

University of Sussex
Centre for Continuing Education

Course: X9070

**Archæological Investigation of
Chithurst Church,
West Sussex, 2007**

SU 842252315



Edited by Robert Hutchinson FSA

Summary

An archaeological investigation of the structure and landscape context of the eleventh-century church at Chithurst, near Midhurst in West Sussex, during May-July 2007, established that it is built on an artificially enhanced river cliff alongside the western Rother. The resultant mound, now 3.08 metres in height, was probably used for a late Saxon or early Norman fort, topped by a wooden palisade, to guard the ford where a north-south drove road crossed the river.

The investigation provided information on the problems of building and maintaining the two-celled church on shifting, uncertain ground as well as revealing two late thirteenth/early fourteenth-century grave-markers in the churchyard. The structure has a complex chronology with seven main building phases. Concurrent archival research has disclosed that the pre-Reformation dedication of Chithurst church was St Nicholas.

1 - The Historical and Topographical Context

1.0 Chithurst is a small, narrow parish in West Sussex, four kilometres (km.) long and just 0.8 km. wide, situated 4.5 kms. west of Midhurst and 10 kms. east of Petersfield, Hants. Its area is 485.6 hectares, of which 145.7 remain woodland, with Kingsham and Borden Woods straddling the northern parish boundary and Holm, Wick and Hammer woods further south. Double ramparts (some of the inner revetted with stone) of a 6.885 hectare Iron Age promontory fort survive in Hammer Wood in the centre of the parish and a north-south Roman road runs just outside its boundary, 600 metres (m.) east of the church.

1.1 The Rother Valley has a regular pattern of similar strip parishes with nucleated villages built on the fertile soils of either the Lower Chalk and Upper Greensand or the Sandgate Beds. In the Saxon period, they contained both woodland for pasture, pannage and open arable land. Most included outlier portions attached to other manors, inland from the parent settlements, providing forest for swine and other resources such as timber, firewood and stone for building.¹ (See *Figure One*). The name 'Chithurst' suggests early Saxon settlement on this site,² derived from the personal name *Citta* and 'hurst',³ (or wood), that utilised the river for fishing and communication. Fresh water was also available from the Hammer Stream, which joins the Rother 350 m. east of the church, and from a small spring 500 m. west of it, once known, locally as 'St. Winifred's well'.⁴

1.2 The Domesday Book recorded: "Morin holds Chithurst from the Earl [Roger de Montgomery, lord of Arundel]. Ælmer [Almar] held it from Earl Godwin in freehold. Then and now it answered for four hides.⁵ Land for two ploughs; in lordship, one; six villagers and five smallholders with two ploughs. A small church; three slaves. One mill [rendering] 8 shillings [and a fishery yielding] 100 eels; five acres of meadow [and] from the woodland, three pigs. In Chichester, 1 haw [shop and close] [rendering] 6d. Value before 1066: 40 shillings; later 30 shillings, now 60 shillings."⁶

1.3 Chithurst manor was probably the knight's fee which a descendant, Morin de Chithurst, held of the Earl of Arundel in 1166, but subsequently it became part of the manor of Harting and was held by the Husee family until 1349 or later. It was held of the Husees by the Vesseler family and in 1285, there was a dispute between the Augustine prior and canons of Calceto priory at Pynham, near Arundel, and John le Vesseler, rector of Chithurst, over an annual pension of five shillings successfully claimed by them as due

¹ See Mark Gardiner, 'Saxon Settlement and Land Division in the Western Weald,' *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, (hereafter, *S.A.C.*), vol. 122, (1984), pp. 75-83.

² The density of Old English names in the Rother valley suggests there was little room for later settlement expansion. See Gardiner, *opt. cit.*, p.79 and T.H. Ashton, 'The Origins of the Manor in England,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, vol. 8, p. 75.

³ A Mawer and F.M.Stenton, *The Place-names of Sussex*, 2 vols., vol.1, p. 33, Cambridge, 1969.

⁴ A seventh-century Welsh saint associated with springs.

⁵ The area of a hide varied wildly. In the Domesday Book it usually equated to 120 acres, (47 hectares).

⁶ John Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book, Sussex*, section 11-9, Chichester, 1976.

for tithes of land held by Roger Kingsham.⁷ In 1291, the church was omitted from the taxation of Pope Nicholas because of its poverty. In 1304, le Vesseler, described as parson of the church of Chithurst, conveyed land there and the advowson of the church to William le Vesseler.⁸ John le Vesseler held the manor in 1316 and four years later, a messuage and 9-31 hectares at Chithurst were settled on John for life, with a remainder to John, brother of Robert le Vesseler and to Alice, sister of "the said John" in tail successively.⁹ John le Vesseler seems to have died between 1327, when he was the main taxpayer in Chithurst, and 1332, when none of the family appear in the Subsidy Roll.¹⁰ The Vesselers were among several local benefactors to Durford Abbey, a Premonstratensian house founded by Henry Husee in 1161 in the nearby parish of Rogate. Its chartulary records their gift of a quarry in Wick Wood and land at de la Holme (Holm Wood) in the parish¹¹ during this period. Chithurst and Iping have been linked as parishes since at least 1482 when they were called 'Iping cum capella de Chithurst.' It is now a chapelry of Trotton.

► **Fig. 1:** Map of Chithurst Parish, showing outliers from other manors and the location of Chithurst church, near the southern parish boundary, alongside a north-south drove road and the Roman road connecting Silchester and Chichester. (Elizabeth Garrett, after Gardiner, 'Saxon Settlement and Land Division in the Western Weald,' *S.A.C.*, vol.122, p.80)



1.4 The Vesseler interest in Chithurst manor ended before 1398 and it was subsequently held by the Bartelot, Goring and Bettesworth families.¹²

1.5 The manor house,¹³ built on rising ground east of the church, consists of a timber framed three-bay main range (with central chimney) with a cross wing that possibly replaced a fourth bay. There is a small wing at a lower level at the south end. Externally, it is built of stone with brick dressings except to the east face, which is timber framed with a continuous jetty. The cross wing has two stories with an attic and cellar. A lead fret on a ground floor window on the north side, between the two stacks, was uncovered in 1930-31 and can be linked stylistically to examples at Hampton Court.¹⁴ A building survey by Annabelle Hughes in 1997 concluded that the main range was the remains of a four bay timber framed house with a continuous jetty on the east elevation, dating from about 1540. Its chimney was originally a timber framed flue above the ground floor, but a brick chimney was inserted about 1600. In the same period, the northern bay was replaced with the present cross wing.¹⁵

⁷ *S.A.C.*, vol. 11, (1859), pp. 99-100.

⁸ L.F. Salzman, *Sussex Fines 1249-1307*, Sussex Record Society, (hereafter, *S.R.S.*), vol. 7, (1908), no. 1176.

⁹ L.F. Salzman, *Sussex Fines 1308-1509*, *S.R.S.*, vol. 23, (1916), no. 1564.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 238.

¹¹ Janet Stevenson, *Durford Chartulary*, *S.R.S.* vol. 90 (2006), pp. xxvii, xliii and no. 1161.

¹² L.Z. Salzman, (ed.), *Victoria County History of Sussex*, (hereafter *V.C.H.*), vol. 4, The Rape of Chichester,

p. 5, London, 1953.

¹³ Formerly called Chithurst Abbey.

