

EXCAVATIONS AT KESTON CHURCH, 1950

By E. D. C. JACKSON and N. PIERCY FOX

DURING the war a bomb fell outside the east wall of Keston Church, and in June, 1950, the work of rebuilding the east wall commenced. The builder, Mr. George Smith, without whose interest and generous help little could have been achieved, Mr. D. C. Harben and the writers watched and recorded the course of the work, and later, with the permission of the Rector of Keston, the Reverend W. J. Hepburn Whyte, excavated the area outside the blocked 13th-century arch on the south wall of the nave with the help of other members of Keston Field Club. When graves were discovered under the foundations of the east wall, Mr. W. F. Grimes, F.S.A., came and advised. No excavation of undisturbed graves was allowed and such evidence as they may contain could not be recovered. Keston Church is close to the Roman site and it was hoped that evidence of Roman occupation would be found, but there was no trace of any Roman material in the ground examined. Only three potsherds were found: two 13th—14th-century unstratified sherds from the S.E. corner of the Tower were part of a "thumbed" base with speckled green glaze adhering, and the third was part of the base of a Tudor pot with traces of green glaze found near the entrance to the vault.

The excavations show that the site of Keston Church was used as a burial ground before the foundations of the original building were laid. The present church is of the normal nave and chancel type without aisles. It stands on the original foundations except at the west end where the church was lengthened in 1878, and on plan could be of Saxon or Norman date (see Plan No. 2). The demolition of the east wall revealed that it traversed parts of four shallow graves, cut in the chalk, previously cleared of their contents sufficiently to allow the wall material to stand upon the floor of the graves. The photograph (Plate No. 1) is taken from the south end of the chancel east wall and shows the lower walls from which Section EE of Plan No. 1 was measured. It also shows all four graves, after removal of the southern end of these walls, and their position in relation to the chancel floor which is seen on the left. The skull at the right-hand bottom corner belongs to a later interment and is some 18 in. above the chalk graves. An undisturbed skull from grave No. 5 on Plan No. 1 was examined by Sir Arthur Keith who identified it as the skull of a woman of Romano-British type and placed it in the first half of the first millenium A.D. Mr. Roberts, of the Department of Human



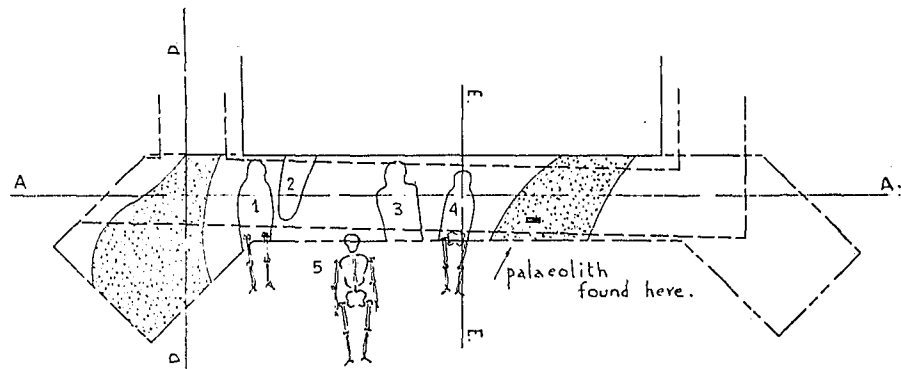
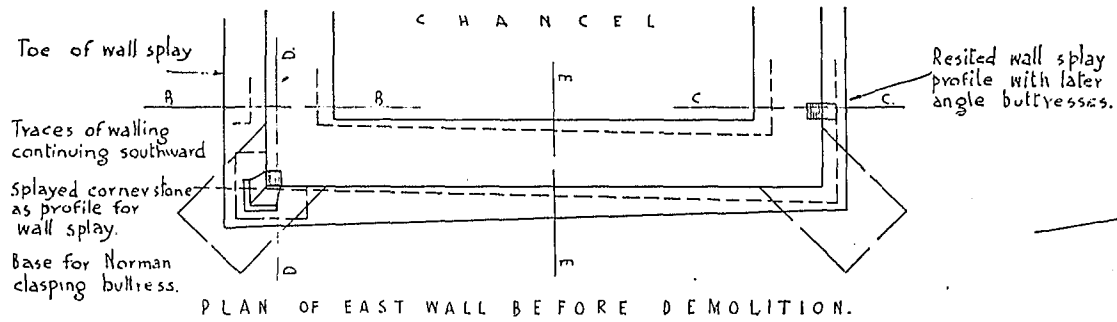
KESTON CHURCH, KENT. East wall rebuilding, 1950.

