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BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

# St Michael's Chapel

## MUCH WENLOCK PRIORY

*B.U.F.A.U.*



A Survey of St. Michael's Chapel,  
Wenlock Priory

by

Jon Sterenberg

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### Much Wenlock Priory, Shropshire

#### Introduction

Wenlock Priory is situated in Much Wenlock, Shropshire, a small town on the A458 to the north east of Bridgnorth. The priory remains now standing were constructed in the 1220's, the main priory church being over 350 feet in length, constructed mainly of red sandstone, with infilling of a coarser green sandstone. Extensive areas of the other priory buildings remain untouched including the priory lodging, infirmary hall, dormitory range, and the reredorter, now turned over to private use. The most interesting surviving fragment, which may have been unique in England, is the small oblong chapel of St. Michael, which occupies the three westernmost bays of the southern side of the nave. Probably built within the first forty or fifty years of the 13th century, it includes impressive vaulted ceilings on both ground and first floor levels.

#### Survey Brief

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by English Heritage to undertake the recording of mouldings destroyed or threatened by erosion in St. Michael's chapel and the arched passage beneath. The recording also involved planning of the vault, rib, and boss arrangements, drawing of wall sections and, finally, the recording of two grave slabs situated in a small building on the east side of the south transept. One of the slabs being intricately carved, the other little more than an eroded and pitted block.

Work began on 30 January 1989 and ended on 7 February 1989. Profiles of all the various elements of the vaulted ceilings, i.e. vault springers, ribs, bosses and corbels were recorded at a scale of 1:1, the most complicated of all being the arched doorway on the lower western wall of

the arcade. Floor plans were produced at a scale of 1:50 and an overlay produced showing the vaulting and boss arrangements, the location of profile lines and finally the areas of weathering, on a subjective scale of one to three, three being the most seriously weathered areas.

Approximately 60 black and white photographs were taken, including detailed photographs of the boss remains, corbel decorations and overall shots of the two floors of the chapel.

The wall faces on both floors were drawn at a scale of 1:20 mainly to show the positions of the corbels, the door and window openings and any springers that appeared on the wall faces themselves. Finally the two grave slabs were drawn in detail at a scale of 1:5, and photographs were also taken. The original drawings and photographs have been sent to H.B.M.C., but a duplicate photographic record has been retained in the Unit archive.

#### Survey Staff

Survey work was carried out by Jon Sterenberg and Laurence Jones, profiles taken by Q Hutchinson, often in strange positions, and the tombstones drawn by Trevor Pearson. Thanks also to the staff at Wenlock Priory for the use of their mess room facilities, and Iain Ferris for reading through the first draft of the report.

Jon Sterenberg,  
1 March 1989

#### References

"Medieval Monasteries of Great Britain" Lionel Butler and Chris Given-Wilson 1979

## Figures

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- Figure 6      Mouldings. (Q. Hutchinson)
- Figure 7      Mouldings of rib vaults. (Q. Hutchinson)
- Figure 8      Mouldings of arch on Ground Floor. (Q. Hutchinson)
- Figure 9      The Grave Slabs. (T. Pearson)

