

# IKEN, ST BOTOLPH, AND THE COMING OF EAST ANGLIAN CHRISTIANITY

by S. E. WEST, M.A., PH.D., F.S.A. and NORMAN SCARFE, M.A., F.S.A.  
with a contribution by ROSEMARY CRAMP, M.A., B.LITT., F.S.A.

## IKEN CHURCH

by S. E. West

'In this year [654] Anna was slain  
and Botwulf began to build the Minster at Icanho'  
(*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, for the year 654).<sup>1</sup>

### *Summary*

There has been considerable controversy about the identification of Icanho, more recently revived by an attempt to identify it with Hadstock in Essex (Rodwell 1976, 55-57). In January 1977 the writer, on a routine visit to the partly-ruined church of Iken, discovered a piece of carved stone built into the north-east corner, at the base of the tower. The decoration, clearly of the Anglo-Saxon period, prompted an excavation of part of the nave and the extraction of the stone. The stone proved to be a very large fragment of an Anglo-Saxon cross shaft, broken in antiquity and re-used in the base of the tower. The excavation demonstrated that the Norman foundations of the present nave overlay traces of an earlier building and cut earlier graves. A few fragments of Middle Saxon Ipswich Ware are important indicators of an early date for the occupation of the site. There follows a discussion of the dating of the Cross Shaft by Professor Rosemary Cramp and a re-examination of the historical data concerning Iken and its identification with the site of Botolph's monastery by Norman Scarfe.

### *The Site*

Iken is a large parish, occupying most of the southern bank of the Alde Estuary, originally with extensive marshlands, now reclaimed, rising to sandy heathland. A small patch of ancient oak woodland still survives at the western end of the parish. (Rackham 1980, 289-290). Two prominent features dominate the landscape, Yarn Hill and the promontory with St Botolph's Church (Fig. 70). The church occupies a dramatic site, 10 metres O.D. with the Alde to the north and west and extensive views over marshland and the estuary to the east (Fig. 71). To the south the marshland virtually isolated the site until the mid 19th century; the road approaching the church has the aspect of a causeway giving the site a distinct sense of isolation, even today.

### *The Standing Church* (TM 4120 5664; County No. IKN 007)

Prior to the disastrous fire in 1968 when the thatched roof of the nave was completely destroyed, this simple church had been well maintained. It consisted of a Victorian chancel, a nave, a south porch and a fine flint-faced tower. Davy (MS vol. 25, p. 44) noted in 1810, and again in 1831, that the chancel had originally been much longer, with a plan showing remains of the north wall and traces of the east and south walls extending the length of the chancel to a little more than twice what it was in his day (Fig. 72). Subsequently, in a major restoration in the mid-19th century the chancel was restored to its original length and faced in Kentish ragstone. Davy also noted, and showed on his plan, that a stable had been erected on the north side of the ruined part of the chancel, where the wall was still standing to a height of eight to ten feet.

The nave is 47ft 9ins long (14.55m) by 19ft 1in wide (5.81m) internally, and is constructed largely of septaria, with lime-stone fragments and tile used for repairs, the whole plastered over, internally and externally. Two small, narrow, Norman single-light windows were found in the north wall during the excavation, each with round heads cut from single blocks. At the east end of the north wall there is a blocked rood stair. No traces of Norman work were observable in the south wall, but the existing plaster was not stripped.

There is a single-lancet Early English window immediately east of the south porch; and a two-light window with 'Y' tracery to the east, probably a replacement of an earlier window. The north and south doors are opposite one another one third of the way along the nave from the west end; the north door long since disused. Both doorways have two-centred outer arches, flatter rear arches and plain chamfers. The south porch is large, with blocked two-light windows in both the north and south walls. The moulded doorway is flanked by simple flint flushwork panelling; there has been rebuilding in brick in the gable in the 19th century. There is a sundial on the east jamb of the doorway. The chancel arch has attached shafts with moulded capitals and bases and a simple, outer moulding reaching to ground level. The chancel, as has already been mentioned, is entirely rebuilt, including the buttresses at the junction with the nave.

The tower, flint faced with stone dressings, is rectangular in plan, with diagonal buttresses, and has been inserted into the west end of the nave by removing the original west wall, the easterly buttresses meeting the older nave walls at an angle. It was in the lower part of the east wall and north-east buttress of the tower that the fragment of Saxon cross shaft was found.

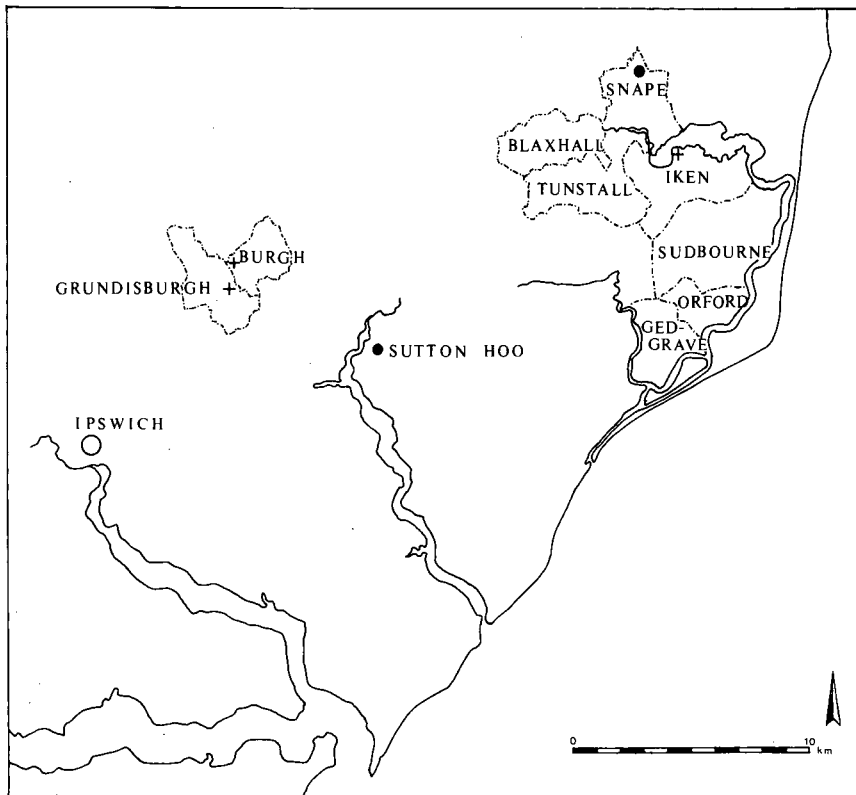


FIG. 69 — South-east Suffolk showing principal places mentioned in the texts and selected parish boundaries.

