

# St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill

The Evidence for Lanfranc's Church and the Possible Anglo-Saxon Minster

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# ST MARY, HARROW-ON-THE-HILL: THE EVIDENCE FOR LANFRANC'S CHURCH AND THE POSSIBLE ANGLO-SAXON MINSTER

*Limited survey work on the standing building at St Mary's church, Harrow-on-the-Hill has shown that, despite assertions to the contrary, the fabric of the nave of the late eleventh century church survives, and that the present early thirteenth century arcades are insertions. There are also signs that the predecessors of the present late medieval transepts were diminutive structures; it is just possible these originated as porticus of an even earlier minster church. While no minster was ever directly mentioned at Harrow, the indirect documentary and place-name evidence suggests that such a foundation existed*

## Introduction

The parish church of St Mary, Harrow (TQ 1531 8745) in the former county of Middlesex (Fig 1) and now in Greater London has been the subject of previous survey and research (Gardner 1918, RCHME 1937), but new visits to the building were made by this writer in the summer of 2007. The first objective was to ascertain whether any of the extant fabric could be related to the church begun by Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury in 1087 and completed by his successor, Anselm, in 1094 (VCH 1971, 249-50). The second objective was to establish whether, if there was evidence of a church of this date, it incorporated the fabric of a still earlier building.

Certain features of the church which were accessible and thought significant to its building history were surveyed using 3m tape. Due to limited accessibility, some features could only be sketch-surveyed, including the diagnostically important quoins in the spandrels of the nave arcades (Figs 5, 6).

## Historical background

Harrow is first documented in 767, when it was described as *Gumeninga hearh*, or 'shrine of the Gumeningas' (S 106). The latter were one of the early Saxon kin-groups implied in west Middlesex by place-names. Others were the *Gillingas* and *Geddingas* of Ealing and Yeading respectively (Stenton 1943, 54). In addition to these, the name of the Lidding Brook in the eastern part of the parish of Harrow might imply the existence of a *Liddingas*. The similarity of these names, however, combined with the proximity of the areas they were supposed to inhabit, might suggest they were one and the same.

In the charter of 767, King Offa of Mercia (757-96) granted thirty hides of land to one Abbot Stihthbert in return for a like amount of land *in Ciltinne in loco ubi dicitur Wichama*. In addition to this, Offa made a gift to the abbot of six hides of land and a *habatatio* east of the Lidding. *Wichama* has usually been identified as Wycombe in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns (VCH 1971, 203; Zaluckyj 2001, 151), and it is indeed true that in the much later Domesday Survey, the combined value of High and West Wycombe was 29 ½ hides (VCH 1906, 223, 258). On the other hand, Margaret Gelling has suggested that *Wichama* was Wickham near Hurstpierpoint, Sussex, and that *Ciltinne* was neighbouring Chiltington (Anglo Saxons.net S 106). The combined value of land in Hurstpierpoint, Wickham and Chiltington on the eve of the Conquest was 30 ½ hides (VCH 1905, 440-2). It is not certain what monastery or minster Abbot Stihthbert was head of (Blair 2005, 129), though the later history of Harrow may suggest that it was a dependency of Christ Church, Canterbury. The six hides and the dwelling house mentioned in the grant must be represented by the later settlement of Preston (Fig 2).

In 793, Offa made a grant (S 132) to the Archbishop of Canterbury of sixty hides in Hayes and Yeading, and thirty hides in Twickenham (Fig 1), but by 799 X 801, Harrow was in lay hands (S 1186a), being held by Pilheard, a thegn of King Coenwulf of Mercia. Coenwulf, his wife Cynethryth and his daughter Cwoenthryth were notorious appropriators of minsters and monastic lands (Blair *op cit*, 130-1). They had usurped control of the important minsters of Reculver and Minster-in-Thanel, Kent, Cwoenthryth becoming abess of the latter. It was Archbishop Wulfred (805-32) who fought to return the minsters to ecclesiastical control. At the council held in 825 at the unidentified place of *Clofesho*, Cwoenthryth made amends for the spoliation of Reculver and Minster in Thanet by surrendering 104 hides in Harrow, *Herefrethinglond*,