KESTON CHURCH. KENT.

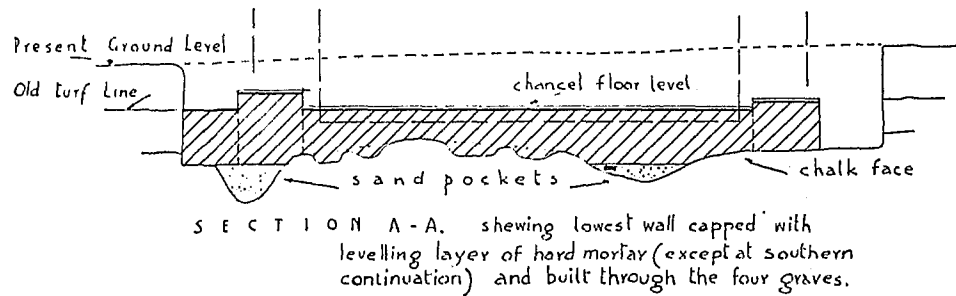
PLAN NO 1.

PRENORMAN GRAVES & EARLY WALLING FOUND DURING REBUILDING OF EAST WALL OF CHANCEL. JUNE 1950.

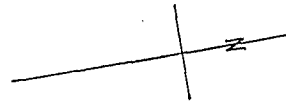
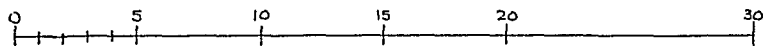
Measured & Drawn by E DUDLEY C. JACKSON, KESTON. 1950.


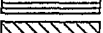
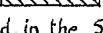



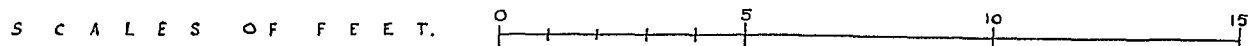
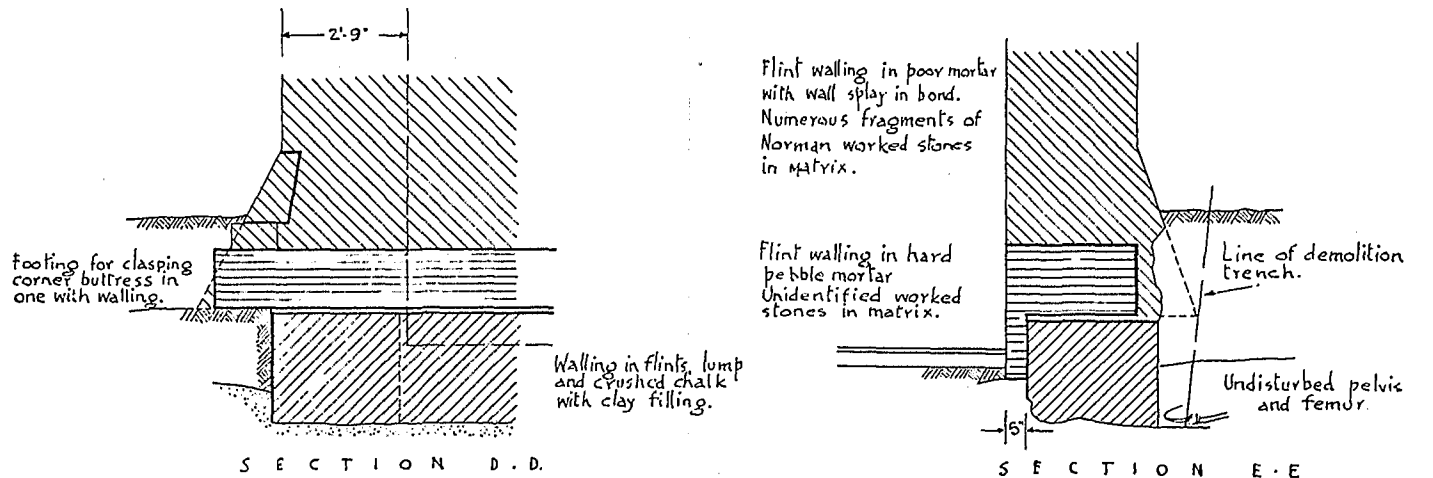
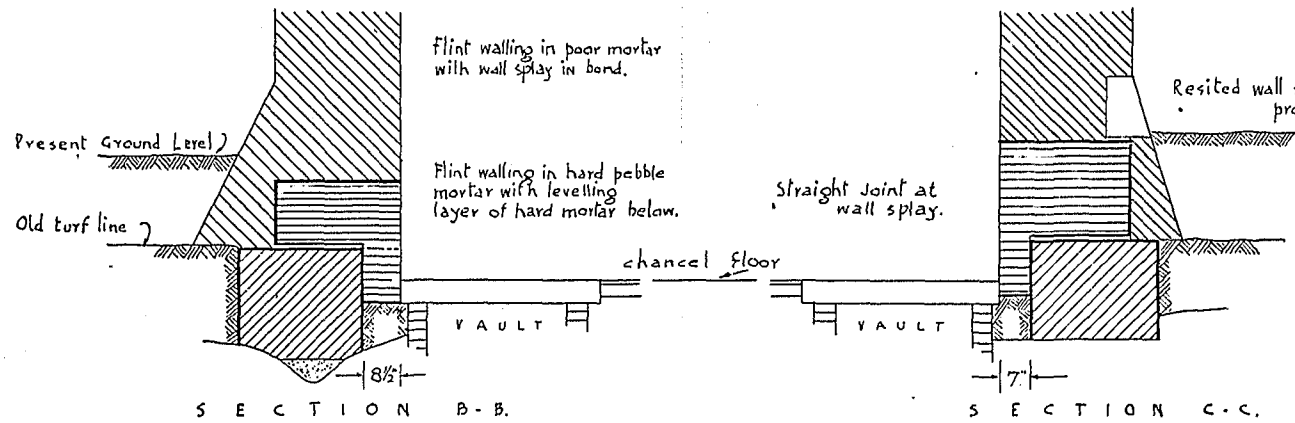
PLAN OF EXCAVATION TRENCH AFTER WALL REMOVED showing:— Four graves cut into the chalk face. The alignment of the lowest wall traversing the graves. Skeletal remains protruding into the excavation trench, but outside the original wall trench. (Complementary bones removed when lowest wall was built.)