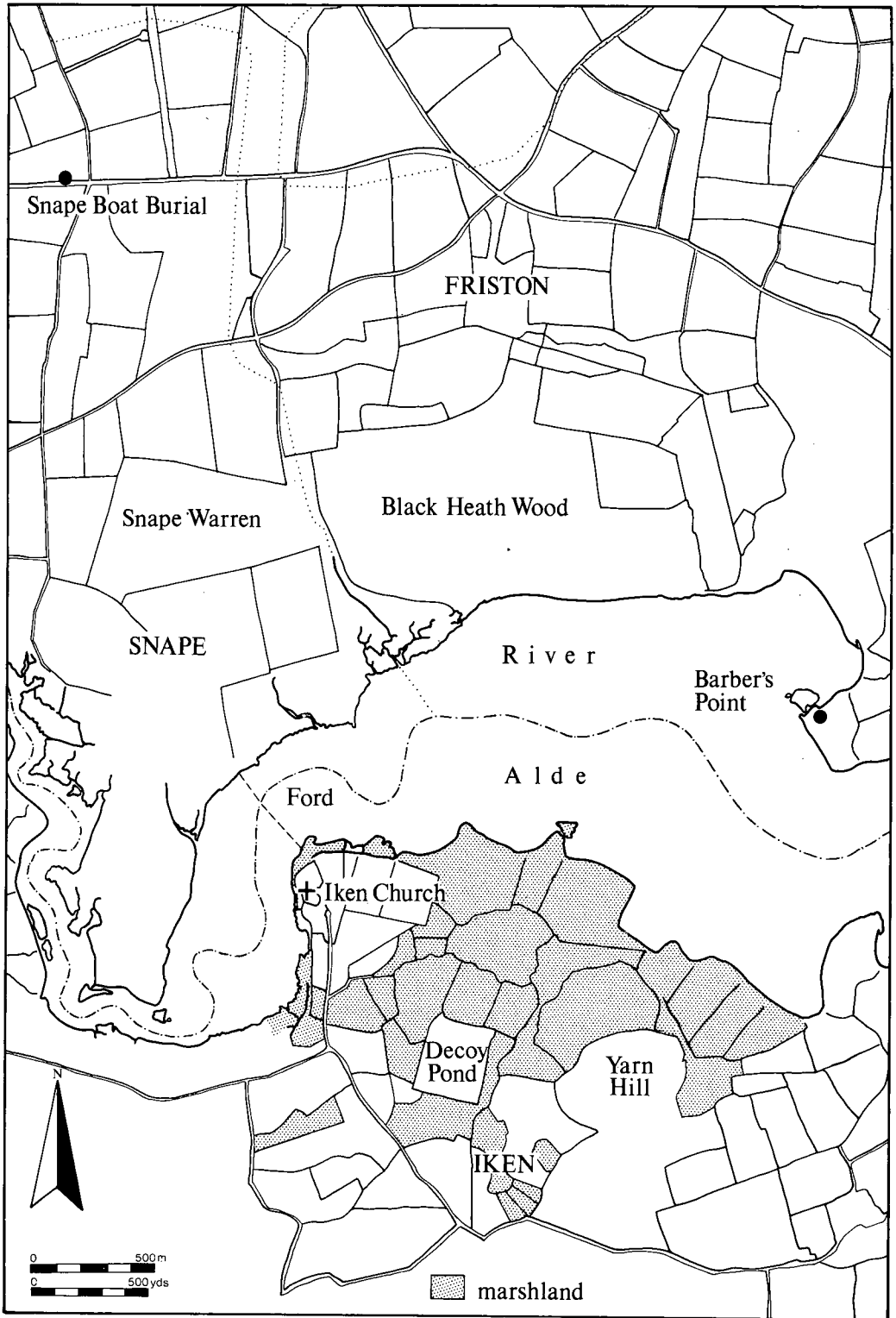


FIG. 70 — Location map: Iken church, the Alde and surrounding marshland.