### Historical background

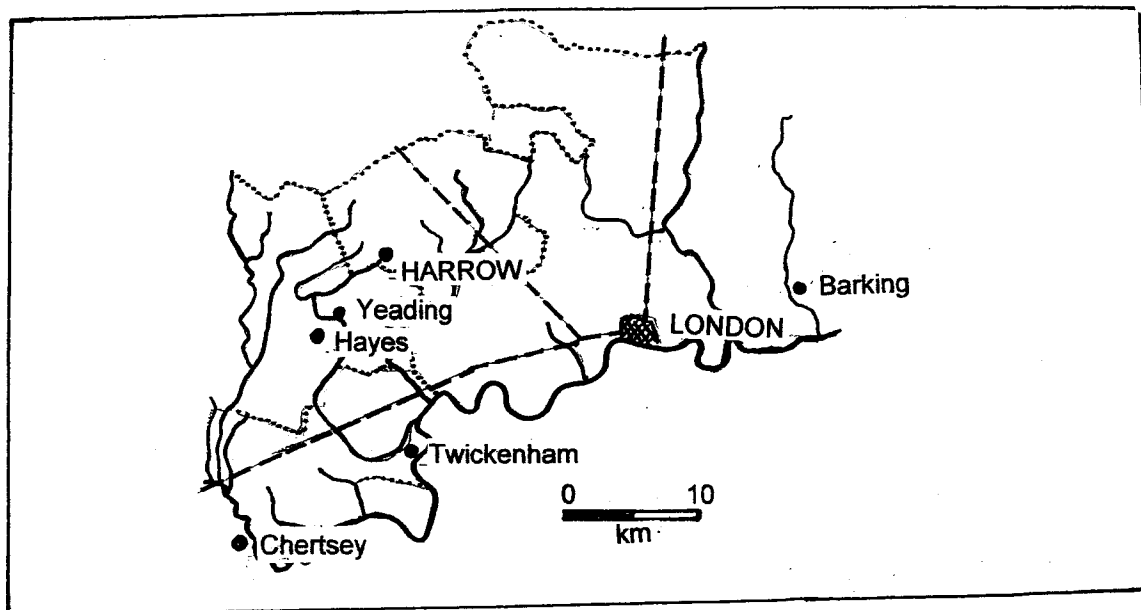


Figure 1. Location of parish of Harrow, and places mentioned in text

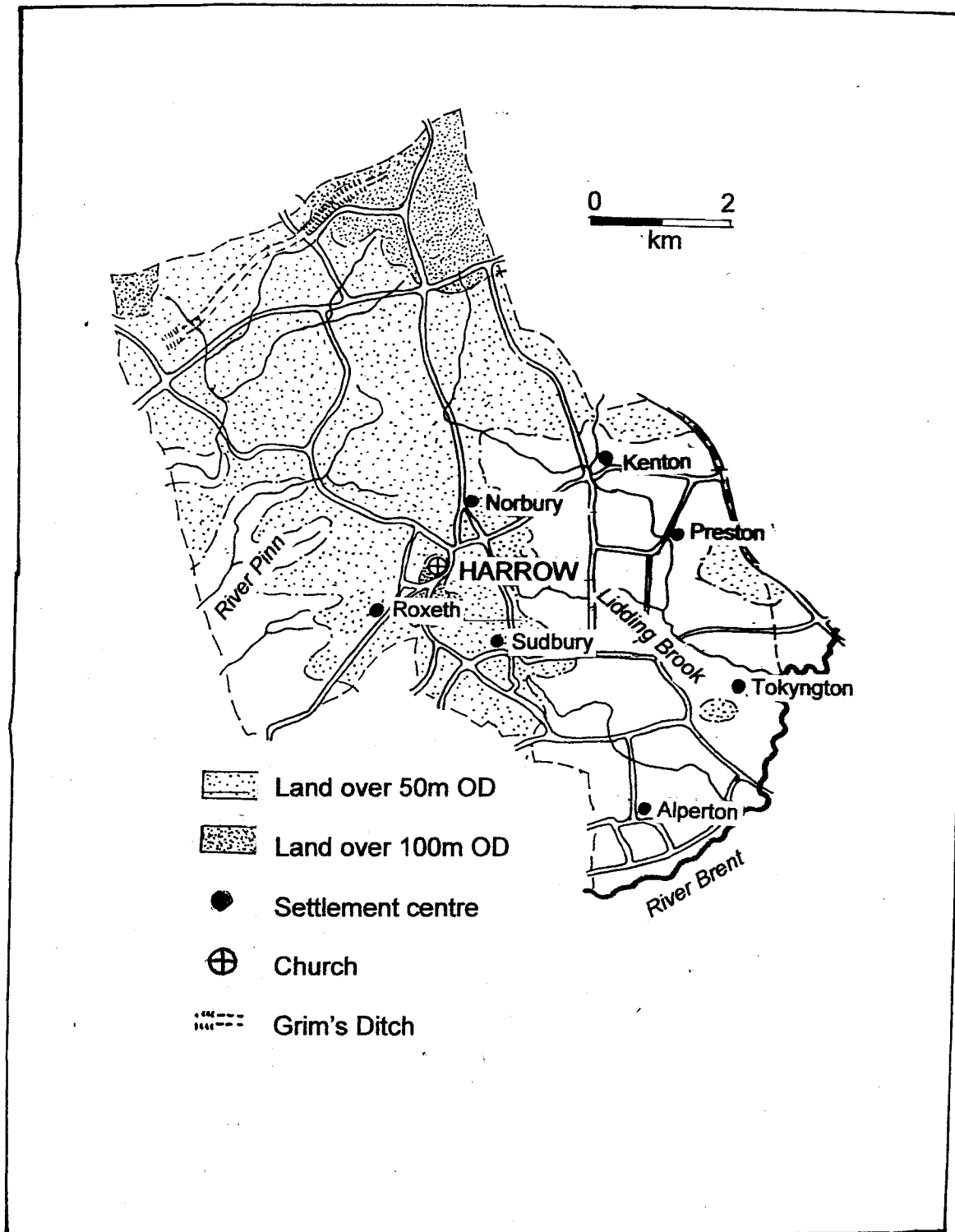
Wembley and Yeading (S 1436). While *Herefrethinglond* cannot be identified with certainty, the place-name derives from the personal name Herefrith. One Herefrith was a priest who died in 747, but whoa year previously had delivered a letter from St Boniface to King Aethelbald of Mercia (716-57), warning the latter about his laviscious conduct (Noble 2000, 108-9). Another Herefrith was a witness to a charter issued next to the Archbishop of Canterbury's minster at Croydon, Surrey in 809 (S164). Harrow was a member of the Deanery of Croydon from the twelfth century onwards (VCH 1971, 250), but this may have been a more ancient arrangement. Was *Herefrethinglond* in Harrow synonymous with Preston, and the land then held directly by the Dean of Canterbury, being later delegated to a priest, hence the place-name?

Shortly after this time, Canterbury's lands in Middlesex, including Harrow, were held by Werhard, who appeared on a witness-list of 824 as a *diaconus* (S 1266). In 825 X 832, immediately after Canterbury had regained possession of Harrow, he witnessed a charter as *presbyter abbas* (S 1268). Is it more than coincidence that Werhard appears to have been promoted to abbot at the exact time that Canterbury recovered its estates in Harrow? In 833 X 845, but probably very shortly after Wulfred's death in 832, Werhard bequeathed a number of lands to Christ Church (S 1414). In Middlesex, these consisted of 104 hides in Harrow, which Werhard held from Archbishop Wulfred for life, and land from his own patrimony. The latter consisted of 32 hides in Hayes, an unspecified amount of land in *Megeldworthe*, eight hides at *Cuniland* (perhaps 'Colne-land' and an early name for Colham (Fig 1), which gelled at eight hides in 1086; VCH 1969, 124). It is assumed that Werhard retained the remaining 28 hides of the sixty hide estate of Hayes. He must have still exercised administrative control over Harrow, since, in 845, Werhard exchanged a hide of land in *Hroces seathum* (Roxeth; Fig 2) with Werenberht, a king's thegn, for a hide of land in Greenford (S 1194). In this charter, Werhard is described as *presbiter et abbate*.

For over two centuries after this time, there is no documentation of Harrow, though Twickenham was re-granted to the Archbishops of Canterbury in 941 by King Eadwig (S 477). Harrow re-appears in the Domesday Survey, when it was assessed at 100 hides, the other four hides, which were in Yeading, now being assessed with Hayes (Ibid, 120-1). By Edward the Confessor's reign, Harrow was in the hands of Earl Leofwine, Harold Godwineson's younger brother. It has been suggested that Harrow only passed into lay ownership after Leofwine was given an earldom in 1057 (Ibid, 98), but his father, Earl Godwine, was another usurper of church lands. Godwine had certainly deprived Canterbury of its manor of Folkestone shortly before this time (Walker 1997, 67). Canterbury had also lost Twickenham, which was incorporated into Earl Aelfgar's great estate of Isleworth (VCH 1969, 127). Canterbury never recovered Twickenham, but by 1086, Harrow was in the hands of Archbishop Lanfranc. According to the twelfth century chronicler Eadmer, Lanfranc began building a church at Harrow in the following year. Lanfranc died in 1089, and the

*St Mary, Harrow-on-the Hill*

church was consecrated by his successor, Archbishop Anselm, in 1094. The later history of the church is generally not relevant to this paper, and is discussed in VCH 1971, 249-55.



*Figure 2. Harrow, Anglo-Saxon and medieval settlement pattern*

## Topography of Harrow

Harrow lies within Gore hundred, in the north-western corner of the historic county of Middlesex and some 20km WNW of the City of London (Fig 1). Pinner, now a parish in its own right, was a dependent chapelry of Harrow in 1233 X 1240 (Ibid). Together, these lands constituted the hundred hides which the manor had been assessed at in 1086. The parish is bounded on the south by the River Brent and on the north by the linear earthwork known as Grim's Ditch.

Harrow Hill, which rises spectacularly above the basins of the Rivers Colne and Brent, reaches an altitude of 125m OD at St Mary's church. The remainder of the land in the parish is at 50-100m OD, except in the extreme north, where the high ground of Harrow Weald rises to over 130m OD. Settlement is dispersed throughout the parish. Four centres, Kenton, Alperton, Tokyngton and Preston have *-tun* suffixes suggesting eighth-tenth century origins (Hey 2004, 23). There is independent evidence, cited above, that Preston originated in the eighth century. The centres of Sudbury and Norbury, alias Greenhill, are only documented in the late thirteenth century (VCH 1971, 195-8) but have earlier origins, whose significance is discussed hereafter. Harrow Hill has a distinctive double-summit profile. St Mary's church (Fig 3) occupies the northern of these. There is little doubt that the hill is the site of the *Gumeninga hergae* mentioned in the charter of 767. While the place-name implies a pagan Saxon cult centre, quantities of Roman brick are found in the later fabric of the church (Figs 7-8). The hilltop site is an appropriate one for a Romano-British temple. The excavated temple site at Harlow occupies the summit of a much smaller but equally prominent hill (France and Gobel 1985, 12ff).

The churchyard at Harrow has man-made scarps 3m high to the south and east (Fig 3, a-b). The eastern one is a recent cutting to accommodate the road there, but the southern one may be earlier. Immediately to its south is the vicarage (c). The present building is of 18<sup>th</sup> century and later date, but it lies on the site of the vicarage mentioned in 1233 X 1240. To the north-east of the church, the house known as The Grove (d) was formerly the rectory. That it adjoins the hide of land held by the priest mentioned in 1086 (VCH 1969, 121) raises the possibility that The Grove is on or near the priest's house of that date. The gardens of the house are surrounded by a bank 2-3m high (e). This must represent the course of the garden wall mentioned in 1796 (VCH 1971, 252) and the bank is almost certainly post-medieval. In the garden of Druries House, dated by inscription to 1863, is another earthwork bank (f) which is about 20m long and 1.8m high. The bank pre-dates the house, but like most of the other earthworks on the hill, is probably recent.

Settlement probably began in the relatively level area of the High Street and spread along West Street.

## The church, description

### *Previous research and surveys*

An early description of the church was made by Lysons (1795, 561-4), who thought that the church had been rebuilt in the fourteenth century. The first detailed survey and description was made by Samuel Gardner in 1895, a year after the chancel had been drastically restored. A plan of the church was made in the same year by William G. Lewis. The survey and description were summarized in a guidebook (Gardner 1918). A further plan and description were made by the Royal Commission for Historic Monuments for England (RCHME 1937, 64-6). Their interpretation of the structure was slightly different from Gardner's. The Victoria County History's description of the church is very brief (VCH 1971, 255), and it is further described in the new edition of *The Buildings of England* for north-west London (1991, 260-2).

