under an interdict by the Bishop of Worcester. However, from 1368 until 1870 the graveyard was in continual use; it was already too full by 1831, for a site in Barton Street was then used as an extension.

The 13th-century church had no west end tower, but Edward III granted land for one in 1371; however, there is no record of its building, until 1460-70, when the existing tower was erected; this was repaired in 1777, 1801, and again in 1850.

After the Reformation, the church was evidently allowed to fall into disrepair. The chantries, rood-screen and altar were removed and sold in 1550, though the altar was replaced three years later. For about the next two hundred years, a row of little shops stood up against the north wall of the church, along Eastgate Street. During the Commonwealth, in 1653-4, extensive repairs were undertaken, the east end, arcade, and south wall being rebuilt. However by 1740 the east end apparently needed re-building again, and in 1777 the south wall was once more replaced with new work.

By this time the church must have presented a veritable patch-work appearance. A sketch-map of 1847 shows that there was a sloping south wall, with what appears to be a bay window in the middle—the west end of the church being considerably narrower than the east end (FIG. 1). Three years later, this awkwardly shaped building was taken down and replaced by the Victorian gothic church, which was itself finally demolished in 1956.

THE EXCAVATION

This took place in May and June 1956. The made ground, chiefly consisting of rubble and graveyard fill, was removed mechanically over a large area of the church and in the churchyard. Water was a continual nuisance since any foundations of Roman date were at or just below water-level, which was at 54.35 O.D. Undisturbed subsoil was reached just below the water-level, and consisted of clayey sand with pebbles. This seemed to be part of the gravel cap on top of the

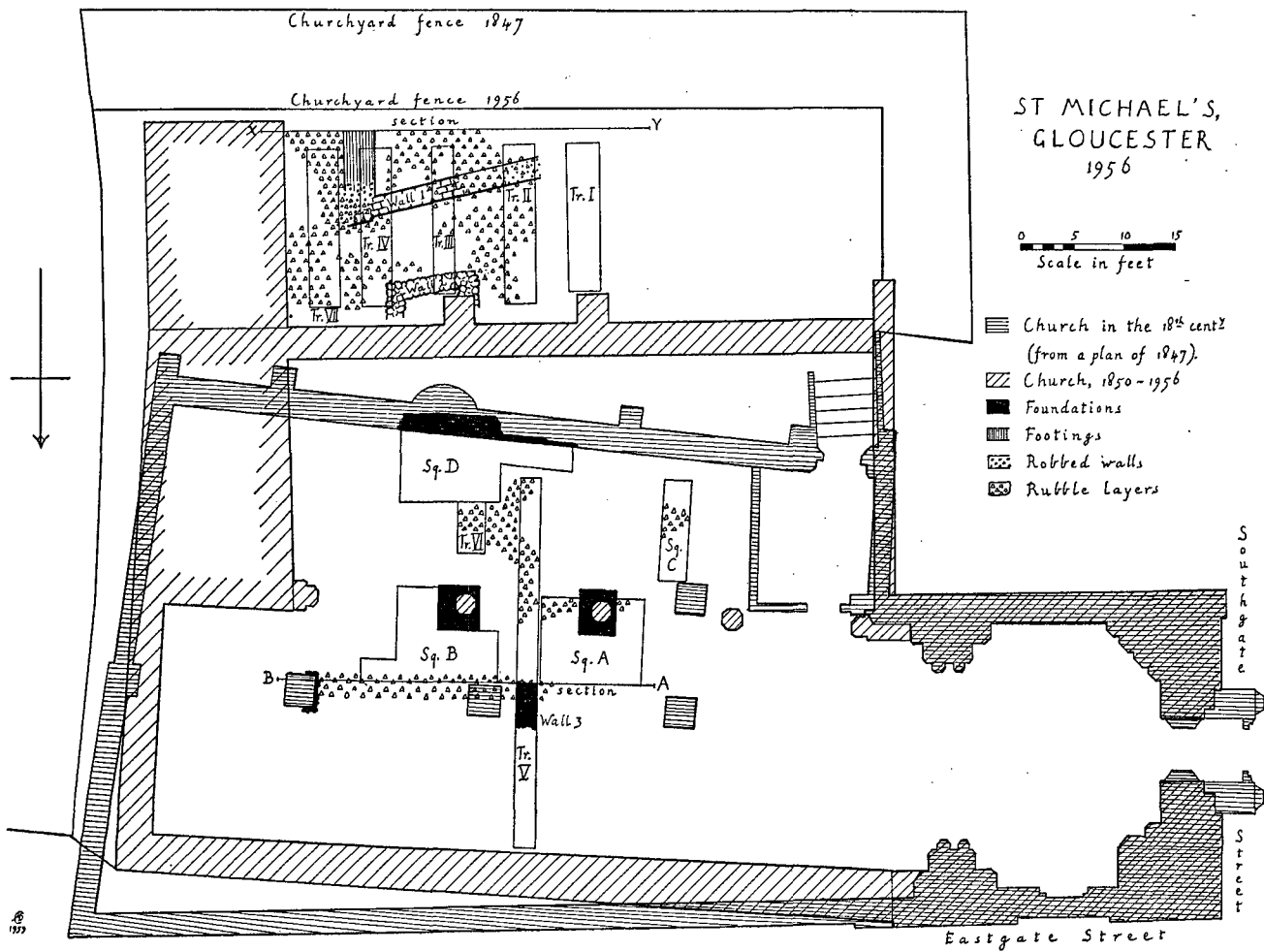


Fig. 1. Plan of site

hill on which central Gloucester is sited; it overlay the blue lias clay, and a sample boring at St Michael's analysed by Mr L. Richardson, showed the gravelly sand to go down about 12 feet, with variations in its composition, until Lower Lias clay was reached at a depth of 22 feet below modern street level (FIG. 2 and Appendix 2). Mr Richardson regards the whole of this sandy deposit as being not in its natural arrangement, but from the point of view of the excavation it can, I think, be described as 'undisturbed'.

