

A Structural Analysis of The Chantry, Bridport, Dorset

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STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS of the Chantry, Bridport before and during its restoration has revealed that it was constructed in the late 13th or early 14th century as a municipal building, probably associated with a harbour. In the later 14th century it was converted into a house for a chantry priest. The building was enlarged at this date by the addition of an attic storey which contains a columbarium.

The building known as the Chantry is situated in South Street close to the limits of the medieval town of Bridport (Fig. 1). It is set back from the frontage on the W. side of the street, and in recent years the buildings to the N. have been demolished to create an access road. There is some modern development on the land to the rear, which slopes gently down to the R. Brit.

Its form is unusual (Pls. v, A, B), being compact and tower-like, with a two-storeyed porch on the street elevation and a double-pile attic set back above a projecting course of slabs. Consequently its original date and function have aroused a considerable amount of historical speculation.²

The building, which had been untenanted since 1972, is owned by W. Dorset District Council and leased to the Vivat Trust, which restored and converted it in 1987 with the aid of a grant from English Heritage. It now provides a flat for holiday letting on the two upper floors and space for a local museum display on the ground floor. The author was engaged by English Heritage to undertake an archaeological survey of the building prior to and during its restoration.

The building is constructed of local limestone; a grey, shelly Middle Oolite rubble was used for the walls, and a finer-grained, brown Lower Oolite, of Ham Hill type for the dressings. The latter has weathered badly. Both types could be cut into large slabs for copings and lintels. The bonding material varied according to the period of the work; loam was used in Periods 1 and 3, but a hard white mortar in Period 2. Three of the external elevations were recorded photogrammetrically³ but the S. wall proved too close to adjoining buildings to allow this. The results were plotted stone by stone at a scale of 1:20, although clarity was hindered by grime and the poor condition of pointing and stonework. This detail has been omitted on the published drawings.

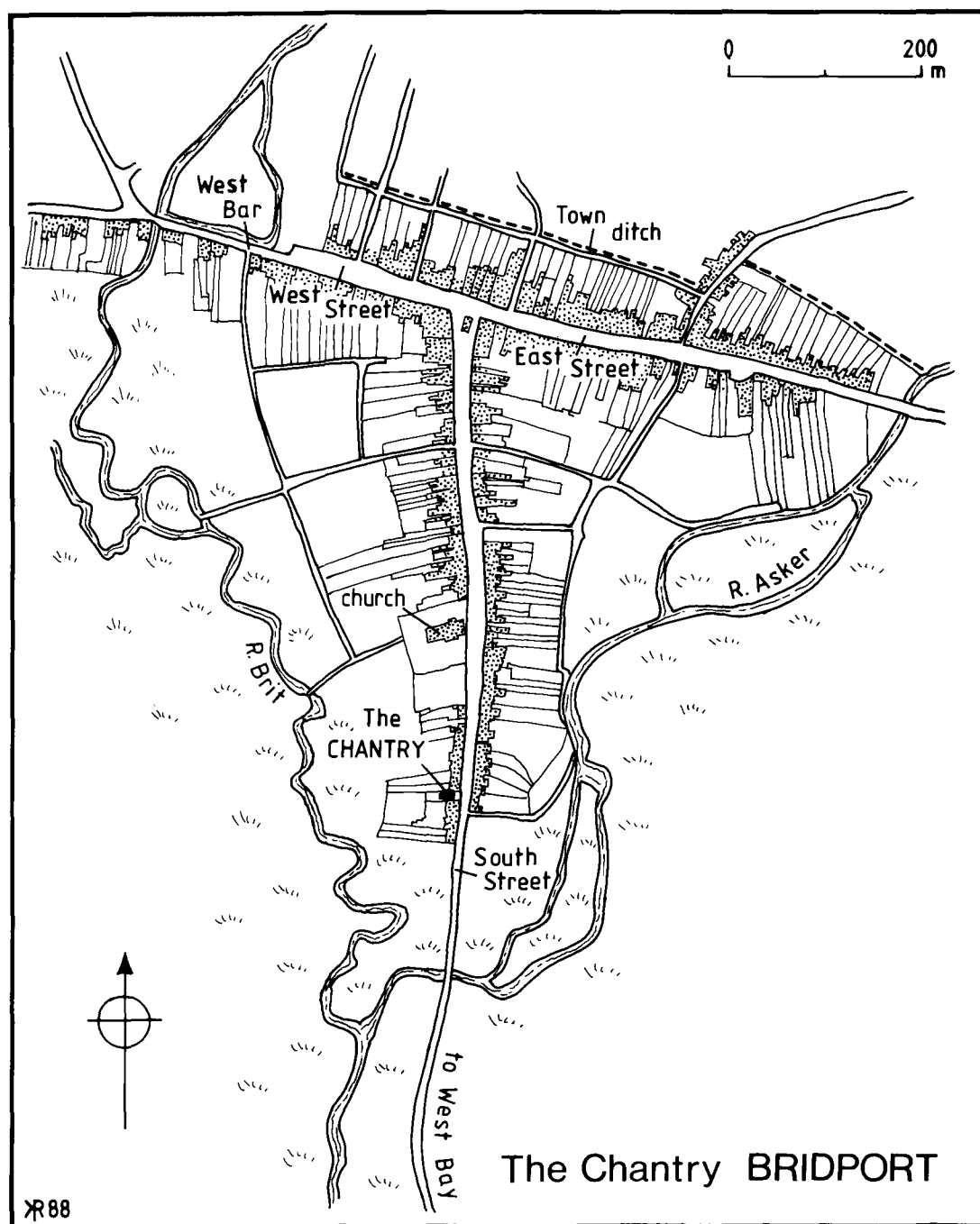


FIG. 1

Location map showing the position of the Chantry within the medieval town

The interior was recorded by measured survey and the visible fabric was analysed before restoration work commenced. In the late 19th century the rooms on the two lower floors were fitted out with varnished pine panelling, which had been removed before the survey began. Very little old plaster was found to survive on the exposed walls, so that their construction could be studied. Conversely the attic rooms had been replastered in the late 19th century and were uninformative at this stage.

Recording continued in step with the restoration programme, as parts of the building not previously accessible were revealed. A drainage trench dug round the exterior exposed the foundations and provided evidence for alterations to the building not reflected in the standing fabric. Internally the ground floor was taken up and relaid, but as the level had been lowered by up to 0.4 m in the 19th century, this proved uninformative. Scaffolding and raking-out of the pointing made the exterior accessible for study, and cross-sections of the wall construction could be observed at a number of points where repairs had to be made. Internally the timber floor and roof structures were revealed, and the newel stair exposed during repairs. In the attics the plaster was stripped to reveal an unsuspected *columbarium*.

The structural evidence has been recorded on plan (Fig. 2) and a series of nine elevations (Fig. 3, 1–4 external; Fig. 4, 5–9 internal). It has been broken down into four periods on the basis of stratigraphical relationships, combined with differences in constructional technique.⁴ For reference the features in each wall of the building have been given a separate series of numbers; features, such as windows, common to both an internal and external elevation have a single number e.g. E3.2 & E7.2.⁵ There are separate numbered sequences for trusses and corbels. Reconstruction drawings based on this primary evidence are presented in Figs. 5 to 8.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The town of Bridport was granted a charter in 1253 and enjoyed considerable prosperity during the medieval period, based on the rope-making industry.⁶ In addition to the parish church of St Mary, there was a chapel of St Andrew and a number of chantries were endowed. For one of these, Munden's Chantry, the 15th-century account books survive.⁷ The identification of the Chantry as a priest's house is a traditional one. J. Hutchins in his *History of Dorset* (1774)⁸ wrote, 'Near the entrance of the south street is an ancient building said to be the prior's house, most probably for one of the chantry priests in the church'. It was also popularly known as Dungeness, 'a name which is not inappropriate if it has any reference to its prison-like appearance'.⁹ The chantry was associated with, and sometimes assumed to be, the chapel of St Leonard, but it is clear that this was actually within the parish church. Two charters survive¹⁰ granting a messuage and curtilage to the priest Richard Stratton 'that the same priest and his successors every day shall celebrate mass in a certain chapel of St Leonard, in the church of St Mary of Brideport, to wit, the mass of the Blessed Katharine every Monday, but on other days as it is held and taught by the use of Sarum'. The masses were to be said for the souls of Robert Bemynstre and his wife, Claricia, his parents and ancestors, the burgesses of Bridport and their successors. A licence in mortmain was granted for the

establishment of this chantry in 1368.¹¹ There are two inventories relating to this chantry;¹² the earlier, probably of 1390, makes reference to Robert Bemynstre, and lists together with vestments and church plate, a table in the hall, a coffer and a dresser. The other, dated 1474, records in addition to liturgical items, a silver cup and ten silver spoons, a basin and ewer, two brass pots, two napkins and a towel in the manse house.