In the frontispiece of the re-published edition of Gardner's guide, it is stated that in 1323, the roof of the south porch was raised to create an upper chamber, and that when this was done, a 'Norman' east window in the porch was blocked. A twelfth century coffin-slab in the floor of the porch was also noted. No sources for the above assertions were given. The porch, however, can hardly pre-date the south aisle, and there is no evidence that the latter is any earlier than the early thirteenth century.

At the time of writing (August 2007), rotting pews at the western part of the north aisle (Fig 4, a) were removed, together with the flagstone flooring. Indications of a burial, cut by the aisle wall, were found in the area. This is being archaeologically investigated (<http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk>)

St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill

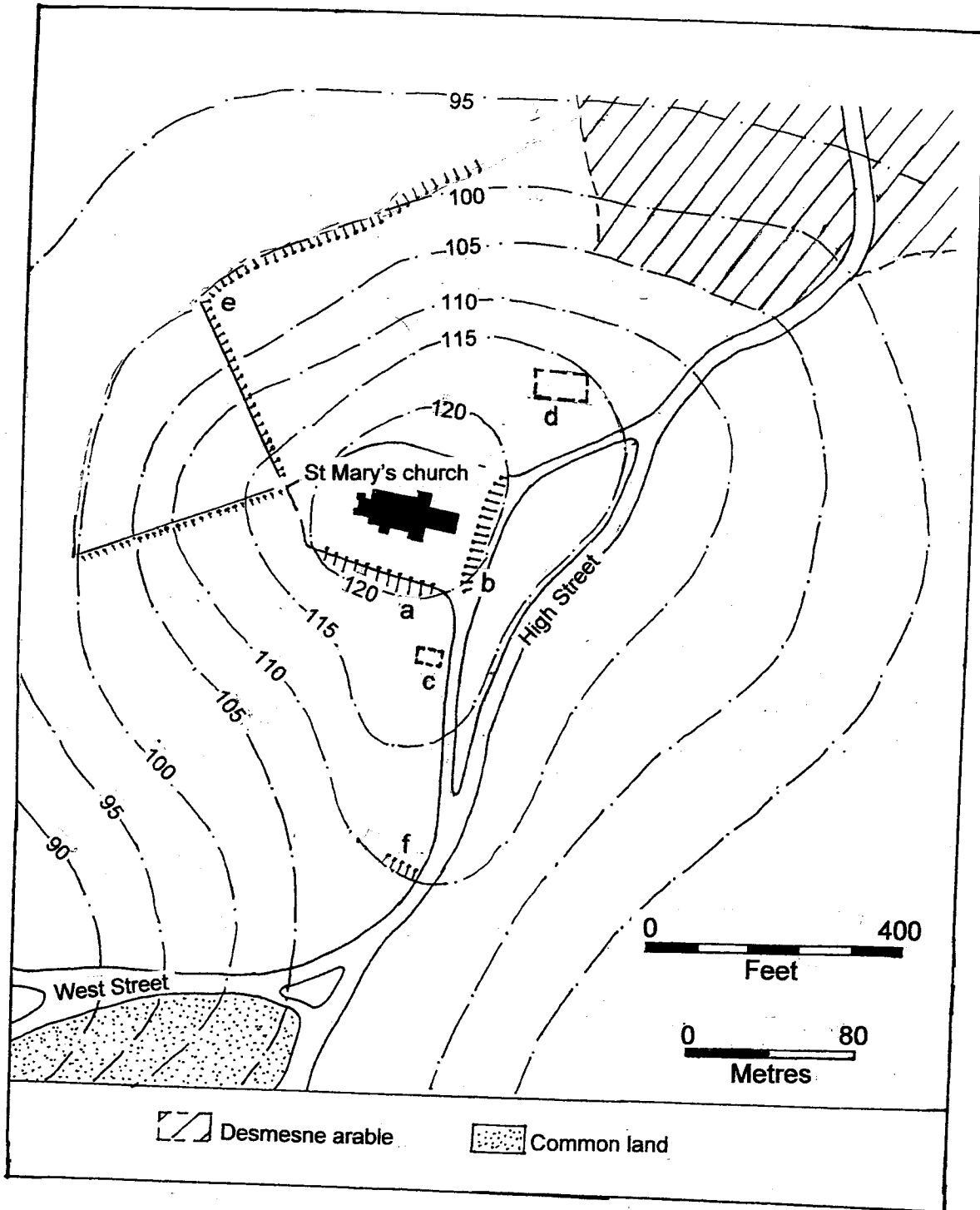


Figure 3. Harrow-on-the-Hill: St Mary's church: situation

### *The church, summary of phases*

#### *Summary of phases*

The following account differs somewhat from both Gardner and the Royal Commission in its interpretation and dating of some of the features of the church. The earliest extant phase is the nave of the church begun by Lanfranc, into which thirteenth century arcades have been inserted (figs 4-6). There is also some evidence that this primary church had small transepts (Figs 7-8) which were replaced in the late medieval period. This primary phase is discussed more fully hereafter.

There is convincing evidence that the primary nave was longer than at present and that the structure was truncated by the construction of the west tower (Fig 4). There is nothing to support Gardner's assertion that the Romanesque west doorway of the tower is a later insertion (Gardner 1918, 9). The details of the doorway, which are mainly of moulded chevron work, suggest a date in the second quarter of the twelfth century. The tower might therefore have been commissioned by either Archbishop William de Corbeil (1126-36) or Theobald (1138-61). The tower has massive clasping buttresses to the south-west and north-west. The latter is a thirteenth century rebuilding. Its walls abut the primary work, and the quoins of the buttress are constructed of the same brown sandstone used in the thirteenth century building, or refenestration, of the second stage of the tower.

The church was almost entirely rebuilt in the earlier thirteenth century. It is uncertain whether Elias of Dereham, who was rector of Harrow in 1235-42, was actually the master mason but he, or his superior, Archbishop Edmund Rich must have overseen the work (Ibid, 3). The chancel was roofed in 1242 (VCH 1971, 255). It is not quite certain whether this was done before the nave arcades were inserted and aisles were added, or whether both were roofed consecutively, though the latter is perhaps more likely.

The present arrangement of five lancet windows on the south side of the chancel was due to J. Oldrid Scott's restoration of 1894. None of the windows retain their original dressings and only the central three retain their original splays. The westernmost and easternmost windows are creations based on the restorer's assumptions about the original arrangement. There was presumably an easternmost window (Fig 4, b) to illuminate the altar, but the existence of an original westernmost window is doubtful.

The nave arcades rest on massive square plinths above which are cylindrical piers with typical early thirteenth century water-holding bases. The arcades have octagonal capitals and double-chamfered two-centred arches (Fig 5.1, 6.1). The details are executed in Reigate stone. Both Gardner and the RCHME have suggested that the transept arches (Fig 5.1, a; Fig 6.1, a) are later, ascribing them to the later thirteenth century (Gardner) and early fourteenth century (RCHME). Only the half-arch of the north transept arcade, however, need be later. It is true that these arcades are narrower than those of the nave, but this may be because they are rebuildings of arches that gave access to the transepts of Lanfranc's church. It is also true that these piers are slightly different in style in that they lack water-holding bases, but the difference in style may be due to their function rather than date. The transept arcades almost certainly stood east of the site of a pulpitum, its position marked by grooves in the abaci of the nave arcade responds (Fig 5.1, b; Fig 6.1, b). At Wimborne Minster, Dorset, the arcades east of the site of the pulpitum in the late twelfth century nave there are even more different in style, but contemporary with the rest of the structure (RCHME 1975, 78-83). At Harrow, the outer order of the north transept aisle arch rests on the abacus of the arcade arch (Fig 7, b). The former, as outlined below, was probably built in the second quarter of the thirteenth century.

The north and south aisles at Harrow retain their early thirteenth century north and south doorways, but were otherwise entirely refenestrated in the fifteenth century. To the west of the south doorway there is, however, the blocked splay of a lancet window (Fig 4, c).

The transepts of the church were rebuilt in the late medieval period, and were extended east of the thirteenth century nave-chancel division. The Royal Commission ascribes them to the early fourteenth century, yet all the window splays, where not rebuilt in the Victorian period, appear to be fifteenth century. There is a piscina with a characteristically late thirteenth century shouldered-lintelled head in the north wall of the south transept (d), but this appears to be re-set. The enlarged transepts may therefore be fifteenth century work. It may have been at this time that the flying arch of the north transept arcade was built. The intention was presumably to demolish the chancel arch and create a new, grander crossing, but the project was abandoned at an early stage.