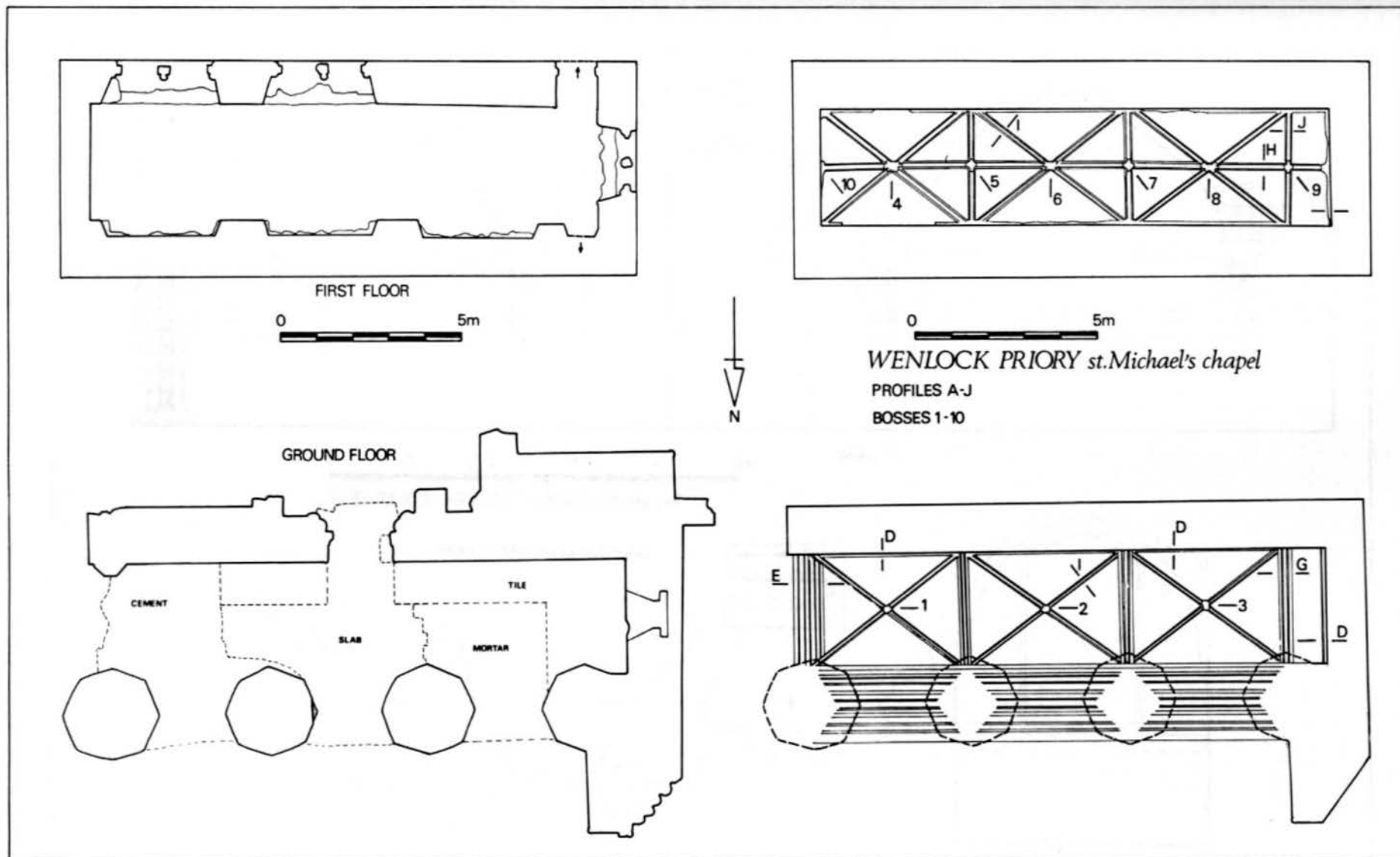


Figure 1

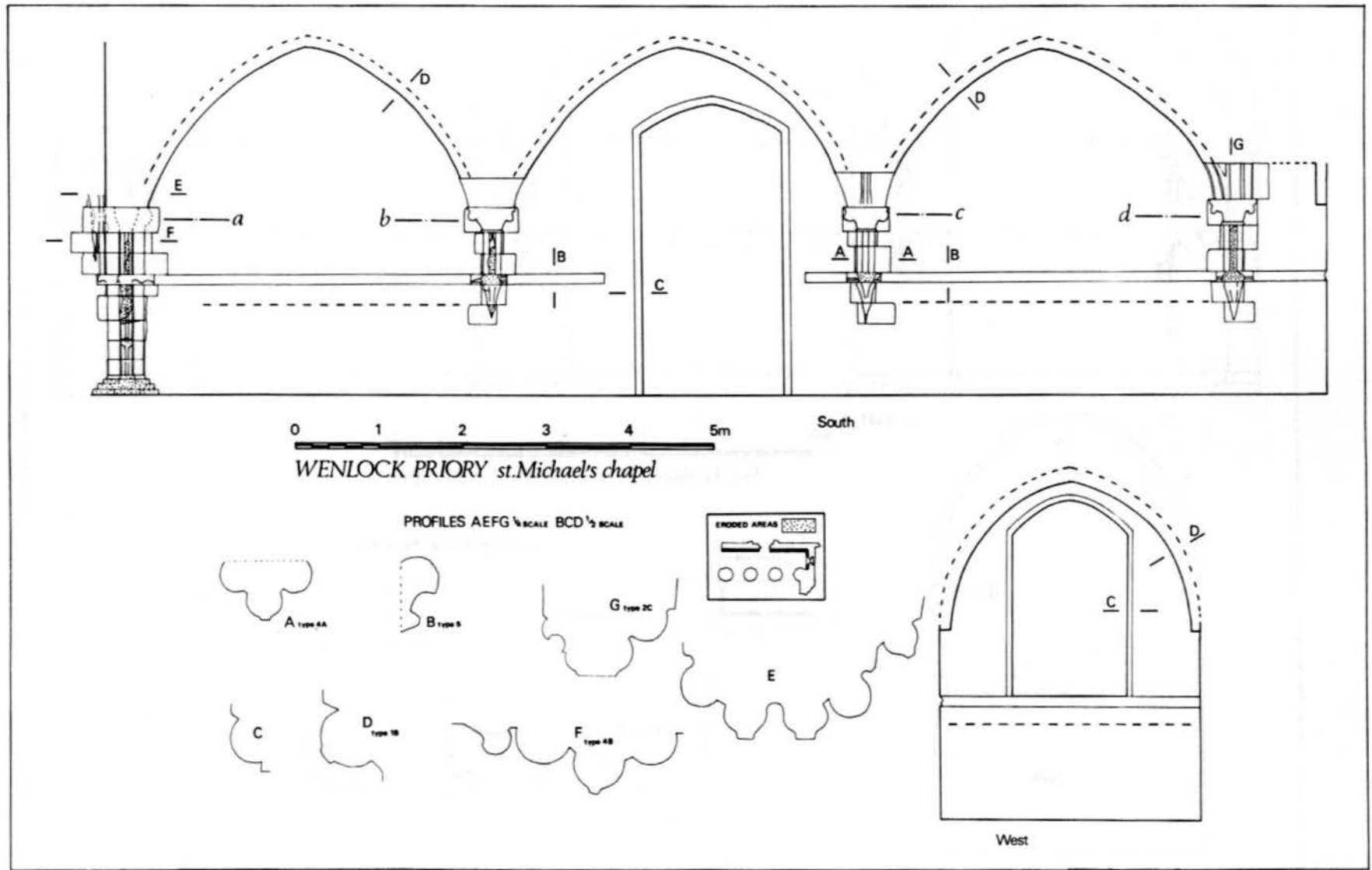


