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PROCEEDINGS OF THE CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



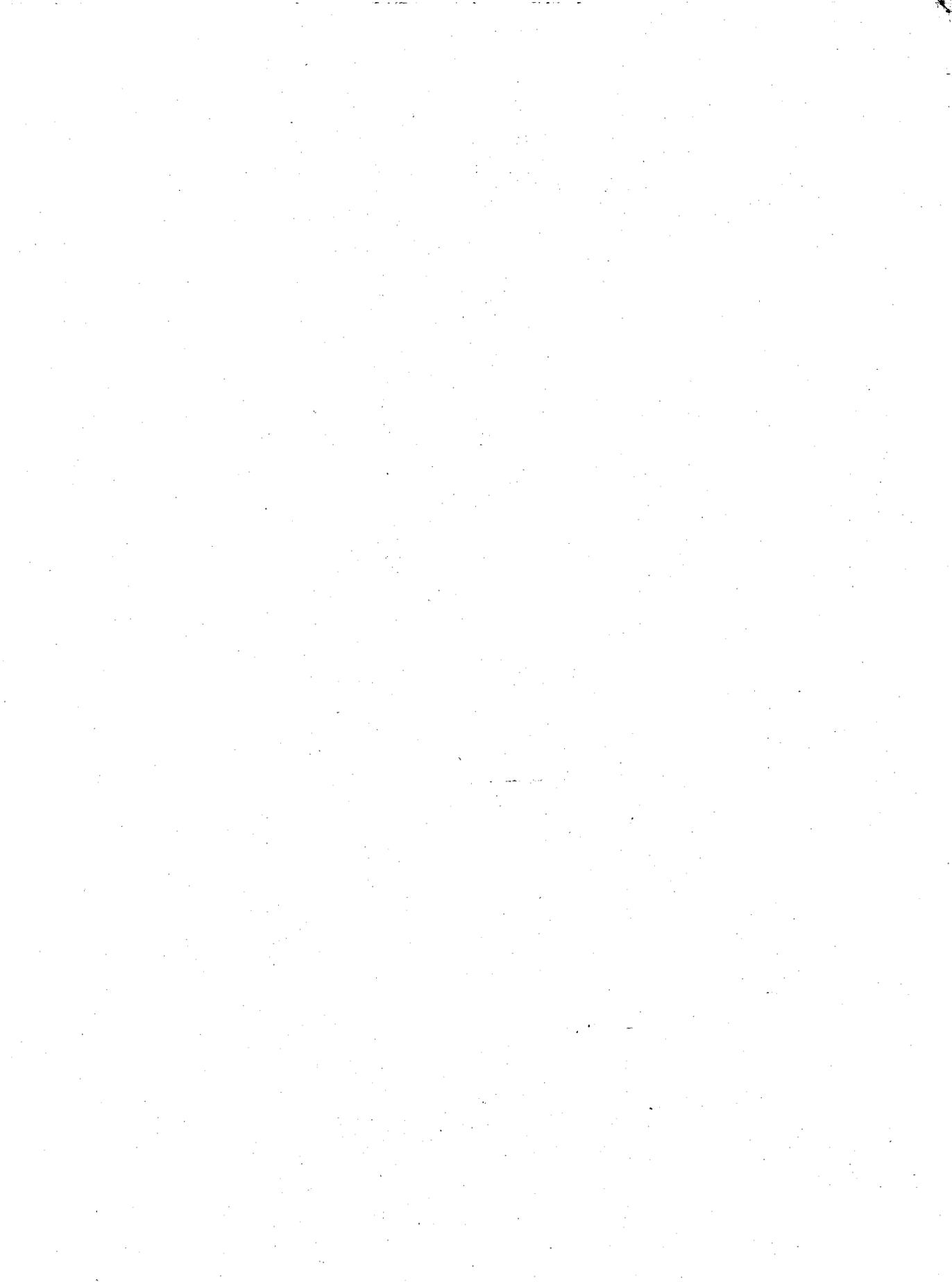
VOLUME LI

JANUARY 1957 TO DECEMBER 1957

CAMBRIDGE
DEIGHTON BELL

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THE MASONS' MARKS IN THE CHURCH OF ST MARY, OVER, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

LAURENCE TURNER

THE earliest work to be seen in the Parish Church of Over, Cambridgeshire, dates from the thirteenth century.

Early in the fourteenth century, a major rebuilding was started when the present aisles, porch, third stage of the tower and spire were constructed. Early in the Perpendicular period a further rebuilding was carried out, including the nave arcades and part of the chancel. It is this latter work, whereon masons' marks are to be found, with which this inquiry is chiefly concerned. Its architectural features can be seen in some detail on Pls. VI and VII.