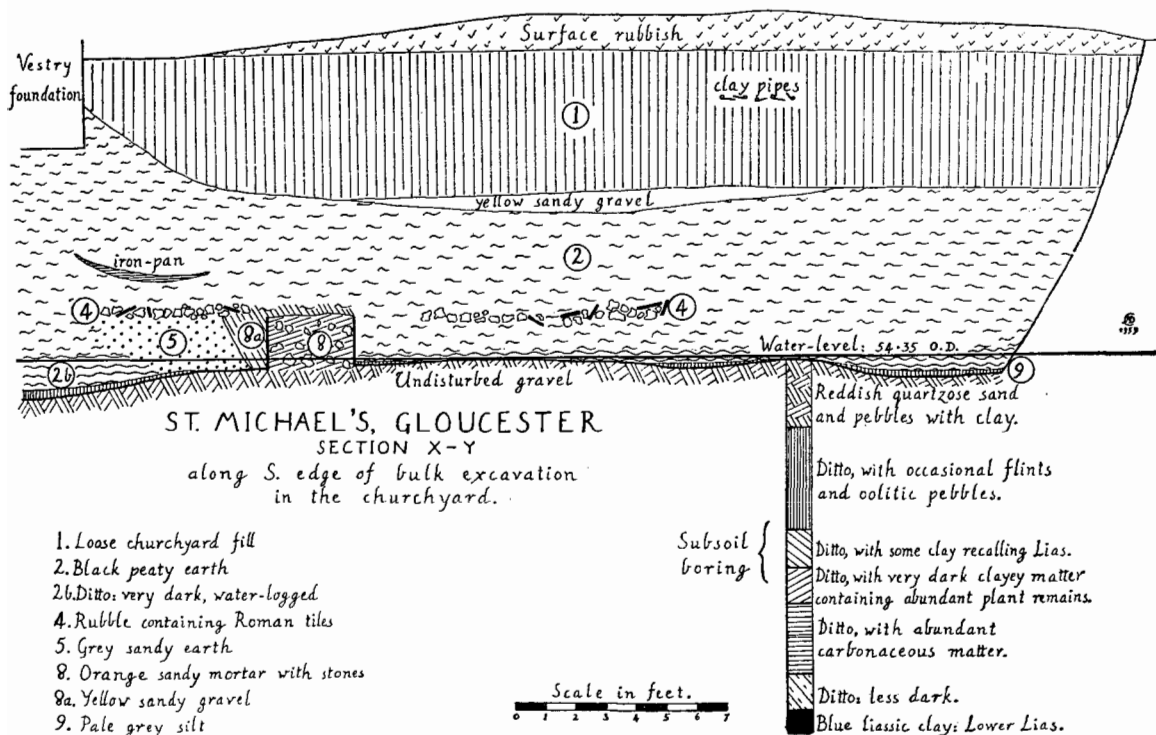


Fig. 2. Section X-Y along south edge

The area within the church was excavated in squares based on a grid; but these had to be considerably modified to avoid foundations of the 1850 piers and other features; these pier foundations were sunk right into natural to a depth of about 14 feet below the surface.

A trench was subsequently dug right across the church running north and south (FIG. 1). Most of the area had been riddled with burial-vaults, often built of what appeared to be early 19th-century brick; this made interpretation extremely difficult. No trace of the

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Roman masonry reported in 1850 was found in position, but in view of the depth of the Victorian foundations this is perhaps not surprising. A possible clue lies in the very large number of big rough-hewn blocks of stone found underneath the church; these looked as if they might have been Roman foundation stones, re-used for the same purpose by the Victorian builders.