There are two other unpublished documents relating to this chantry;¹³ in 1369 the chaplain, Richard Stratton agreed with Robert Bemynstre to share the profits and outgoings of a *columbarium*,¹⁴ and in 1376 Stratton made an agreement with the corporation bailiffs for the building of a hall and chamber next to his kitchen, with free access to the same through his hall, and an easement in the kitchen.¹⁵ Neither of these documents can be associated directly with the standing building, but the discovery that one of the attic rooms was constructed as a *columbarium* makes the identification almost certain,¹⁶ for only particular landlords and clergy were allowed to maintain them. The other reference appears to document the construction of a separate building on the rear of the plot.

After the suppression of the chantries in 1547 the building reverted to the corporation. In 1549 it was leased to Thomas Watson, William Adeys and their heirs¹⁷ but little is known of its subsequent tenants. It was leased to Dr James Westly in 1695, and to the Chilcott family in the 18th century, when it was sub-let. In 1851 Hunt & Co's *Directory* described it as 'having been of late years inhabited by some poor families'. The building remained tenanted until 1972.

The building was described at some length in the third edition of Hutchin's *History of Dorset*¹⁸ before its restoration (Period 4) in 1870 by a builder, John Green. This work was commented upon in the *Bridport Almanac* of 1887, which described it as 'an ancient Norman building believed to have once been the Priory of St Leonards, locally known as the Dungeness. Unfortunately its restoration has divested it of much of the primitive beauty through a modern architect's attempting to bring it somewhat in character with the nineteenth century style'. The earliest illustrations of the Chantry are two watercolours painted at the time of its restoration by Miss G. Stephens (1870) and Mrs Fox (c. 1875).¹⁹ Both show the building from the S. after the demolition of lean-to structures, which the former painting shows in the form of a pointed arcade. However this appears to be artistic licence, as it is not represented in the other painting, and there is no trace of it in the fabric. There is also an interesting but structurally uninformative sketch of 1895-96 by the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh. In this century the building was surveyed by the R.C.H.M. in 1938.²⁰ There are also photographs of the eastern roof, prior to its removal in 1951, and of the interiors before the restoration work commenced.²¹

DESCRIPTION

PERIOD 1 (Figs. 2-4)

The soakaway trench dug around the building to a depth of c. 0.4 m on the S. and E. sides was cut through subsoil which shaded into a natural alluvial clay. It gave no indication that the plot had been occupied prior to the construction of the present building. On the N. and W. sides of the building the deposits were deeper (up to 0.8 m), which was due in part to

modern build-up, and partly to the fact that the underlying contour of the ground fell away on the W. towards the river. This could be observed in a drainage trench dug down the garden, in which there was up to 1.4 m of dark soil.

The basic form of the building originated at this period; it was two storeys high and nearly square, measuring 7.6 by 8.3 m externally with walls up to 0.9 m thick. The soakaway trench revealed a continuous offset foundation and exposed the footings of a primary porch, which projected beyond the foundations of the existing Period 2 porch. To the S. was a stone-capped drain.

Work of this period was characterized by its matrix of ochre-coloured loam and the use of fairly small, thin pieces of grey limestone rubble for the body of the walls. Occasional large slabs, only roughly worked, were used for corbels and some lintels; other lintels and window dressings were in brown limestone.

The N. elevation is the most unaltered, with original masonry surviving to a maximum height of 7 m above ground level (E4.4). There are two small square-headed windows at first-floor level (E4.1, 2), whose jambs are in bond with the wall. Most of the other first-floor windows, which are built to a uniform size and pattern, are also original (E1.4; E2.5, 6; E3, 2). Their jambs are badly eroded but bear a continuous hollow-chamfered moulding; the openings have been altered and now contain wooden casement windows. The only surviving original ground-floor window is N. of the porch in the E. elevation (E1.3), although it was enlarged in Period 3. The extent of Period 2 alterations at this level makes it impossible to reconstruct the full ground-floor window pattern. The external doors also belong to the next period.

Another primary feature is the corbel, which projects 0.3 m between the first-floor windows on the S. elevation (E2.10). This is irregularly shaped and has a small round socket in the centre of its upper face. It is aligned beneath a larger circular cut-out in the projecting offset course at second-floor level (E2.13), which belongs to Period 2 but which may have been reset.

The interior was divided by a N.-S. partition wall. At ground-floor level this has been almost entirely removed or rebuilt, surviving only as a scar in the adjoining walls (E6.18; E8.19) and as a foundation below the floor, but on the first floor it is better preserved (E9.1) and demonstrates clearly the differences in construction between this period and the next. There is no surviving evidence for communicating doors in this wall, or for the original stair.

In the SW. corner of room 6 there is an original garderobe (E6.19; Pl. vi, B) built into the thickness of the wall and forming an integral part of its construction. The shaft, which is still partly void, descends to ground level, but no longer has a visible outlet; the large external slab at the foot of the wall (E2.30) may have been used to close it off. A second upright slab is used in room 6 as a front to the seat, which is formed from two strips of dressed stone. The recess has a slab roof carried on two lengths of hollow-chamfered moulding. This detail is repeated on all the primary windows, as a projecting moulding carried round one or more faces of the window recesses at cill level (E5.4, 7; E6.5, 6; E7.2; E8.1, 2). In room 5 it also occurs under the lintels (E7.2 has a convex moulding). There is a physical connection between the garderobe and the adjacent S. window in that the block used for the cill moulding is also part of the jamb of the garderobe recess.

Room 6 opened directly into the first floor of the original porch; the opening, which survives behind the Period 2 arch, was roofed with slabs carried on a deep double corbel (E6.20). No other primary porch features survive. The ceilings to rooms 5 and 6 were supported on four pairs of corbels formed from large blocks of roughly dressed grey limestone. The inner pairs were formed from single stones which spanned the partition wall. Many of these corbels were reset when the second floor was added, but a number are in their original positions (C12, 13, 15, 19, 23, 27). None of the ceiling timbers demonstrably belongs to this period. The first floor is also carried on corbels, but none belongs to this period.

The wall above first-floor ceiling level has been rebuilt, so that the original form of the roof cannot be ascertained with certainty, but it was probably of very low pitch and parapeted. This is suggested both by the use of corbels to support the roof timbers, and by the