¹⁴ Walter H. Godfrey, 'A Lead Fret at Chithurst Abbey,' *Sussex Notes & Queries*, vol. 3, (1931), pp. 92-3.

¹⁵ Annabelle Hughes, *Report on Chithurst Manor*, West Sussex Record Office (hereafter *W.S.R.O.*), MP 4281.

1.6 A large pond, called the Hammer Pond, straddles the boundary between Chithurst and Iping parishes, one kilometre north east of the church at SU 846236, which was the site of iron-working from the early seventeenth-century. A 100 m. long bay, 3-25 m. in height, survives, damming the Hammer Stream, with a spillway at the eastern end. A water-filled hollow near the centre of the bay may be the site of a pit for the water wheel that powered the forge hammers. A small quantity of forge cinder in a bank of black soil between the spillway and water hollow may be the working area. Sir Peter Bettesworth was noted as the owner of a forge and furnace in Iping in 1632, in a two-year legal action over the supply of charcoal with his clerk, Roger Pearson.¹⁶ The furnace, associated with the Chithurst forge, may have been located at Inholme Copse in Stedham (SU 855263).¹⁷

2 – The Church

2.0 The pre-Reformation dedication of Chithurst church is lost. In recent years, it was re-dedicated to St Mary, but archival research associated with this project has established that it was recorded in the fourteenth-century as St Nicholas, patron saint of sailors and children, and a fashionable new dedication in eleventh-century Western Europe.

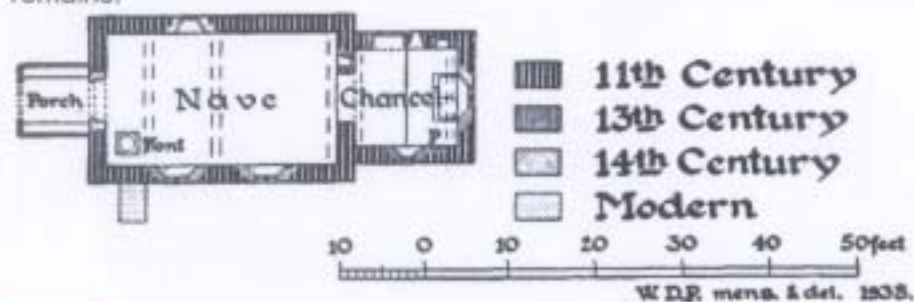
2.1 The church is a two celled structure, with nave and chancel of c.1080, built of cream and ochre coloured sandstone rubble and quoins from the Hythe formation. (Figure Two). Dimensions are typical of a late Saxon/early Norman church: the nave measures 8-23 m. in length, and 4-57 in width and the chancel 3-66 x 3-35 m. Nave



height is 4-57 m. and that of the chancel 3-96 - giving the church a distinctive 'tall and thin' appearance, commensurate with its date. Herringbone masonry was used in the north and south walls of the nave, near the wall-plate. A few fragments of probably Roman tile and brick

◀ Fig. 2: Chithurst church from the north-east, showing its two celled structure. The east window, with two ogee trefoil lights, was inserted c.1310.

remain in the east wall of the nave above the chancel roof apex.¹⁸ Masonry surveys indicating different mortars and stonework typology suggest that the eastern portion of the chancel may have been built at a different time than the western end: did the patrons' temporarily run out of money? A porch at the west end was added in the fifteenth- or sixteenth-centuries and has been rebuilt at least twice since then, in the late 1850s and again in 1911. The exterior walls of the church were originally plastered with a pink mortar, also characteristic of the date of construction, but little of this original surface now remains.



◀ Fig. 3: Plan of Chithurst Church, drawn by W.D. Peckham in 1938. (www.british-history.ac.uk)

¹⁶ National Archives C 78/416/6

¹⁷ Henry Cleere and David Crossley, *The Iron Industry of the Weald*, (2nd. edn, ed. Jeremy Hodgkinson), pp. 323, 384 and 387, Cardiff, 1995.

¹⁸ Burton church, near Bignor, has similar herringbone masonry and nearby Elsted has very high walls.

2.2 Stone for the church was probably quarried in Hammer Wood, one km. north of the site. A number of ancient shallow pits remain within the wood (*Figure Four*) revealing strata of the yellow, medium grained sandstone, which on superficial examination, seems to match. The stone was quarried in large blocks and transported by cart down the drove road adjacent to the church site. The Hythe beds sandstone is resistant to weather erosion but is also soft enough to be easily worked.



► **Fig. 5:** Drawing of Chithurst church, of c.1804, showing the priest's door in the north wall of the chancel. (Sussex Archaeological Society, Sharpe Collection, no 88, Michelham Priory).

◄ **Fig. 4:** One of a number of ancient shallow quarry pits in the Hythe beds of Hammer Wood, (SU 843243) close to an east-west track linking up with the drove road passing the site of Chithurst Church, allowing convenient transportation of stone for the building of the structure. The gift of a quarry in the adjacent Wick and Holm Woods confirms medieval quarrying in this area. (Ken Jordan).

2.3 A priest's door was inserted in the north wall of the chancel in c.1310. This was blocked in 1859, and the interior doorway jambs later masked by a wooden cupboard in the chancel. Antiquarian drawings show the door before closure.



► **Fig. 6:** North wall of nave showing herringbone masonry near wall plate. (Robert Hutchinson).



▲ **Fig. 7:** Exterior and Interior photographs of original unglazed window of c.1080 in north wall of chancel. Note wall thickness, (which averages 0.62 metres throughout the church) as displayed by the interior splay, and the hole on the right of the exterior window which may indicate a bracket for an outside shutter.

2.4 Inside the structure, the chancel narrow arch, measuring 3.66 m. in height and 1.62 m. in width, is also original, although its chamfered imposts and plinths were crudely re-tooled with combing during the 1859 restoration.



◀ Fig. 8: Chancel arch at Chithurst of c.1080.

▶ Fig. 9: Crude re-tooling of chancel arch dating from the 1859 restoration. (Robert Hutchinson)



2.5 In c.1200, a number of refinements were added: an original window in the south wall of the chancel was enlarged into a single splayed unglazed lancet light, rebated for an interior shutter. An aumbry was inserted into the north wall of the chancel and a small piscina in the south wall. A squint, possibly indicating a secondary altar in the nave, was cut through the chancel arch wall in the early fourteenth-century. As well as the east window and the priest's door, a new window was also inserted in the north nave wall, and two more in the south wall, with elegant quatrefoil openings,¹⁹ together with a doorway in the west wall, which may have replaced a blocked entrance in the north nave wall.



▲ Fig. 10: West doorway of c.1310 with plain pointed arch and segmental rear-arch.

▶ Fig. 11: Original plinth of c.1310 west doorway with a later repair above. (Robert Hutchinson).



¹⁹ The easternmost window in the south wall of the nave looks like a nineteenth-century restoration.

2.6 The oak nave and chancel roofs are not coeval with the original structure. The nave probably dates from the work of c.1200 and the chancel from c.1310. The three tie beams and trussed rafters in the nave were exposed during the restoration of 1911 by Philip Mainwaring Johnston, when a plaster ceiling was removed.



► Fig. 12: Nave roof, looking west, showing exposed trussed rafters and tie-beams.

The chancel roof has braces but no collars, the braces crossing each other – a form of roof construction rare in Sussex. Both sets of rafters are marked with carpenters' numerals for assembly on site.²⁰

2.7 The position of the church, on an artificially enhanced natural feature, has led to a number of problems affecting the integrity of the structure, caused by insecure foundations and shrinkage of the clay soil of the mound.