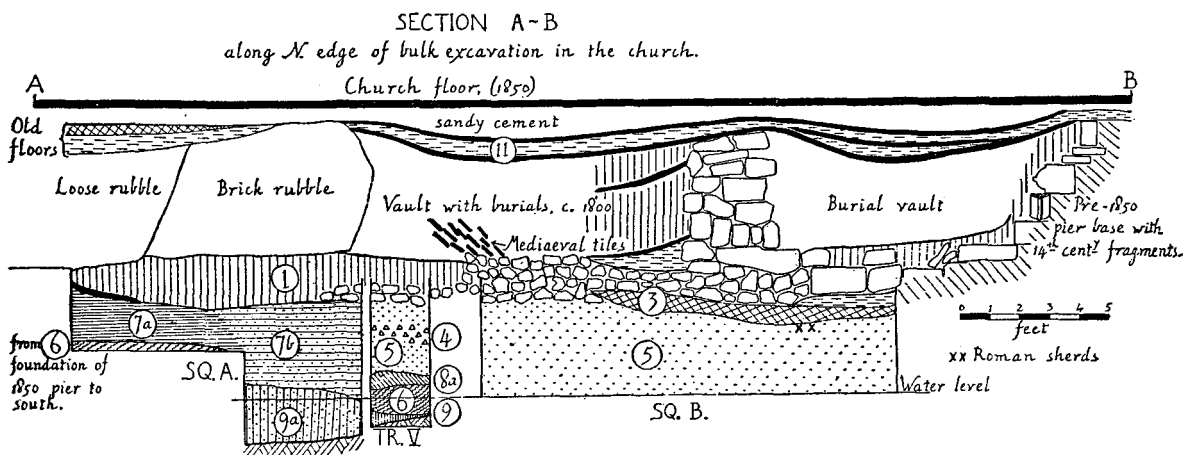


Fig. 3. Section A-B along north edge

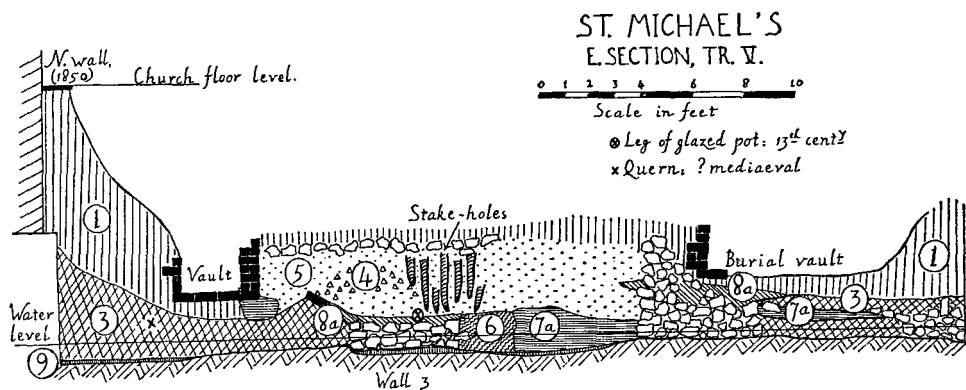


Fig. 4. Section—Trench V

There was no stratification which had not been disturbed by subsequent building operations; even pottery of Roman date seemed to be lacking, although some stray sherds were found below the levels of the vaults. These ranged in date from early 2nd-century 'Samian', to late 3rd-4th-century colour-coated wares. (Appendix 1).

Trench V across the church brought to light a fragment of walling, running east-west, and resting on natural at a depth of 10 feet (Wall 3, FIGS. 1 and 4, PLATE VIII). It was of fairly loose construction and did not appear to be Roman; it might perhaps have been the south wall of the church which stood here in Norman times, but there was no definite evidence. In the sandy gravel overlying this wall, was the leg of a mediaeval tripod pot.

Further south was another possible wall; but this had been so disturbed as to be little more than a pile of stones of which no sense could be made; the same applies to several other similar agglomerations of loose stones found resting on natural, but seeming to have no plan or purpose.

Above Wall 3, but separated from it by a layer of rubbly earth, was a pile of rubble, next to which were a series of deep stake-holes (FIG. 4 and PLATE IX). The top-ends of these were cut by a layer of loose stones and vault-filling; they may perhaps best be explained as sockets of scaffolding poles during some stage of mediaeval building.

The northern edge of the bulk excavation ran almost along the line of the mediaeval arcade, as shown in the 1847 plan (FIGS. 1 and 3). This section clearly confirmed the 17th-century re-building of this arcade. The foundation for the easternmost pier was exposed and was composed almost entirely of 14th-century architectural fragments (PLATE VII). Mediaeval glazed floor-tiles were also found, shot in above a thick layer of large stones apparently placed along the line of the arcade as a footing.

On the southern side of the church in Square D (FIG. 5), the sloping south wall of the old church was encountered, running N.W.-S.E. on the line expected. Underneath this wall, and below the usual confusion of vaults and rubble, we first encountered the thick layer of black peaty silt, which stretched across the southern half of the church and the whole churchyard (FIG. 2). Other building operations in the vicinity later showed that it extended beneath the Cadena Café to the east and the Bell Hotel to the south. This black layer was in places as much as 7 feet thick; it was compact and horizontally bedded, as if laid in water. It contained no occupation débris above the bottom 2 feet, but in parts was full of well-preserved vegetable matter. A sample of this sent to Kew for examination contained seeds and pips of apple, sloe, blackberry, poppy, buttercups, daisies, and various grasses (Appendix 3).

The area of the churchyard mechanically excavated was next examined by running five trenches across it from north to south (FIG. 1 and PLATE X). Roman foundations were found resting on natural and



PLATE VII. Section A-B; pier-base (pre-1850), composed of 14th-century fragments

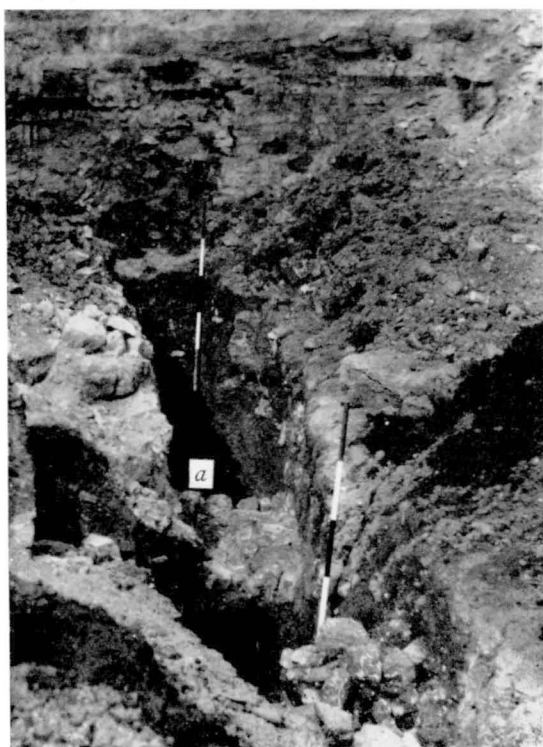


PLATE VIII. Trench V, looking north
a. Wall 3



PLATE IX. Wall 3 and stake-holes



PLATE X. Churchyard area, looking north-west
a. Wall 1. *b.* Robber trench. *c.* Wall 2