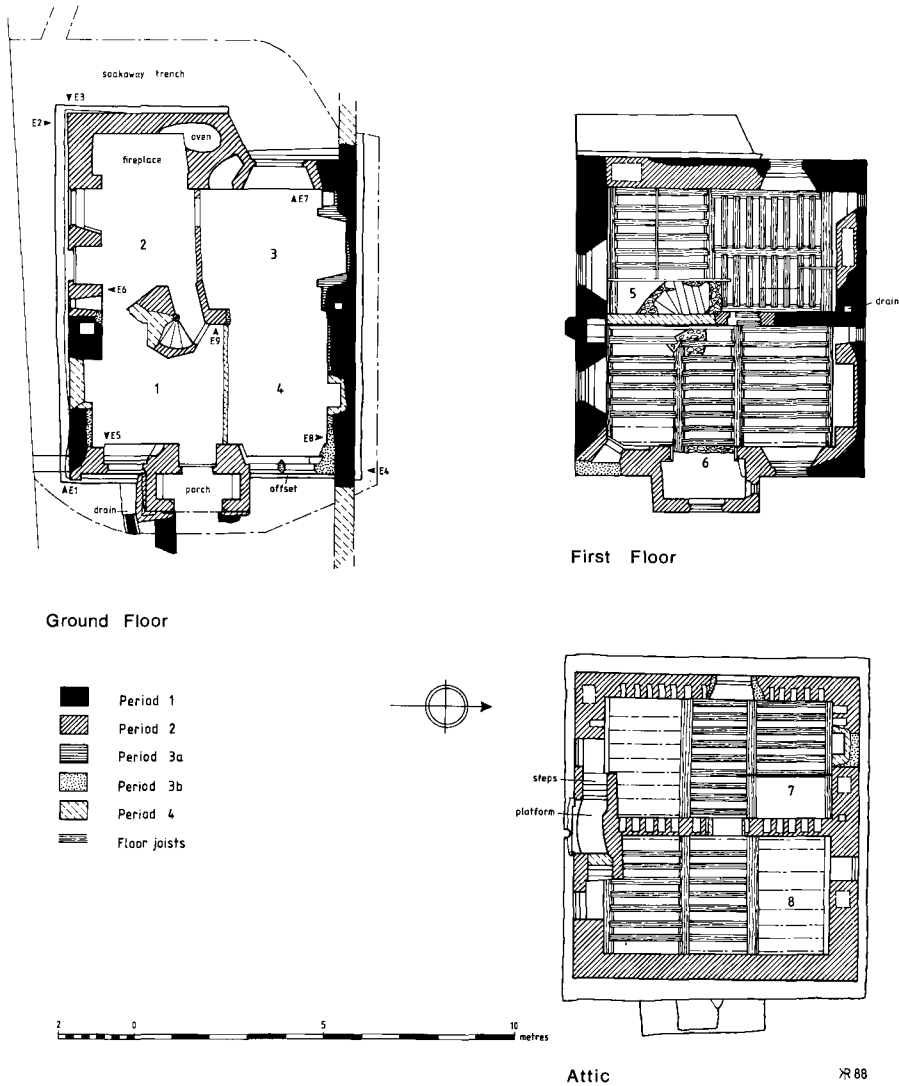


FIG. 2

Plans at ground floor, first floor and attic levels. Scale 1:200

projecting course of slabs at second-floor level. These are built into the Period 2 attic storey, but serve no useful function, and may be a re-set parapet course. There is also a vertical shaft c. 0.15 m square, within the thickness of the N. wall (Fig. 2). It was revealed by repairs to the wall at first-floor level, which established that it was a primary feature and that it extended for the height of the building. It appears to have been a rainwater drain, which implies a parapeted rather than a pitched roof. It must originally have been lead-lined, as the sides are set in loam but are unweathered.

PERIOD 2 (Figs. 2-4)

Work of this period was distinguished by the use of a hard white sandy mortar. The grey limestone rubble was cut into larger, squarer blocks than were used in Period 1 and some attempt was made at coursing. Brown limestone, which has weathered badly, was used for door and window dressings.

Exterior

The principal alteration to the E. elevation was the reconstruction of the porch; its foundations overlie those of the Period 1 porch and are butted against the lowest courses of the E. wall (E1.7). It is open at ground level; the outer, two-centred arch (E1.6) has moulded jambs, and the four-centred doorway (E1.1) hollow-chamfered jambs. At first-floor level there is a central square-headed window (E1.5). Beneath there are several brown limestone slabs built into the wall (E1.9). Given their position and the fact that the use of this stone is confined to dressings, it is probable that these once bore projecting detail, such as a bracket and canopy work for a statue. The porch is roofed with large slabs.

Another ground-floor window (E1.2) was inserted S. of the porch, and a projecting first-floor garderobe was constructed on the SE. corner. Little remains externally except the scar of its removal (E1.11) and the corbel from which it sprang (E1.10).

The dominant new feature of the S. and W. elevations was the large projecting chimney stack (E3.5; Pl.v, B). It occupies more than half of the W. elevation at ground level and has a splayed, pitched stone capping which meets the wall below a weathering course. The wall above is partially rebuilt to accommodate the flue. To the N. of the stack a ground-floor window (E3.1) was inserted; it was altered in the 19th century. The adjacent S. elevation was also completely rebuilt (E2.11) to incorporate three new windows (E2.2-4) and a door (E2.1) of the same pattern as the front door (E1.1). The windows have jamb stones in common.

The building was heightened by the addition of an attic storey, which was inset above a projecting course of large rough slabs; c. 1 m of the wall below the slab course was rebuilt at the same time. The roof was of double pile form, gabled to N. and S. with a central valley gutter. All gables but the SE. were surmounted by a stack. The two N. stacks (E4) retain their original hollow-chamfered finial mouldings. This moulding is repeated at the base of the stacks where they meet the slab coping to the gable parapets. The eaves level detail of these parapets has been lost. The S. stack, which was the largest, has been reduced and capped. The roofs were covered with large stone slates; the two lowest courses on the outer roof-slopes, which are bedded directly on the angled wall heads, are still in position, but the remainder have been replaced by clay tiles. There were two windows in each of the gabled elevations (E2.7, 8; E4.3, 6); the W. pair were surmounted by plain hood moulds. On the N. elevation the central valley had a plain parapet, but on the S. elevation there was a more elaborate structure. As already described there is a semicircular recess within the projecting slab course (E2.13), aligned over the Period 1 feature E2.10. On top of the projecting course at this point is another recessed slab which has been truncated; it carries a screen wall which projects 0.10 m from the face of the gable and stands to a height of 1.1 m, although scars on the flanking walls suggest that it was originally 1.5 m high. Behind this wall is a platform with access from the interior.

Interior

The E. ground-floor room (1/4) remained undivided at this period and was separated from room 3 by the cross wall. Access to room 2 was via a passage built into an inserted newel staircase (E9.4). This formed a semi-octagonal projection into room 1; two faces have been damaged by the insertion of the 19th-century stair (E9.5), but surviving features include the four-centred passage doorway, rebated for a door frame (E9.2); a lamp-niche with a cusped ogee head (E9.3), and part of a small square stair-light. The stairs were entered from the passage by an arched doorway. They turned through more than 180° around the newel and then ascended in a straight flight against the cross wall in room 5 (Pl. vii, A). The bottom four