Vertical cracks are found in the north wall of the nave and through a window in the south wall, indicating continued settlement. Two large rectangular slabs form part of



▲ Figs. 13 and 14: Large shaped slabs found as footings on (left) the south-east corner of the chancel and (right), the south-west corner of the nave. They both appear to be coeval with the original eleventh-century structure.

the footings of the south-east corner of the chancel and the south-west corner of the nave. Both closely resemble the type of sandstone used in the impostes of the chancel arch, which may indicate they are original work of c.1080: as both seem to be unnecessarily chamfered, it may be that these were intended for use in the interior but were pressed into service as emergency repairs. Replacement of the quoins, c.1310, at the south-west corner of the nave also suggests early remedial work to correct signs of subsidence of this section of the church. Two raking brick buttresses on the north-west corner of the nave and a third at the south-west were removed during the 1911 restoration. The architect, Johnston, retained one to support the wall of the nave at the latter.

2.8 After the demolition of nearby Iping church and its second rebuilding of the nineteenth-century, a rose window was brought from there to be inserted high up in the west wall of Chithurst, as shown in a photograph taken before the 1911 restoration. The window was later removed, as it endangered the structural integrity of this part of the church and serious cracks remain in the west wall as evidence of the continuing problem, compounded by the weight of the single bell-cote above. (See Figures Fifteen and Sixteen).

²⁰ P.M.Johnston, 'Chithurst Church' S.A.C. vol. 55, (1912) p. 106.



▲ Fig. 15: Photograph of west end of Chithurst church before 1911, showing now removed circular rose window from Iping church and raked buttress on west wall. (via Tony and Lesley Voice).

► Fig. 16: West wall of Chithurst church showing scar of removed rose window and settlement cracks above the roof line of the porch, worsened by the downward thrust of the bell cote above. (Robert Hutchinson)



2.9 The eastern-most window of the south wall of the nave was inserted in the late 1850s, possibly as a replacement for another of c.1310, with considerable repairs to the stonework below - again probably because of settlement problems.



▲ Fig 17: Eastern-most window in the south wall of the nave, inserted in the 1850s, with evidence of a series of repairs to the masonry to correct subsidence.

► Fig.18: Rough quoins of c.1310 as a repair to the south west corner (Robert Hutchinson)



3 – Summary of Building Phases

Phase I: - Speculative wooden chapel built on top of an artificially enhanced river cliff.

Phase II. c.1080 – Construction of a tall, thin two-celled structure, with herringbone masonry near the wall plate of the nave and probably main entrance in the north wall of nave.

Phase IIB – Insertion of early twelfth-century font.

Phase III. c.1200 – New single lancet light, south wall of chancel, and aumbry and piscina inserted in chancel walls. Nave roof replaced.

Phase IV. c.1310 – Priest's door inserted in north wall of chancel; new two-light east window replaces a single light of c.1080, new window in north wall of nave (probably replacing Phase II north door) and two new windows in south wall, nave. New entrance created via west door. Chancel roof replaced and rebuild of wall at south-west corner of nave.

Phase V. Late fifteenth/early sixteenth-centuries – construction of porch at west end.

Phase VI. 1858-9 – Priest's door in chancel blocked; chancel arch and other interior stonework combed; porch rebuilt and single bell-cote erected at west end of nave roof. Four brick raking buttresses erected at west end to support structure.

Phase VII. 'About 1885'²¹ – Insertion in west wall of rose window from demolished Iping church.

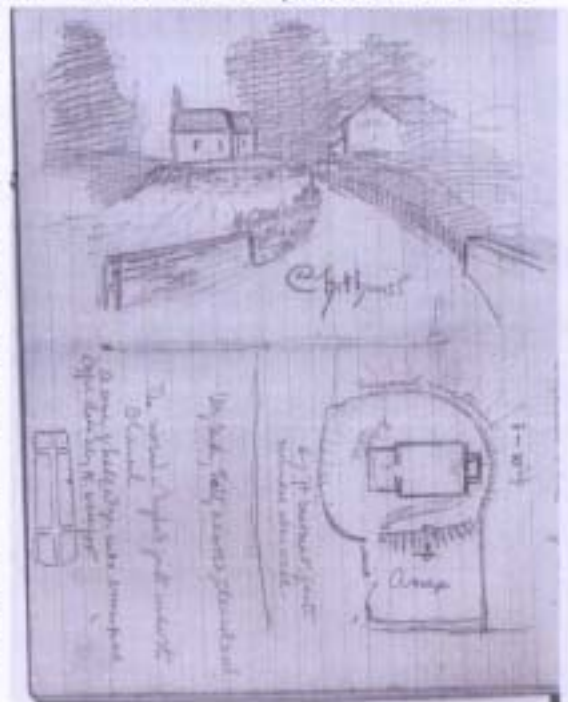
Phase VII. 1911 – Rose window removed, as are three of the buttresses in restoration by Philip Mainwaring Johnston. New porch constructed – although this may have been completed later, as suggested by the discovery of a small stone, inscribed "1915" covered by undergrowth near its western edge.

4 – The Mound

4.0 Earlier antiquaries speculated that the mound on which the church is built is a prehistoric burial barrow,²² or "a place of assembly for heathen worship or a cemetery in pre-Christian times."²³ More recently, Richard Morris has emphasised that the association of such earthworks with a church indicates the presence of lordship.²⁴ Hadrian Allcroft's sketch (*Figure Nineteen*) done during a visit to Chithurst on 11 April 1921, suggests that the graveyard is circular – sometimes an indicator of a Saxon burial site. However,

► **Fig. 19:** Allcroft's notebook page recording his visit to Chithurst, which notes that the mound "is highest just under the Chancel" and records both a "6-7 ft revetment garth mounded above wall" at the eastern end and a "buried revetment" along the south side of the mound. (Sussex Archaeological Society Library, Barbican House: Hadrian Allcroft Working Papers, Shelf 113, box 1, book numbered 3A).

both the survey in September 1923 by Robert Gurd and the topographical survey kindly undertaken by members of the Worthing Archaeological Society as part of the CCE project confirm that the graveyard area is roughly rectangular – more normally associated with earthwork fortifications,



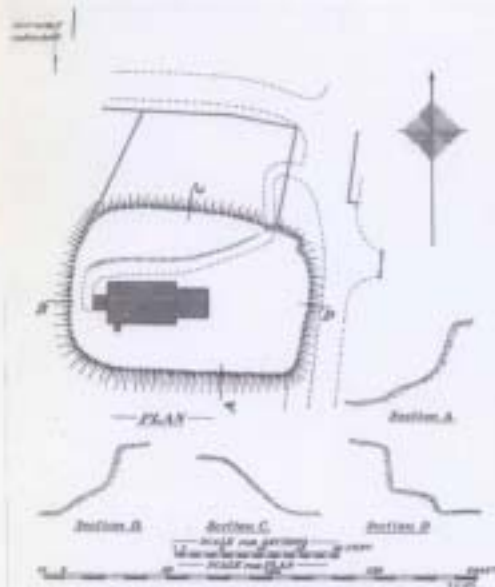
²¹ *VCH Sussex*, vol.4, p. 6. Iping was rebuilt in 1840 by Thomas Greenshields and again, except for the tower, in 1886 by Loftus Brook.