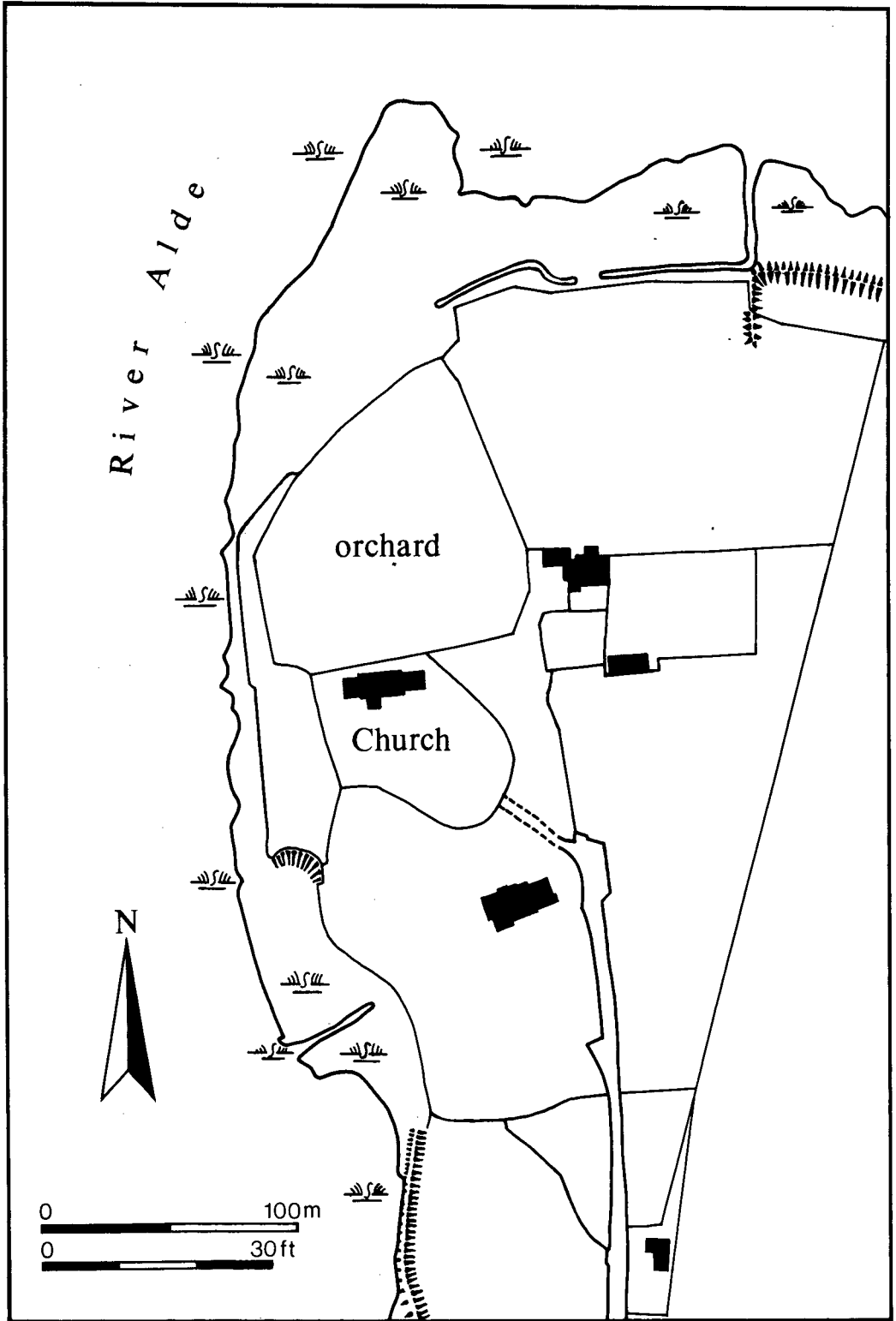


FIG. 71 — Iken peninsula: detail.

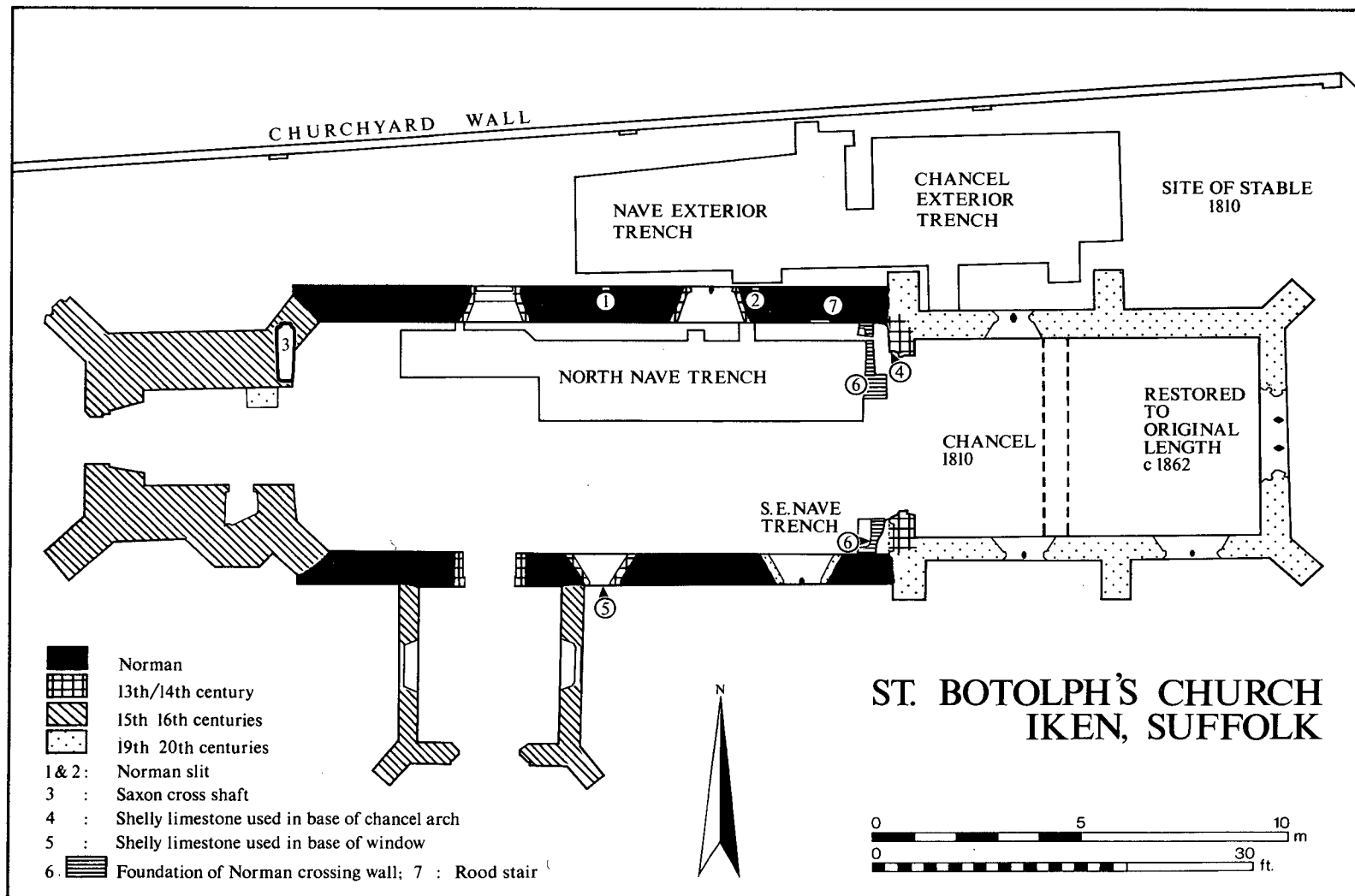


FIG. 72 — Plan of Iken church: excavated areas.