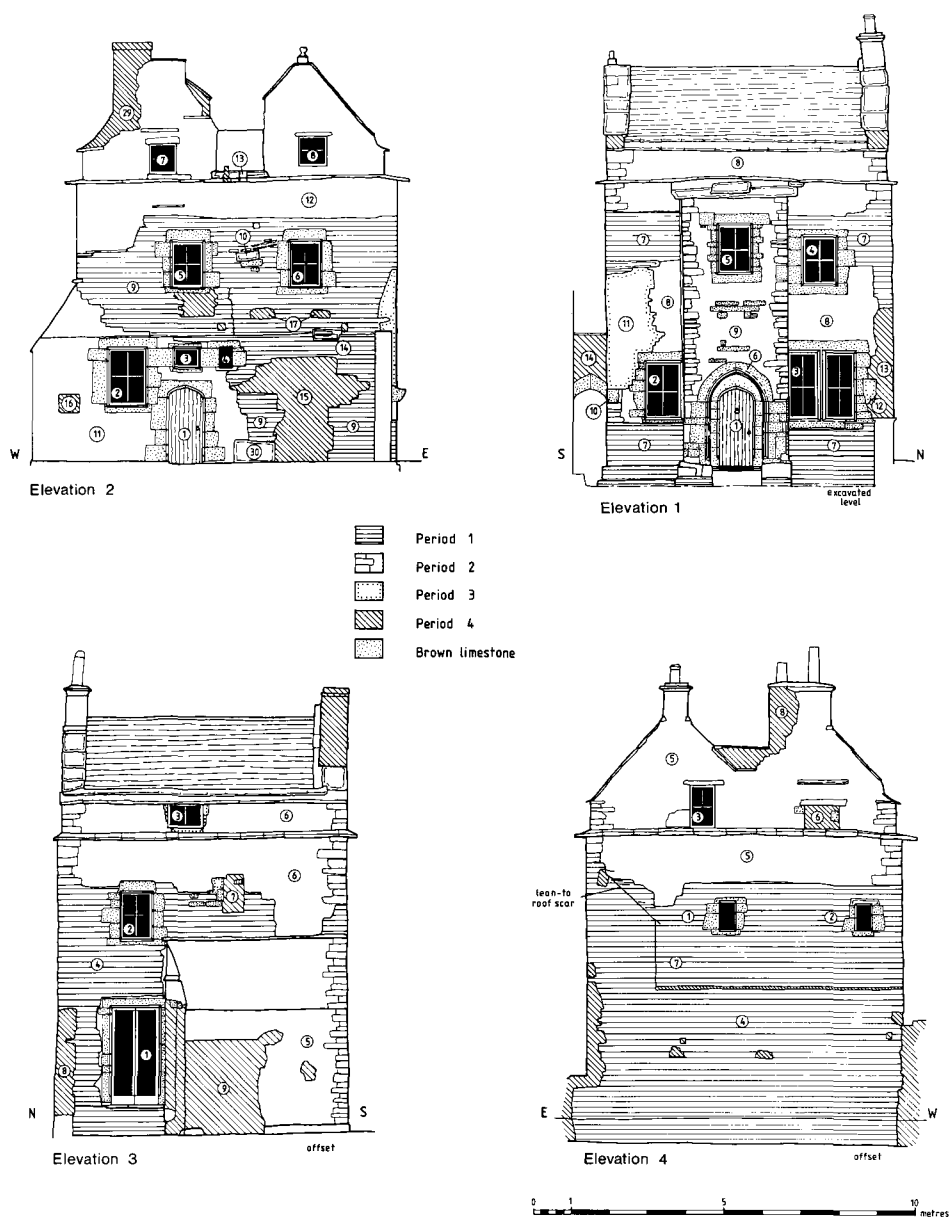


FIG. 3
External elevations, E1-4. Scale 1:200

and top seven steps survive but the remainder were destroyed in the 19th century. Many of the treads were also renewed in Period 3, so that it is not clear how the outer edge of the stair was originally finished N. of the cross wall.

The rear of the ground floor was divided into two rooms by the existing plank and muntin screen, which is morticed into the ceiling beam and which retains its original cill. Fireplaces were installed in both rooms, but the one in room 3 was replaced in Period 3 (E8.15), and is represented only by a large relieving arch (E8.9), which is off-centre to the replacement. The face of the wall in the room above has been partly rebuilt to accommodate the flue (E8.10). Access to this room was probably through a door in the cross wall from room 1/4. The fireplace in room 2 occupies the whole of the W. wall (E7.10); it has a shouldered lintel and two semi-octagonal moulded lamp brackets. The large slab which forms the lintel has been recessed, but this is a 19th-century alteration; it was originally flush with the wall face. Built into the back of the fireplace there is an original domed oven with an arched doorway; a cupboard within the thickness of the stack opens into room 3 (E7.11), and upstairs in room 5, there is the door to a smoke-chamber (E7.12).

Apart from the addition of the flues, no major alterations were made to room 5, which was itself unheated. A door with a four-centred head and hollow-chamfered mouldings (E9.6) was inserted into the cross wall to communicate with room 6. Springing from the slab that forms the head of this door is a relieving arch (E9.7), which gave headroom over the stair below.

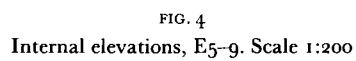
A number of improvements were made to room 6, including the insertion of a fireplace in the N. wall (E8.11; Pl. VI, A). This also has a shouldered lintel, but here the shoulders project slightly and have hollow-chamfered mouldings. As in room 2 the lintel is a large block of brown limestone, which is surmounted by a relieving arch.

On the W. wall a pointed arch with hollow-chamfered mouldings was inserted into the opening to the porch (E5.16). Although they are contemporary, the jambs are not bonded into the surrounding wall except at plinth level, where the N. side of the arch is part of a single large slab spanning beneath the window (E5.4) to the N. wall. A similar stone forms the lintel of the ground-floor window. Above springer level the arch and the surrounding wall are in bond. The mortar joints have been lined out, a technique also seen on the rebuilt cross wall (E9.8). The arch gives the appearance of having been adapted to fit the space; the junction between jambs and arch is an awkward one, and the curve of the arch suggests that it was designed for a narrower opening. Furthermore the plinths are below floor level and must always have been so; the southern plinth is visible as a shallow corbel in the room below.

Most of the W. wall was rebuilt at the same time as the arch. The window to the N. (E5.4) is a Period 1 feature, but the lintel is the only element not to have been reset; S. of the arch the wall was rebuilt to insert a garderobe. A stone doorway with a four-centred head (E5.17; Pl. VI, B) is set diagonally across the corner of the room. The surround is rebated for a door, which hinged on the eastern jamb and opened into a recess in the adjoining wall. The garderobe interior has been blocked, but part of a step remains. Beneath the adjoining S. window (E6.6) a roughly arched tapered opening was cut to form a sluice (E6.14). The base was formed from a hollowed slab set at floor level, which had a lip to the exterior (E2.14).

In addition to its E. window (E1.5) the first floor of the porch has a small single light window in the N. wall. In the S. wall there is a piscina with an ogee head (E6.21); the circular bowl, which has been cut back to the wall face has a central raised rosette over the drainage hole. Stone slabs were used for both the floor and ceiling of the porch.

The structure of both the first and second floors dates largely from this period. In room 5 the floor joists are carried on a grid of beams; the N.-S. members are morticed into the E.-W. members, which are supported on corbels (C3-7); three of these belong to this phase and two are reused. The joists are housed in open mortices in the upper faces of the beams. In room 6 the structure has been altered; the terminal beams appear to have been lodged on offsets in the N. and S. walls, and one of the intermediate beams was supported on corbels, (C1, new; C11, reused). However the other beam is an insertion, cut into the fabric of the stair tower (E9.16), and it is not clear how the floor was originally arranged at this end of the room.



There is a possibility that the joists were continuous, although this makes their span rather long, but it is more probable that the floor plan copied the N. end of room 5, and that beam and joists have been rotated through 90°. There was a step down onto the stone floor of the porch.

The construction of the floor above is simpler; in each room the joists were supported by four cross-beams, which were built into deep sockets within the walls. In the E. wall of room 8 these are large enough to allow the beams to be lowered into place after the wall was built (E5.19–21). The mortices for the joists are closed, except in the S. bay of room 8; this also indicates that the floor structure is original to this phase. The lateral faces of the joists contain rows of small round holes at c. 0.22 m centres, which housed the framework for the lath and plaster infill. This floor is now reached by a 19th-century staircase and there is no clear evidence for its predecessor. The survival of original joists limits its position to the extremities of room 7, or the N. end of room 8. Here there are some otherwise unexplained sockets in the wall which may have been part of a stair structure (E5.18; E8.14; E9.10) and other considerations also favour this position. Throughout the building all the major ceiling beams were deeply chamfered.

Room 7 was constructed as a *columbarium* and the long walls are a honeycomb of slab-built recesses (E7.13). A number have been destroyed by the insertion of the door to room 8, but there are 86 surviving pigeon-holes in the E. wall, arranged in seven tiers, from floor level to the underside of the valley gutter (Pl. VII, B). The two lowest rows are continuous but the upper are built in banks of five between the roof trusses, their spacing is not completely regular. The W. wall was similarly laid out, but on this side the plaster was not stripped to reveal the full pattern; some have been destroyed by an inserted window (E7.3). At the N. end of this wall there is one larger recess (E7.14) which has not been reopened. The centre of the N. wall was taken up with a window (E4.6) and the flue to the ground-floor fireplace, so that the pigeon-holes are confined to the corners (E8.12, 13). In the S. wall there is a single bank of five (E6.24). There must have been c. 190 nest boxes in total. The S. wall also contains the entrance, which is set behind a screen wall and approached by a short flight of steps. It opens onto an external platform, which connects with a door to room 8. The whole is cantilevered out from the inner face of the wall on a platform of large slabs. The pigeon-holes were not repeated in room 8, which had no other special features.

The original roof to room 7 survives, albeit in poor condition. It consisted of four raised-cruck trusses (E6, E7. T5–8), pegged at the apex and morticed for a ridge-piece. There was a single trenched purlin per side with pegs for up to six common rafters. The present collars are replacements, set above ceiling level and bolted to the trusses, but there is the mortice for an original collar close to the base of the W. blade of truss 5. It is set too low to allow headroom, but this would not be necessary in a pigeon loft. The truss feet were set into the wall and survive as slots where the timbers have rotted or been removed, as has happened to truss 8 and the whole of the roof over room 8 (E5, E9. T1–4). This was removed in 1951; photographs taken at the time show that it had been of the same construction as the roof over room 7. Set between the two rooms on the head of the cross wall were cantilevered stone slabs used to form a valley gutter. This was served by the Period 1 internal drain, which continued in use and was built up to the new level.