²² Hadrian Allcroft, *The Circle and the Cross*, vol. 2, p. 312, two vols., London 1927-30.

²³ Johnston, *opt.cit.*, p. 99.

²⁴ Richard Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, p. 258, London, 1989.

although the published literature on such Saxon structures is sparse.



◀ Fig. 20: Measured drawing and sections of the Chithurst mound by Robert Gurd in September 1923. (Sussex Archaeology Society Library, Barbican House).

4.1 On the opposite bank at Chithurst, there is little slope away from the river bank. Similar natural river cliffs or terraces occur at a number of nearby points along the Rother – Terwick (SU 820228); Trotton (832228) and at Stedham (862228) created by lateral fluvial erosion which tended to widen the flood plain. All these features are made up of a mixture of sand, gravel and flint/chert. The Gurd drawing shows steep sections on the eastern and western boundaries, with more gradual slopes north and south. There seems little doubt that a natural feature here has been artificially enhanced to create a mound overlooking (and

controlling) a ford across the River Rother. Traces of that ford remain visible on the river bed immediately west of the bridge below the church site. Another drawing of the church, made at the same time by Gurd before the site became wooded, gives a good impression of the top of the mound. (Figure Twenty-one).

► Fig. 21: Drawing of Chithurst Church from the grounds of the manor house, done by Robert Gurd in 1923, showing the pronounced slope of the mound on which the church is built. (Sussex Archaeology Society Library, Barbican House).

▼ Fig. 22: Chithurst Church taken from the southern bank of the River Rother in 1898 – before the growth of trees and shrubbery on the northern side. Note the apparent revetment along the southern boundary of the churchyard, indicated by arrows. (Francis Frith collection, no. 42350).



FIG. 21. CHITHURST, 1923.
Drawn by Robert Gurd, 1923.



4.2 As Morris suggests, artificially enhancing such a mound demonstrated local status and power, as well as enabling control of what must have been an important north-south droving road where it crossed the river. It is interesting to note that the nearby Roman road seemed not of significance in the choice of site both for a fortification or a village settlement.

4.3 The scale of the enhancement is plainly visible, looking south from the churchyard extension, given by Commander Henry King RN, and consecrated on 18 June, 1862.²⁵ Here, earth has been banked up to build up the north side, possibly to create

better all-round defence for the mound, which was probably topped merely by a wooden palisade in the Saxon period, or as a temporary fortification immediately following the Conquest. (Figure Twenty-four).

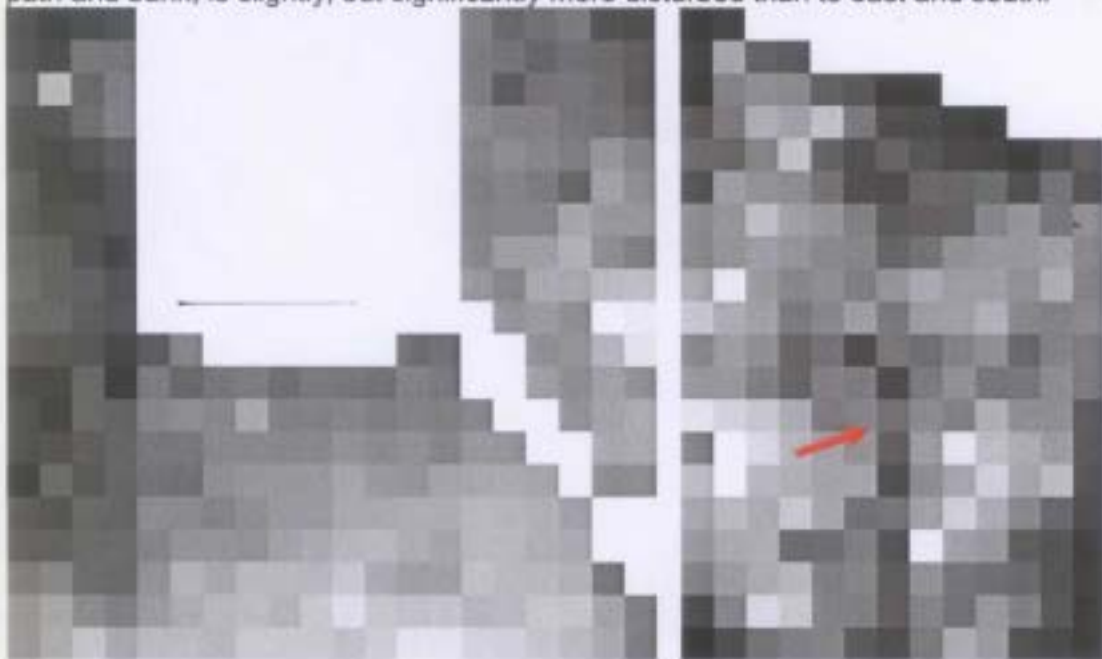
²⁵ W.S.R.O. EPI/17/49.



CHITHURST CHURCH AND MOUND. Clockwise from top left: (Fig. 23): from South-East, showing exposed mixture of sand, gravel, flint and chert, typical of river terraces and cliffs. (Fig. 24): from North, taken from the extension to the churchyard, showing a sharp bank, almost certainly artificially created or enhanced. (Fig. 25): from West, with possible indications of old revetment along top of mound that continues along the southern edge. (Fig. 26): from East, indicating the bank cut by the modern course of Chithurst Lane. (Robert Hutchinson).

4.4 Was there a wooden chapel built within such a speculative fortification? As other buildings would be within the palisade, the small area enclosed makes it difficult to envisage such a structure coeval with the mound's construction. But the site's inherited importance may have marked it out as a suitable location for a church c.1080, providing dominance over the settlement and visibility of the building. As part of the CCE project, a resistivity survey of the top of the mound was undertaken by Ian Allison and his colleagues Rodney Gunner and Peter Skilton from the Worthing Archaeology Society in an attempt to discover indications of an earlier church or fortification.