Figure 2

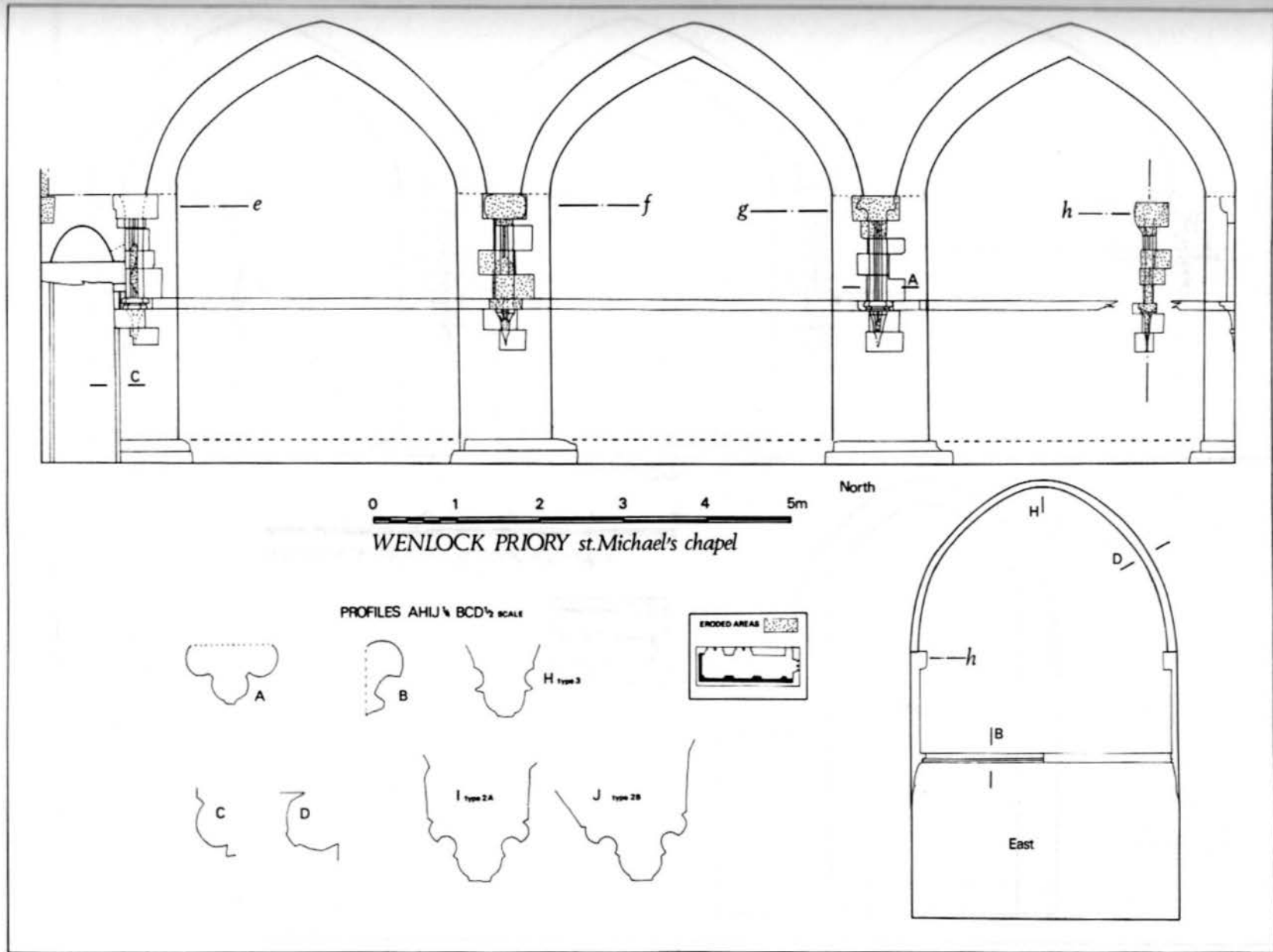


Figure 3