The fifteenth century saw the almost total refenestration of the church apart from the chancel and tower. The spire, roof and the supporting corbels of the latter also date from this time. The nave clerestory was



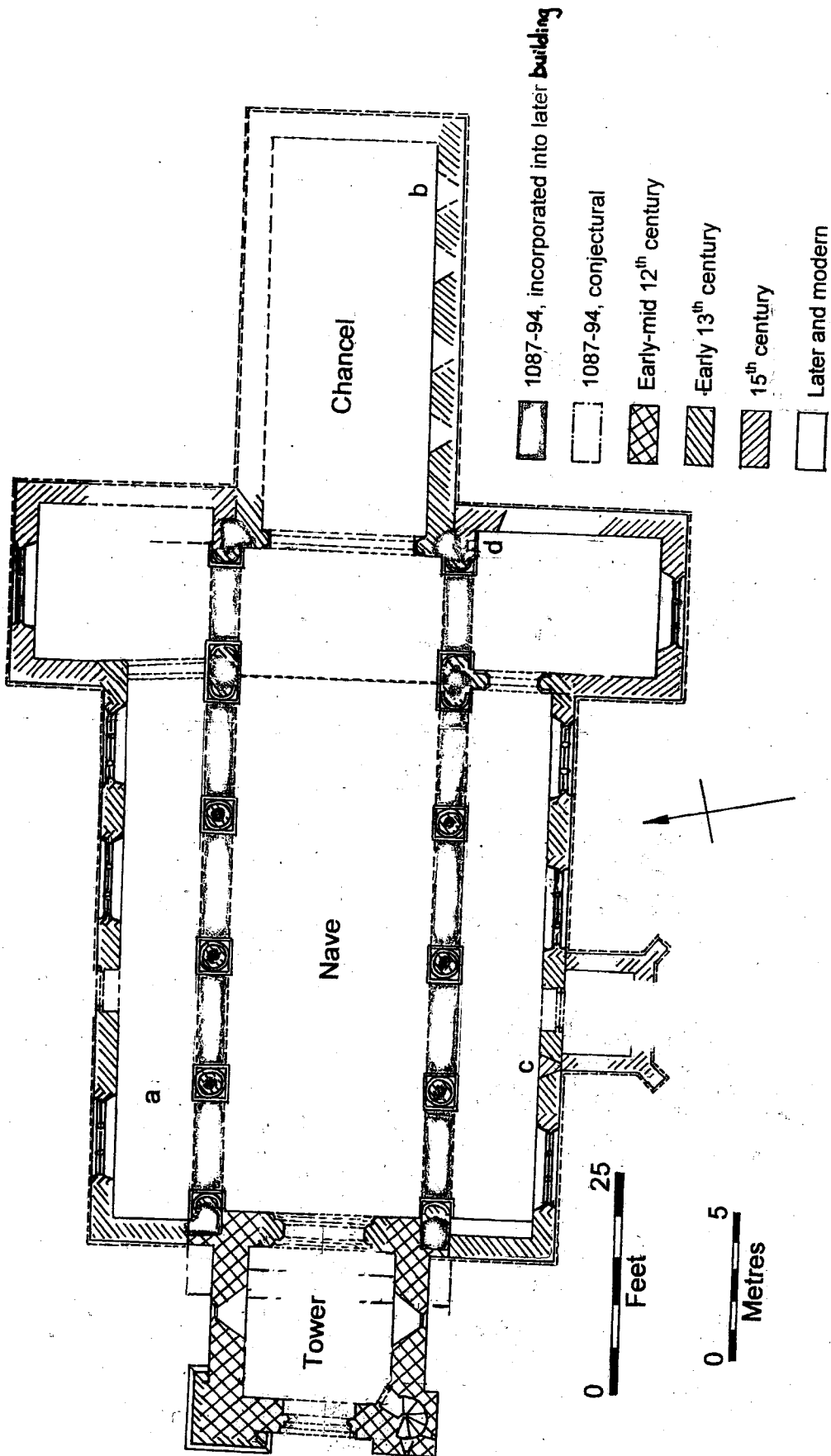


Figure 4. St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill: fifteenth century and earlier phases

### *The evidence for Lanfranc's nave*

also added or more likely, rebuilt. The drastic restoration of the church in 1846-7 resulted in the wholesale re-facing of the exterior with cut flint, which has no doubt destroyed diagnostic features. An entirely new north chapel of this date is not shown on fig 4, neither is the vestry of 1909.

#### *The evidence for Lanfranc's nave*

The massive plinths on which the piers of the nave arcades rest are 1.15m broad. These plinths are 0.12-0.58m high below the offsets represented by early thirteenth century hollow-chamfered mouldings (Fig 7-8). The walls above these offsets, into which the arcades have been inserted, are 0.96m thick.

In the spandrels between the arches of the earlier thirteenth century arcades, plastered-over quoins are noticeable at a height of between 5.8m and 6.4m above the present floor level. The quoins represent the remains of jambs for window-splays which were between 1.3m and 1.5m broad (Fig 5.1, c; Fig 6.1, c). The heads of the windows have been destroyed by the construction of the clerestory. The position of a window in the central southern spandrel has been obscured by a nineteenth-century tablet. The relict window splays are generally 3m apart. It is noticeable, however, that there are quoins towards the west wall of the nave (Fig 5.1, d; Fig 6.1, d) which are only 0.9m from the western wall. This indicates that former window-splays at this point were blocked and the wall of the nave truncated when the west tower was raised in the second quarter of the twelfth century.

It is apparent that the early thirteenth century arcades are insertions, and that Lanfranc's nave survives. The elevations of the latter can be tentatively reconstructed (Figs 5.2, 6.2). The positions of the former easternmost splays of the windows of Lanfranc's nave are also notable (Fig 5.1, e; Fig 6.1, e) These were 4.1m west of the structural division between nave and chancel on the southern side and 3.7m on the northern one. This, along with evidence cited below, suggests there were small, low transepts at this point (Fig 10). It is notable that in the east wall of the nave, there is a slight sill at a height of 5.5m above the present floor level (Fig 9, a). This may mark a junction between primary and later work. The upper part of the walling must be at least as early as the early thirteenth century chancel arch which is set into it, therefore the lower part of the walling is probably Lanfranc's work, if not earlier fabric.

#### *The evidence for primary transepts*

It has already been noted that the blocked splays of the easternmost windows of the nave are some distance from the division between the nave and the chancel. The plinths of the western responds of the transept arcade arches are also notable (Fig 7, a). The rendering of these has partially fallen away to reveal their original construction. The exposed masonry is of re-used Roman brick (a, b). There is no sign that this is a re-facing. This would imply that there were arches 2.68m wide at this point (Figs 5.2, 6.2), and were re-modelled when the nave arcades were inserted and aisles added in the early thirteenth century.

The lower part of the wall of the north aisle transept arch has a three degree western slant (Fig 4). The arch itself is of two hollow-chamfered orders with a label and head-stops on its eastern side. The sculpted heads are of a wimpled woman to the south and a man with long hair to the north. Gardner (1918, 12) thought the sculpture was no earlier than c. 1250 or 1260, but similar head-stops are found in the younger Marshals' alterations to the Great Tower at Chepstow Castle, a project that was nearing completion in 1234. This, like the work at Harrow, has also been attributed to Elias of Dereham, though whether he was actually master mason has also been disputed at Chepstow (Turner and Johnson 2006, 91-112). Whether or not Elias was in direct control of both projects, the similarity of the mouldings at Harrow to those at Chepstow would suggest that the former belong to the second rather than the third quarter of the thirteenth century. Above the arch is a very noticeable break in the wall (Fig 7, c), and above this point, the wall retains fifteenth century corbels (d) for the timber roof of this date which still survives. The break in the wall here, at a height of 4.9m above the present floor level, is well below the height of the thirteenth century nave arcades. This suggests that rather than the upper part of the wall being fifteenth century, it is thirteenth century, and the archway has been inserted into an earlier lower wall. Further, if slight evidence that this archway is an insertion comes from the plinth. The Reigate mouldings of the offsets here terminate in two courses of re-used Roman brick (e). To the east of this, there is a slight bulge in the plinth (f) which may mark the point where a transverse wall has been cut away. The eastern wall of any former transept that may have existed here would have presumably been flush with the nave-chancel division (Fig 10). The north-south dimensions are harder to ascertain, but there is a noticeable crack in the plastering of