Masons' marks can be seen on the stonework of many medieval buildings. A great number of designs occur, including geometrical, alphabetical and pictorial types and it is usually accepted that each represents the personal device of the mason who actually cut the stone. By no means all medieval works possess such marks but it is possible that they were often used where a building was erected rather more quickly than usual and with a large labour force. In this way, the work of each mason could be easily identified and his rate and quality of production ascertained.

The marks at Over, however, are unusual in so far as those on the nave arcade pillars include both personal devices—in this case, hammers, arrows and squares—and a numeral system to be described later. Devices and numbers are frequently combined but occasionally only one or the other may be seen on a particular stone. No mark incorporating the numeral system occurs elsewhere in the building.

Various typical marks, with certain others to be noted later, are shown on Figs. 1-3. All the marks recorded have been divided into four groups, of which the 'hammer', 'arrow' and 'square' groups have marks with and without the numeral system and the fourth has numerals only.

The total numbers in each group, with their positions, are as follows:

	Hammer	Arrow	Square	Numerals only	Totals
Nave arcade pillars	70	59	10	19	158
Nave arcade bases	16	8	1	—	25
Nave arcade respond side walls	—	8	—	—	8
Nave arcade arch voussoirs	16	—	—	—	16
Nave arcade diagonal ridges	—	2	—	—	2
Chancel window sills	—	3	—	—	3
Chancel bay arcade pillars	2	—	—	—	2
Totals	104	80	11	19	214

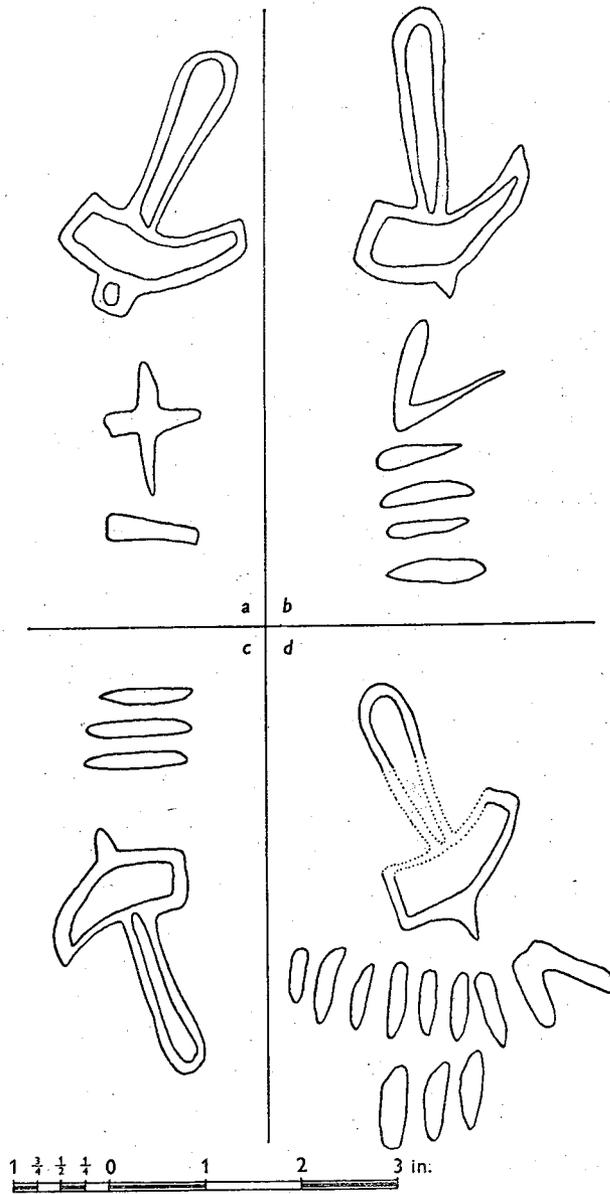


Fig. 1

The exact position of the marks on the nave arcade pillars, bases and side walls of the responds can be seen on Figs. 4 and 5.

The following table gives details of positions where hammers have been recorded on the undersides of the nave arcade arch voussoirs. ('E' or 'W', followed by a number, represents the east or west side of the arch concerned, together with the actual stone, numbering from the base of the arch on which the mark has been recorded.)