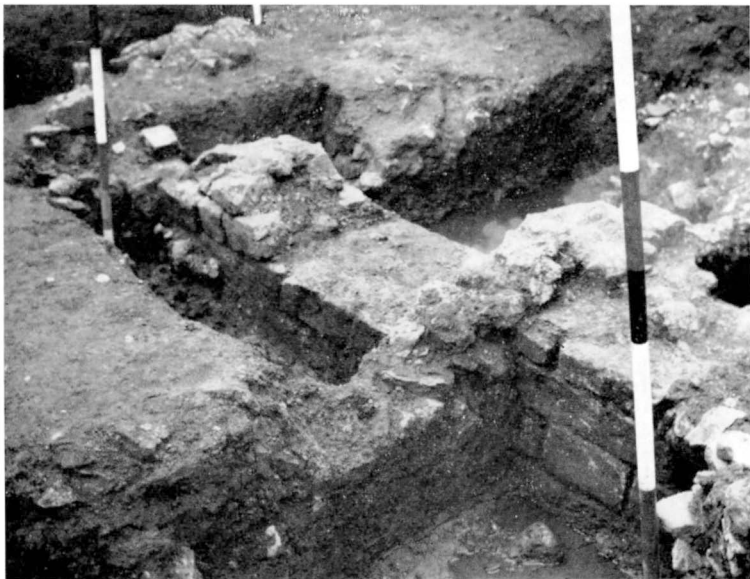


PLATE XI. Wall 1

S. SECTION, SQ. D.

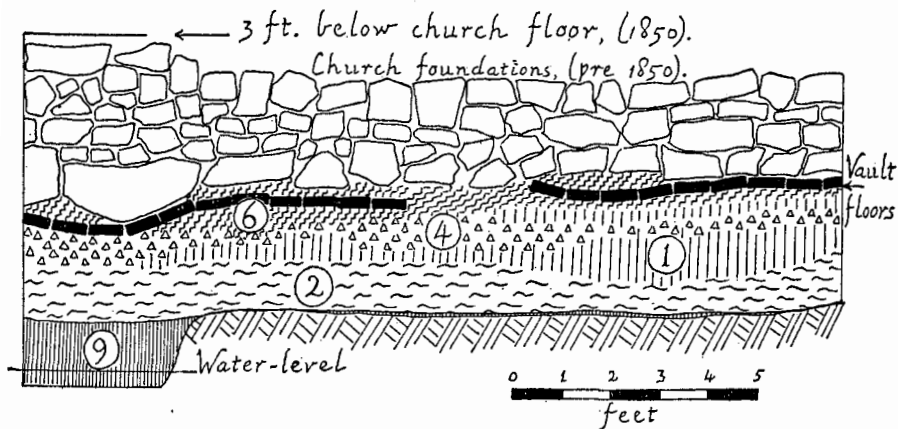


Fig. 5. Section—Square D

E. SECTION, TR. VII

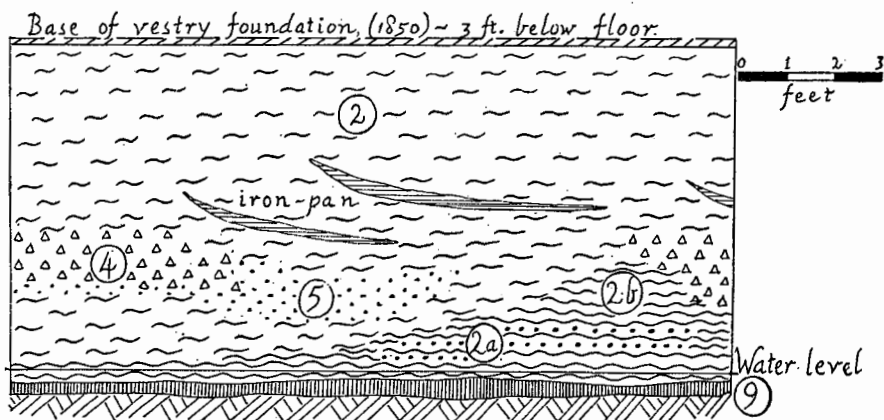


Fig. 6. Section—Trench VII

E. SECTION, TR. II

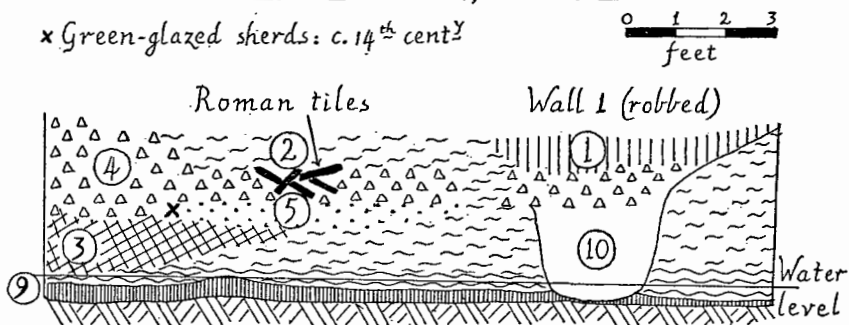


Fig. 7. Section—Trench II

below the black peaty layer. Above these was a discontinuous layer of rubble—débris resulting from the robbing of the Roman buildings—containing Roman brick and sandstone roof-tiles and pottery, together with a few mediaeval sherds. This rubble was in many places sandwiched into the base of the black water-laid deposit (FIGS. 2 and 6). Also at this level, the peaty layer had preserved several fragments of worked and shaped wood.

