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**St Peter's Gardens, Wolverhampton  
An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by  
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## 1.0 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during a programme of improvements to the gardens around St. Peter's church, Wolverhampton (NGR SO 914988) between July and August 1998. The majority of the archaeological features identified were recorded during the replacement of two terrace revetment walls to the south of the church. Disarticulated human remains were recovered from both these areas. In addition, evidence for grave cuts were recorded in the base of the foundation trenches for the southernmost wall. These grave cuts provide an indication of the southern extent of the original graveyard. Two fragments of medieval pottery and a small group of post-medieval ceramics and other finds were recovered during the course of the ground works.

## 2.0 Introduction

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief and salvage recording undertaken at St Peter's churchyard, Wolverhampton (Fig. 1; NGR SO 914988 and West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record Number 457). The work was undertaken during a programme of improvements to the gardens around St Peter's church between July and August 1998. The work included the resurfacing of paths a new access ramp and planting. The project was financed through the Heritage Lottery Fund. The watching brief was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council and conforms to a brief prepared by West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record (1997).

## 3.0 Archaeological and historical background

The area around St Peter's church is potentially one of the most significant archaeological areas in Wolverhampton (Wolverhampton MBC 1996). The church has occupied a place of prominence within the town of Wolverhampton since Anglo-Saxon times. There has reputedly been Christian activity in the area since the 7th century. However, the church was much modified throughout the medieval period and nothing now survives of the Anglo-Saxon church other than the cross-shaft situated to the south of the church. The earliest surviving masonry of the medieval church dates to the late 13th century and can be found in the crossing and the south transept. The church survived the reformation and underwent further alterations in the post-medieval period, culminating in the major restoration project undertaken by E.Christian between 1852 and 1865.

From the foundation of the earliest church it is probable that there would have been a graveyard surrounding it. Little is known of the form or extent of the early graveyard and the earliest map evidence is the Isaac Taylor map of 1750 (Fig. 4). This map

shows a graveyard surrounding three sides of the church and also shows the dense housing development which runs along Lichfield Street to the south of the church. In 1875 it became possible to remove these slum dwellings with the passing of the Artisan Dwelling Act by the Council. Those buildings between the church and Lichfield Street were acquired and demolished between 1878 and 1880. The passing of the Open Spaces Act of 1881 enabled the Council to contemplate the creation of gardens in this area. A complex sequence of garden construction followed and their design evolved as the council obtained new pieces of land which could be incorporated into the over-all plan. The final phase of development came in the mid-1930s when the Church allowed the greater part of the surviving graveyard to be incorporated into the gardens. A narrow area around the church was retained as church property but the rest was landscaped and forms part of the basic design which can be viewed today. The gardens remained mostly unaltered except for the area on the west side of the church which, in the 1970s, was re-modelled during the construction of the Civic Centre and associated landscaping.

Although the gardens remained in good repair over the following decades, some damage was inevitable. Trees growing beyond their planned dimensions, the partial collapse of revetting walls and the inevitable wear on heavily used public pathways combined to make a thorough restoration of the graveyard essential.

Archaeological work in the immediate area of the gardens has been limited to two small excavations next to the Saxon cross shaft (Rix 1949, Hughes and Buteux 1992 and Hughes 1993).

#### **4.0 Objectives**

The objectives of the salvage recording and watching brief was to identify any earlier structures that lay in the area, to retrieve all archaeological finds for analysis and to gather disturbed human remains (for eventual reburial).

#### **5.0 Methods**

All groundworks associated with the development were archaeologically monitored including works associated with new walls, steps, the realignment of paths and the relocation of the Harris War Memorial. The uncertain timing of the various areas of groundwork required close liaison between the site manager and Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit to ensure that an archaeologist was present at the required times.

All ground disturbance was examined for evidence of archaeological deposits and/or features. Where appropriate a photographic record was made and measurements taken. A representative sample of the pottery was collected and examined by S. Ratkai (see below). All other finds were collected.

A license for the removal of human remains was obtained (Home Office Ref. BCR/98 5/6/2). Every effort was made to ensure that no intact burials were disturbed. However, it was inevitable that previously disturbed human bones would be recovered. This bone was carefully collected, boxed and re-buried with a service of re-consecration (see Fig. 2 for location of re-burial).