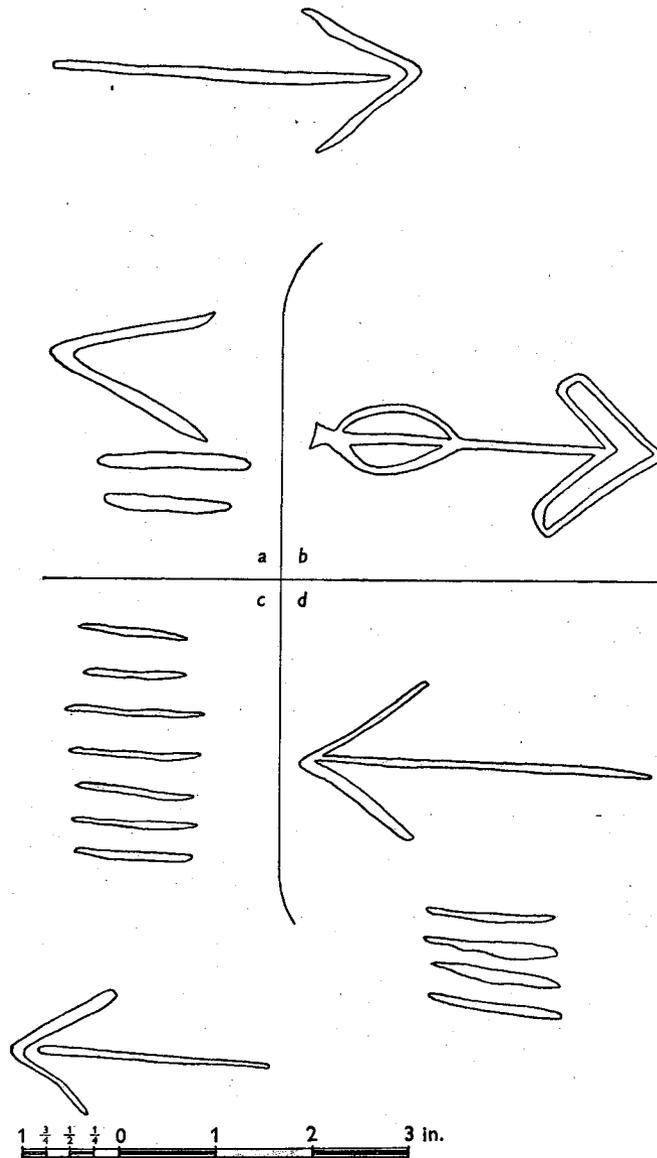


Fig. 2

On the N arcade:

On the first arch from the E. . . . E 5;

On the second arch from the E. . . E 1, E 3, W 1, W 9;

On the third arch from the E. . . E 5, E 7, W 5, W 9;

On the fourth arch from the E. . . E 8, E 9, E 12, W 6.

On the S arcade there are two hammers on the second arch from the E and one on the fifth, all three being at the vertex of their respective arch.

On the SW diagonal ridge of the first pillar from the E on the S side are two arrows—one at the level of the capital and the other immediately above.

Three arrows are cut on the inner sloping face of the chancel window sills. On

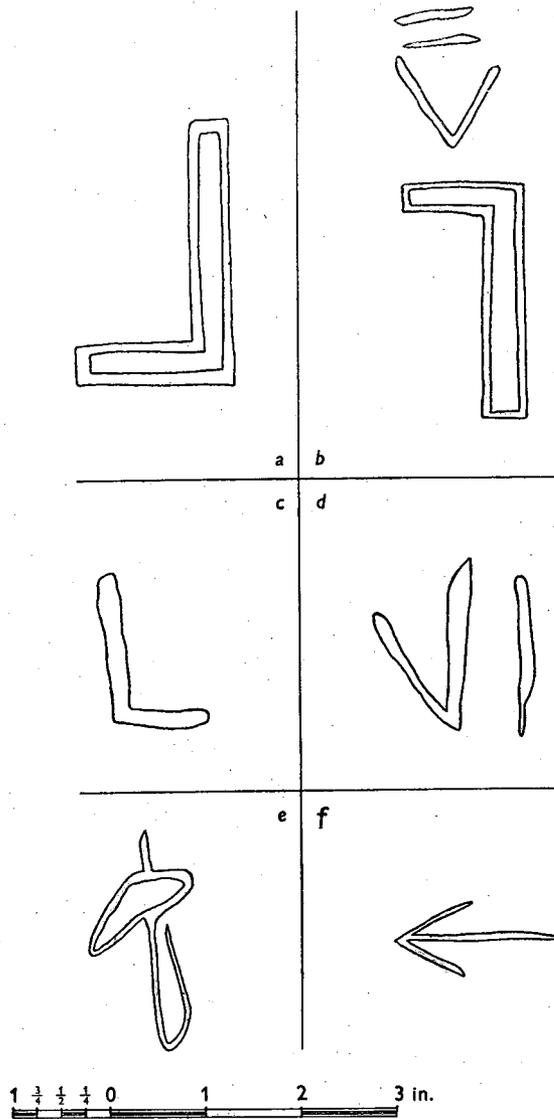


Fig. 3

the S side, there is one on the centre window and one on the easternmost and, on the N, there is one again on the easternmost window.