There is a west door with a two-centred arch and hood-mould, above which there is a Perpendicular, three-light window with transomes. The belfry openings are of two cinquefoiled lights with a four-centred arch. The internal stair to the tower is a three-sided projection against the south-east buttress.

### *The Excavation*

The discovery of part of an Anglo-Saxon cross shaft in the base of the tower (Pl. XXa) provided an opportunity to excavate, in the summer of 1977, within the nave and in the narrow space between the north wall and the churchyard wall. The excavation had to be conducted with the greatest sensitivity; graves were observed, but not disturbed and the whole site carefully restored to former levels. All the work was done by hand with a small team of excavators.

### *The Excavation in the Nave*

The northern half of the nave was examined from the chancel steps to a point six feet west of the north door opening. In spite of reports that the entire interior of the nave had been stripped to natural after the fire and filled with rubble preparatory to laying a concrete floor, it was found that this was not, in fact, the case. It would appear that the collapsed debris, pews and floor were removed and the site levelled to a depth of a few inches only. The south edge of the excavation was taken to the bricked edge of a heating channel which ran down the centre of the nave from just opposite the north/south doors, to the chancel steps. Immediately beneath the rubble the soil in the nave was relatively level; this ginger-brown, sandy soil was almost stone free and cleaned remarkably well, with the result that a series of post-holes were at once apparent. These post-holes, up to 35cm deep, formed two paired rows (Fig. 73) for most of the exposed area, but toward the chancel arch the pattern was confused. These post-sockets were clearly late in the sequence and must surely relate to scaffolding in the building of the nave or re-roofing at some stage.

From the plan (Fig. 73) and the difference in the fills, it is possible to discern more than one phase for these features: the majority of the post-holes were filled with a greenish/grey or blue clay, sometimes mixed with sand. Three had a yellowish clay with sand and traces of mortar and two had sand and mortar only. In the case of the latter five post-holes two were cut by post-holes with blue clay in their fills. At the western end of the excavation no post-holes were found, but there were large areas of disturbance, possibly later than the post-holes. Only in one area, toward the east of the series, is there a break in the pattern, suggesting that the grave (004), in that position, was later than the post-holes.

Cautley (1975, 300) records that the nave roof was of the 'late' arch-braced type and, as such, is likely to have been of 15th-century date. The lack of disturbance of the clay packed post-holes in the nave may suggest that at least the main series belong to that date. It should, however, be noted that evidence of the use of the same clay was found in the foundation trench of the nave wall (Feature 114).

Following the removal of the post-holes, a number of graves became apparent, together with the outline of the foundation trenches for the Norman nave wall and the chancel arch. In view of the unstable nature of the exposed base of the nave wall only three small cuttings were made to section the foundation trench and to test the stratigraphy in the main trenches.

The foundation trench for the nave wall became visible in places as soon as the site was cleared of rubble. It was found to continue south across the opening of the chancel arch and was traced to the edge of the heating channel down the centre of the nave. A small excavation in the south-east corner of the nave confirmed the presence of the trench there. At the western end of the excavation in the nave the edge of the trench was some 30cm from the edge of the nave wall, but rapidly narrowed to 6cm toward the east end. At the crossing the inner edge of the