The gardens surrounding St Peter's Church can be divided into four areas each of which has its own characteristics (Fig. 2):

*The Lower Gardens* - This was the area situated closest to Lichfield Street. All the paths and flower bed edging were replaced and the statue dedicated to Seaman Harris was removed to a new position. However, nowhere did the ground disturbance penetrate to a depth where archaeological deposits were disturbed.

*The Middle Terrace* - This was situated to the north of the Lower Gardens and at a slightly higher level. The southern edge of the terrace was retained by a revetment wall (Fig. 3, Lower Revetment). The whole of this wall was replaced involving a considerable amount of disturbance. Further ground disturbance occurred at the eastern end of the terrace where new access steps were constructed (Fig. 2, Steps 1) and at the western end where the access steps were replaced with a ramp.

*The Upper Terrace* - This terrace runs around the southern, eastern and northern sides of the church and is considerably higher than the other areas. The revetment wall (Fig. 3, Upper Revetment) between this terrace and the Middle Terrace was also replaced.

*The Memorial Gardens* - These are located to the west of the church. Little or no ground disturbance occurred in this area.

## 6.0 Results

Archaeological features were in the area of the Middle and Upper Terraces to the south of the church.

### *The Middle Terrace and the Lower Revetment Wall (Fig.2 and Fig.3 A-B)*

The foundation trench for the Lower Revetment wall was recorded following its removal and prior to its replacement. Within the eastern half of the foundation trench, the natural orange brown sandy subsoil was identified at a depth of approximately 0.4m below the present footpath level. This was overlain by a medium grey sandy loam topsoil becoming more sandy towards the base. No cuts were visible in this section. However, a number of negative features were observed and recorded in the base of the trench. The location of these features is indicated on Fig. 3. No features were recorded within the western part of the foundation trench because the natural subsoil was not exposed.

*Feature 1:* The northwestern part of a grave with an orange/grey sandy loam fill with some small pebbles and bone flecks. The rounded end of the cut for the grave and the absence of modern components in the fill such as brick fragments would suggest that this was an early, possibly medieval, grave.

*Feature 2:* An area of dark grey/brown sandy loam containing brick fragments. This may have been a grave or, more probably, a modern disturbance.

*Feature 3:* An irregular area of mixed dark grey/brown sandy loam. Probably a modern disturbance.

*Feature 4:* The eastern part of a grave with a fill of very dark sandy loam including some bone fragments. This was probably an early, possibly medieval, grave.

*Feature 5:* The southern part of a grave, the northern part extending beyond the northern section of the foundation trench. It measured 1.9m long. Some of the bones were exposed, with a skull to the west. However, the grave was not excavated and the exposed remains were protected with sand until building commenced. No traces of a coffin or associated metalwork were noted and it seems probable that this is another early grave, possibly medieval in date.

*Feature 6 (not on plan):* Modern service trench for an electricity cable.

*Feature 7:* The southern part of a negative feature which extends beyond the northern section. The fill consisted of a medium brown sandy loam. This was probably a grave of early, possibly medieval, date. Length 1.4m

*Feature 8:* Negative feature with a fill consisting of very dark, grey/brown loam. Inclusions consisted of stone, brick and tile fragments. Although no datable pottery finds were obtained this feature is probably a modern pit.

A single feature (Feature 13) was recorded during the replacement of the revetment wall to the east of the war memorial. This was a brick and stone built shaft constructed to take the pump for the nearby fountain. The pumping mechanism appeared to be of modern manufacture although the structure could be contemporary with the construction of the fountain in 1894.

### *The southwestern ramp*

A considerable amount of ground disturbance occurred during the conversion of a stepped access to a ramped access. Only one archaeological feature was recorded, a tomb dedicated to the Holland family (Fig. 2, F12). This was situated to the west of the southern end of the new access ramp and consisted of a vault above ground level. The grave slab functioned as an entrance at the southern end of the vault. During the groundworks, the southeast corner of the tomb was damaged, revealing intact coffins inside. The damage to the corner was immediately repaired. Elsewhere, occasional clusters of long bones suggested the presence of earlier disturbed burials.

#### *The northeastern steps (Fig. 2 Steps 1)*

The steps leading from Lichfield Street, through the gardens towards the church were replaced. Although this resulted in considerable ground disturbance, nothing of archaeological significance was observed. Human remains seemed to be much less frequent in this area of the site.