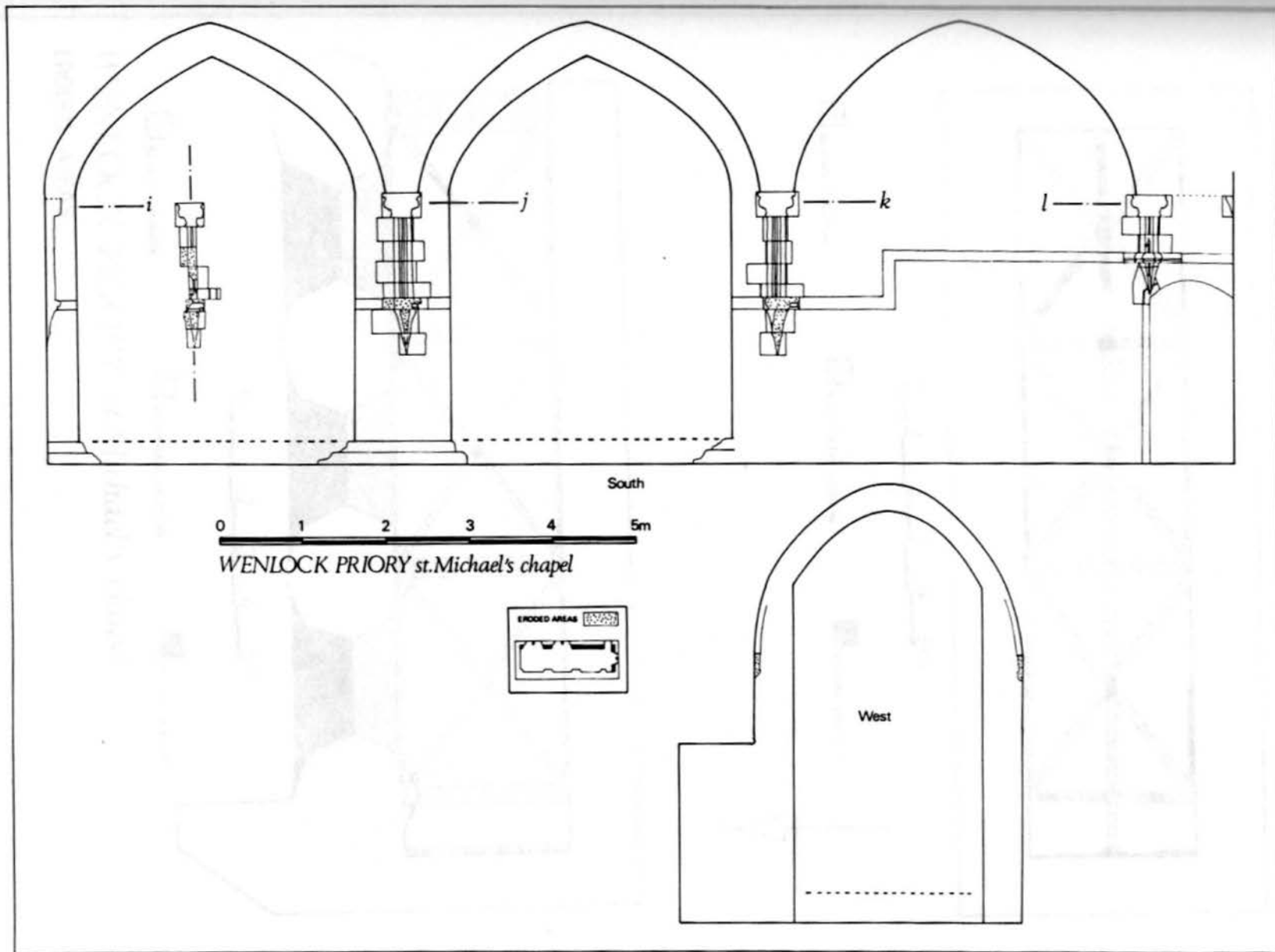
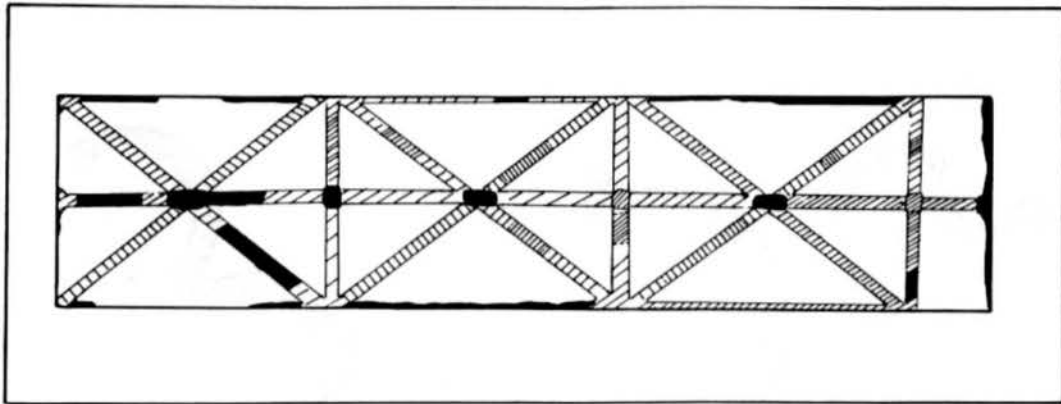