IKEN CHURCH 1977  
 NORMAN AND LATER PHASES

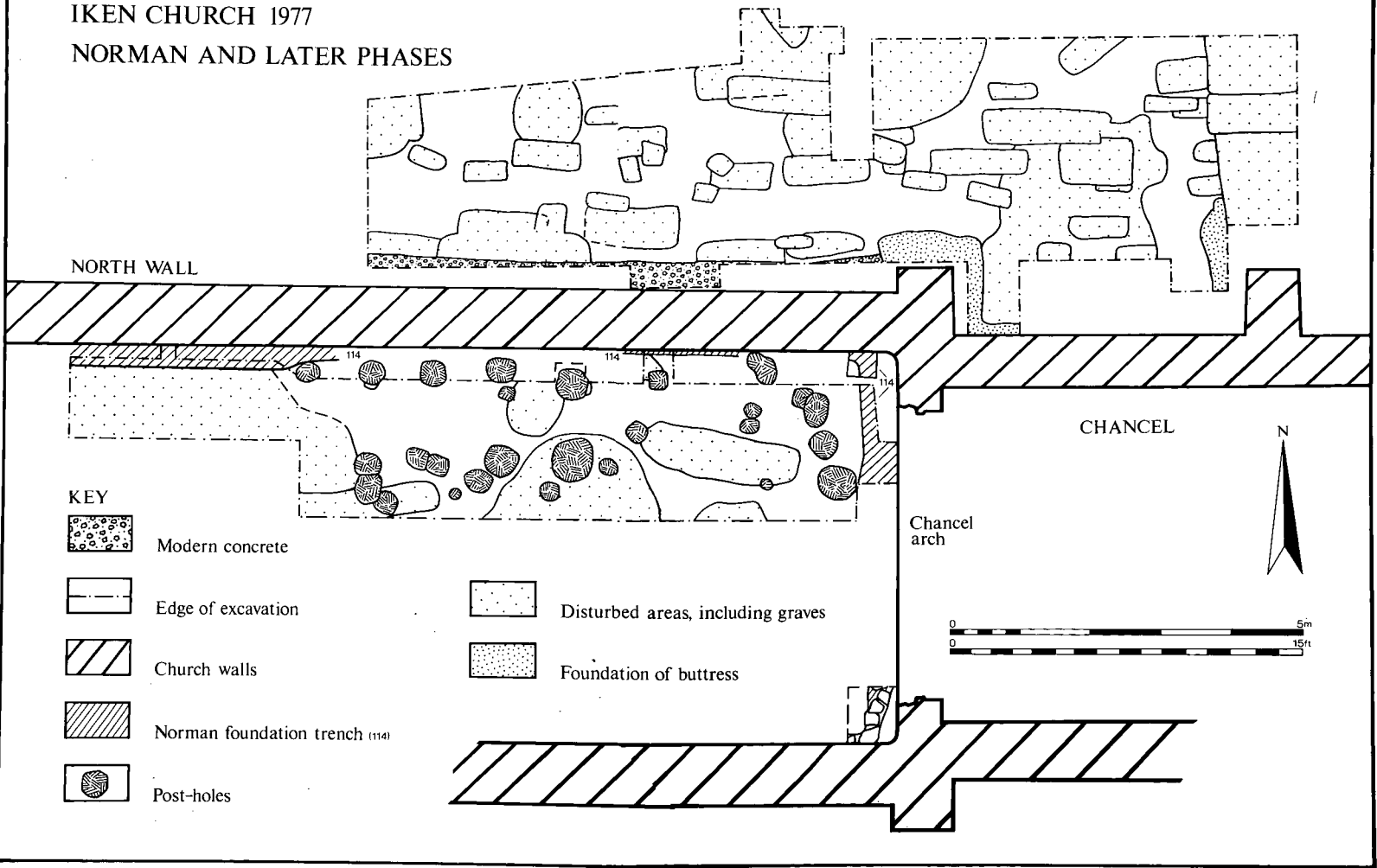


FIG. 73 — Iken church: Norman and later phases.

foundation trench was 50cm from the edge of the 15th-century chancel arch. The width and nature of the foundation trench at the crossing suggests that the original Norman opening had been much narrower. The trench itself was steep sided, 1.5m deep beneath the lowest layer of septaria blocks of which the nave walls are constructed. The filling of the trench consisted of a series of layers of rounded flint pebbles, of average size 3 x 2 x 2cm; sand and septaria and hard packed yellowish-brown and blue clay, with rounded flints and septaria. The mortared septaria forming the core of the wall could barely have penetrated the original ground surface.

At 58cm from the surface the excavation was narrowed and taken down a further 28cm to clarify suspected further graves. A series of graves were identified (Fig. 74), some of which were cut by the Norman foundation trench for the nave wall. (Graves 165, 163, 113; cutting 168, 164 and 153; 154 and, by the chancel crossing, grave 126 cutting 134).

Two other graves are worthy of note: 155 obscured by 034, a large pit, had a distinct coffin outline. Apart from fragments of the skull at the west end only faint, discoloured traces remained of the rest of the skeleton. Grave 086 was squared, the outline traced to the edge of the Norman foundation trench where it appeared to be truncated by it. The pit was excavated to the level at which human bones appeared and found to contain parts of a dismembered skeleton; a detached skull, lying face-down, with no associated vertebra, was seen to have a hole at the rear of maximum extent 10 x 5cm. No lower jaw was seen. The skull was found to be above one of a pair of articulated legs and parts of the ankles, with the femurs to the west. Other ankle bones and the feet were above the second femur at the west end of the pit. There was no evidence to suggest that these bones were disturbed and reburied by the building of the nave wall.

In the narrow space between the churchyard wall to the north and the nave and chancel, a broad trench was stripped to the level of the natural sand. The whole area was found to be much disturbed by graves and pits dug to receive bones disturbed by later grave digging.

A modern concrete plinth has been inserted along the whole length of the north wall of the nave. This protruded for 40cm beyond the edge of the wall and was carried down for at least 80cm and so totally destroyed any trace of the outer line of the foundation trench of the wall. The buttress at the junction of the nave and chancel was not underpinned and the mortared foundation for that extended for 50cm beyond its outer edge.