#### *The Upper Terrace and the Upper Revetment wall (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, C-D)*

Following the removal of the Upper Revetment wall the foundation trench was recorded. The material in the trench consisted of a dark grey/brown sandy loam. Only two features were recorded.

*Feature 9:* This consisted of a concentration of disarticulated bones and was visible in the north section of the trench. They were presumably placed in a pit having been collected after disturbance, during the excavation of a later grave.

*Feature 10:* The southern face of a brick-built tomb. At its eastern end was a sandstone plinth with a moulded top, intended to support a gravestone which has since been removed.

#### *Pathway leading to the Saxon cross shaft*

A new pathway was excavated, running to the north-west, towards the Saxon cross shaft. A brick-built tomb was exposed (Fig. 2, F11), measuring 2.4m from west to east and 1.74 from north to south. The surviving brickwork, which was bonded with an off-white mortar, showed evidence of having had a barrel vault, although this had collapsed into the tomb interior. The tomb was recorded and the ground above compacted in order to take the pathway.

#### *The northeastern steps (Fig. 2, Steps 2)*

The steps between the upper terrace and the corner between Wulfruna Street and St Peter's Close were replaced. Although this resulted in considerable ground disturbance, no archaeologically significant features were observed.

## 7.0 The finds

### 7.1 The pottery by G. Kalkot

All finds come from unstratified contexts.

There were two fragments of medieval pottery, both coming from the Lower Terrace. These consisted of one sherd of sandy cooking pot and one sherd of glazed sandy/buff ware. Neither sherd is diagnostic and the fabrics are common in the North Worcestershire/South Staffordshire area. They date to the 13th/14th centuries.

The post-medieval collection contained blackwares and yellow wares which date to the late 16th/17th centuries although these form only a small part of the collection.

From the late-17th/early 18th centuries come sherds of feathered slipwares and trailed slipwares. A small part of the assemblage consisted of coarsewares of the same period.

By far the greater part of the collection comes from the 18th century with English stoneware ( one sherd with a sprigged decoration in the form of a male figure smoking a pipe ), sherds of Westerwald stoneware, white salt glaze ware, cream ware and fine blackwares.

A variety of factory-produced 19th century wares occurred in the assemblage including pearl and mocha wares.

The general characteristics of the assemblage indicate the main period of activity being in the 18th/19th centuries, with the overwhelming presence of table wares suggesting a middle class domestic source. Surprisingly, there are virtually no tea-bowls or cups but this may merely reflect comparative breakage rates for different vessel forms.

### 7.2 Other finds

*Metalwork* - Seventeen objects of iron were collected of which eight were identified as coffin handles. The rest were either nails or unidentified objects. One piece of bronze sheet was recovered, measuring 43mm by 33mm and undecorated. One piece of lead window calm was recovered.

*Vessel glass* - A number of fragments of vessel glass were retained, including modern bottle glass, 19th-century moulded glass and 18th-century dark green hand blown bottle glass.

*Bone and shell* - A small quantity of animal bone was identified, some with evidence of butchery marks. A number of oyster shells were also recovered.

*Clay pipes* - Fifty seven fragments of clay pipe stem were recovered and seven bowl fragments. None of these provided useful dating evidence.



*Coal and slag* - A few fragments of iron slag and coal were retained.

*Worked stone* - A fragment of what may be a whetstone was retained. It was 100mm long, but broken at both ends, 10mm wide and 15mm deep with bevelled edges on its upper face. It tapered slightly from one end to the other.

A carved red sandstone panel fragment (Fig. 5) with ornate gothic moulding was also retained. This probably dates to the 19th-century restoration. However, remnants of lime wash on its surface might suggest a medieval date as it is unusual for Victorian decorative stonework to be finished in such a manner.

### 7.3 The gravestones

A number of gravestones were recorded during the groundworks. They were generally of mid-18th-century to early-19th-century date and the names commemorated do not appear on the Borough Engineer's survey of the graveyard dated to 1936. It seems probable that they were disturbed during the deliberate clearing of the memorial stones within the cemetery in the early 19th century in order to re-use the area for further burials. It appears that the older stones were laid flat and turf allowed to grow over them rather than being removed from the site. In general, the inscriptions were only partly legible. However, it is likely that an examination of the parish records may provide sufficient additional information to identify the individuals from the information surviving on the stones themselves. Three of the gravestones were inscribed as follows:

#### Memorial 1:

Here lieth the .....  
..... lenor.....  
.....  
...ar.....n.....De  
Parted This Life  
Fcbr 4th Aged 22  
Years Ano Dom 1705

#### Memorial 2:

To the Memory (of)  
Joseph Ma.....y  
Who died Novbr  
24 1746  
Aged  
58

### Memorial 3:

(In Memory of

Thomas Me... ..

who departed this Life

...January...176...