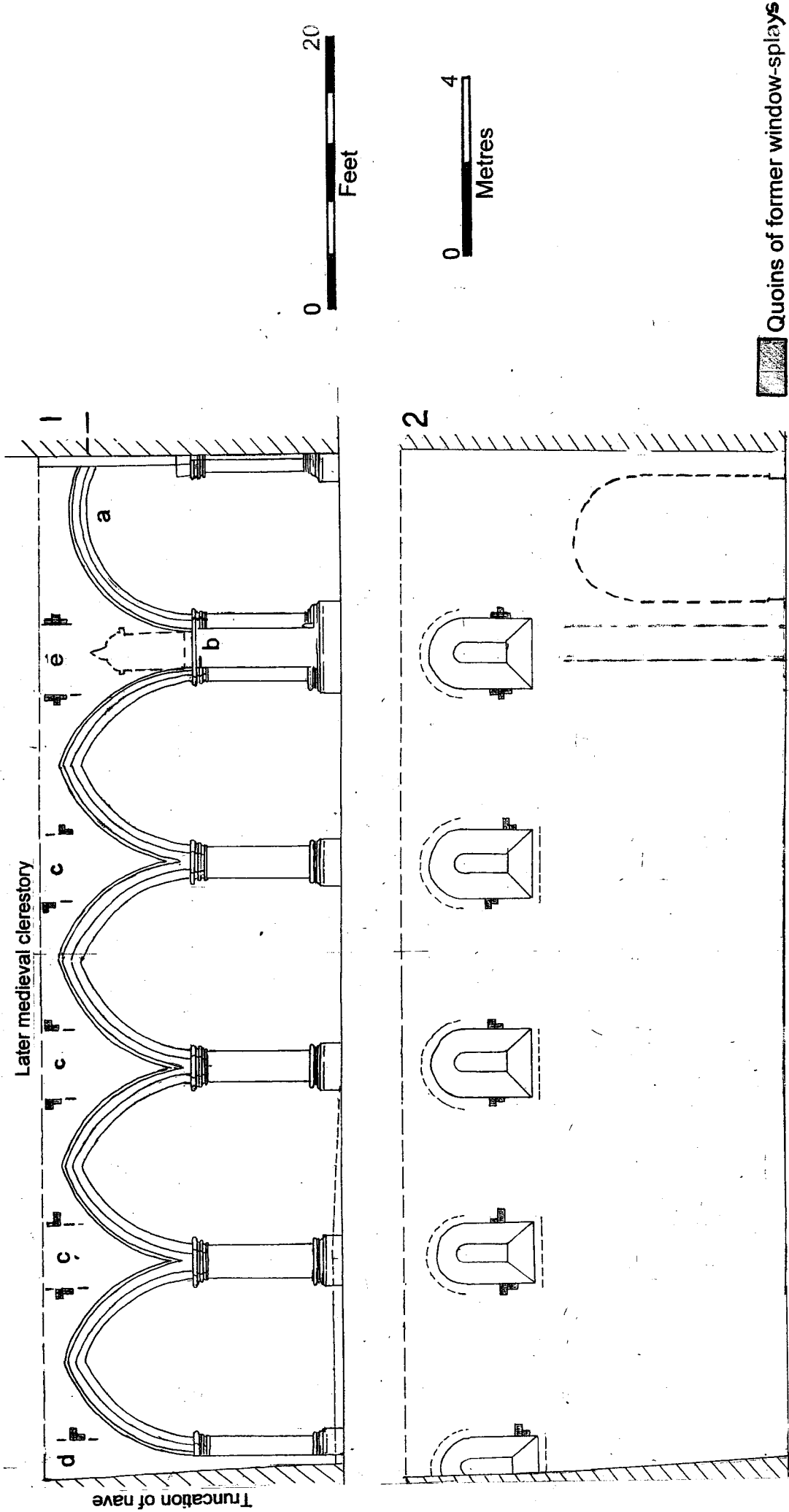


Figure 5. St. Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill: (1) Elevation of north arcade (2) Reconstruction of north wall of Lanfranc's nave

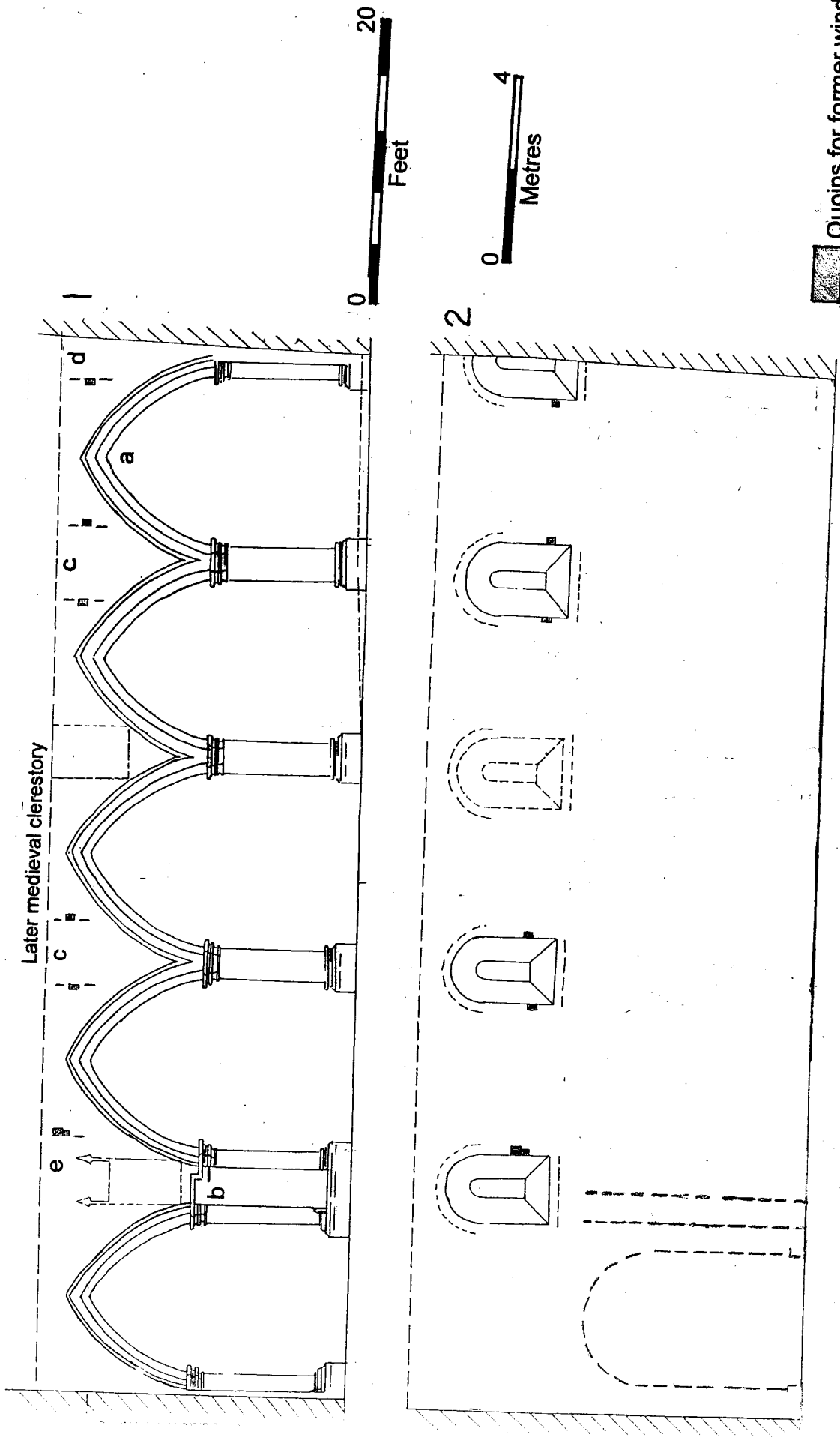


Figure 6. *St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill. (1) Elevation of south arcade (2) Reconstruction of south wall of Lanfranc's nave*

*St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill*

the north transept 1.2m north of the aisle arch (Fig 7, g). It is just possible that this marks a break in construction between the primary transept and its late medieval enlargement. We might speculate on the primary transept being about 3.9m square.