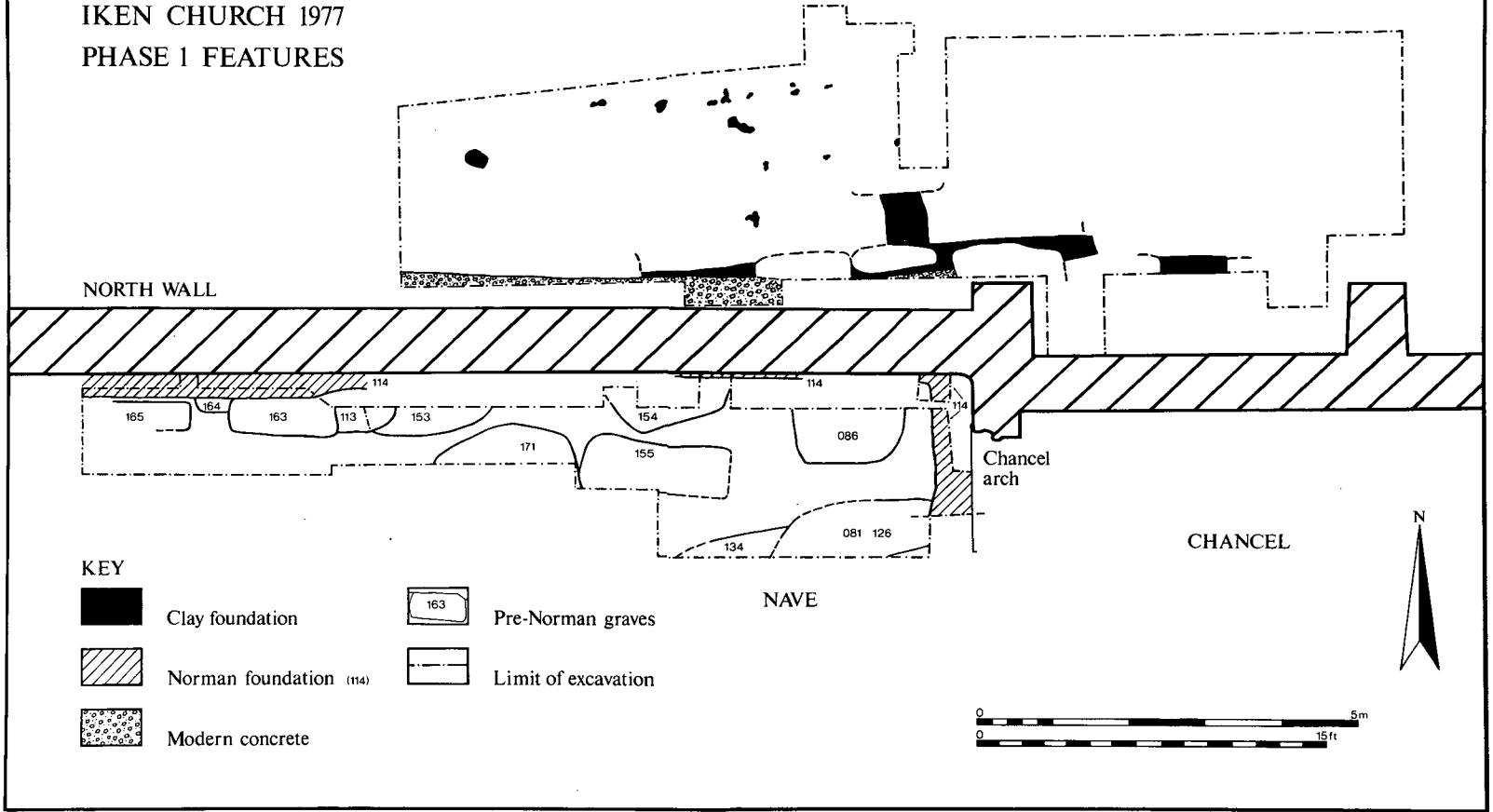
In the trench to the north of the nave wall a number of lumps of yellowy-green clay were found at a depth of *c.* 30 to 35cm from the modern ground surface. Their distribution can be seen in Fig. 74. At 70cm from the surface larger areas of yellow-green clay were found, close to the nave wall. Although badly cut about by graves and, at the extremities, totally destroyed, enough remained to show that there had been two shallow, clay-filled trenches at right-angles to one another. The east to west feature (152) was 40cm wide, the north to south feature (151) 50cm wide. The east/west line was at an angle of 6° north of the Norman nave wall and, at the west end, was cut by the concrete plinth of the nave wall. The lumps of yellowy-green clay already noticed suggest that a similar feature had been destroyed by grave digging, some 2.3m from the main east to west alignment. In section the clay was 12cm thick, filling a shallow trench with sloping sides.

A further patch of similar clay (110) was found closer to the north wall of the chancel in an area much disturbed by burials. Although it could not be traced very far the fragment found appeared to be in its original position. Clay does not occur naturally on the site and it is important to note that the clay in features 151, 152 and the scattered fragments beyond is not the same as the yellowy-blue clay found in the interior of the church.

The clay was cut by the modern concrete plinth underpinning the nave wall so that it is reasonable to assume that the clay-filled trench predates the Norman nave and that it represents a foundation for timber walling. The projection to the north would suggest a side chamber, the north wall of which is perhaps represented by the line of clay fragments disturbed by later graves.



IKEN CHURCH 1977  
 PHASE I FEATURES



287

FIG. 74 — Iken church: Phase I features.

At the east end of the trench outside the chancel, traces of the 19th-century stable recorded by Davy in 1810 were found, consisting of a wall footing of mortared septaria blocks and a rough flint-cobble floor.

### *The Finds*

In the nave the close-packed graves had disturbed soil to a depth of 80cm. These disturbed levels produced eighteen sherds of Romano-British pottery, including one fragment of samian. A further six fragments of coarse ware were recovered from grave fills. Within the nave, two sherds of early medieval ware and one possible piece were found; one from immediately below the rubble infill (in 002), one possible sherd from a grave (136) and, more importantly, a rim sherd from an upper level in the foundation trench (120 in 114) for the Norman nave. Ten sherds of local, later grey wares of the late 12th — 13th century were found in the nave, two in the upper layers (001, 002); four in post-holes (017, 018) and four in graves (014, 015, 034). No fragments of Ipswich or Thetford wares were found within the existing church. Externally, the sequence is quite different. Only one Romano-British sherd was recovered; three sherds of Ipswich ware (two stamped), two sherds of Thetford ware; five sherds of Early Medieval ware, 505 sherds of 12/13th century grey wares, two 13th-century Saintonge glazed sherds all from general disturbed layers and eight post-medieval sherds.

- Fig. 75; 1, 2: Ipswich ware. Sandy fabric with rectangular, cross-hatched stamps. Possibly from same vessel, probably a spouted, lugged pitcher.
- Fig. 75; 3: Polychrome Saintonge Ware. Clear glaze, over green horizontal stripe and part of figure outlined in black. Two joining fragments, from general layer (040), 35cm above the natural.
- Fig. 75; 4: Rectangular slab of stone with main surfaces polished and edges chipped to shape. Green igneous rock, olivine with felspar crystals. From just above natural levels (084) in trench to north of chancel. Probably decorative inlay from a tomb.