Aged...3.....

### **8.0 Discussion**

The groundworks associated with the refurbishment of the gardens was undertaken in such a way as to minimise disturbance or damage to archaeologically significant deposits or features. Consequently, very little of archaeological interest was observed during the course of the watching brief. The identification of burials within the foundation trench for the revetment wall to the south of the Middle Terrace provides some indication of the southward extent of the original graveyard. Their location appears to be outside the supposed boundary of the later graveyard. This fact, together with the shape of the cuts for these graves (with rounded ends) suggests a possible medieval date.

The groundworks undertaken in the area of the Lower Gardens did not penetrate below the upper modern horizons. Consequently, no foundations were recorded of earlier or later buildings which may have faced onto Lichfield Street.

The Middle and Upper Terraces invariably revealed a significant depth of topsoil and subsoil but with few finds other than human bone and no archaeological stratigraphy. Only small numbers of finds were recovered. Although some conclusions can be drawn from the post-medieval pottery assemblage little can be said of the two fragments of medieval pottery.

### **9.0 Acknowledgements**

The Archaeological Watching Brief was undertaken by S. J. Linnane for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Thanks go to S. Whitehouse (Conservation Officer) and J. Onions (Landscape Architect) of Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council who provided much background information on the church and its grounds. Thanks also go to J. Weaver of Mowlem Midlands (the principal contractors) who gave every assistance whilst on site. The illustrations are by M. Breedon and the report was edited by G. Hughes.

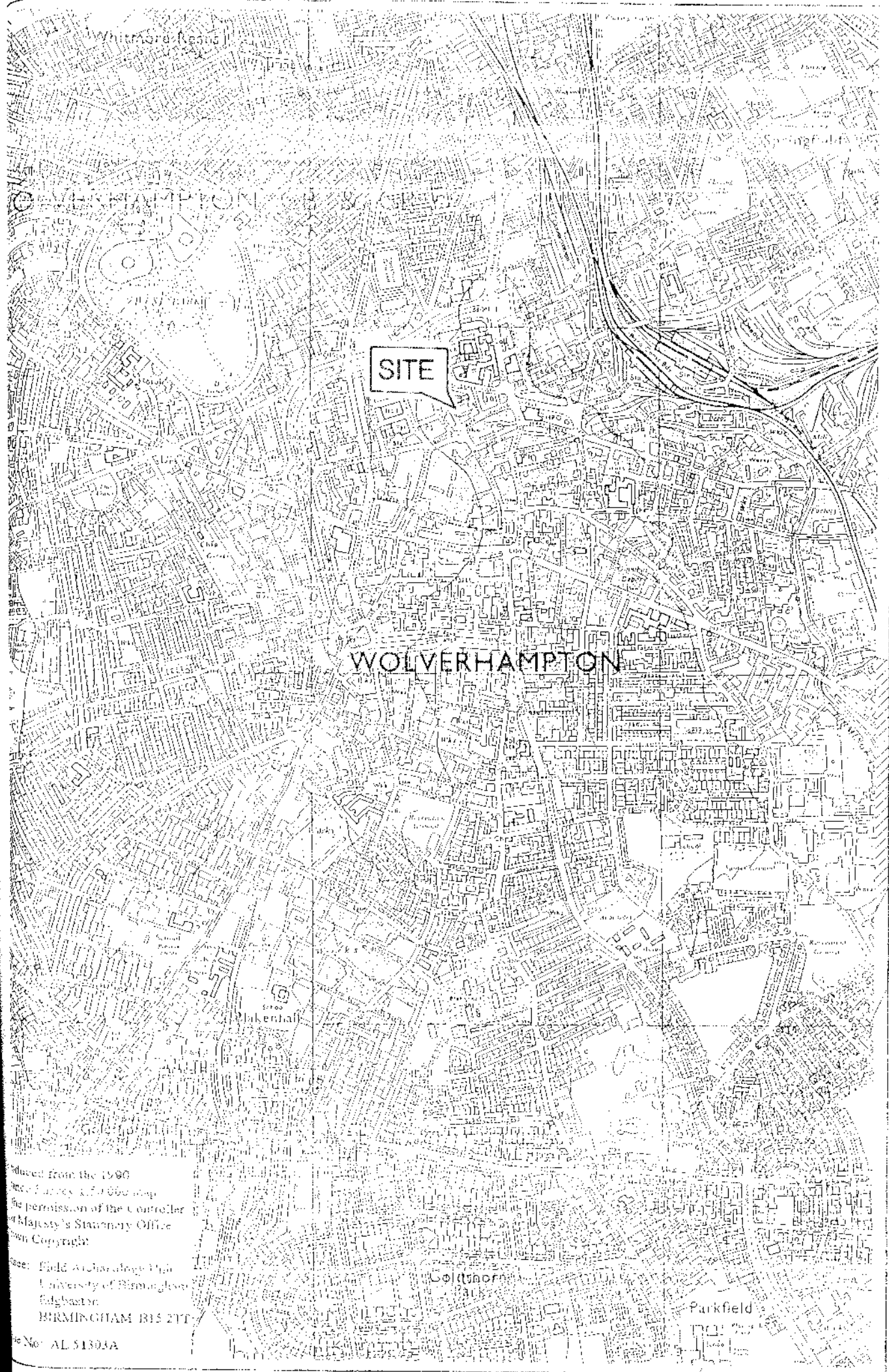
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SITE