The evidence for a primary south transept is even slighter. It is, however notable that the lowest 1.2m of the wall adjoining the south transept arch is abutted by that of the aisle (Fig 8, a). Above this, the walls appear to be contemporary. We might speculate on a south transept with similar dimensions to those which have been proposed for the north one.

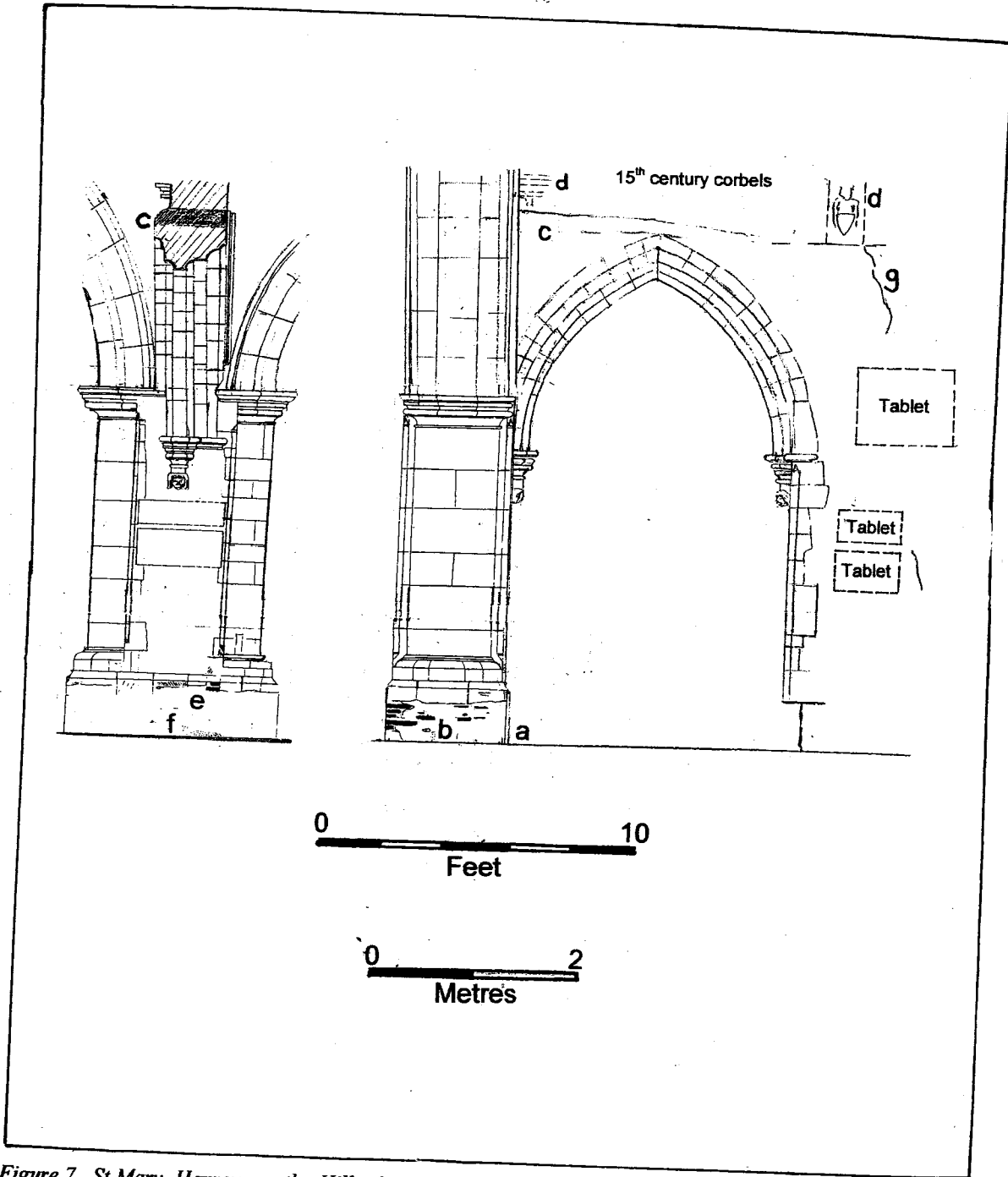


Figure 7. *St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill: elevation of north aisle transept arch*

Reconstructing Lanfranc's church

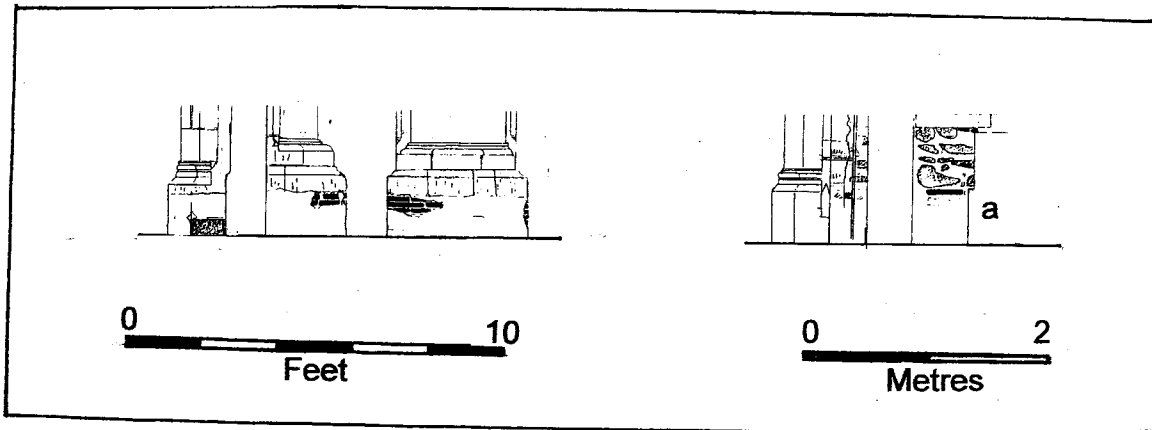


Figure 8. *St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill*: Base of western respond of south transept arcade; base of southern respond of south aisle transept arch