The piece of Roman walling (Wall 1), was a fragment about 10 feet long, having been robbed at both ends; the robber-trench was clearly visible in trenches II and III (FIGS. 7 and 8). Only about five courses of the wall remained, but these were of evenly laid, well-mortared ashlar masonry, bedded right down into the solid natural,

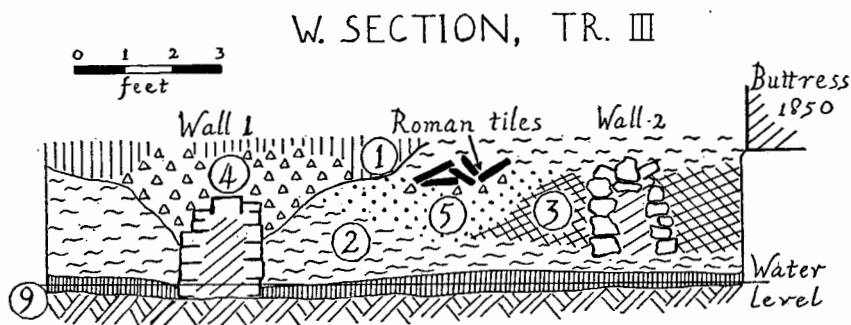


Fig. 8. Section—Trench III

cutting through the grey clayey silt which lay immediately over natural throughout the site (PLATE XI). Wall 1 had a width of 21 inches, but near the east end it was offset, making it 2 feet wide. It ran N.E.—S.W.—that is to say it was not parallel to the Roman street-plan, to which the modern one corresponds fairly closely. At the eastern end of what remained of Wall 1, another foundation ran off southwards; it was not at right-angles to Wall 1 (FIG. 1), but seemed to be connected with it, in that it was built up against Wall 1 (FIG. 9, a). Signs of robbing were again visible here (FIG. 2). This foundation was composed of sandy mortar with stones, but was 3 feet wide, with straight edges, as if it were the footing for a wall.

The building débris already mentioned spread over the top of both these foundations, and at one place contained a pile of Roman roofing tiles (FIGS. 7 and 8). Amongst these was one bearing the stamp RPG/ATTO (FIG. 10, 17 and Appendix 1). Near the bottom of this rubble layer were some green-glazed mediaeval pot-sherds (FIG. 7).

Yet another small building was found in the churchyard (Wall 2, FIG. 1). This wall enclosed a rectangular area, about 5 feet across, but its total length or plan were not obtainable, since the side walls ran back underneath the south wall of the 1850 church. Wall 2 was of

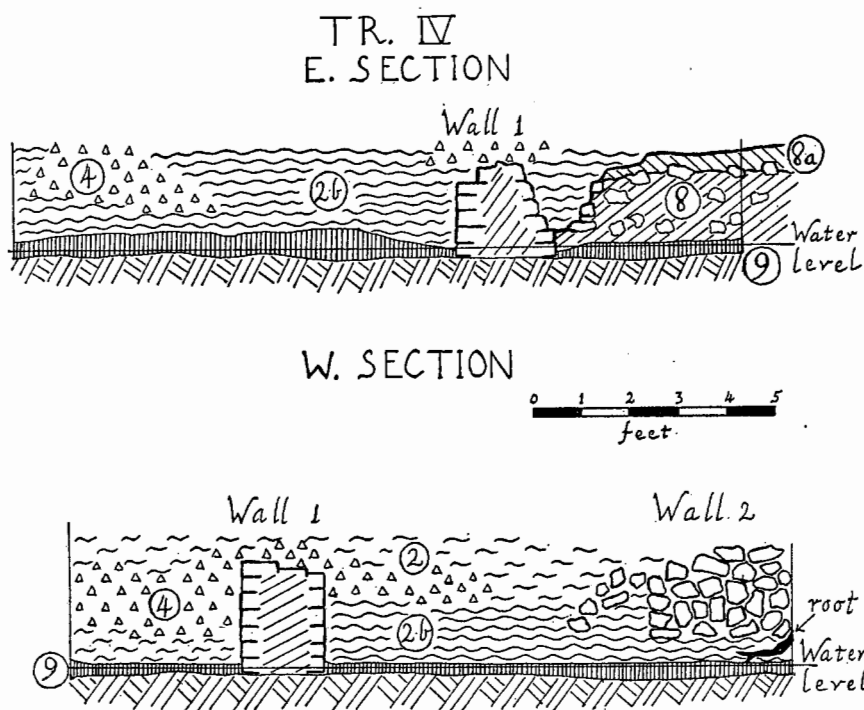


Fig. 9, a/b. East and west sections, Trench IV

extremely rough, dry-stone construction; it rested on top of some of the black peat layer, which also covered it, but the rubble layer stopped short of it, as if it had been in position during the robbing of the Roman building (FIGS. 8 and 9, b). Apart from this, there was no indication of its date.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The excavation was not very productive, but the site had been so thoroughly churned up by successive church foundations and burials, that nearly all earlier stratification had been destroyed.