Only two hammers have been seen on the chancel bay arcade pillars. One, on the first pillar from the E on the S side, is 18 in. below the capital and faces E, while the other, on the second pillar on the S, is 20 in. below the embattled shaft-ring and faces N.

Not included in the figures of any tables are three marks on the sill of the westernmost window in the N wall of the N aisle. This four-light, segmental-headed window is of early fourteenth century date. The marks are 'II', 'III' and 'IIII', one in each division of the sill except the westernmost.

There are several reasons for the probability of some inaccurate recording. The stones on the nave arcade pillars have been subject to severe treatment by rubbing, later incisions and cement repairs, all of which interfere with the original surface. The insertion of iron pegs and wooden plugs has occasionally mutilated a mark. On the nave arches and chancel bay arcades the application of coats of white-wash has filled in most of the deliberate incisions and all but hidden the deepest marks. The pews and wooden flooring cover certain areas of the stonework of the nave arcades and the pulpit covers part of the E respond of the N arcade and these areas, therefore, could not be seen at all.

THE NUMERAL SYSTEM

A comparison was made with all the nave arcade marks incorporating the numeral system and the height in inches of the stone on which they were cut.

The results of this study showed, with a small percentage error, certain definite connections between the marks and those heights.

A 'V' mark, pointing in any direction, represents 10 in., a '+' mark represents 15 in. and each single stroke, when with these, represents an addition of 1 in. Thus, on any one stone, up to four strokes are placed with the 'V' mark and this represents up to 14 in. altogether. When a stone is 9 in. in height, the mark usually used is 'IIII', for 8 in. usually 'III', and for 7 in. 'II'.

Of the 125 stones incorporating the numeral system, fifteen have marks where the theoretical value given by this system differs from the measured height. Of these fifteen, there are seven examples where the two values differ by 1 in. or more.

The heights could not always be accurately determined because the stones were not always cut level top and bottom. Usually, however, in such cases, they were measured at the centre of the attached shafts.

There appears to be some relationship with the Roman numeral system and this can be illustrated in the following way:

	Roman system	Masons' system		Roman system	Masons' system
1	I	No examples	10	X	V
2	II		11	XI	VI
3	III		12	XII	VII
4	IV or IIII		13	XIII	VIII
5	V		14	XIV	VIII
6	VI	15	XV	X	
7	VII	16	XVI	XI	
8	VIII	17	XVII	XII	
9	IX or VIII	18	XVIII	XIII	

It will be seen that the two systems are similar but, in the case of the masons', the directions of the stroke and 'V' are not constant and marks such as those on Figs. 1*d* and 2*c*, though unusual, may still be easily evaluated.

Each course of stonework in the pillars usually consists of two stones which are laid such that their adjoining vertical side is alternately in a plane N/S and E/W (see Figs. 4 and 5). Since the cross-section of the pillars is an elaborated lozenge shape with the E/W axis longer than the N/S, two different sets of stones are necessary to make up a pillar. It appears, however, that the marks are not used in any way for distinguishing the set to which each stone belongs.

When Figs. 4 and 5 are studied, it is apparent that certain pillars are constructed of stones of a good average height and no courses of small stones are fitted in. In this respect, the S arcade is much better than the N; for the N arcade (excluding responds), the total number of stones used in the pillars is 102; for the S arcade, the number is only eighty-four. From this, it seems likely that the S arcade was built first when the better stones were used and the N arcade erected afterwards.

From a close study of the pillars it was noted that the stones were laid in such a manner as to suggest carelessness and speed in construction. Frequently, where the stones are joined, there are steps of up to $\frac{1}{4}$ in. in width in the vertical plane. From the stylistic point of view, however, the workmanship appears to be of a very high standard. It would seem, from this evidence, that the nave arcades and possibly other parts of the early Perpendicular work were 'prefabricated', the stones being transported to Over for erection after having been cut elsewhere. If this were so, the numeral system of marking would probably be of considerable assistance in the work of assembly.

Theories have been suggested before about the use of a particular mark by each mason and such may well apply here, where at least three different designs are used. Reasons have also been suggested to account for the fact that there are not marks on every stone and, in this case, more than 20% of the stones appear to be entirely unmarked. The numeral system, such as used here, however, would seem to be a very rare occurrence but there is a possibility that it may have been used in other local work of similar date and style. In this respect, the rather unusual detail of the E window (ignoring the earlier hood-mould) and chancel bay arcading and the high quality of the whole are particularly notable. However, two examples of contemporary work—the E and W windows of the Lady Chapel of Ely Cathedral (1371–5)¹ and the chancel of the church at Sutton, 7 miles from Over—appear to have no markings whatsoever.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

'A Catalogue of Masons' Marks as an Aid to Architectural History', by R. H. C. Davis² is the best summary of information on this subject so far. No work I have seen,

¹ *Vict. County Hist., Cambs.* vol. IV, p. 60.