WOLVERHAMPTON

Reduced from the 1990  
Scale 1:62,500 map  
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Source: Field, A. Charalambos, P. J.  
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Fig. 1

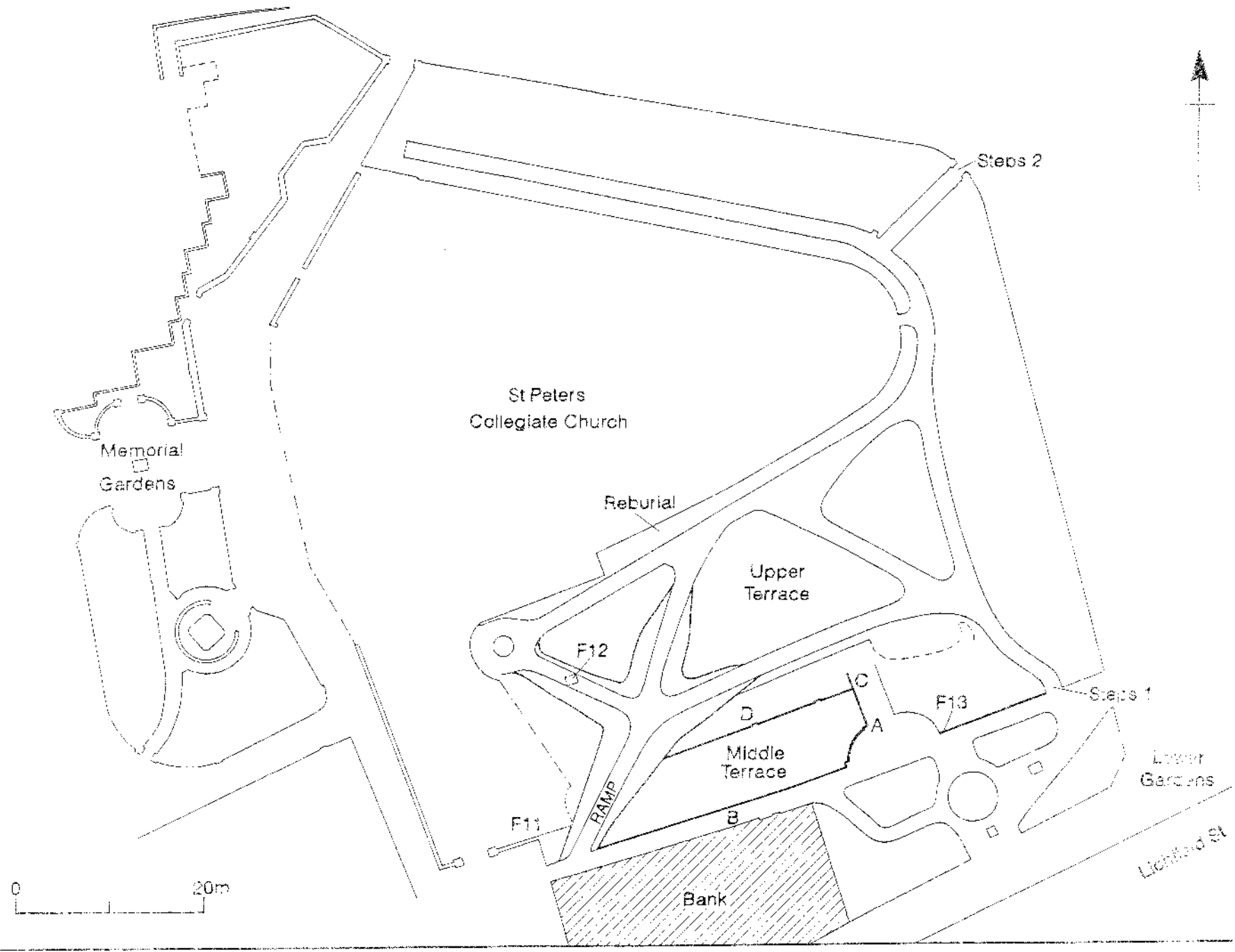


Fig 2

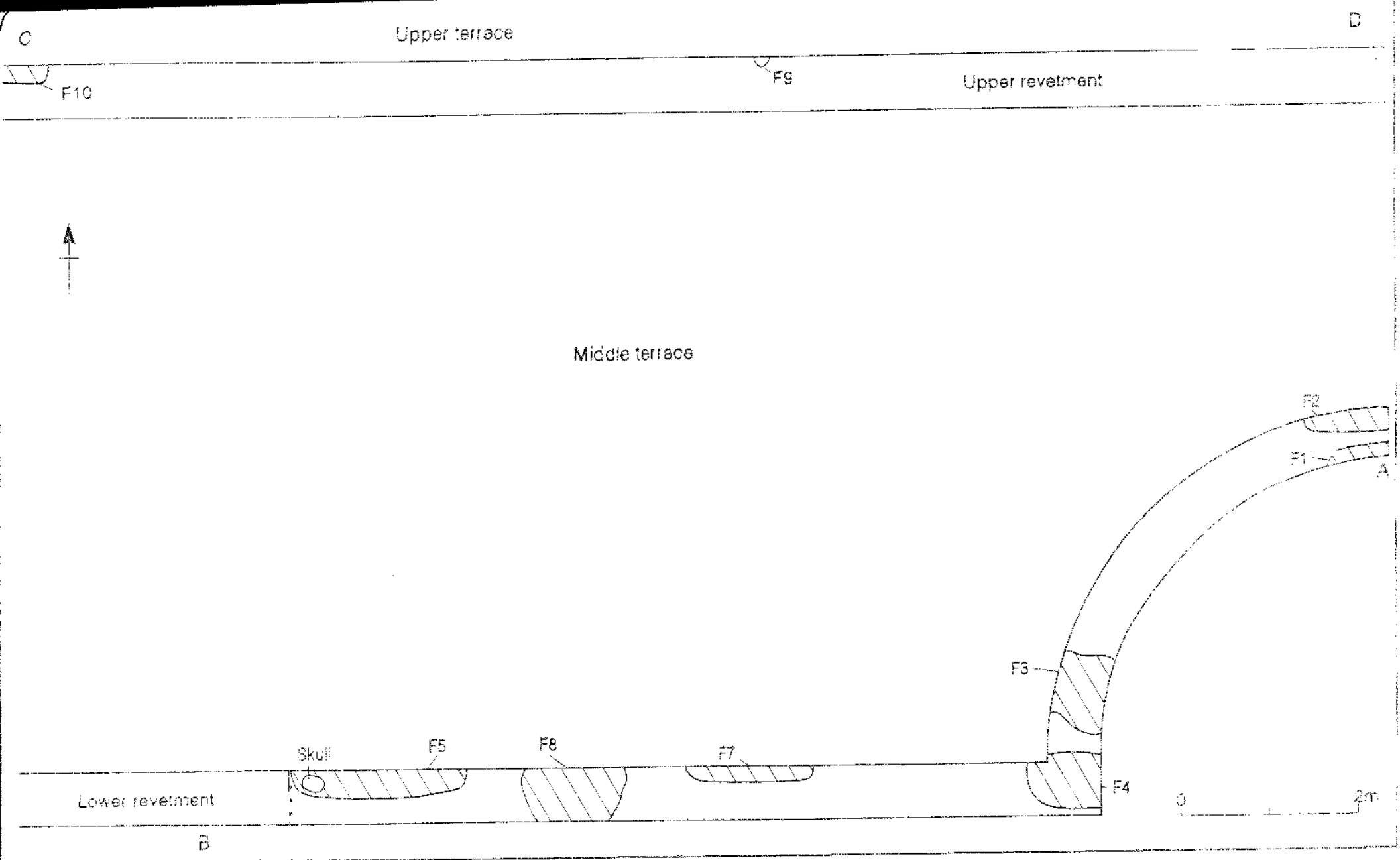
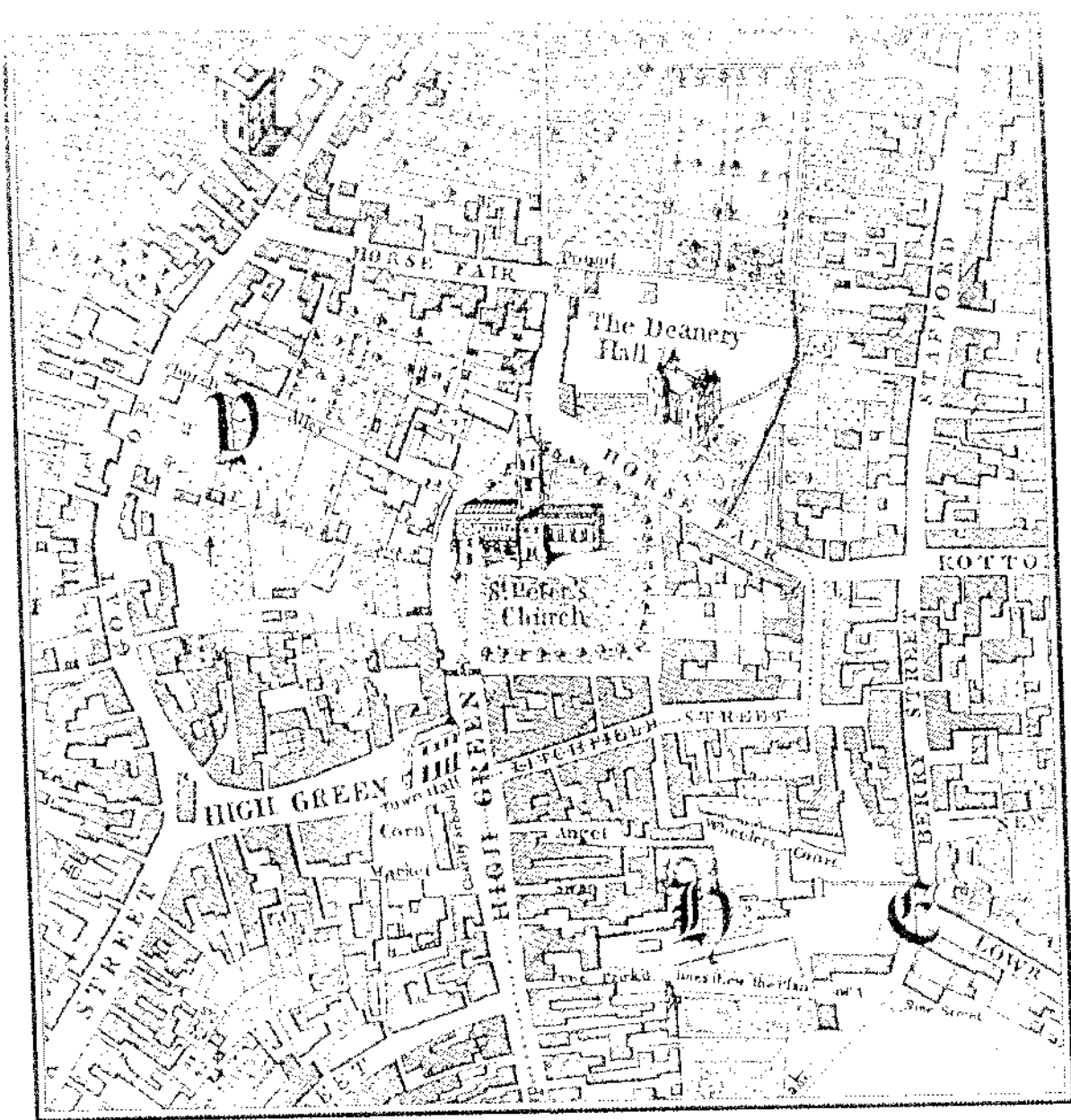


Fig. 8



Extract from the Isaac Taylor map of Wolverhampton dated 1750 showing St Peter's Church and its graveyard. The tenements occupying the area to the south of the graveyard and Lichfield Street were eventually demolished and now form part of the gardens.