PERIOD 3A (Figs. 2–4)

The only alteration made at this period was the replacement of the fireplace in room 3 with the present one (E8.15; Pl. VII, C). It has moulded jambs and a four-centred arch in a square head. There is a tall overmantel with a scroll-moulded cornice. A small wall-recess was created next to it (E8.16) and the surrounding area patched with rubble set in loam. These alterations respected the cross wall (E8.19), and can be distinguished from work of the next phase on grounds of quality and date.

PERIOD 3B (Figs. 2-4)

Work of this period was set in loam with white inclusions which distinguish it from Period 1. The quality of craftsmanship was also noticeably inferior to the earlier periods.

The principal changes took place on the ground floor, where the axis was altered by removing the cross wall between rooms 3 and 4 (E8.19; E9.12). A timber lintel was inserted to carry this wall at first-floor level. The face of the N. wall in room 4, which was offset at ceiling level, was cut back flush with the face of the wall in room 6 (E8.17), and three corbels inserted to carry the first-floor timbers (E8.C8-10). The adjoining window in the E. wall (E5.3) was enlarged rather crudely by cutting away the N. splay (E5.12) and inserting a new stone mullion. The walls were then plastered and painted; there is a foliate design on the new N. wall of room 4, and a geometric design of opposed triangles in black and yellow on the jamb of the opening to room 3 (Pl. VII, D). This is repeated on part of the newel stair wall. Room 1 was divided from room 4 by a new partition S. of the front door, where a ceiling beam, morticed for studs on its underside, was inserted into the stair wall (E5.15; E9.16).

In room 1 part of the S. wall was cut back to create a range of five shelves (E6.25). The two lower shelves are of stone and three upper were of timber, supported by stone brackets; impressions in the plaster indicate their former positions. The plaster in this room was more roughly applied than in room 4 and it bore no traces of paint. The short length of cross wall S. of the stairs was demolished (E6.18) to make an entrance from room 2 and the S. wall was partially refaced to incorporate a built-in alcove (E6.29). More alcoves were built into the flank of the newel stair, facing room 2, and a number of the treads were renewed (Pl. VII, A). From this period the stairs can only have been screened by a timber partition, as the treads extended right to the edge of the staircase block.

Few alterations were made upstairs; in room 6 the projecting garderobe was removed, and in room 5 a rather crude window was created using corbel 26 as a lintel. On the top floor the pigeon-holes in room 7 were filled in and a new window created in the W. wall (E7.3).

The principal change to the exterior was in the windows, which are all alike in having chamfered stone surrounds containing sockets for a grid of iron stanchions. This is the form taken by the enlarged window (E1.3), which has a stone mullion and formerly had a timber transom, and it is possible that the other windows contained wooden frames of a similar pattern. Certainly their present appearance is not medieval, and it may be that decayed stone tracery was cut out at this period.

PERIOD 4A (Figs. 2-4)

Work of this period was minor and of poor quality. It consisted mainly of cutting a doorway (E6.26) through the shelves (E6.25) of Period 3b. This gave access to a lean-to range built into the S. side of the house, which has left scars in the S. wall (E2.17). An oven on the S. side of the stack (E2.16) replaced the original.

PERIOD 4B (Figs. 2-4)

In c. 1870 the building underwent a restoration which removed the Period 4a work. Other external alterations included repairs to the stacks (E2.29; E4.8) and the blocking of windows in the E. and N. elevations (E3.7; E4.6). The W. window E3.1 was extended to ground level to open into a conservatory, and most of the other wooden window frames and the boarded external doors were fitted at this time. The front garden wall and gateposts were constructed and also the arched gateway to the side passage (E1.14).

Internally the floor level was lowered by up to 0.4 m and the newel stair was blocked and partially destroyed by a new wooden staircase (E9.5, 15). The ground floor was divided into four rooms by the insertion of two new wooden partitions, and a fireplace with a brick flue was created in room 4 (E8.18). On the upper floors partitions and a new attic stair were inserted into room 5, room 7 was given a fireplace, and a door to room 8 was cut through the

cross wall (E9.13). The attic rooms were replastered, but the rooms on the lower floors were panelled in pine, varnished brown.

More recent alterations are mainly minor, consisting of patching and repointing connected with the insertion of plumbing and the removal of lean-to buildings from the N. and W. sides. The most radical change was the replacement of the E. roof in 1951.

DISCUSSION

PERIOD 1 (Figs. 5, 6)

Several of the most singular features of the Chantry are original and have conditioned the subsequent form of the building. They also provide the only evidence for its primary function. The square tower-like plan gives it the appearance of a defensive structure, but in fact the walls are no more than 1 m thick and there was at least one large window on the ground floor (E1.3); the N. wall owes its windowless appearance to its position on the plot boundary, where it was abutted by adjoining buildings for most of its history. The first floor was well-lit and retains its full complement of original windows, apart from those in the Period 1 porch.

There were two rooms on each floor, which were apparently unheated, and which do not retain any original features other than windows. The exception is room 6, which has a garderobe (E6.19) and a large, shouldered arch (E6.20) in the opening to the former porch.

There is evidence to suggest that the building had a low-pitched, parapeted roof, with a cresset mounted on the S. wall. If this consisted of an iron fire basket on a pole, it could have been secured by setting the basket on a slab oversailing the parapet course, passing the pole through a hole in the slab, and supporting the bottom of the pole on the corbel between the first-floor windows. This is consistent with the surviving evidence, not all of which is primary.

This interpretation of the evidence from the Chantry must stand on its own merits, as there appear to be no directly comparable surviving structures. Medieval beacons are well attested; an inquisition of 1324 listed 31 on the Isle of Wight,²² where there is also a surviving 14th-century lighthouse at St Catherine's Down.²³ It takes the form of an octagonal buttressed stone tower with a pyramidal roof to the lantern. In Dorset it has been suggested that St Aldhelm's Chapel on the Isle of Purbeck was a lighthouse of similar type, but this is discounted by the Royal Commission because of the difficulties in servicing a beacon mounted on the roof.²⁴

A further pointer to the original function of the Chantry is the position it occupies within the town. Bridport has a classic T-shaped planned layout (Fig. 1) occupying a low promontory at the confluence of the R. Brit and the R. Asker. East and West Street cross the spur; South Street is laid out at right angles, running the length of the promontory. The Chantry is situated at its S. end, on one of the last burgage plots.

Bridport was a town at the time of the Domesday survey,²⁵ but it is not clear whether the street plan, or part of it, dates to this period or is later. It was certainly established by the 13th century, when there are references to a number of surviving topographical features.²⁶ By this period also the rope industry, to which Bridport

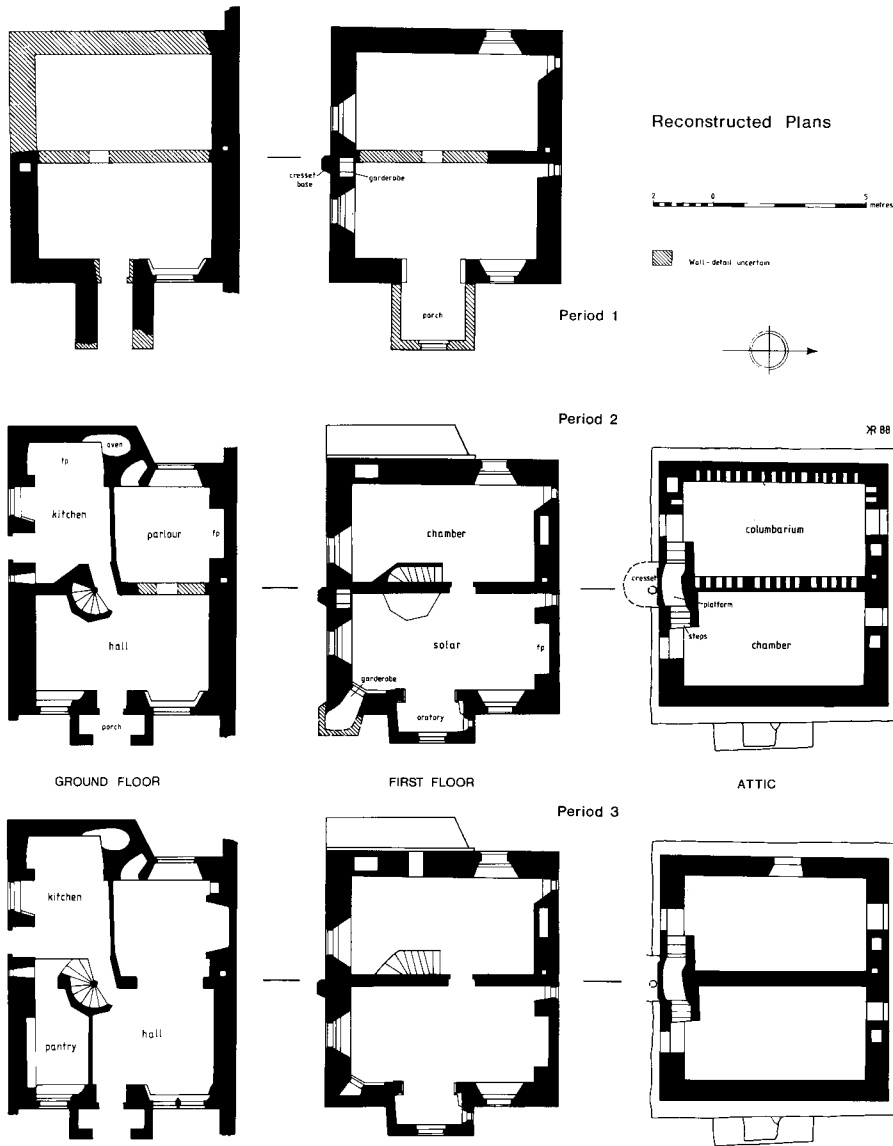
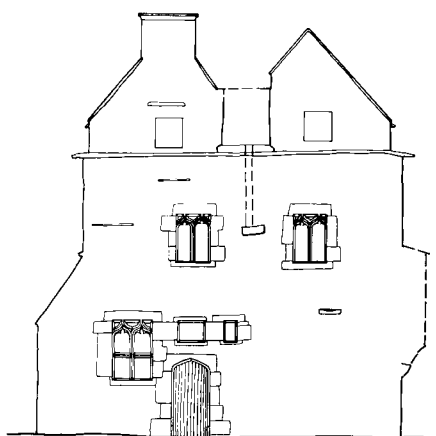