² *J. Brit. Arch. Assn.* (1954), 3rd series, vol. XVII, pp. 43 ff.

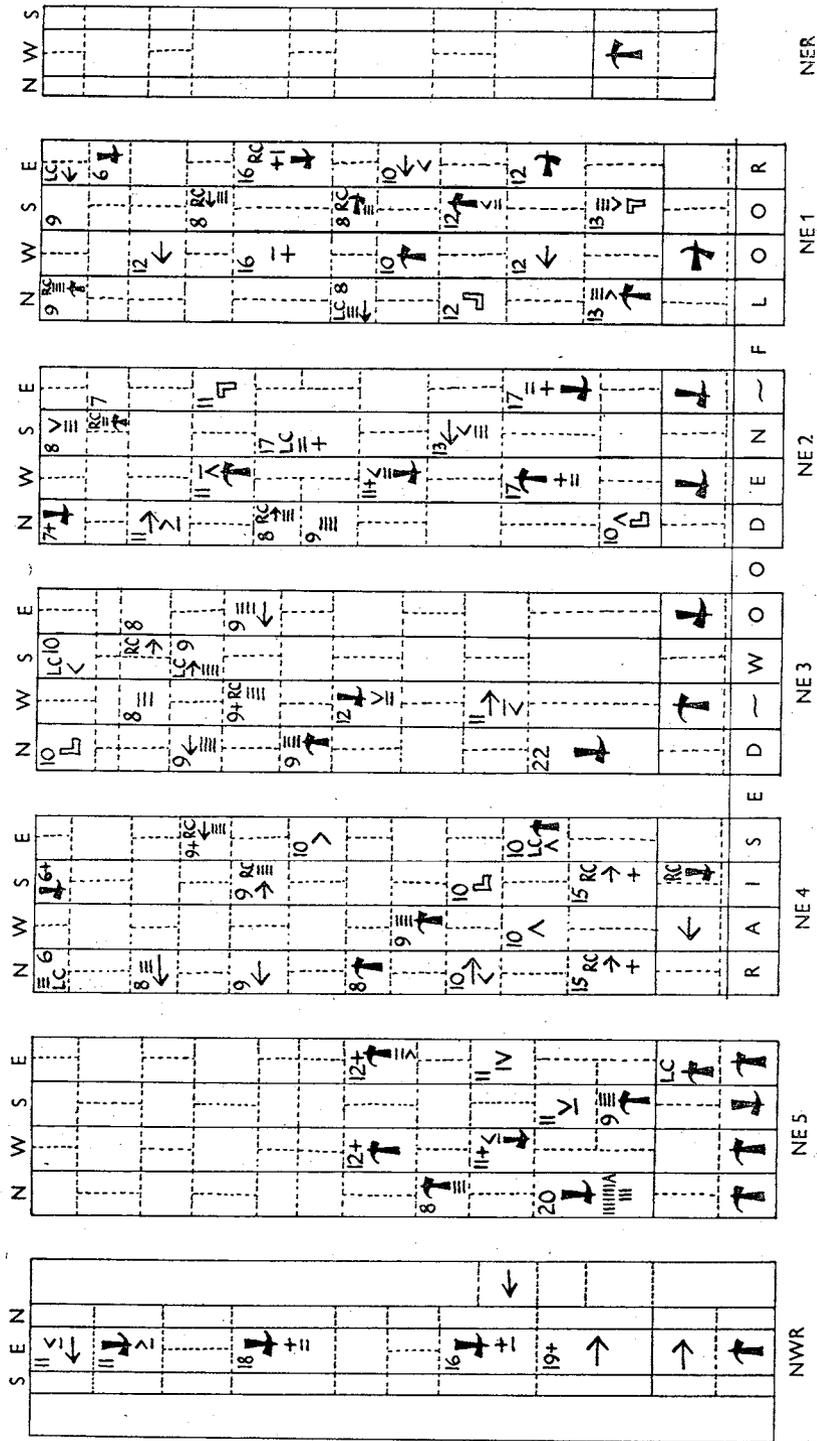


Fig. 4

NER

NE1

NE2

NE3

NE4

NE5

NWR

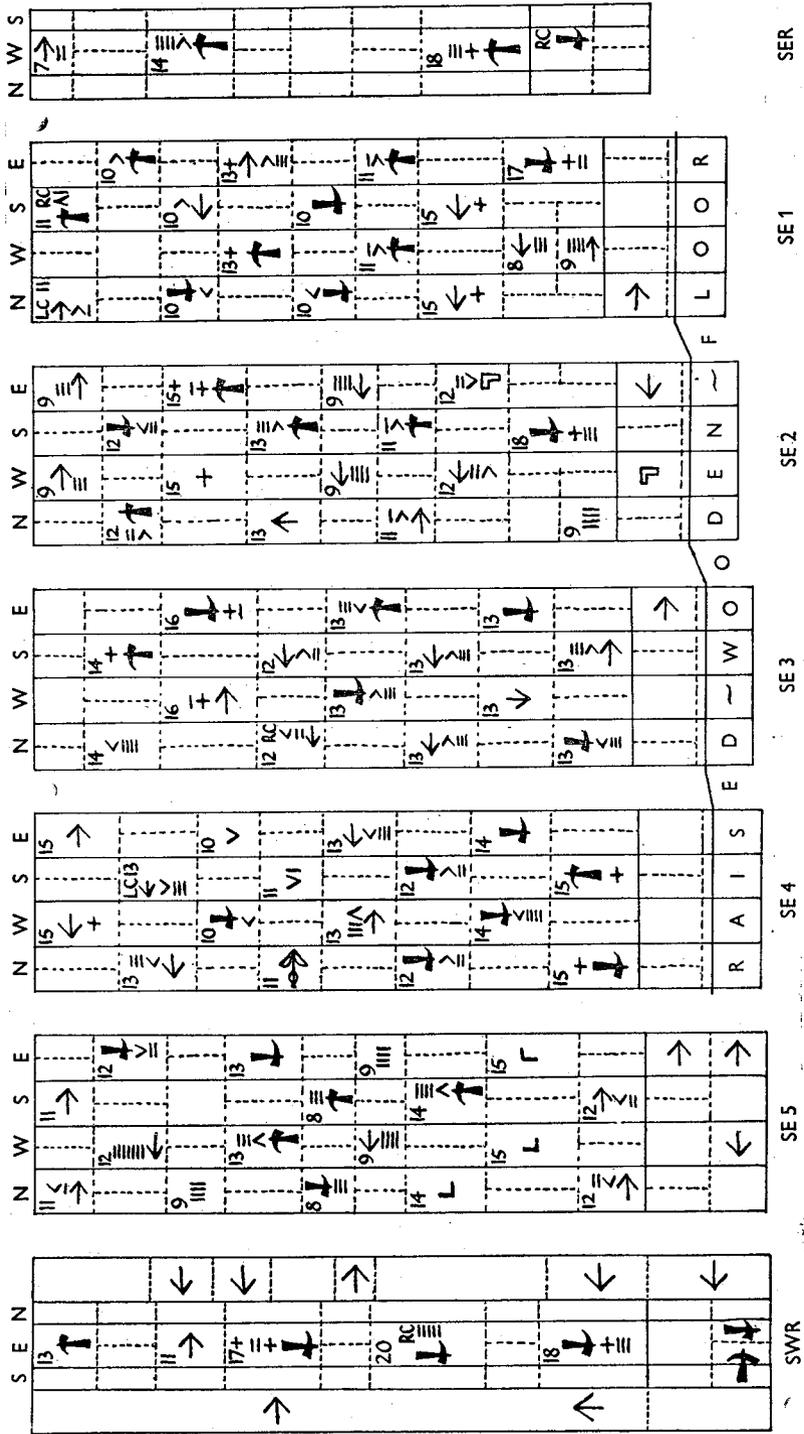


Fig. 5

however, refers to the marks at Over. Dr G. G. Coulton in his book¹ has much to help in his theories and especially mentions (on p. vi of the Cambridge University Press edition of 1953) that certain churches in Burgundy and Switzerland have in their walling 'position-marks, indicating the thickness of the stone and therefore the course into which it may be laid'. He also illustrates (p. 161) the buttresses at Quincy-le-Vicomte, Burgundy, which would seem to bear Roman numerals, but none of these particular observations is elaborated further.

Because so little has been written on this subject, most of the ideas expressed in the preceding paragraphs have been obtained by practical reasoning and discussion with others. In this connection, I must first thank Mr David Howell, of Potters Bar, who has given me much encouragement and assisted me at all times in both the practical and theoretical work. My thanks are also due to Miss Madeline Adams, of Over, for her very kind assistance; to Mr D. M. Downey, of Malpas, Cheshire, for ideas in discussion; and to the Rev. T. A. Bold, M.A., Vicar of Over, for giving me access to the church and entire freedom for this work to be carried out.

Notes on the illustrations

It is frequently necessary below to differentiate between the pillars of the nave arcades and the following system is used without further reference. There are five pillars and two responds to each arcade. Numbered from the E, the pillars on the N side are described as 'NE 1', 'NE 2', etc., and on the S, 'SE 1', 'SE 2', etc. 'NER' and 'NWR' describe the E and W responds respectively on the N arcade and, similarly, 'SER' and 'SWR' describe those on the S.

Plates VI and VII show photographs of various parts of the structure of early Perpendicular date.