SECTION A-A. showing lowest wall capped with levelling layer of hard mortar (except at southern continuation) and built through the four graves.



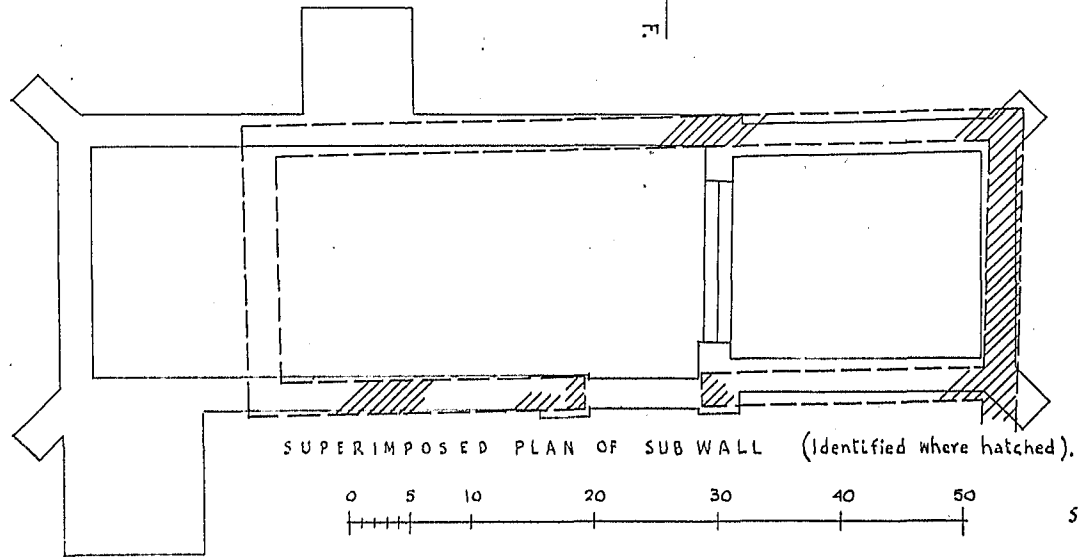
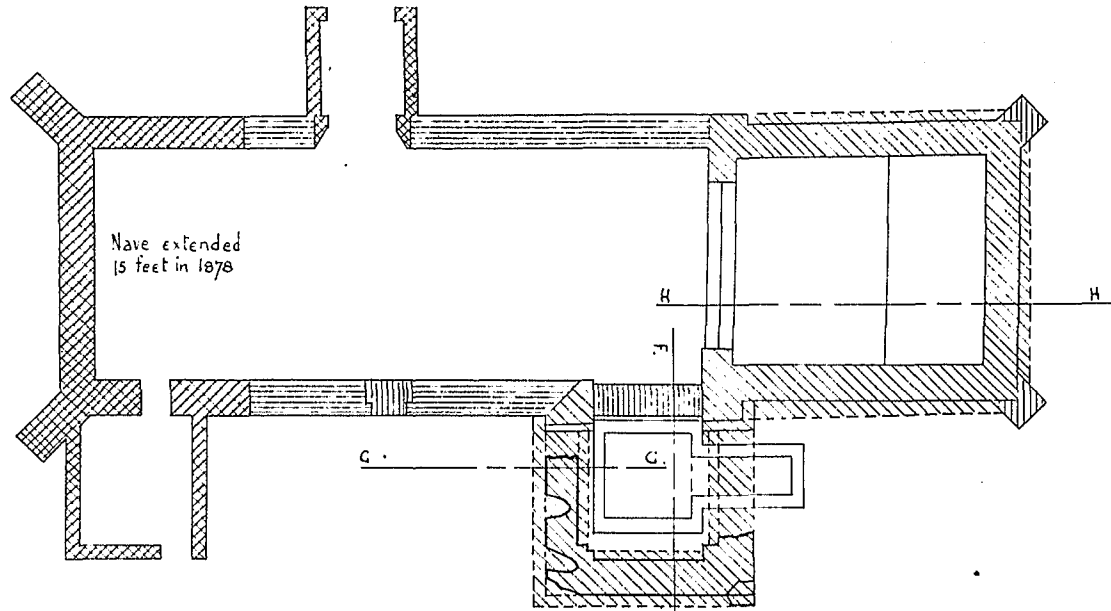
EARLY WALLING IN PLAN ----- IN SECTION. 
 NORMAN. ----- 
 EARLY ENGLISH ----- 
 LATER BUTTRESSES ----- 
 These are omitted in the Sections.



K E S T O N C H U R C H, K E N T.

PLAN N° 2.