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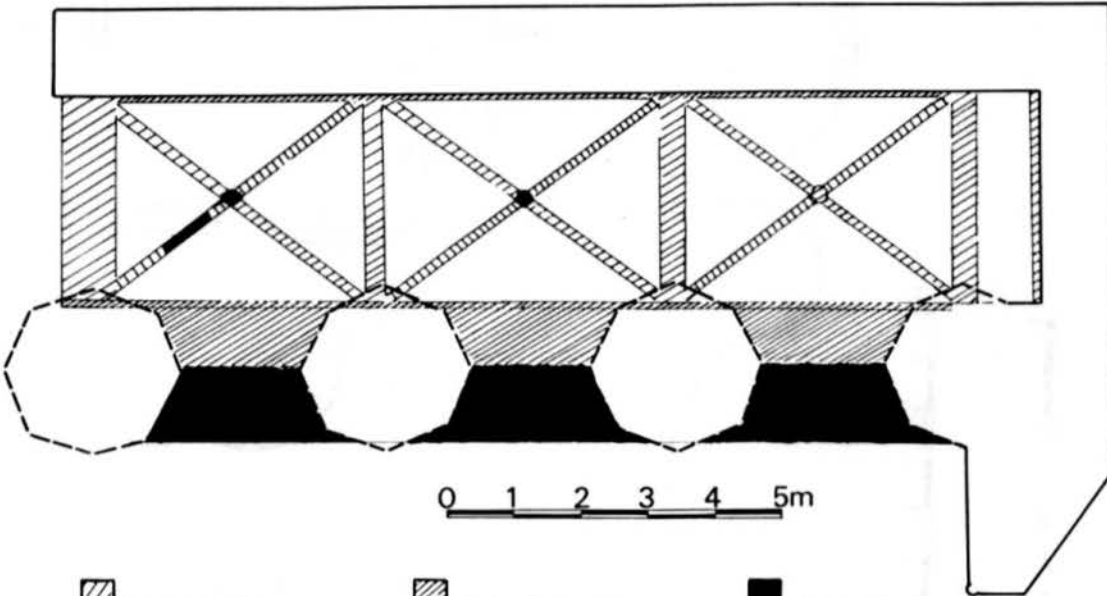
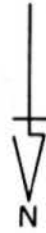