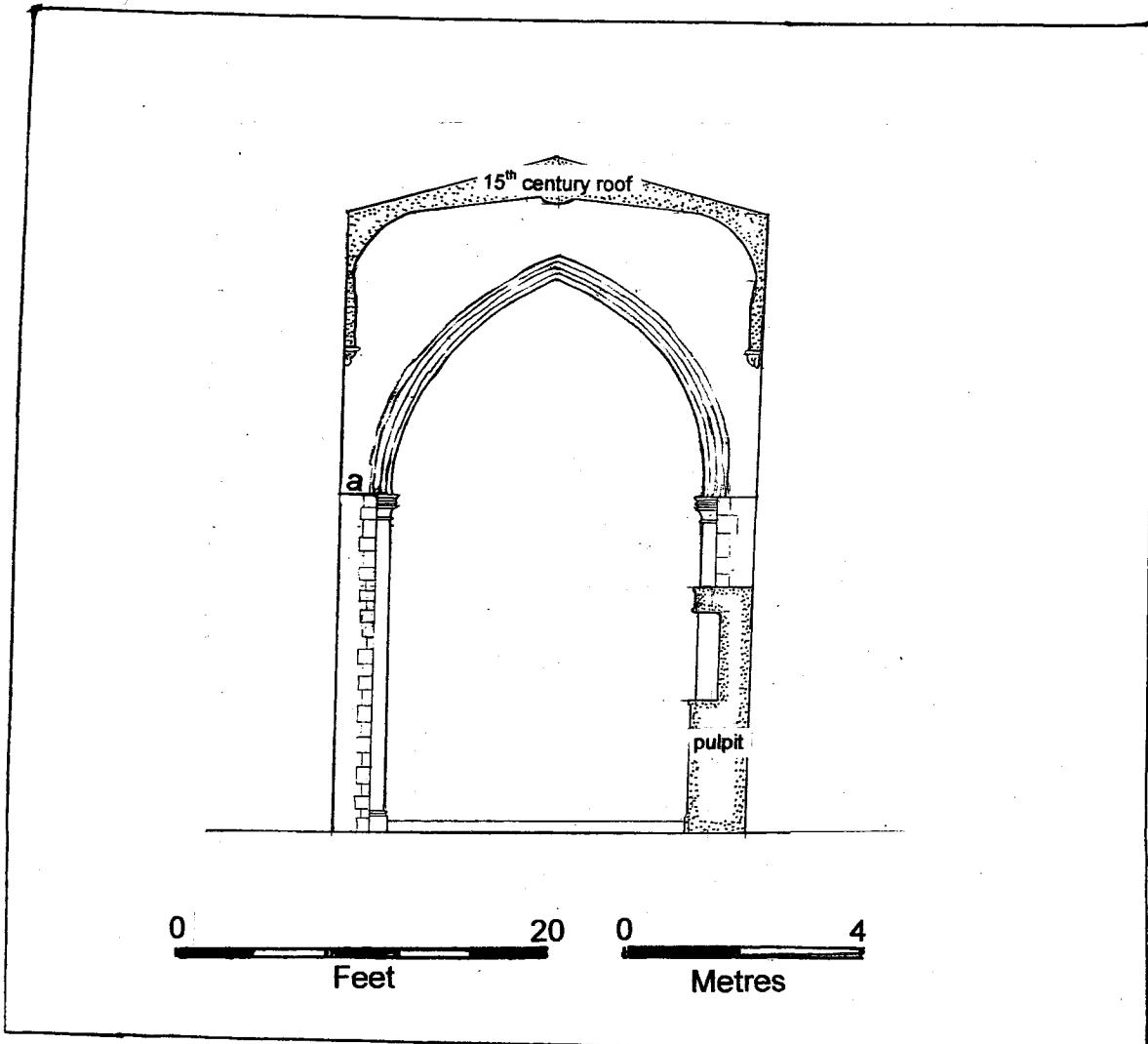


Figure 9. *St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill*: chancel arch

### *Reconstructing Lanfranc's church*

Though only slight vestiges survive of Lanfranc's church, these are enough to allow a tentative reconstruction of the plan of the late eleventh century building (Fig 10). It appears to have consisted of a substantial aisleless nave with walls 0.96m thick over an offset which was both external and internal, and was constructed of re-used Roman brick. The western end of this nave had been demolished in the second quarter of the twelfth century to accommodate the west tower. How long was the nave before this? We might assume that since the gaps between the other former window-splays was generally 3m, there might have been a distance of 1.5m between the western windows and the original western wall of the nave. The latter would therefore have had internal dimensions of about 24.6m by 6.95m. Though the arches of the primary windows were destroyed by the later clerestory wall, the former must have risen almost to the level of the primary eaves. The walls of Lanfranc's nave may therefore have been about 8.4m high (Fig 11).

If this early building had transepts, the walls of these were lower than those of the nave. The height of the lower part of the wall in which the north aisle transept arch is set is significant (Fig 7, c). If a transept were roofed at this height, it would respect the external light of the primary window here (Fig 6.2; Fig 11). While the hypothesis that primary transepts existed here remains to be tested, it would appear that if they did, they were small, low structures which were peripheral to the nave. In fact, they would have resembled *porticus* rather than true transepts (Fig 11). Did Lanfranc's church incorporate parts of the structure of an earlier minster church?

There are no indicators as to the form of the chancel before the early thirteenth century. It could have equally been square-ended or apsidal.

## **The church, discussion**

### *The pagan shrine*

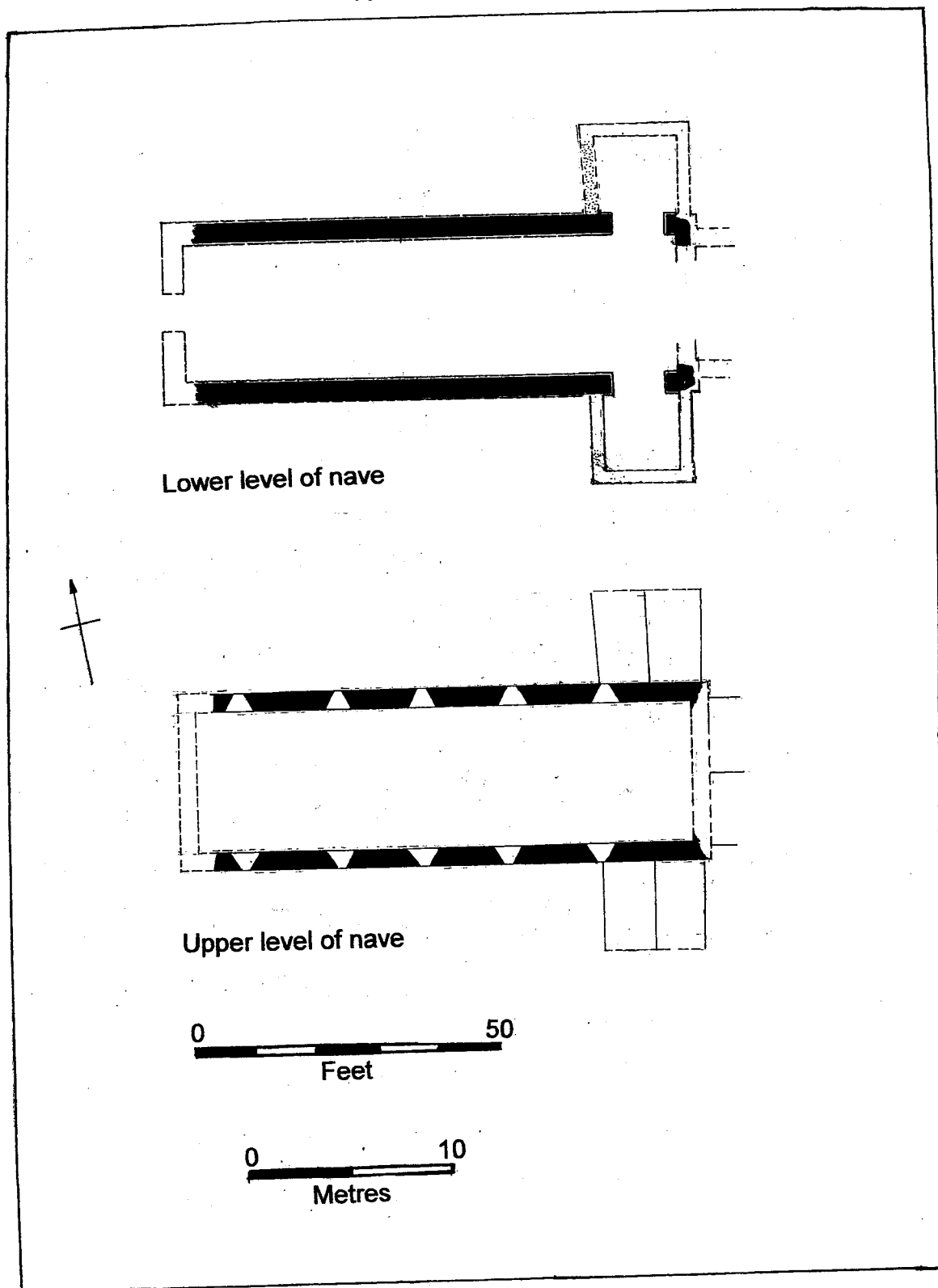
The existence of a pagan Saxon shrine at Harrow is only known from the place-name element *-hearth*. We can only speculate as to what sort of structure, if any existed here. The hilltop site, which would have been all the more spectacular without later development, could always have made it a ritual focus. The large amounts of Roman brick employed in the lower courses of the nave are significant since, as noted above, the site is a suitable one for a Romano-British temple. At Lowbury Hill in the historic county of Berkshire, a derelict Roman temple served as the focus for a 'princely' barrow of the late seventh century (Welch 1992, 96-7). At Harrow Hill in Sussex, the hilltop is occupied by a late Bronze Age earthwork enclosure (TQ 082 100). Excavation showed no evidence of Anglo-Saxon occupation within the enclosure itself, but two Bronze Age barrows at nearby New Barn Down (TQ 100 087), had secondary Anglo-Saxon burials, one accompanied by a *seax* (Curwen 1934b; Holleyman 1937).

Was a pagan shrine at Harrow on the Hill, whatever its form, 'Christianized' at an early date? There is Bede's account of Pope Gregory's famous edict to Mellitus, first Bishop of London, that 'if these temples are well-built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the true god' (HE I, 30). There is, however, little archaeological evidence for pagan-Christian continuity in early Saxon England. Conversely, churches could be founded on sites of ritual significance which had been disused for centuries. At High Wycombe and Taplow, Buckinghamshire, there are, or were churches adjoining seventh century 'princely' barrows, but there is no evidence that the churches were founded any earlier than the eleventh century (Blair 2005, 376-7). At Harrow, there is no evidence of continuity between the assumed pagan shrine and the foundation of the church, but there is independent, indirect documentary evidence of a minster church here.