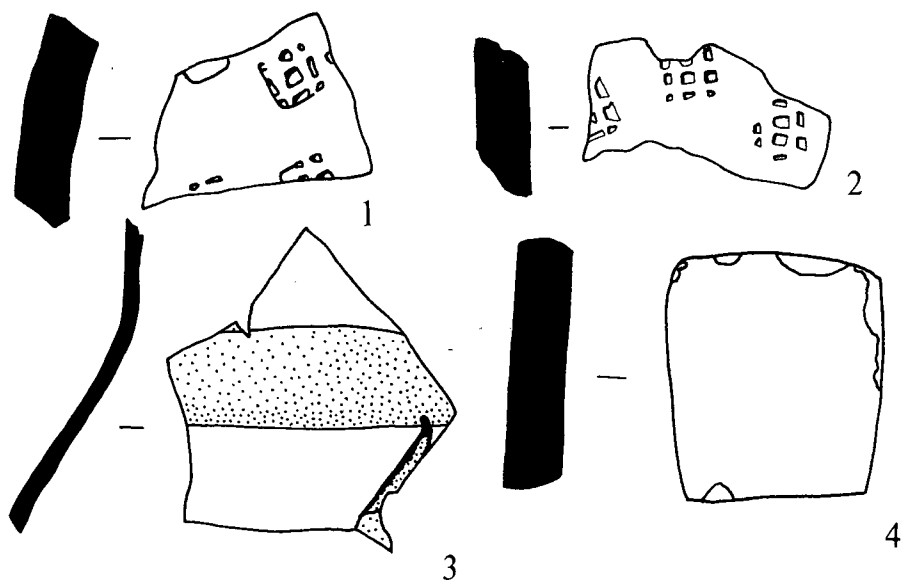


FIG. 75 — The finds: Ipswich ware; Saintonge ware and stone inlay.

### The Cross Shaft (Fig. 76; Plates XXa-XXII)

The fragment consists of the lower part of a monolithic cross-shaft, rectangular in section and tapering slightly toward the upper, broken, end. The freestanding portion is 1.5m long, with a further 14cm of broken tenon at the base. From the proportions of the surviving piece, it is very likely that the complete cross was originally at least 3m high. The tenon has a rounded profile which appears to be original; presumably the base must have been a substantial block of stone. There is extensive damage; the broken upper end has a rounded, weathered appearance and the tenon has lost about a third of its mass. A long crack extends from the fractured tenon into the body of the shaft, plainly visible through the cross on side C and probably the cause of the deep flaking scar on side A.

- Side C : Two panels of interlace above an equal-armed cross. The uppermost panel is loose, poorly designed interlace although it does, in fact, work. It is enclosed by a single border which extends down to the second panel. This second panel is a more competent rendering of a simple knot design based upon a diagonal cross. Even so, although the design is understood, the execution is rather loose. The third design is of an equal-armed cross within a circle. Unfortunately the crack extends across the middle and the resulting flaking has destroyed the centre. The cross stands in relief against the background. Although well carved, it is not symmetrical, the left and right arms being of unequal widths.
- Side A : This side is extensively damaged. The top panel is incomplete, but has, within a heavy border like the middle panel of side C, a complex interlace pattern. Initial impressions of the design suggest that the main elements are two pairs of animal legs or beaks diagonally interwoven with ribbon interlace. An alternative solution is offered here (Fig. 8, E) which shows all the elements as part of a compacted pattern which works, but was not properly understood as a design. The central panel has clear animal ornament without interlace, a coiled, wolf-like creature, with open mouth and protruding tongue is facing downwards. Only the tail and rear limbs are depicted, under and over the body. The body is outlined; the pointed ear, nostril and eye clearly visible. Beneath this animal the surface is badly damaged but on the right side, beneath the first animal, part of the head and other members of a second can just be discerned with oblique lighting. The muzzle, eye and pointed ear are apparent, with a suggestion of the lower jaw and a pointed fragment lower down. The two animals are facing each other as part of the same design; there is no dividing frame. A suggested reconstruction of this animal is offered here (Fig. 76, E) as another coiled shape opposing the one above. Below this point the stone has flaked so that nothing remains of the lowermost panel.
- Side B : The upper part of this narrow side was that which was first seen in the east wall of the tower. The design consists of a tight running scroll with tendrils in the upper part where the scroll tends to degenerate into separate elements.
- Side D : The second narrow side has an angular interlace at the bottom, which becomes an untidy series of knots towards the top.

The reconstructions in Fig. 76, E, F, do not agree with Professor Cramp's interpretation but are offered here as an alternative view.