A large area on the south was covered by a layer of black earth, apparently water-laid, and containing vegetable matter consonant with open scrub and grass, or orchard surroundings. Roman foundations were below this layer and antedated it. Its lower third contained rubble, cattle bones and both Roman and mediaeval pottery; this layer of rubble, presumably coinciding with a fairly early stage in the deposition of the black peat, seemed to be contemporary with the robbing of the Roman walls, by which time a rough stone building was already standing on the site. The upper and thicker part of the black layer contained no human rubbish of any kind. It must, however, have stopped accumulating by the time the ground started to be used for burials, and the south wall of the pre-1850 church rested on top of it—although this wall (since it was rebuilt in the 17th century) may originally have been straight, and thus further north, avoiding the marshy area.

Going on what is in fact rather meagre evidence, a tentative history of the site might run as follows. There were Roman buildings in the area, but their size, dates, or duration are not known. On analogy with a somewhat similar water-laid deposit overlying Roman levels of the Great Bath at Bath, it has been suggested that somewhere in this vicinity there may have been a bath house. Certainly there is an active saline spring, similar to those which formerly fed the Gloucester Spa wells, on Washbourne's premises in Bell Lane. It seems very possible that this spring was used by the Romans, and that in the course of the 5th or 6th centuries, their drainage system became blocked and ruined. The spring, continuing to rise, would form an area of marshy ground, or even a pool, on top of the hill. It is true that the present water on the site is normal subsoil water and bears little resemblance to Washbourne's spring; but that spring has now been re-controlled and indeed must already have been so by the time St Michael's church was built, if the above explanation is correct.

At some time during the course of the Saxon or early Middle Ages, a small building, perhaps one of several, was erected, and the Roman ruins were robbed of their stone. But the peaty deposit continued to accumulate, although it would have been possible for a small church to have been built next to Eastgate Street, where the marshy ground does not extend. However, by the second half of the 14th century at least, the area was considered sufficiently firm for a graveyard.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Apart from those already mentioned at the beginning of this report, I would like to record my gratitude for the help given me by Mr L. Richardson of Worcester on the geology of the site, and by Mr Hamilton, Inspector of Excavations for the Ministry of Works.

I particularly want to thank Mrs H. E. O'Neil for her support and advice, and for taking charge of the excavation during my absence at a critical stage.

NOTE ON SECTIONS

Throughout all the sections (FIGS. 1-9), the layers have as much as possible been co-ordinated and the same symbols used for each layer, in every section where it occurs. A description of the layers, with a key to the symbols, is appended.

KEY TO LAYERS

Layer 1.	Loose brown earth with burials	...	...	...
Layer 2.	Black peaty	...	...	...
Layer 2a.	Red peaty	...	...	...
Layer 2b.	Black peaty, water-logged	...	...	...
Layer 3.	Dark brown, hard	...	...	...
Layer 4.	Rubble	...	...	...
Layer 5.	Grey sandy, with some rubble	...	...	...
Layer 6.	Sandy, under foundations	...	...	...
Layer 7a.	Red clay	...	...	...
Layer 7b.	Grey clay	...	...	...
Layer 8.	Orange sandy mortar (wall foundation)	...	...	...
Layer 8a.	Yellow sandy gravel	...	...	...
Layer 9.	Pale grey silt, immediately overlying natural	...	...	...
Layer 9a.	Black silt at water-level	...	...	...
Layer 10.	Rubbly (robbed wall-footings)	...	...	...
Layer 11.	Sand with black streaks	...	...	...



TRANSACTIONS FOR THE YEAR 1961

APPENDIX 1: POTTERY AND OTHER FINDS

The site produced surprisingly little pottery, and what there was gave small help with dating. Roman sherds were so confused stratigraphically that they can only indicate a somewhat vague bracket covering most of the period that Glevum was in existence. In view of this it has not been thought worth going into great detail in the description of the pottery, but the City Museum catalogue numbers are given, to make further reference to the sherds themselves easier.

'SAMIAN'

Form 29	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3530
Form 18/31	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3531, 3591
Form 37	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3533, 3558
Form 12 (Ritterling)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3545
Form 23 (or 9 Ritterling)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3559

In rubble layer (4) associated with the robber-trench of Wall 1 in the churchyard (FIG. 8) two 'Samian' sherds were found:—

Form 18/31	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3573
Form 37	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3581

COARSE WARES

FIG. 10. 1.	Handled jar; buff ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3532
2.	Jar; 'Glevum' ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3582
3.	Open dish with flanged and beaded rim; black ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3537
4.	Open dish with flanged and beaded rim, and pattern-burnish; black ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3540
5.	Flat dish; dark grey ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3542
	Straight-sided bowl with burnished trellis-pattern; grey ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3576
	Open dish; grey ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3551
	Seven sherds from jars of 'Glevum', grey with pattern-burnish, and buff wares	A.3532, 3546, 3551, 3589

From rubble layer (4), (FIG. 8):—

FIG. 10. 6.	Jar; grey ware	A.3571
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From silt layer (9) just above natural and running beneath Wall 3 (FIG. 4):—

FIG. 10. 7.	Jar; buff ware	A.3561
8.	Bowl; grey ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3561

MORTARIA AND AMPHORA

	Amphora; fragment of base in heavy grey ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3557
FIG. 10. 9.	Mortarium; pinkish ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3538
10.	Mortarium; pinkish ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3550
11.	Mortarium; red-slipped ware	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	A.3549
12.	Mortarium; red-slipped ware	A.3552