Figs. 1-3 show various typical marks and some unusual ones. Their positions are as follows:

	Pillar	Side	Height of stone (in.)
1a	NWR	E	16
b	SE 4	W	14
c	SE 5	S	8
d	NE 5	N	20
2a	SE 5	S	12
b	SE 4	N	11
c	SE 5	W	12
d	SE 5	W	9
3a	NE 1	N	12
b	SE 2	E	12
c	SE 5	N	14
d	SE 4	S	11
e	Chancel bay arcade: 18 in. below the capital of the first pillar from the E on the S side		
f	Chancel window sill: centre division of centre window on the S side		

¹ *Art and the Reformation* (1928), pp. 143 ff.

7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
NE2:7 ↓	SE5:8 ↑	NE5:9 ↑	SE4:10 ↑	SE2:11 ↑	SE2:12 ↑	SE3:13 ↑	SE4:14 ↑	SE3:14 ↑	SE3:16 ↑	SE1:17 ↑	SWR:18 ↑
	SE5:8 ↑	NE4:9 ↑	SE1:10 ↑	SE1:11 ↑	SE5:12 ↑	SE2:13 ↑	SE4:14 ↑	SE4:15 ↑	SE2:15+ ↑	NWR:18 ↑	SE2:18 ↑
	NE5:8 ↑	NE3:9 ↑	SE1:10 ↑	SE1:11 ↑	NE3:12 ↑	NE1:13 ↑	SE5:14 ↑	SE4:15 ↑	NWR:16 ↑	SWR:17+ ↑	SE1:18 ↑
	NE1:8 ↑	NE1:9 ↑	SWR:20 ↑	NE2:11 ↑	SE4:12 ↑	SE5:13 ↑			NE1:16 ↑	NE2:17 ↑	
			SE1:10 ↑	NWR:11 ↑	SE4:12 ↑	SE3:13 ↑				NE2:17 ↑	
			NE4:10 ↑	NE5:11+ ↑	SE2:12 ↑	SE3:13 ↑					
				SE1:11 ↑	NE1:12 ↑						20 ↑
					NE5:12+ ↑						NE5:20 ↑
					NE2:11+ ↑						
SE1:7 ↓	SE2:9 ↑	SE5:9 ↑	NE1:10 ↑	SE2:11 ↑	SE5:12 ↑	SE4:13 ↑		SE4:15 ↑	SE3:16 ↑		
	SE1:8 ↑	SE2:9 ↑	NE4:10 ↑	SE5:11 ↑	SE3:12 ↑	SE3:13 ↑		SE1:15 ↑			
	NE1:8 ↑	SE1:9 ↑	SE1:10 ↑	SE1:11 ↑	SE2:12 ↑	NE2:13 ↑		SE1:15 ↑			
	SE2:9 ↑	NE4:9+ ↑		NE2:11 ↑	SE5:12 ↑	SE4:13 ↑		NE4:15 ↑			
	NE4:8 ↑	NE3:9 ↑		AI:11 ↓	SE3:12 ↑	SE3:13 ↑		NE4:15 ↑			
	NE2:8 ↑	SE2:9 ↑		NWR:11 ↓	SE5:12 ↑	SE3:13 ↑					
	NE1:8 ↑	NE3:9 ↑				SE4:13 ↑					
		NE3:9 ↑				SE4:13 ↑					
		NE4:9 ↑				SE1:13+ ↑					
			NE2:10 ↑		SE2:12 ↑	NE1:13 ↑					
	NE4:6 ↑	NE3:9+ ↑	NE3:10 ↑	NE5:11 ↑		NE2:8 ↑	SE3:14 ↑	SE2:15 ↑	NE1:16 ↑	NE2:17 ↑	
	NE3:8 ↑	NE2:9 ↑	NE4:10 ↑	NE5:11 ↑							
		SE5:9 ↑	SE4:10 ↑	SE4:11 ↑							
		SE5:9 ↑	NE4:10 ↑								
		SE2:9 ↑									
SE5:14 ↑	SE5:15 ↑	NE4:10 ↑	NE1:12 ↑	SE3:13 ↑	SE4:11 ↑	NE1:9 ↑	SWR:11 ↑	NE1:12 ↑	NE1:10 ↑	NE5:12+ ↑	SWR:13 ↑
		NE3:10 ↑		SE2:13 ↑		NE1:12 ↑	SE5:11 ↑			NE4:6+ ↑	SE5:13 ↑
		NE2:11 ↑				NE1:12 ↑	SE4:15 ↑			NE4:8 ↑	SE4:14 ↑
							NWR:19+ ↑			NE3:22 ↑	SE3:13 ↑
							NE4:9 ↑			NE2:7+ ↑	SE1:13+ ↑
							NE3:8 ↑			NE1:6 ↑	SE1:10 ↑