Fig.4

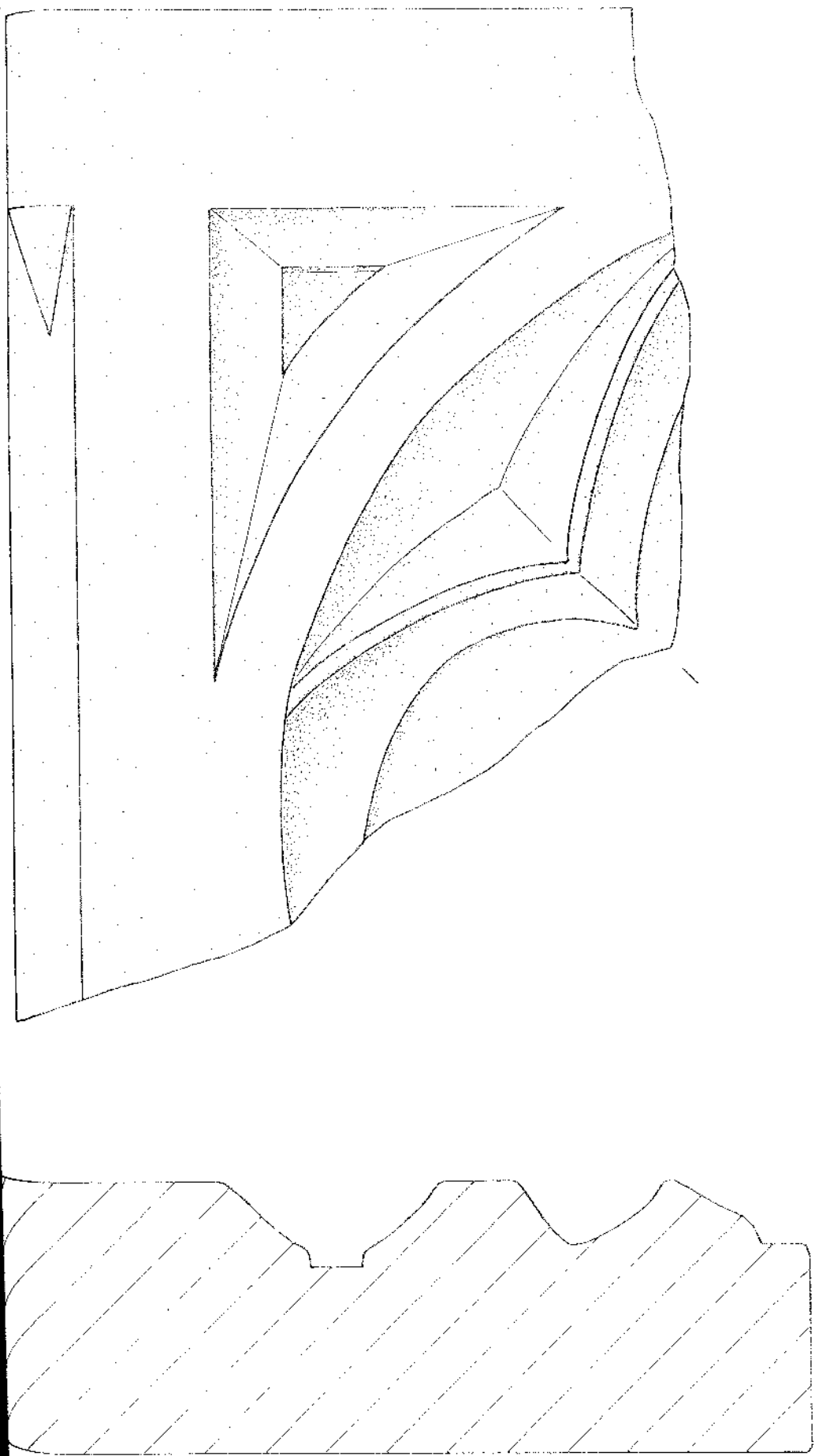


Fig.5