0 1 2 3 4 5m

 SLIGHT EROSION

 MODERATE EROSION

 SEVERE EROSION



0 1 2 3 4 5m

 SLIGHT EROSION

 MODERATE EROSION

 SEVERE EROSION

WENLOCK PRIORY *st. Michael's chapel*  
 ERODED AREAS

Figure 5

MUCH WENLOCK  
mouldings from  
St Michaels Chapel

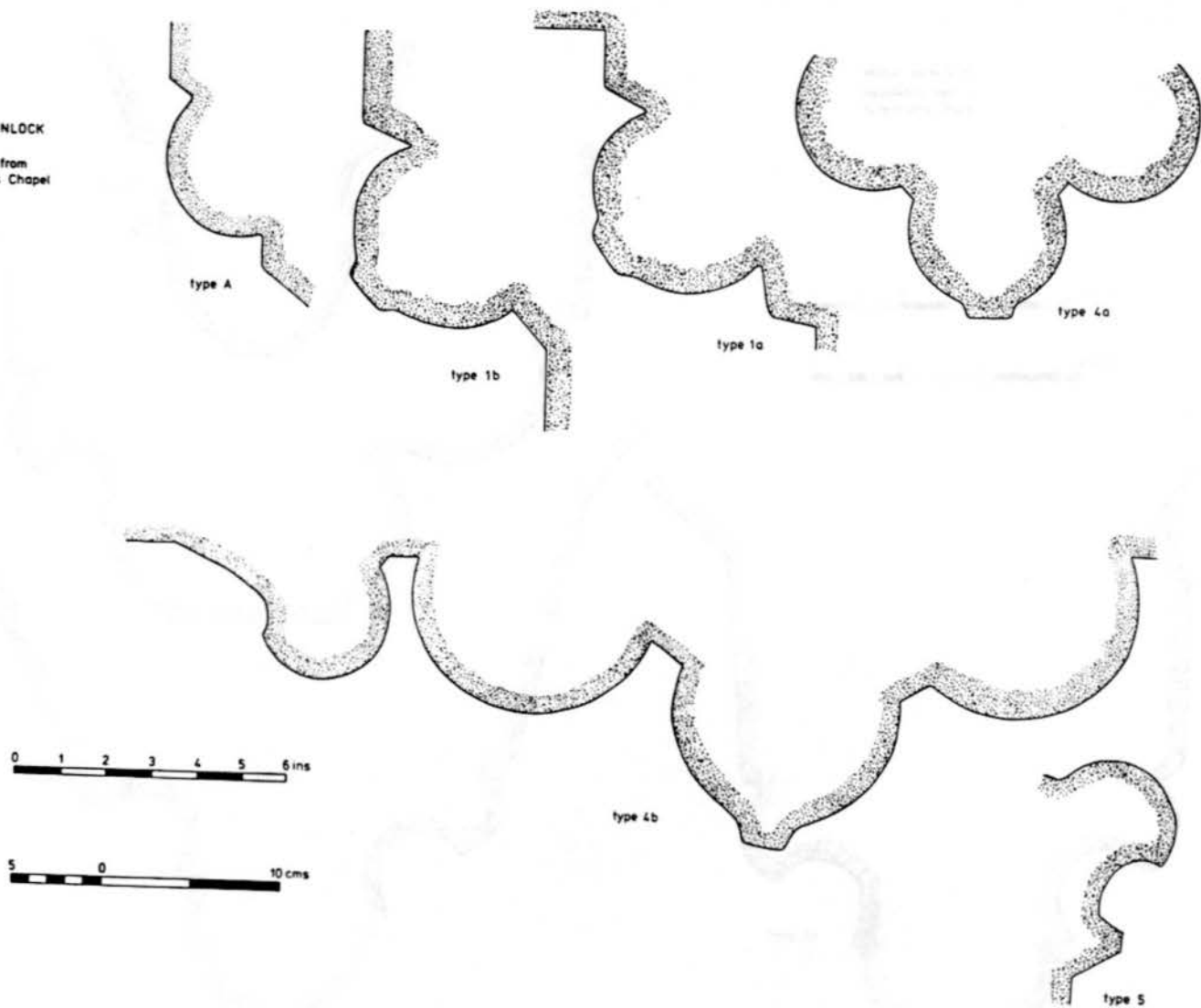


Figure 6

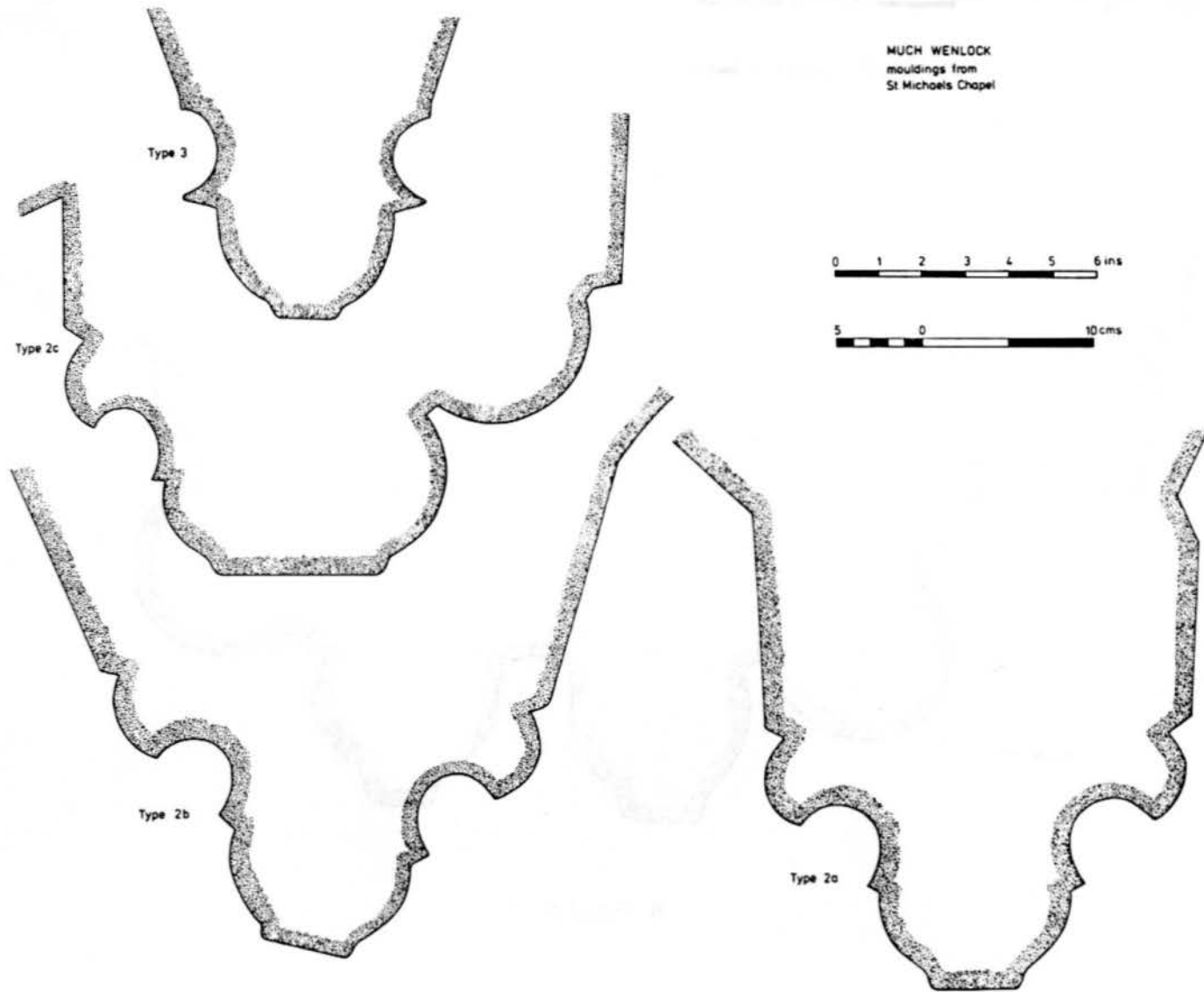
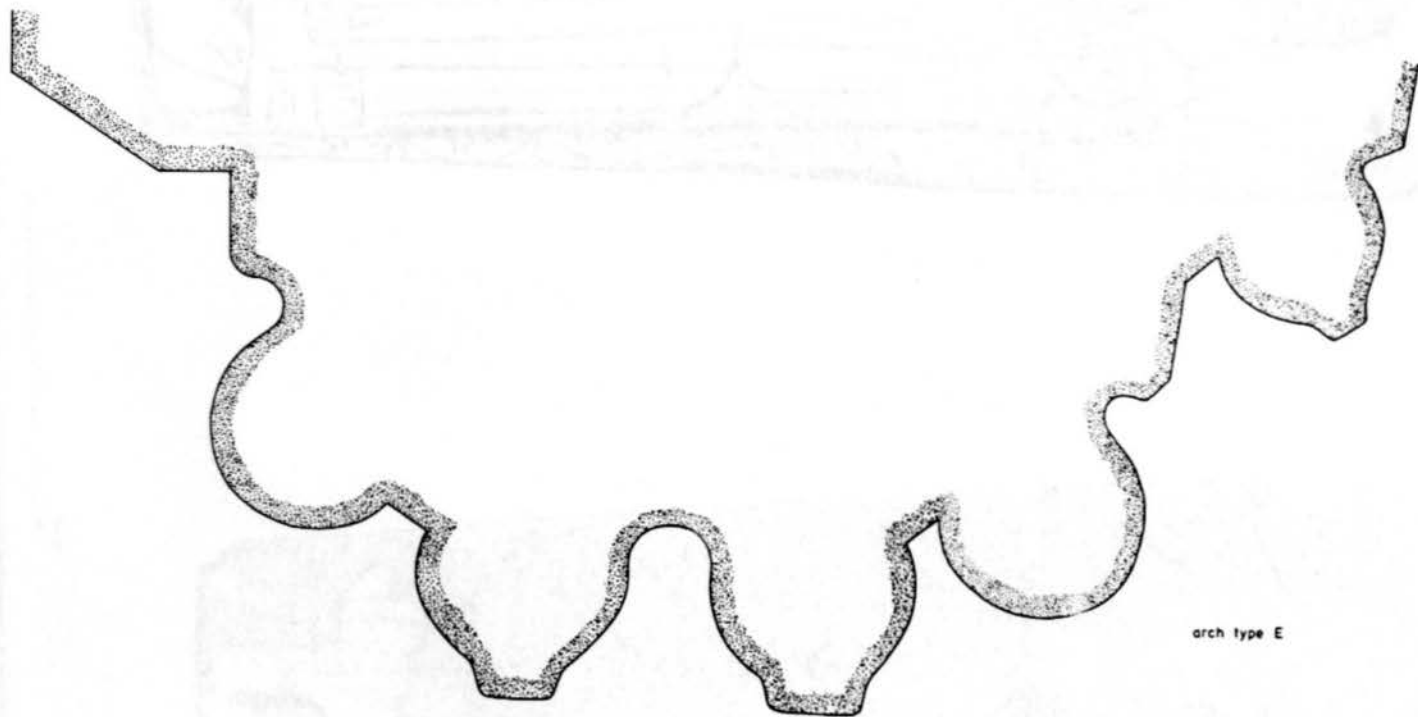