Fig. 6



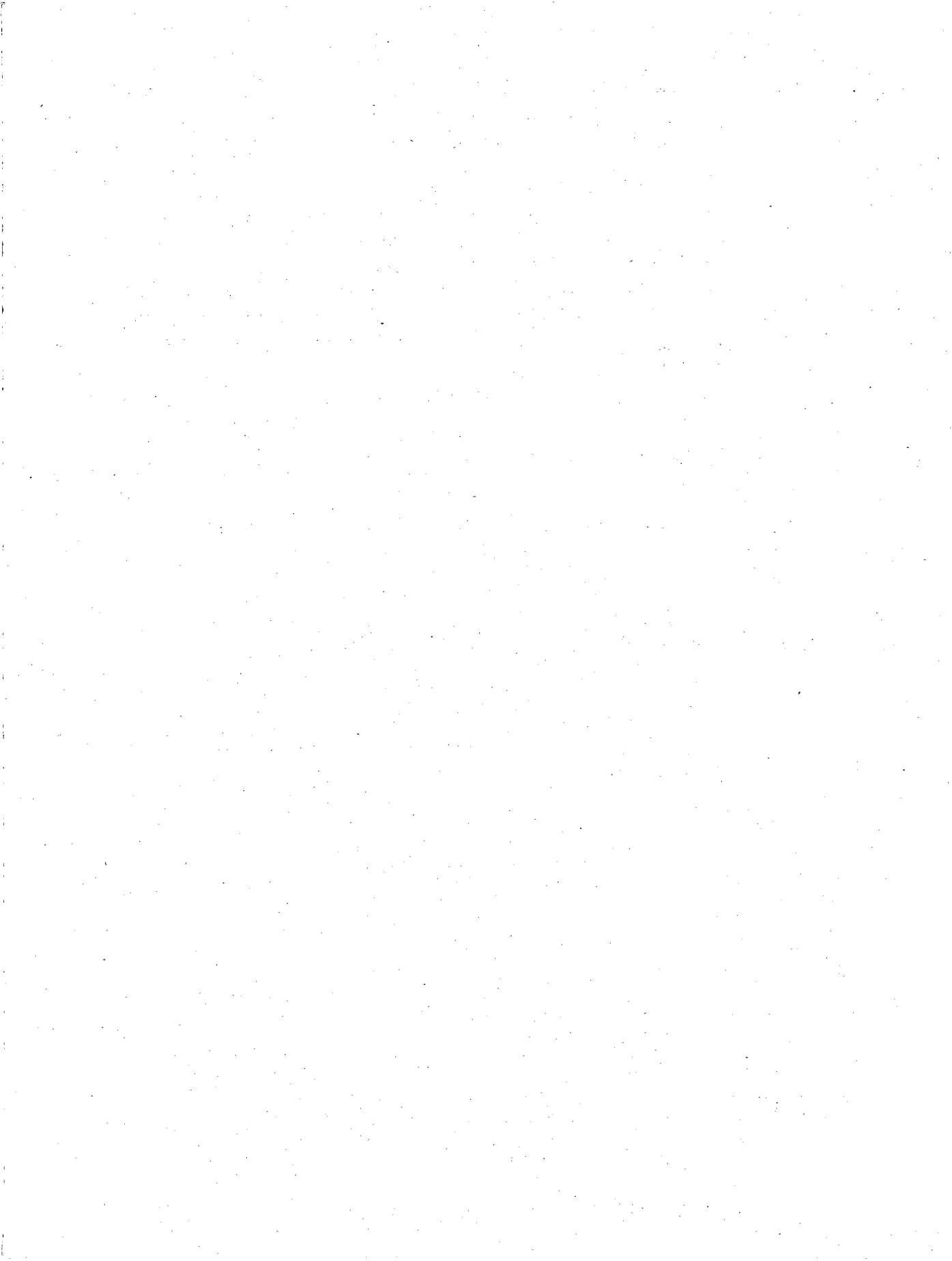
The north arcade of the nave



The north side of the chancel bay arcading

Figs. 4 and 5 give a diagrammatic layout of the stones and marks of the nave arcades. The four vertical columns to each pillar represent the faces of the attached shafts. Where marks are on the right or left chamfer of these shafts 'RC' or 'LC' respectively is noted above or below the mark or part of the mark concerned. The dotted lines represent the mortar between the stones. The number to each marked stone is its actual measured height in inches. The marks on the side walls of the responds are shown with the respond concerned.

Fig. 6 is the register of all marks noted on the nave arcade pillars and responds. The numerical marks are divided into the theoretical values determined by the system mentioned above; those not conforming with this are in darker-edged squares. The remaining marks are divided into the different groups by design only.



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