From rubble layer (4), (FIG. 8):—

FIG. 10. 13.	Mortarium; red-slipped ware	A.3564
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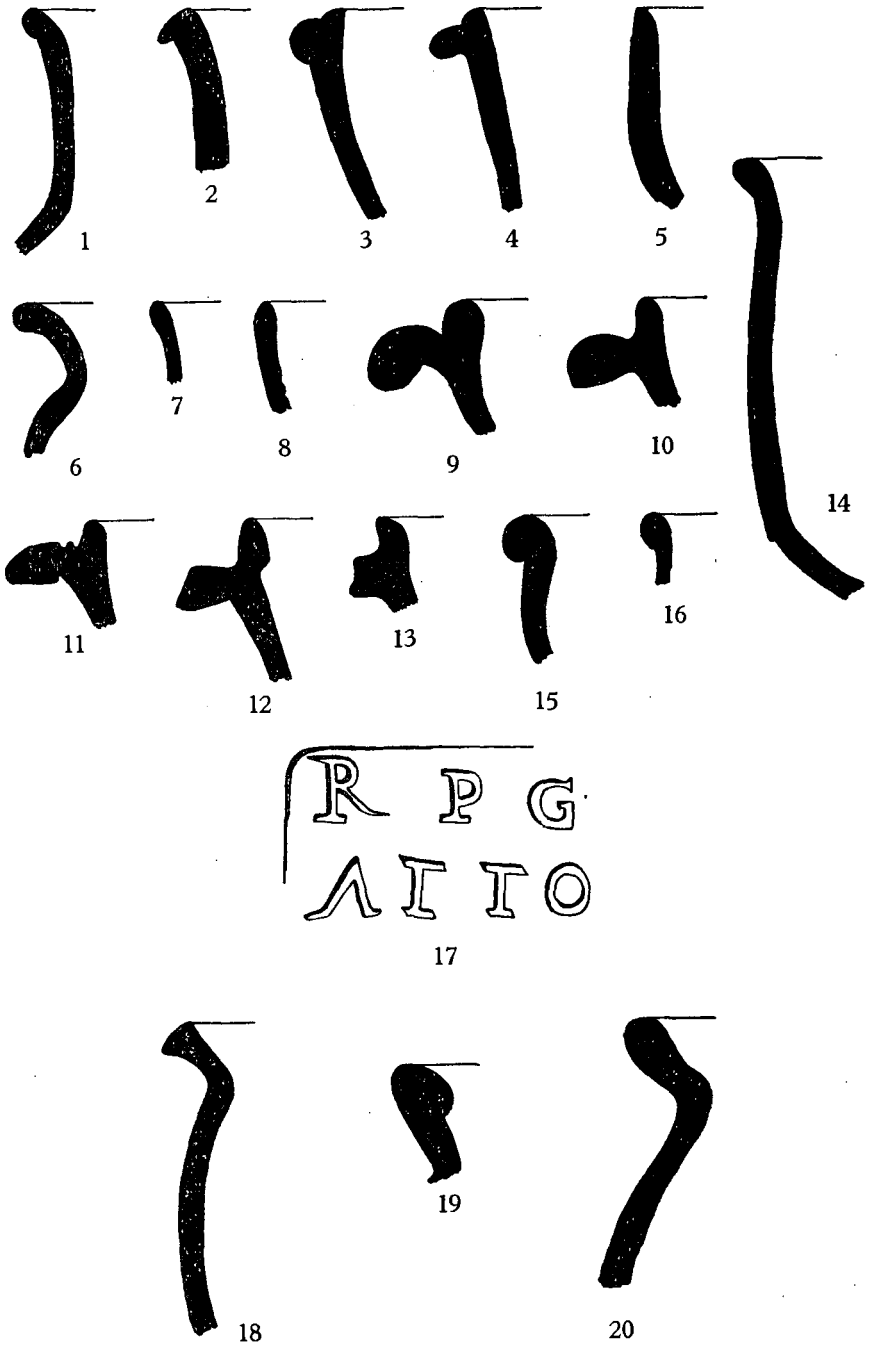


Fig. 10. Pottery

TRANSACTIONS FOR THE YEAR 1961

COLOUR-COATED WARES

Beaker sherds with red-brown slip	A.3536
Beaker sherds with blackish slip	...	...	...	...	A.3544
FIG. 10. 14. Bowl with soft red slip and stamped and rouletted decoration	...	...	...	...	A.3535
Sherds similar to above	...	...	...	...	A.3541, 3556
FIG. 10. 15. Bowl with red slip	...	...	...	...	A.3549
Dish with red slip and rouletted horizontal lines	...	...	...	...	A.3552

From rubble layer (4), (FIG. 8):—

FIG. 10. 16. Jar with red slip	...	...	...	...	A.3567
Two sherds with orange-red slip and a white painted pattern	...	...	...	...	A.3590
Beaker sherds with red slip and 'scale' decoration	...	...	...	...	A.3572
Beaker sherds with black slip and rouletted 'cut-glass' decoration	...	...	...	...	A.3587-8

TILES, ETC.

- (a) A fairly large number of Roman roof-tiles were found, both *tegulae* and *imbrices*, scattered throughout the site. There were also a few stone slates, diamond-shaped, one of which was found with the iron nail still in its hole (A.3534, 3568). The rubble layer (4), (FIG. 8), contained a pile of many Roman tiles, amongst them one (A.3565) bearing the stamp: RPG (FIG. 10.17).