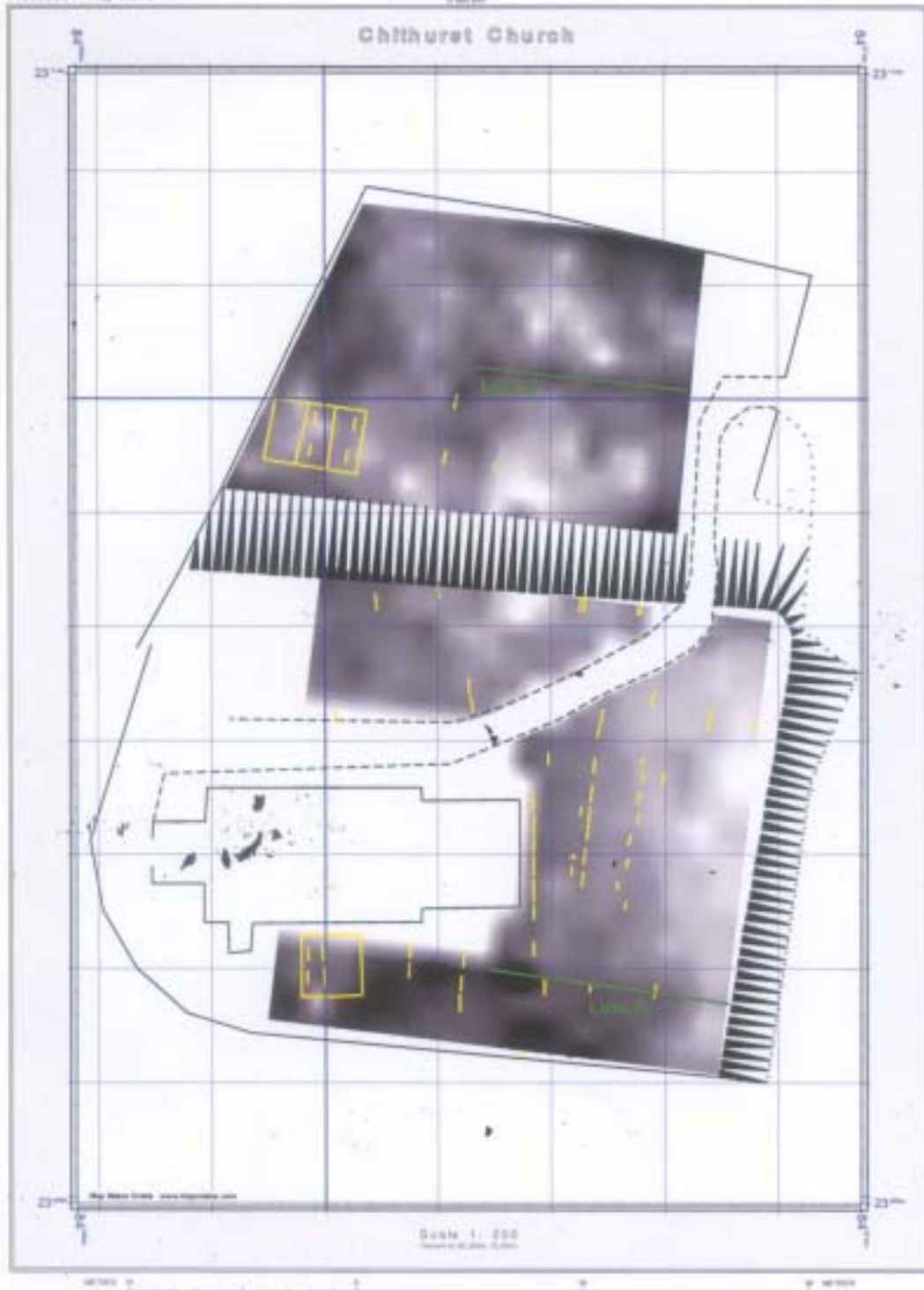
4.5 Two grids were laid out. The southern covered most of the graveyard to the east of the church plus strips to north and south. Results showed considerable variation between adjacent squares, indicating disturbance typical of an old-established graveyard. Three distinct areas can be identified within the grid. The ground is more moist south of the church, probably caused by the many trees retaining moisture and keeping the sun off the area for most of the day. The ground becomes drier towards the east, caused by leeching of water down the mound's slope into Chithurst Lane. Finally, based on statistical analysis of the data, the northern portion of the graveyard, between path and bank, is slightly, but significantly more disturbed than to east and south.



▲ Fig. 27: Raw data from the resistivity survey. Left: Southern grid, measuring 20 x 20 m. The outline of the church and path are clearly visible. Right, is the northern grid, 20x 13 m. The arrow indicates an east-west linear feature. The steep slope separating the two sections of the churchyard was not surveyed for health and safety reasons. West is at the top. (Ian Allison, Worthing Archaeology Society).

The northern grid covered most of the area north of the steep east-west slope separating the graveyard extension from the rest of the churchyard. Of obvious interest is the dark linear feature running east-west down the centre of the grid, possibly a land drain, or an earlier boundary wall. The extension is considerably less disturbed than the older graveyard.

4.6 To aid interpretation, a topographical survey was made at the same time as the resistivity exercise and the results of this were employed to position and align the geophysical data. The results are shown in *Figure Twenty-eight*. Gravestones are indicated by yellow lines. Two linear features thrown up by the smoothed resistivity results are shown in green, one the east-west feature in the graveyard extension, another, to the south east of the church. Do these features provide some evidence of changes to the management and usage of the churchyard? Does line 'A' set aside an area to the south that was used at a different period than the main area of the graveyard? Similarly, does line 'B' indicate an earlier northern boundary of the churchyard?



▲ Fig. 28: Smoothed resistivity results within the landscape. OS grid north to top of page. (Ian Allison, Worthing Archaeological Society).

It seems to align well with the southern-most gatepost of the current entrance. This could explain the weak linear feature running north-south at right angles to line 'B' which might possibly represent a pathway from an entrance in the speculative earlier north wall. As the current north wall makes a small change in alignment where this possible path meets it, it may be that a later repair to the wall closed off a redundant entrance.

4.6 There were no indications of earlier wooden structures on the mound, (such as post-holes) – unsurprising given the disturbance of the ground - but the land contour survey does seem to confirm artificial enhancement of the slope of the mound, when

compared with the adjacent manor grounds. Its shape and size is strongly suggestive of a small fortification.

5 – Fixtures and Fittings within the Church

5.0 There are no surviving indications of a Rood screen having been fitted within or near the chancel arch. However, two Hythe sandstone corbels, which probably date from Phase III (c.1200) on the east wall immediately behind the modern altar, almost certainly supported a beam on which the Holy Rood was placed.²⁶ They measure 12 cm.



in depth x 14 cm. height x 10 cm. in width. To the north of these, is a single carved corbel, 13.5 cm. tall x 12.5 cm. width of the same date which supported an image, possibly of the Virgin Mary, as in 1520, Robert Paynell of Terwick left in his will, a bequest of 'an ewe to [pay for a candle for] o' lady Light of Chethurst.'²⁷

◀ Fig. 29: The modern altar table in front of two crude sandstone corbels which supported a Rood beam. At left, another corbel which probably supported an image of the Virgin Mary. The communion rails are

eighteenth-century, set in a later frame. (Robert Hutchinson).

5.1 A brass alms dish formerly stood behind the altar but is now held in the Treasury of Chichester Cathedral. The dish, 37.4 cm in diameter, shows Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. A similar dish with the same design, made in Nuremburg in 1487, from the church of Foulis Easter in Perthshire, is now in the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh. Stylistically, therefore,



► Fig. 30: The Chithurst brass 'Adam and Eve' alms dish, now in the Treasury of Chichester Cathedral. (Tony Voice).

the Chithurst dish can be dated to the late fifteenth-century. It is not known how the artefact came to Chithurst – a drawing of it *in situ* is dated 1848²⁸ – but another, portraying Adam and Eve, of seventeenth-century date, was at North Marden, in West Sussex.²⁹

5.2 Beneath the modern altar table is a highly-polished blue Sussex marble slab, measuring 140 cm. x 75 cm. This was found during Johnston's 1911 restoration and turned over in the hope that it was the church's mediaeval *mensa* or altar-slab, ejected at the Reformation. No crosses were found and the edges were not bevelled³⁰ and presumably, it was merely formerly a grave-slab.

²⁶ As in Hardham church.

²⁷ *W.S.R.O.* Chichester Consistory Court, vol. I, fol. 15 (STC/II/15) and vol. II, fol. 23B (STC/II/23B).