Figure 7

MUCH WENLOCK  
mouldings from  
St Michaels Chapel

5 0 10 cms

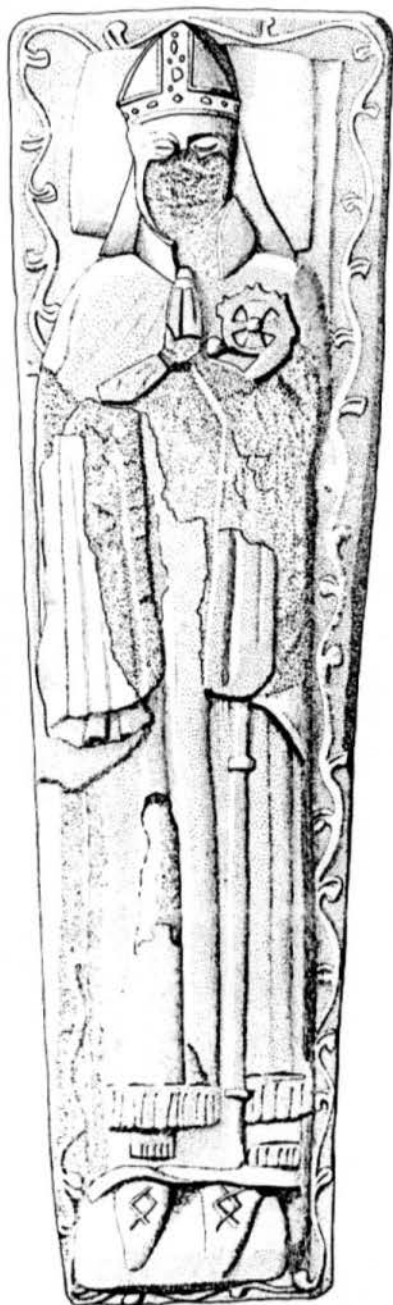
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 ins



arch type E

Figure 8

MUCH WENLOCK ABBEY *Grave Slabs*



0 50cms.

Figure 9