ATTO

Mr R. P. Wright, when examining the stamp for C.I.L., commented 'It seems to be the impression from a die unevenly placed, so that the right hand portion made no mark. Four or five more letters would be needed to make a stamp comparable to the one from Hucclecote villa in the City Museum collection:—

RPGQQIVL

FLORETCCRSM

- (b) Several pieces of shaped wood, including planks and an object which could have been a shutter for controlling the flow in a small water-channel (A.3583-4), were found well-preserved right at the bottom of the black peaty layer (2) at the western end of the churchyard.

MEDIAEVAL POTTERY

Stray sherds occurred throughout the site, most of them apparently dating from the 13th-14th centuries.

Unglazed sherds A.3529, 3543, 3548, 3566.

Unglazed base with pinched out junction to side A.3570.

Sagging base with pinched out edges; the upper part of the pitcher appeared to have had a yellow-green glaze A.3547.

Glazed sherds A.3529, 3539, 3548, 3566, 3585.

The glazes included a green-speckled yellow, green with brown streaks, and plain green, one of which had bands of rouletted decoration under the glaze.

From layer (8a) immediately overlying Wall 3 (FIG. 4):—

Leg of a tripod jar with green glaze A.3560.

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From the bottom of the black peaty layer (2) just outside Wall 2 (FIG. 9, b):—

FIG. 10. 18.	Rim of rough gritty ware	A.3575
19.	Rim of unglazed gritty ware	...	...	...	...	A.3579
20.	Rim of unglazed gritty ware	...	...	...	...	A.3580
Two bases	...	...	...	...	...	A.3578
Glazed sherds	...	...	...	...	...	A.3574, 3577, 3579

The glazes included mottled green, plain green, one with a slashed raised band, and brown.

From layer (2), BELOW rubble (4), (FIG. 7), found with small fragments of Mediaeval floor-tiles:—

Rim and handle of a green-glazed pitcher	...	...	...	...	A.3562
Two unglazed sherds and two green-glazed, one of which had internal glaze as well	...	...	...	...	A.3563

APPENDIX 2 : REPORT ON THE GEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS IN THE BORING BELOW THE LOWEST LEVEL OF THE EXCAVATIONS

By Mr L. RICHARDSON

Present surface level—approx. 64.50 O.D.

Made ground—mostly black earth.

Surface of sand and gravel—approx. 54.35 O.D.

- Sample 1. Reddish quartzose sand and pebbles (mostly quartz) with a considerable admixture of clay: some dark (? derived from made ground) and some suggestive of Lower Lias. Small pebbles of Inferior Oolite, ooliths and small flint.
2. Reddish quartzose sand and pebbles with a considerable admixture of dark clay. Two flints.
 3. Ditto, but the whole redder than 1 and 2. Rare inclusions of carbonaceous matter.
 4. Resembles 3 but more crumbly.
 5. Resembles 4. Pebble of oolite and occasional small flints.
 6. Ditto, but some admixture of dark clay recalling Lower Lias.
 7. Ditto, with admixture of clay and very dark clayey matter with plant remains—striated stems recognizable.
 8. Ditto, with abundant black carbonaceous matter.
 9. Ditto. Retentive of moisture.
 10. Ditto. Less dark; retentive of moisture.

Approx. 42.35 O.D.:—

Lower Lias; typical blue Liassic clay.

Samples taken at intervals of about 1.2 feet, under church on north side of the site.

Generalized Description of Superficial Deposit

Reddish quartzose sand with scattered pebbles (mostly quartz), and a variable, occasionally a considerable, admixture of clayey matter, in places recalling Lower Lias clay. The clayey matter is mostly dark, locally black, with carbonaceous matter; also very similar clay, but black with vegetable matter, and—at about 3 to 4 feet above Lower Lias—intense black with recognizable fragments of rushes. A small pebble of Inferior Oolite was noted; also occasional small chips of flint. Approximately 12 feet.

APPENDIX 3 :

REPORT ON PLANT REMAINS FROM BLACK PEATY LAYER (2)

By Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

The first consignment consisted of a wood sample and two bottles of silt and relatively small particles. The wood sample is Oak (*Quercus* sp.). Some relatively large pieces of Oak were also found in one of the bottles. The remaining material in the bottles was washed through sieves, and was found to include a considerable variety of seeds and fruits, amongst which the following were tentatively identified.

- (1) Stony endocarps ('stones') of Sloes and/or cherries.
- (2) Apple pips.
- (3) Blackberry seeds.
- (4) Seeds of Corncockle *Lychnis githago*.
- (5) Miscellaneous fruits and seeds amongst which the following were tentatively identified :—*Aethusa cynapium*, *Apium* sp., *Lapsana communis*, *Eleocharis palustris* and members of the *Caryophyllaceae* and *Papaveraceae*.

The second consignment, consisting of wet, peat-like material, was washed on sieves and was found to consist largely of small pieces of bark, twigs and other vegetable material. No attempt was made to identify this material more precisely, for it would take a long time to do so and it seems most improbable that it would serve any useful purpose.

Seeds and portions of fruits were also present, some of which were tentatively identified as follows:—stones of sloes, apple pips, *Scutellaria galericulata*, *Polygonum bistorta*, *Anthemis cotula*, *Anethum graveolens*, *Thlaspi arvense*, *Lapsana communis*, *Picris* sp., *Ranunculus* sp., *Luzula* sp., *Carex* sp., species of *Atriplex* and *Chenopodium* and other members of the *Compositae*.

Note:—The seed and fruit identifications are tentative, and they have not been confirmed by microscopical examination.