FOUNDATIONS & LOWER WALLS OF FORMER ADJUNCT TO THE NAVE and
PART CONJECTURAL PLAN OF SUB WALLING BELOW THE NORMAN CHURCH.



S C A L E S O F F E E T.

Windows are omitted from these drawings. They are Early English or later.

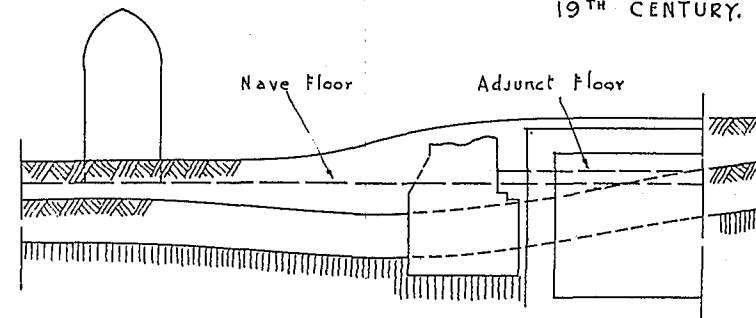
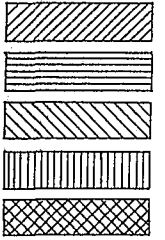
EARLY WALLING (subwall.)

NORMAN.

EARLY ENGLISH c.1250.

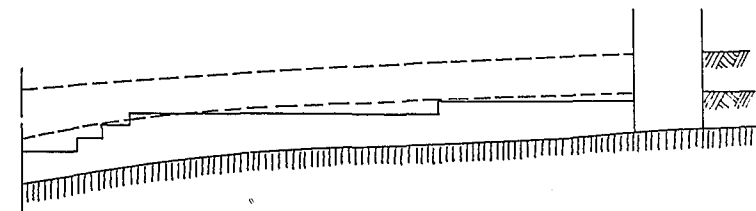
18TH CENTURY.