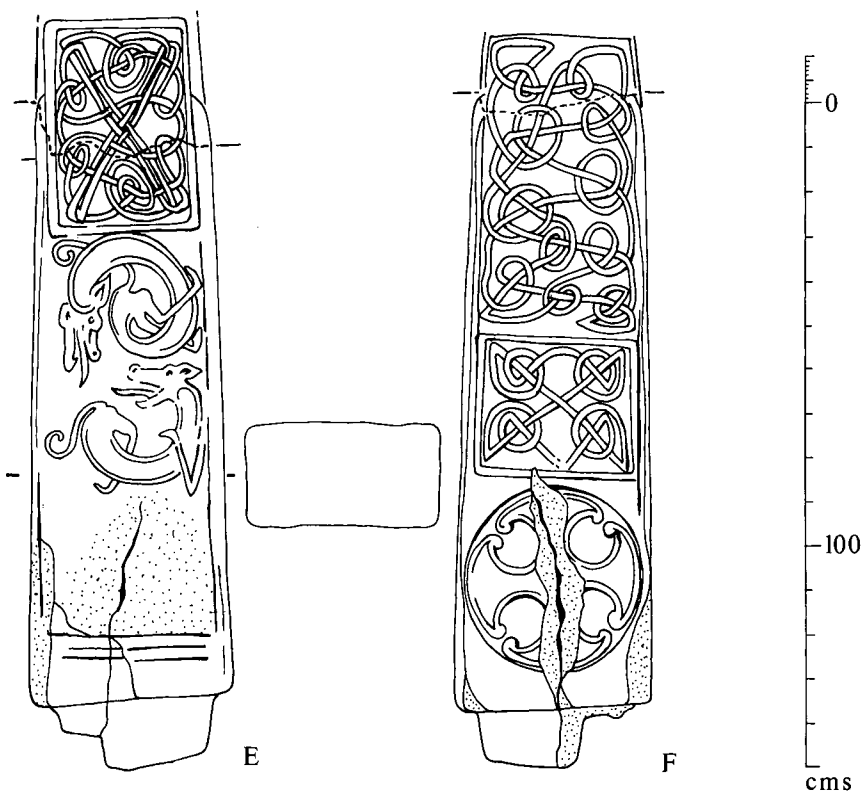
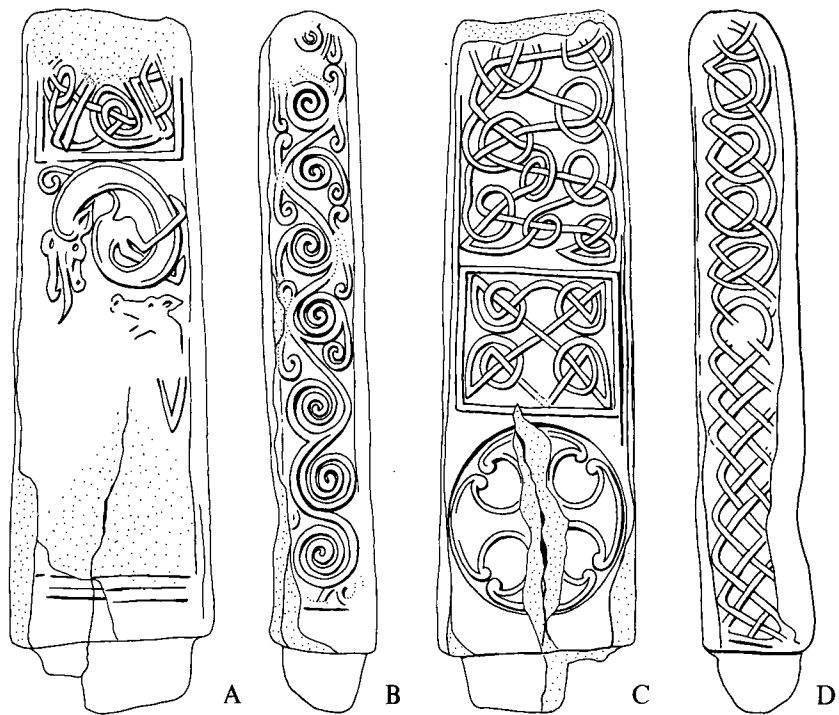


FIG. 76 — Iken cross-shaft: sides A-D as extant; E and F with suggested reconstructions.

*Conclusions*

The existing stone structure of Iken church is clearly of Norman origin, built on a site of an earlier timber framed building, with evidence of Middle Saxon occupation. The pre-Norman burials cannot be closely dated but are likely to be associated with the earlier structure as they only occur on one side of it. The dating of the cross shaft to the late 9th or early 10th centuries by Professor Cramp suggests that the cross was commemorative and could be assumed to be still standing when Ulfitell came to remove the saint nearly 100 years later. The following phases can be identified:

- Phase 1        Some unknown Romano-British occupation, possibly with a preceding Iron Age presence.
- Phase 2        Middle-Saxon. Three sherds of Ipswich ware.
- Phase 3        Late Saxon/Norman. Two Thetford ware sherds.
- (Unphased)    Pre-Norman graves in nave, and clay foundations of a timber building on a different alignment outside the Norman north wall of the nave.
- Phase 4        Early Medieval. The Norman nave with its foundation trench, a more massive chancel arch, and a chancel of unknown proportions.
- Phase 5        Considerable activity in the late 13th/14th century (524 sherds) replacement of the chancel arch, modifications to the doors and windows in the nave.
- Phase 6        Later medieval building: the tower (1450) with re-use of Saxon cross fragment; re-roofing of the nave, addition of south porch.
- Phase 7        Post-medieval modification and restructuring of the chancel.

## THE IKEN CROSS-SHAFT

*by Rosemary Cramp*

The lower part of a cross-shaft discovered by Stanley West in 1977 built into the base of the tower of Iken church may indeed have served as a memorial to St Botolph, even though it was carved many years after his death. It is dangerous to infer from a single piece of sculpture that it was unique or of special significance in its time, since the survival of such pieces is so random. Nevertheless in Suffolk, unlike Northumbria or Mercia, cross-shafts are not commonplace features in church walls. Indeed this shaft is unusual in its region. There are plenty of slab grave covers from excavated church yards in Eastern England from Lincolnshire to Cambridge, but even these are comparatively late. It is possible that this monument represents an attempt to copy a monument type from another region or of an earlier age, since, on every face the motifs, with the notable exception of the fan-armed cross-head, and the animals on the broad faces, are waveringly and even incompetently produced.

The cross is 1.5m high with a broken tenon at the base and is of slab-like section, which in other regions, such as Northumbria, would be considered a late characteristic (Fig. 76, A-D).

On one broad face, A, the ornament is weathered away save at the top where parts of two panels survive; in the uppermost which is surrounded by an inner roll moulding, seem to be the heads of two creatures, with long, beaked jaws with rolled tips, enmeshed in interlace. Below an elegant, confidently drawn ribbon animal with a coiled contoured body. It has a canine head with open jaws and extended tongue; its eye is lightly dotted and it has a pointed ear. Its hindquarters terminate in long spindly legs and a tail which passes under its body and terminates in a tight coil. The head of a second beast of similar type is just discernible below, but the stone has so flaked away that the rest of it is lost. The origins of such creatures in 7th/8th-century Insular manuscripts can hardly be in dispute and it would seem that the dog