FIG. 5

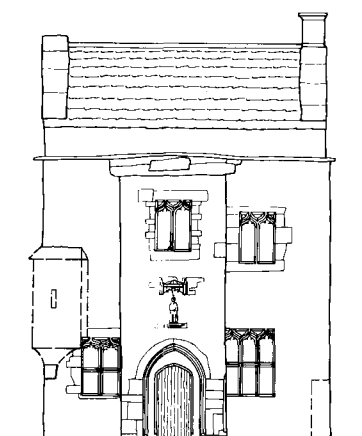
Development of the plan, Period 1–Period 3. Scale 1:250

owed its considerable medieval prosperity, had developed, and the town received a charter in 1253.²⁷

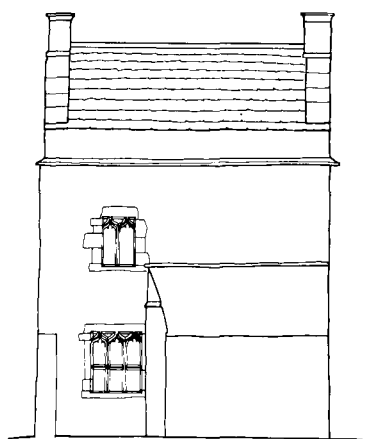
Bridport, which is two miles from the sea at West Bay, was never a port of any consequence, and the history of its harbour installations is intermittent. There are two late 13th-century references to a harbour;²⁸ a court record of 1279–80 which reveals that boats came as far upstream as Bridport to land, and a commission of



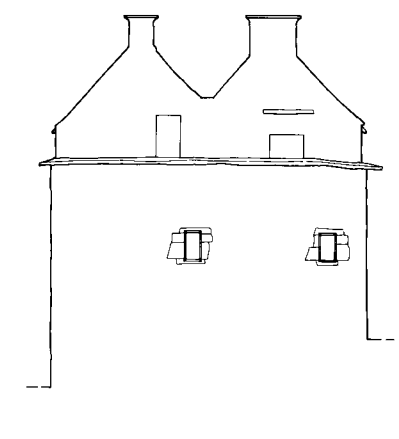
South (E2)



East (E1)



West (E3)



North (E4)

R 88

FIG. 6

Reconstructed external elevations, Period 2. Scale 1:200

1274 reporting a dispute over tolls. The W. bank of the river mouth, at West Bay, was owned by the Abbot of Cerne and the E. bank by the Prior of Frampton, neither of whom would allow the burgesses to collect the tolls in the borough's harbour. It has been suggested that this harbour was on the Brit, W. of the Chantry, where there is a silted loop of the river. By the late 14th century it appears to have fallen out of use, for it was decided in 1385 to create a harbour 'where there was none', and by 1395 a controller of customs existed. However this harbour was in disrepair by 1450 and silted up by Leland's time. Boats were then pulled up on the beach until the present harbour at West Bay was created in the 18th century.

Within this framework it is possible to suggest that the Chantry may have originated as a municipal building connected with a harbour just outside the town. It was not defensive, although it could have served as a lookout, and it incorporated a light as a guide to an awkward harbour entrance. Its principal function was probably the collection of tolls at the S. approach to the town, in conjunction with a barrier across the road. There are references to properties 'without the bars' in both West and South Street²⁹ from the time of Edward I, and a contemporary document³⁰ states that by the W. gate, there was a *tourel* on the S. side standing near the water, which suggests that the Chantry had a counterpart. These features were not part of a full defensive circuit, but barriers controlling entry and exit. The rivers formed natural boundaries round much of the town, but on the N., landward side there was a town ditch, first mentioned in the mid 13th century. There was probably a bar on the E. bridge although no mention appears to be made of it.

Bars linked by a ditch are recorded at several other towns. Banbury,³¹ where there was an important livestock market, had four bars, first recorded in 1219. Their form is unknown, for the last of them was demolished in 1817. Salisbury was granted the right to build defences in 1227³² but they were still unfinished *c.* 1440, and the entrances to the city were controlled by eight bars, first mentioned in 1269. These took the form of wooden barriers as late as the 15th century, and only two formal gates were ever constructed. Beverley had a town ditch, first mentioned in the 12th century,³³ four main gates and a series of lesser bars and turnstiles, for which the 15th-century building accounts survive. The original form of the gates is unknown for they were rebuilt in brick at the start of the 15th century; the N. gate is still standing.³⁴

It remains to consider the date of the Period 1 work at the Chantry. There is a firm terminal date of *c.* 1370 imposed by the Period 2 alterations, but otherwise there is only the general context of the building within the town and the not very pronounced architectural style of the Period 1 features. A recurrent feature is the use of the shouldered lintel, in the garderobe, the windows to room 5, and the opening from room 6 to the porch. Doorways with shouldered lintels occur in the late 13th-century solar at Stokesay Castle, Shropshire,³⁵ and within Dorset at Corfe Castle,³⁶ where there is an example in the SW. gatehouse, dated to *c.* 1250. Ludlow Castle, Shropshire has early 14th-century garderobe recesses with shouldered heads.³⁷

A late 13th- or early 14th-century date would be consistent with the architectural evidence and would also coincide with a period of municipal growth, following

the grant of the Charter in 1253. A number of officials had been appointed by the time of Edward III,³⁸ and the evidence for litigation indicates that there was an active harbour in the late 13th century. This was apparently moribund a century later, so that the building was leased as a dwelling.

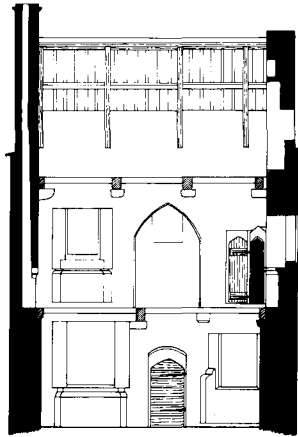
PERIOD 2 (Figs. 5, 7–9)

The Chantry owes its name to its identification with the dwelling of the chantry priest of St Leonard. If it is compared with other buildings known to have housed chantry priests and parochial clergy,³⁹ the size and standard of accommodation provided is very similar. The mid 15th-century chantry house at Trent, Dorset⁴⁰ measures 37×20 ft. externally and is two storeys high, with a hall and a kitchen, separated by a screens passage, on the ground floor and two chambers above. All but one of the chambers were heated. The chantry at Combe Raleigh, Devon⁴¹ was almost the same size and provided the same accommodation, except that the upper-floor levels were split to provide an open-roofed chamber with a garderobe over the hall, but a ceiled chamber, with an attic above, over the kitchen. All the rooms except the attic were heated and access to the upper floors was by a newel stair at the end of the cross passage. Both these buildings were intended to accommodate a single chantry priest.