19TH CENTURY.



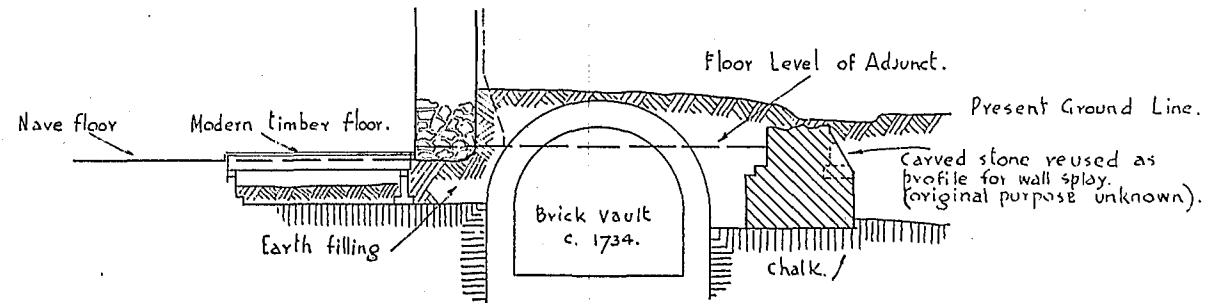
S E C T I O N C - G

Present Ground Level.
Medieval Ground Level.
chalk.

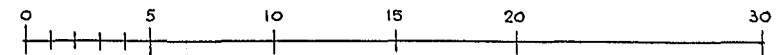


S E C T I O N H - H.

Present Ground Level.
Medieval Ground Level.
chalk.



S E C T I O N F - F.



Measured & Drawn by E. DUDLEY C. JACKSON, KESTON, 1950

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Anatomy in the University of Oxford, also examined the skull and reported that it was definitely post-Iron Age and pre-Norman. The orientation of the graves is approaching S.E. and N.W. with the heads to the N.W. At present this cannot positively be ascribed to Christian tradition and may be conditioned by sand pockets (see Plan No. 1). No grave goods were found in the limited parts of the graves which could be examined and there is no evidence to justify a close date. A pointed Paleolithic hand-axe was found in a pocket of sand close to grave No. 4. (National Grid Reference 541850/163000. O.D. 443.40.)

The chancel fabric above ground is of Early English period of about A.D. 1250, but carved fragments embodied in the matrix of the demolished east wall proved that an earlier wall existed and the footings of a flat clasping buttress at the S.E. corner suggests late 11th-century work. Below the level of these footings another wall was found; the orientation was materially different and it was of greater length than the wall above it. No dating material or technique was identifiable, but excavation at the S.E. corner of the nave proved that the return of the wall showed no break in alignment between the nave and the chancel (see Plan No. 2).

The excavations south of the nave in front of the high 13th-century blocked archway revealed the foundations and walls of an adjunct to the nave. The walls retained a splay similar to that found round the 13th-century chancel and from their thickness (4 ft. 6 in.) the inference is that a tower was raised upon them (see Plan No. 2). The internal dimensions are 11 ft. by 12 ft. Carved members of the base of an arch pilaster *in situ* were also found corresponding in style to the blocked archway. Within this adjunct and at a lower level an uncharted vault was discovered which belonged to the family of John Pepys, Watchmaker of St. Brides, and a relative of the Diarist. The first Pepys entry in the burial register is that of "John, infant son of Mr. John Pepys from London, buried in the vault December 10th, 1734." The barrel roof of this vault stands about 2 ft. above the floor of the adjunct and almost fills the floor area. The manner of its construction shows that it could not have been built until the adjunct had been demolished and this would appear to have taken place prior to 1734. Mr. John Pepys died in 1749, and his son, Edmund, later became head of the senior (Cottenham) branch of the family.

A closely detailed atlas of the County by Andrews, Dury and Herbert, published in 1769, no doubt the result of many years preparation, shows Keston Church with a tower at the S.E. end of the nave as at Kingsdown, near Farningham. Other than this and the fact that "two small bells of brass suted in the steeple" are mentioned in the Inventory of Church Goods VI Edward VI no record of an adjunct is known to exist.