### *The postulated minster*

While there is no direct archaeological or documentary evidence for a minster church at Harrow, there is indirect evidence that such a foundation existed. Werhard's bequest of 833 X 845 shows the massive extent of the lands held by the See of Canterbury in Middlesex and that time. Canterbury's estates in Harrow, Hayes, Twickenham, Yeading and *Cuniland* amounted to 202 hides. It is hard to see how this extent of land would not be served by a church of some sort, but if the Archbishops of Canterbury did have a minster serving their Middlesex estates, why should it have been at Harrow? One argument against this is that early minsters were often on riverine sites (Blair 2005, 194). If this was solely the criteria, a more

*Reconstruction of plan of late eleventh-century church*



*Figure 10. St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill: reconstruction of plan of late eleventh century church*



St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill

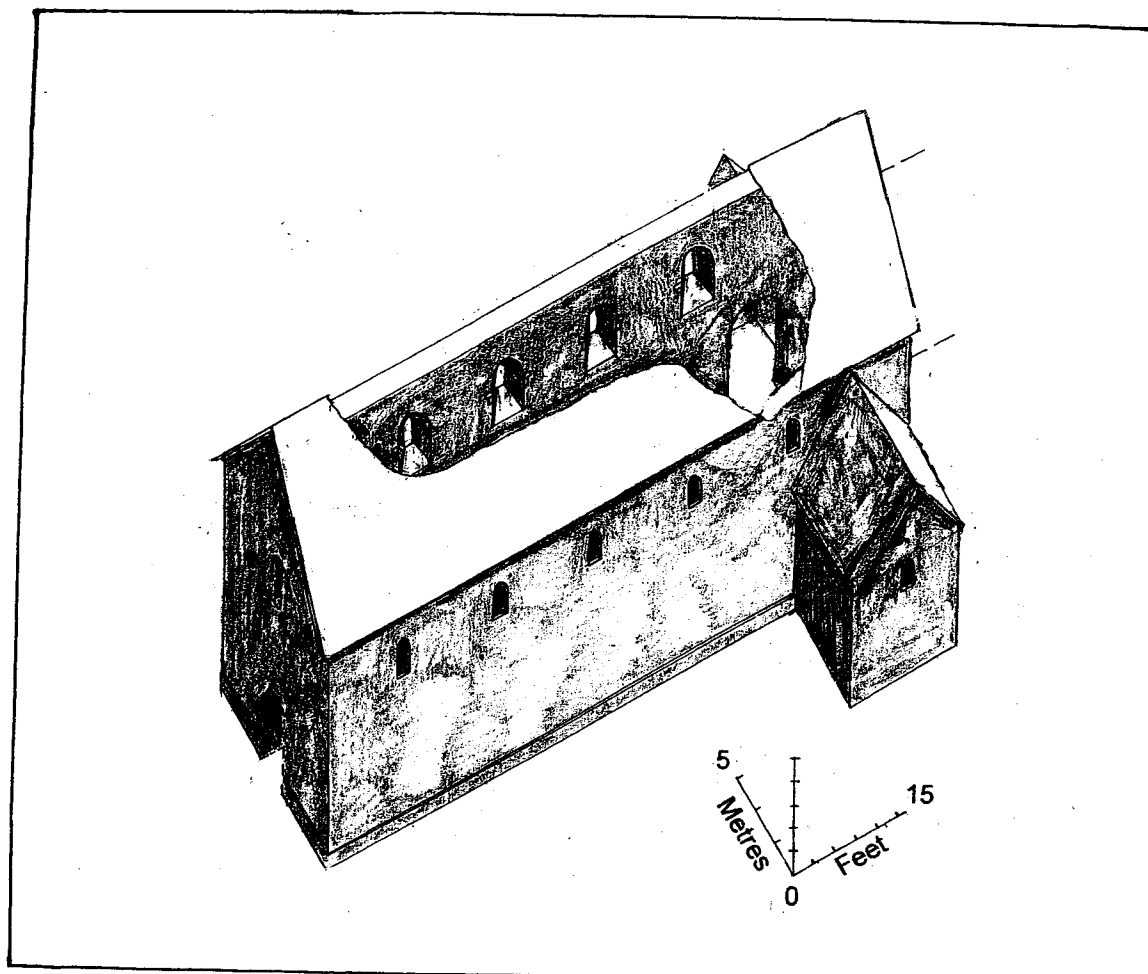


Figure 11. St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill: conjectural reconstruction of Lanfranc's nave

suitable site for a minster within Canterbury's Middlesex estates would be at Twickenham. The site of the church there, adjacent to an eyot on the Thames is more comparable with the sites of known seventh century minsters at Chertsey and Barking (HE IV, 6).

There are two reasons why Twickenham is rejected as a minster site. Firstly, after Twickenham was amalgamated into Earl Aelfgar's manor of Isleworth in the mid eleventh century (VCH 1969, 127), the priest for both manors only held three virgates of land, which probably also included the benefice of Hampton, also held by Aelfgar. Where a church was a former minster, the priest is normally found on a hide or more of land, as at Harrow.

Secondly, not all minsters are on riverine locations. Those at Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire and Breedon on the Hill, Leicestershire were founded within former hillforts, and were not adjacent to major water-courses (Blair 2005, 190n). While no evidence for a hillfort has yet been found at Harrow, the prominent position of the latter can be compared to Breedon, or Aylesbury before modern development.

At both Hayes and Harrow, a hide of land was allotted to the priest in the Domesday survey, but at Harrow, the priest originally held much more land in the form of the six hides and *habatatio* east of the Lidding, mentioned in charter S 106 of 767, which became the later hamlet of Preston. 'Preston' place-names are elsewhere associated with minsters. At Twynham, alias Christchurch in Hampshire, mentioned in 1020 X 1038, one of the appurtenances of the minster there was known as Preston (Ibid, 513-16). In Cheshire, the minster of Prestbury was head of a massive mother-parish (Ibid, 309). It is perhaps more than co-incidence that in 824, Werhard appears on a witness list as a *diaconus* (S 1266), but that no sooner had Cwoenthryth surrendered Harrow to Canterbury, he is described as *presbyter abbas* (S 1268). Could he

### *Lanfranc's church*

have been Abbot of Harrow? Further evidence for a minster at Harrow comes from the directional place-names of the adjacent hamlets of Norbury and Sudbury. Though these are not documented before the late thirteenth century, directional place names occur in all four cardinal points around Leominster in Herefordshire (Ibid, 251n).

The circumstantial evidence therefore suggests that a minster had been founded at Harrow in the early ninth, if not the eighth century, on a site which was remembered as a pagan cult centre. Harrow disappears from the documentary record at about the time of the major Viking incursions, but this might have less to do with the decline of minsters than is commonly supposed (Ibid, 191-5). The hundred hide land unit at Harrow, if not a church, survived into the eleventh century.

Finally, there is tenuous evidence in the plan-form and fabric of the church that Lanfranc's building may have had diminutive transepts, akin to *porticus*. The latter may have been retained from a pre-Conquest church that awaits archaeological discovery.

### *Lanfranc's church*

Whether or not Lanfranc's church was built from scratch, the dimensions of the nave (Fig 10) show that it was no normal 'parish' church. The nave is of an appropriate size for a lesser monastic or collegiate foundation, but Harrow was neither. The church was a particularly high status proprietary church. In size, the nave can be compared with that at North Elmham, Norfolk, built by the Bishop of Norwich, Herbert Losinga, between 1091 and 1119 (Pevsner and Wilson 1999, 566-8). Unlike Harrow, North Elmham was provided with a west tower from the outset. That one was added at Harrow shortly after the construction of the nave may have been due to a need to keep up appearances with similar churches.

## Scope for further research

The hypothesis that the church at Harrow originated as an Anglo Saxon minster of course needs archaeologically testing. The brief survey in this paper should be followed up by a comprehensive standing building survey. It is hoped that radiocarbon dates will soon become available for the burial discovered under the north aisle. Evidence for a minster, however, is equally likely to be found within the environs of the church. Any early settlement growth is likely to have been on the site of the present high street, where the nineteenth-century school buildings will have destroyed much of the evidence.

Minsters invariably had boundary enclosures. These were usually about 150-300m across (Blair 2005, 196-8) but at Harrow, the steepness of the hill would have meant less space available for occupation, and any former enclosure might have been larger to compensate for this. While the present earthworks around the hill all appear to be post-medieval, survey work might reveal earlier boundaries

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