The vicarage, Congresbury, Somerset⁴² is slightly larger, measuring *c.* 42×20 ft. but has the same bipartite, two storeyed plan, including a porch with a first-floor chamber. An example of the smallest type of priest's house is the Old Rectory, Winford, Somerset,⁴³ measuring only 20×15 ft. internally, which had a hall, screens passage and buttery on the ground floor and a single chamber on the first floor. This is comparable in size with the houses provided for the Vicars Choral in the Vicars' Close at Wells,⁴⁴ which had internal dimensions of 20×13 ft. and a single room on each floor linked by a newel stair. Both rooms were heated. The two priests of Munden's chantry, Bridport, whose house does not survive, had a hall, kitchen and pantry, and a room each. They also had a garden, an orchard and a dovecote.⁴⁵

It can be seen that the Chantry with its internal dimensions of 18 ft. 9 in. \times 22 ft. (5.7×6.7 m) has a similar floor area to the smallest type of accommodation such as Winford, but in number of rooms it is comparable to other establishments for a single chantry priest such as Trent or Combe Raleigh. The constraints on space and unorthodox plan are a consequence of adapting a pre-existing building.

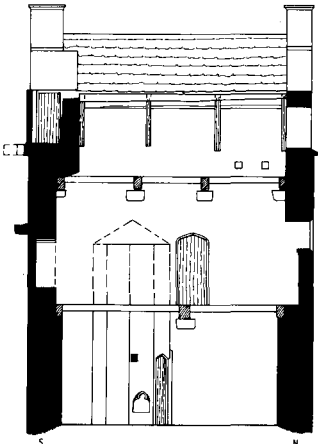
A normal complement of rooms consisted of a hall, screens passage, kitchen or buttery and parlour on the ground floor, with a solar and one or more other chambers on the first floor. Within the Chantry, room 1 can be identified as a hall, although it is unheated; room 2, with its large fireplace, as the kitchen, and room 3, which was also heated, as a parlour. There is no room for a screens passage; a short passage linking hall to kitchen is combined with the newel stair. The parlour was probably entered directly from the hall. Upstairs room 6, the best room in the building, was clearly the solar. It was heated, had its own garderobe and a sink set in the wall. The Period 1 garderobe, which was not filled in, was probably retained as a



East (E5)



South (E6)

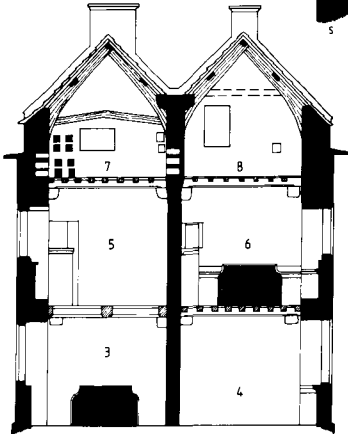


Cross Wall (E9)

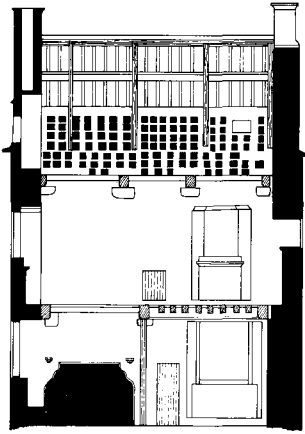
The Chantry
BRIDPORT
Reconstructed Internal Elevations

2 0 5 metres

✱ 88



North (E8)



West (E7)

FIG. 7
Reconstructed internal elevations, Period 2. Scale 1:200

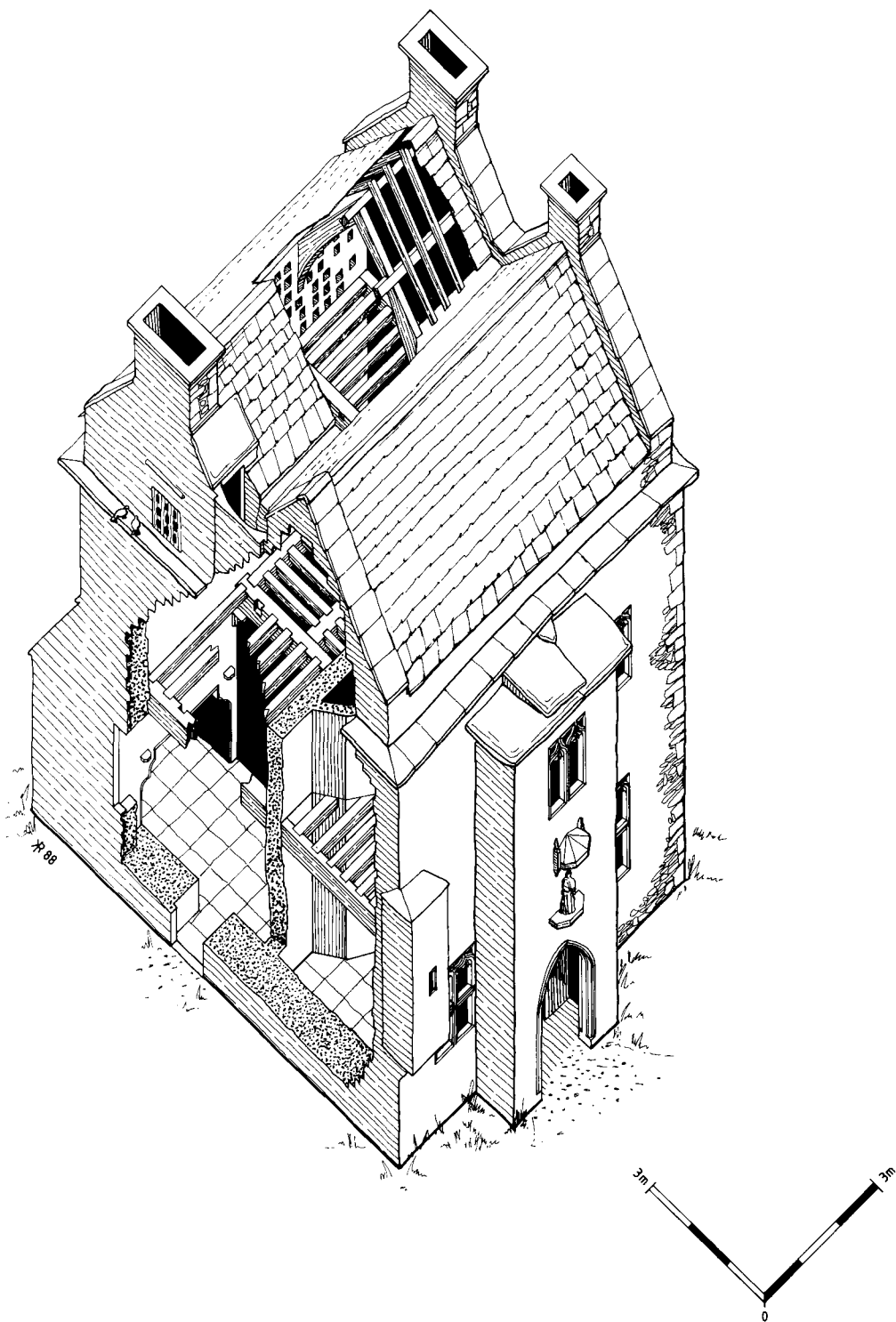


FIG. 8
Axonometric reconstruction, Period 2

cupboard.⁴⁶ The piscina indicates that the first floor of the porch was used as an oratory. Room 5 was plainer and unheated; it may have been used to house a lodger.