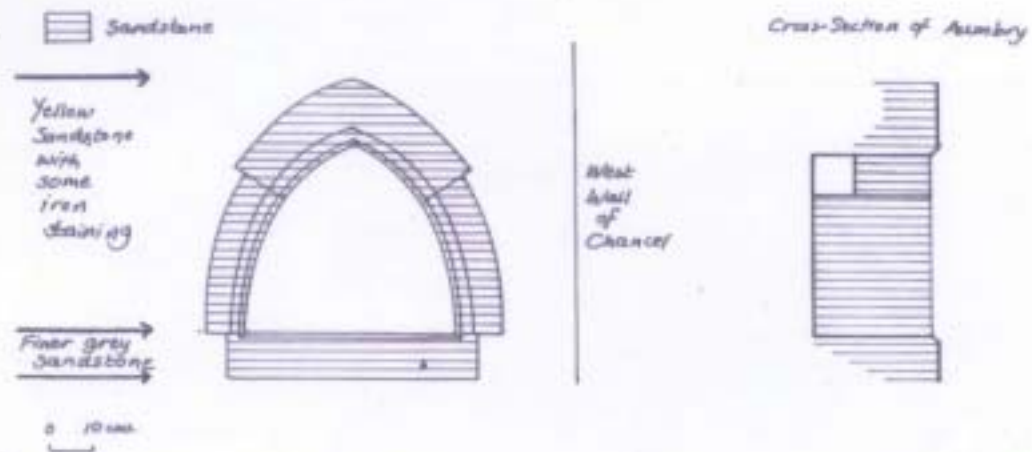
²⁸ *W.S.R.O.* PD 2011 (41.)

²⁹ It is displayed alongside the Chithurst dish in the Cathedral Treasury.

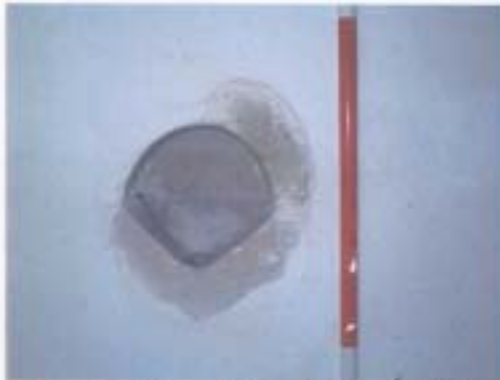
³⁰ Johnston, *opt.cit.*, p. 105.

5.3 In the north wall of the chancel is the Phase III aumbry, 44 cm. in height and 38 cm. in width with a plain pointed arch and edge rebated for a door, but with no indications of hinges or a lock. Its exposed faces were combed in the 1859 restoration.

Chithurst Church: Aumbry in North Wall of Chancel



▲ Fig. 31: Measured drawing of Phase III aumbry in north wall of Chithurst church. (Elizabeth Garrett)



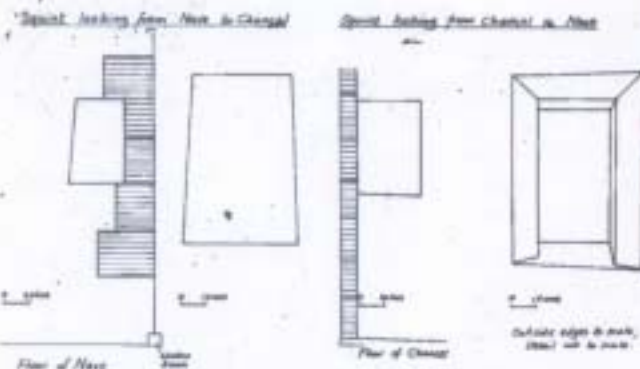
5.4 In the south wall is a small piscina, 24 cm. wide and 38 cm. in height, inserted at the same time as the aumbry, with a unusual triangular shaped bowl above the drain. The front of the bowl has been smashed, probably during the Protestant iconoclasm of the 1550s.³¹

◀ Fig. 32: Phase III piscina in south wall of chancel; the front of its bowl deliberately smashed or hacked off. (Robert Hutchinson).

▼ Fig. 33: Phase IV Squint, pictured looking west from Chancel. (Robert Hutchinson)

5.5 A Phase IV squint is cut through the wall on the north side of the chancel arch. Whether this was intended for use by a priest celebrating mass at a subsidiary altar on the north side of the nave or to enable a view of the image atop the bracket on the east wall of the Chancel is problematical.

Chithurst Church: Squint



▲ Fig. 34: Measured drawing of Chithurst squint. (Elizabeth Garrett)



³¹ A piscina of the same design and dimensions is now on a window sill in the church at Tufton, Hants.



5.6 The crude early twelfth-century (Phase IIB) tub-shaped Bargate stone font on a later octagonal base, is on the south side of the nave at the west end. It belongs to a group of early West Sussex fonts at Didling, Littlehampton and Walberton and is probably the work of an itinerant mason. It was re-tooled in 1859, when it was probably re-set. Its wooden font cover was recorded in 1891.

◀ Fig. 35: Drawing of Chithurst font by Adelaide Tracy in 1848 before the nineteenth- and twentieth century restorations, (via Tony & Lesley Voice).

▼ Fig. 36: Drawing of the early twelfth-century tub font, 68.5 cm in diameter, (Sarah Welsh & Liz Walker).

5.7 The seating on the south side of the nave appears to be partly old, possibly of mid-sixteenth-century date. Those on the north side are modern copies, probably made during the 1859 restoration.

5.8 Above the west door hangs a canvas panel with a painted Royal Arms, slightly damaged top and bottom, and displaying the arms as borne in 1810-37. (Figure Thirty-seven).

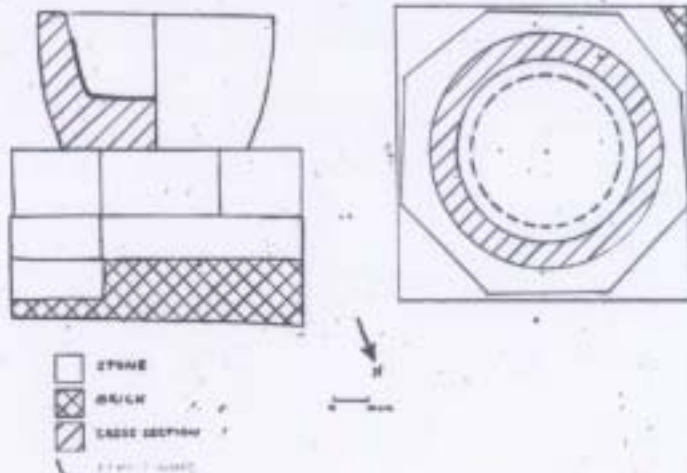
5.9 A number of wall paintings existed within the church but have now been lost without record. A sketch of 1848 by Adelaide Tracy records the outline of a number of scrolls above and around the chancel arch which possibly could date to the mid-sixteenth century and which contained Protestant texts; but by their shape and position, were more likely to be eighteenth-century.



▶ Fig. 37: Royal arms, as borne 1810-37, on a framed painted canvas panel recently moved to hang high on the west wall of Chithurst church, above the doorway.

◀ Fig. 38: Interior view of Chithurst church in 1848, drawn by Adelaide Tracy, showing lost wall paintings above chancel arch. (W.S.R.O. PD 2011(41) via Tony and Lesley Voice).

CHITHURST CHURCH FONT
FRANK WELSH & LIZ WALKER 19/8/09



7 – The Dedication of Chithurst Church

7.0 The original dedication of the church was apparently lost at the Reformation but in the second half of the twentieth-century it was decided that Chithurst should follow the dedication of the church at Iping and became St. Mary's.