It is uncertain whether the plain attic room 8 was used for accommodation or storage, but room 7 was purpose-built as a *columbarium*. This is an unusual position, for the commonest medieval form was a free-standing circular tower. The dovecote at Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire⁴⁷ could accommodate *c.* 1200 nests, but a more modest example, at the Old Rectory, Kidlington, Oxon⁴⁸ had 440 nest boxes. There are 14th-century excavated examples, estimated to have had a similar capacity, in Bristol⁴⁹ and at Englishcombe, Bath.⁵⁰ At Totnes, Devon a cob-walled dovecote was built on the plot appropriated to the town vicarage in the 13th century.⁵¹ There is a contemporary example of nest boxes within a dwelling at Godlingstone Manor, Dorset, where they are built into the top stage of a 14th-century round tower.⁵²

At Bridport access for the birds was probably by way of the N. and S. windows, which could have been fitted with wooden louvres. People gained entry via a door opening onto the roof-level platform, which was reached in turn from room 8. It is not certain how room 8 communicated with room 6, but a simple ladder stair at the N. end of the building, where the joists have been replaced, seems the most probable arrangement. The structural evidence makes it clear that neither the newel stair nor the projecting garderobe can have been carried up to attic level. The roof level platform also provided access to the cresset. It is unlikely that this remained in use, but its retention may have been stipulated in the terms of the lease.

Although the majority of the square-headed window openings belong to Periods 1 or 2, none of the original window tracery survives. It is possible that there were wooden window frames, but it is much more probable, in a building of this quality, that stone was used. Tracery in a square-headed window of a similar size can be seen in the parish church, where the S. porch has an early 15th-century oriel made of the same stone.⁵³ The tracery in the Chantry probably took the form of a pair of trefoil-headed lights with pierced spandrels; the larger windows may have had a transom.⁵⁴ Windows of this type occur at Woodsford Castle, Dorset,⁵⁵ where licence to crenellate was granted in 1335 and building work was completed *c.* 1370.

Parallels can be found at Woodsford Castle for several other Period 2 features; the doors have four-centred heads and continuous chamfered mouldings, one of the upper rooms has a stone sink with an external drain set in the wall, and another has a cusped, ogee-headed piscina⁵⁶ of a similar pattern to both the piscina and the lamp recess in the newel stair at Bridport. The fireplaces added to rooms 2 and 6 in Period 2 are also consistent with a 14th-century date. The latter has a slightly projecting shouldered lintel⁵⁷ and the former a pair of brackets for lights.⁵⁸ Therefore the architectural and documentary evidence is in agreement in pointing to a date shortly after 1368 for the conversion of the building into a chantry priest's house.

PERIOD 3 (Fig. 5)

The only feature belonging to Period 3a is the fireplace surround in room 3. This is of early 16th-century type and similar to one of the fireplaces in the Abbot's Lodging at Muchelney Abbey.⁵⁹ The deep overmantel may have been painted in

imitation of more elaborate examples, which were frequently carved with a row of quatrefoils.⁶⁰ This fireplace therefore dates to a period when the building was still a chantry priest's house.

More extensive alterations took place in Period 3b, marking an adaption to family use. The only features which can provide a date are the wall paintings⁶¹ and the ground-floor E. window, which has a thick stone mullion and formerly had a wooden transom. A date of c. 1600 might be appropriate for these alterations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Mr P. J. Drury, at the time English Heritage inspector for the area, who initiated the project; Mr N. Phillips, architect for the Vivat Trust; Mr P. Aley, the project architect; Mr J. Sales, then curator of Bridport Museum; Mr J. Turner, who assisted with the measured survey; and Mr J. B. Whitehouse for his comments and assistance with the documentary evidence. Bridport Museum kindly supplied Plates I, A and VII, C, D.

NOTES

- ¹ Archaeological Consultant, 24 New King Street, Bath BA1 2BL.
- ² J. Newman and N. Pevsner, *The buildings of England: Dorset* (London, 1972), 111.
- ³ The survey was carried out by the Photogrammetry Unit of York University for English Heritage.
- ⁴ Factors taken into account included the type of stone used, the size, shape and manner in which the blocks were laid, and the matrix in which they were set.
- ⁵ Features such as the door in the corner of room 6 (E5.17), have only been numbered once.
- ⁶ K. J. Penn, *Historic Towns in Dorset* (Dorset Nat. Hist. & Archaeol. Soc. mono. ser. 1, 1980), 23–29.
- ⁷ K. M. Wood-Legh, *A Small Household of the 15th Century* (Manchester, 1955).
- ⁸ J. Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, 2 vols. (1774); 3rd edn., ed. W. Shipp and J. W. Hodson, 4 vols. (1861–70), vol. 2, 21. All references are to the 3rd edition.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 21.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 28; dated 35 Edw. III and 38 Edw. III.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 28; Feb 4, 42 Edw. III.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 28–29. On 19.2.1390 William Sherard became chaplain after the death of Richard Stratton (Wilts. C.R.O., Bishop Waltham's Register, 130). Both are referred to as the chantry of St Katherine.
- ¹³ Bridport has extensive town records and documentary work on the Chantry has been undertaken by the Revd E. B. Short. This summary is based on his notes. Mr J. B. Whitehouse has also made a study of the Bridport chantries, and I am grateful for his references and comments on this part of the report.
- ¹⁴ Dorset C.R.O. B3/CD24.
- ¹⁵ Dorset C.R.O. B3/S247.
- ¹⁶ R. W. Brunskill, *The Traditional Farm Buildings of Britain* (London, 1982), 80–86.
- ¹⁷ *Op. cit.* in note 8, vol. 2, 28.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 22.
- ¹⁹ A copy of the former and the original of the latter are in Bridport Museum.
- ²⁰ R.C.H.M., *County of Dorset*, vol. 1; *West Dorset* (1952), 48–49 with plan.
- ²¹ In Bridport Museum.
- ²² G. C. Dunning, 'The History of Niton, Isle of Wight', *Proc. Isle of Wight Nat. Hist. Soc.* 4 (1946–55), 191–204.
- ²³ *Ibid.*; N. Pevsner and D. Lloyd, *The Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (London, 1967), 766.
- ²⁴ R.C.H.M., *County of Dorset*, vol. 2; *South-East* (1970), 412.
- ²⁵ *Op. cit.* in note 6, 23.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ³¹ M. D. Lobel (ed.), 'Banbury', *Historic Towns Atlas* 1 (1969), 1–8.
- ³² R.C.H.M., *City of Salisbury*, vol. 1 (1980), 50–51.
- ³³ R.C.H.M., *Beverley: An archaeological and architectural study* Supplementary Series (1982), 39–45.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ³⁵ M. Wood, *The English Medieval House* (London, 1965), 339.
- ³⁶ *Op. cit.* in note 24, 57–78; pl. 77.
- ³⁷ *Op. cit.* in note 35, pl. LIX.H.

- ³⁸ Op. cit. in note 6, 26.
- ³⁹ W. A. Pantin, 'Medieval priests' houses in south-west England', *Medieval Archaeol.*, 1 (1957), 118-46.
- ⁴⁰ W. A. Pantin, 'Chantry priests' houses and other medieval lodgings', *Medieval Archaeol.*, III (1959), 216-58.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 241-43.
- ⁴² Op. cit. in note 39, 128-31.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 138-39.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.
- ⁴⁵ Op. cit. in note 7.
- ⁴⁶ There is a 16th-century example of the same process at Acton Court, Avon, where a garderobe within a chimney stack was partially blocked and a panelled cupboard built within the reduced recess (survey by author).
- ⁴⁷ Op. cit. in note 16, 80-86; figs. 61-62.
- ⁴⁸ S. M. Youngs and J. Clark (eds.), 'Medieval Britain in 1981' *Medieval Archaeol.*, xxvi (1982), 204.
- ⁴⁹ L. E. Webster and J. Cherry (eds.), 'Medieval Britain in 1979', *Medieval Archaeol.*, xxiv (1980), 236.
- ⁵⁰ D. M. Wilson and J. G. Hurst (eds.), 'Medieval Britain in 1956', *Medieval Archaeol.*, 1 (1957), 168-69.
- ⁵¹ S. M. Youngs, J. Clark and T. Barry, 'Medieval Britain and Ireland in 1985', *Medieval Archaeol.*, xxx (1986), 133.
- ⁵² Op. cit. in note 24, 294-95.
- ⁵³ Op. cit. in note 20, 45.
- ⁵⁴ Op. cit. in note 35, Pl. LVb, c.
- ⁵⁵ Op. cit. in note 24, 397-400; pl. 199.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pl. 4.
- ⁵⁷ Op. cit. in note 35, 265.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 263.
- ⁵⁹ N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South and West Somerset* (London, 1958), 248-50.
- ⁶⁰ Op. cit. in note 35, pl. XLII. The overmantel from another, found locally, was stored in the Chantry.
- ⁶¹ The wall painting was not conserved at the time of writing.