7.1 However, archival research associated with this CCE project by Tony Voice has disclosed that in the fourteenth-century, Chithurst was dedicated to St. Nicholas.³⁴ On 29 November 1329, the incumbent rector of Chithurst, John Crowe, exchanged benefices with John Doget, previously vicar of St. Giles' church, Reading, Berkshire, then part of the Diocese of Salisbury.³⁵ The entry in the Sarum register reads:

16 September 1329: Ramsbury Park. John Crowe, rector of St. Nicholas, Chithurst [*Chidhurst*], diocese of Chichester [*Cicestr*], presented by abbot and convent of Reading [*Radyngg*] to vicarage of St. Giles, Reading, by reason of exchange and had letters of inquiry.

29 November 1329: Ramsbury Park. After the causes of the exchange had been heard, examined, sufficiently investigated and approved as legitimate, and the resignations accepted, the Bishop admitted and installed John Crowe as perpetual vicar.....

The Bishop's Register for the Diocese of Chichester does not survive for this date.

8 – The Exterior Grave-slabs

8.0 Outside the north wall of the nave, is a line of ten grave-slabs lying east-west in the gravel path skirting the church. The second from the east is a fourteenth-century coped slab (163 cm in length tapering from 36 to 22 cm in width), bearing the worn remains of a floriated cross, probably to a priest at Chithurst and almost certainly removed from the chancel.



► **Fig.40:** Worn and badly cracked floriated cross slab, (Slab 2), fourteenth-century, probably to a priest; second from the east in the line of slabs running east-west in path alongside north wall of Chithurst church.

The tenth and last is the upper portion of a medieval gravemarker, of which more anon.

8.1 The remaining eight slabs, with various cross variants carved in high relief in a hard Bargate stone, (probably quarried locally), belong to a West Sussex group, all dating from the late eleventh-century/early twelfth-century. They appear to have been

³⁴ Edwards, K., *Registers of Roger Martival, Bishop of Salisbury, 1315-30*, vol. 55, p. 400, Canterbury & York Society, Oxford, 1959.

³⁵ Doget was instituted rector of Chithurst the same day.

discovered between April 1859, when restoration work began at Chithurst church and June 1862, when the old graveyard was partially levelled in preparation for the new churchyard extension. Johnston reported in 1933 that they were found buried when the church path was being constructed.



◀ Fig. 41: The line of slabs in the gravel path in front of the north wall of Chithurst church, seen from the west. (Tony and Lesley Voice)

8.2 Similar slabs are found in other churches further east along the Rother valley; two at Woolbeding (in the nave and chancel) and eight at Stedham, found during the demolition of the early twelfth-century nave and chancel in 1850, and now built into the walls of the new church, or propped up against them. Another two are at Steyning and one was found in the twentieth-century at nearby Cocking, buried in the foundations of the chancel there, which is dated to c.1080. An outlying example, linked on stylistic grounds, is at Milton Bryan, Bedfordshire.

8.3 Were the Bargate slabs removed from within Chithurst church? Whilst the medieval church in England was notorious

for casting out old grave-slabs to create room for newer monuments, the church seems far too small to house so many roughly contemporaneous memorials. The Stedham slabs formed lower sections of the nave walls of the original church, set edge-ways³⁶ and when they were removed, they were found to retain brown staining from dead moss on their hidden (and protected) sides, perhaps indicating original use in the churchyard. One of the Steyning slabs was discovered in 1938 at the eastern entrance to the graveyard there.³⁷ Conversely, as we have seen, were the two slabs at Woolbeding moved inside the church?

8.4 Whom did the slabs commemorate? Whilst some, at Steyning and Milton Bryan, seem to be high status monuments, judging by the complexity of their iconography, the numbers extant, in parishes with small populations, and the relatively short dating span involved suggests that a local quarry supplied low-cost monuments to families below the manorial class as grave-covers in the churchyard.

8.5 The Chithurst Bargate slabs are numbered and illustrated from east to west, omitting the cross slab already shown in *Figure Forty*.



◀ Fig. 42: Slab I: 'Y'-shaped cross with upper and lower horizontal bar; 174 cm. in length; 53 cm. width at top, narrowing to 40 cm. at base. Cross vanes 3 cm. deep in relief. Similar in design to a slab at Stedham and probably eleventh-century in date.

³⁶ Butler, J.E., 'The Antiquities of Stedham Church,' *S.A.C.*, vol.4 (1851), pp.19-20.

³⁷ It is now fixed to the east wall of the south porch at Steyning; the other slab is on the south wall of the nave.



▲ Fig. 43: Slab 3 (Possibly cut-down) – cross with double arms, now 92 cm. in length; 40 cm. in width, tapering to 32 cm. at west end. (Tony & Lesley Voice).



▲ Fig. 44: Slab 4 (again, possibly cut-down) – cross with double arms, now 89 cm. in length and tapering from 40 cm. width down to 33 cm. (Tony & Lesley Voice).



▲ Fig. 45: Slab 5 (again, possibly cut down – cross with double arms, now 81 cm. in length and 33 cm, tapering down to 24 cm. in width. (Tony & Lesley Voice).



▲ Fig. 46: Slab 6 (possibly cut-down, broken at west end) – cross with double arms, now 90 cm. in length and 40 cm. width. Heavy relief carving, 4 cm. deep. (Tony & Lesley Voice).



▲ Fig. 47: Slab 7, cut down – 64 cm. in length, and tapering upwards from 30 cm. in east to 40 cm. in west. Very deep relief carving of single-armed cross, varying from 7 to 8 cm. deep. (Tony & Lesley Voice).



▲ Fig. 48: Slab 8: 103 cm. in length, tapering from 59 cm. in east to 51 cm. in west. West end very worn and relief of cross almost effaced. (Tony & Lesley Voice).



◀ Fig. 49: Slab 9. Cut down slab measuring 33 cm. in length and 30 cm in width. The size would suggest it is probably not a grave-marker – possibly a cover for the grave of a child. (Robert Hutchinson).

9 – The Chithurst grave-markers

9.0 The last slab, at the west end of the Chithurst series, is a grave-marker, used to delineate the head and foot of a churchyard burial in the Middle Ages. (Such survivals are rare in England and Wales and their designs and usage are at the early stages of research).³⁸ A second grave-marker was subsequently found, probably in its original position on the southern churchyard boundary. For purposes of clarity, the marker in the line of slabs will be termed 'Chithurst 1' and the other, 'Chithurst 2'.

9.1 The brown sandstone Chithurst 1 originally had a carved bulbous top – bearing a Latin cross with flower-like terminations -

narrowing down to a rectangular base that was buried; the characteristic "lollipop" shape of this type of monument. It measures 39 cm in length, of which the top comprises 25 cm. Depth is 13 cm. While dating such monuments is always difficult, Chithurst 1 is probably late thirteenth/early-fourteenth-century. On turning over the slab, the reverse was also found to be carved, with a shallow, delicate floriated cross, confirming its



▲ Figs. 50 and 51: The Chithurst 1 grave-marker: left – obverse, showing a Latin cross with bulbous terminations and right – reverse, showing a floriated cross. (Robert Hutchinson).

³⁸ See, for example, the survey of 66 grave-markers in 29 Kent parishes by Ben Stocker: 'Medieval Grave Markers in Kent', *Church Monuments*, vol.1, pt. ii, pp.106-14. His 'Type 5' resembles the Chithurst 1 obverse.

identification as a grave-marker. The obverse is comparable to a surviving grave-marker built into the south wall of the new church at Stedham, south-west of the porch – during its rebuilding in 1850. Fragments of three more are also to be found at this neighbouring church.



◀ Fig. 52: Fragment of a grave-marker built in the south wall of the new church at Stedham, south-west of the porch – during its rebuilding in 1850. Its design resembles that of Chithurst 1. (Tony & Lesley Voice).

and it is tempting to theorise that again, local quarries were supplying this type of monument to meet the funerary aspirations of the more affluent members of the Rother valley communities.

9.2 Chithurst 2 is a very similar example with crisp carving extant on the obverse, and remains upright, probably at the head of its original

grave. (See Figures Fifty-six and Fifty-seven for measured drawings of both grave-markers).



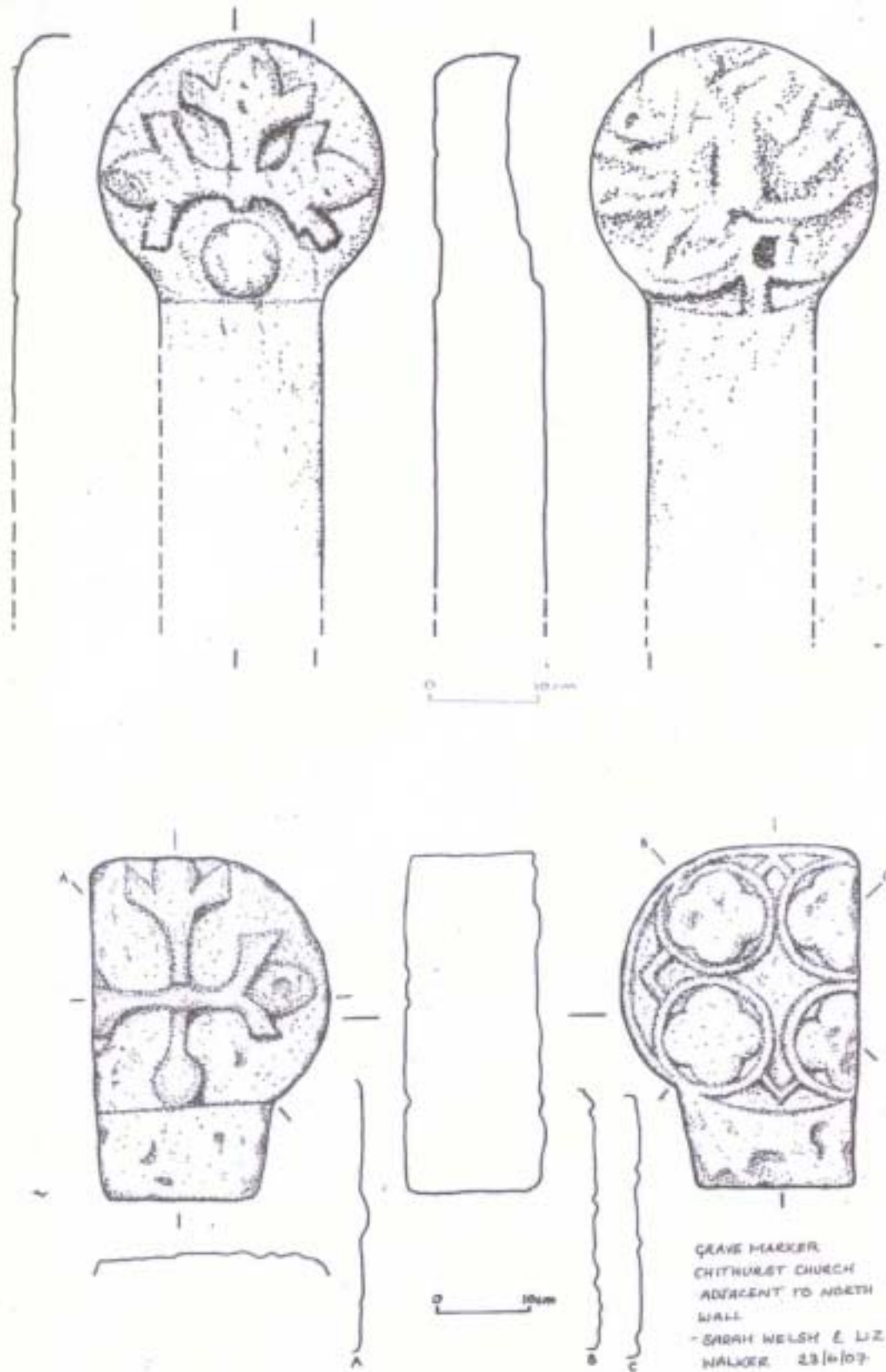
◀ Fig. 53: Chithurst 2 at the moment of discovery amidst undergrowth on the southern boundary of the churchyard. (Ken Jordan).

Fig 54, lower left: Obverse of Chithurst 2 showing a similar Latin cross to Chithurst 1. (Robert Hutchinson).

▼ Fig. 55: Reverse of

Chithurst 2. The design is too badly eroded to distinguish more than it contained a relief carved cross. The surface of the graveyard was not disturbed during the discovery of this grave-marker.





Figs. 56 and 57: Measured drawings of Chithurst 1 and 2 grave-markers. Top - obverse, reverse and profile of Chithurst 2. Bottom - obverse, reverse and profile of Chithurst 1. (Sarah Welsh & Liz Walker).

10 – Other Finds

10.0 North-east of the west porch of Chithurst church is a large stone tub, holding a shrub. Examination of this artefact confirmed that it is a sandstone font that can be dated to the eleventh-century and is therefore earlier than the one in the church. Bearing in mind the transfer of the rose window from Iping church at its demolition in the late 1880s, this could well be the ancient font from Iping church.



10.1 There are no marks on the rim of the font to indicate that a lockable cover was ever present to protect the holy water inside it. The font currently sits on a base of concrete. It was not possible to check if the font is lined with lead or indeed, the depth of the bowl. The font measures 64cm. in diameter and has a depth of 39cm. The lip of the bowl has a width of 8cm.

◀ **Fig. 58:** *Eleventh-century font, possibly from Iping church, now outside the porch of Chithurst church. (Robert Hutchinson).*

10.2 Alongside the tub font is a featureless grave slab lying next to the north wall of the porch. It measures 136 cm. in length and a maximum width of 50cm. Another, again featureless, slab lies north of the porch, measuring 106 cm. and 36 cm. in width. Both were presumably ejected out of the church during its 1859 restoration and dumped in their present positions.

Acknowledgements

My grateful thanks are due to the Rector of Trotton, the Revd. Edward Doyle, Elizabeth David, Sarah Miles and all the other residents of Chithurst for their kindness and assistance during the project. I am also, as ever, very grateful to Rodney Gunner and Ian Allison and their team from the Worthing Archæological Society, for all their hard work in connection with the resistivity and topographical surveys of the site. Jane Russell, my colleague from CCE, taught archæological drawing during this project. Finally, this report could not have been compiled without the enthusiasm, interest and labour of the students involved in the project: Judith Billingham, Susan Clay-Joyce, Elizabeth and John Garrett, Christine Gray, Ken Jordan, Geoffrey Murray, Lesley and Tony Voice, Liz Walker and Sarah Welsh. Their work has built up a valuable archive of photographs, measured drawings and notes.

Robert Hutchinson
December 2007