

# THE CHAPEL OF ST COLUMBANUS AT CHEDDAR

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The chapel of St Columbanus at Cheddar is now a conserved ruin in the grounds of the Kings of Wessex School. Archaeological excavation in 1960–62 showed it had its origin as the royal chapel of the palace complex in the 10th century. In spite of its early-sounding dedication it did not succeed any earlier religious structure, but was in fact built over a hall of an earlier period (Rahtz 1979, 52–67, 193–223, 374–9).

The chapel was rebuilt in the late Saxon or early Norman period and again in the 13th century, with considerable modifications in the 14th century. The only documentary reference to it is from 1321, after the chapel had passed out of royal hands into those of the Bishop of Wells (Rahtz 1979, 19). After the Reformation, the building was given over to secular use, and was a dwelling until its partial destruction in about 1910 (see Fig. 9 and Rahtz 1979, 216–7).

Details of the below-ground features are given in Rahtz 1979. The architectural sequence above ground is not, however, dealt with in that report, and the purpose of this note is to record the details of the above-ground elevations (Figs. 3–8) which were drawn by R. Sladden, then at the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings. The relationships between the standing walls and the stratification of below-ground features are shown in a series of sections through the chapel in Rahtz 1979, Figs. 68, 72 and 74.

The basic sequence is shown in the summary plan of Fig. 1. The first chapel (I) of the 10th century survived only as a footing, though other evidence could be adduced for the character of its superstructure (Rahtz 1979, 202–203 and see Pls. III and IV).

The footings of the nave of Chapel II (built in the late 10th to 11th century) were found under the standing walls on the north, south and west sides, but its eastern foundation was located on the west side of the present east wall. Beyond this was a slightly narrower chancel (Rahtz 1979, Fig. 73).

## *Chapel IIIA*

In the 13th century Chapel IIIA was built on the foundations of Chapel II. The east end of the nave of Chapel II was demolished to floor level, and the chancel was widened to the full width of the nave; there may have been no subdivision in this phase. Apart from limestone and freestone used in the earlier chapels, conglomerate was now widely used and some lias limestone; buff mortar was used throughout the IIIA work. The north, south and west walls of the surviving structure are of period IIIA with the following surviving architectural features.

38. Window in centre of west wall (Figs. 4, 5, 6 and 7). Single light lancet with two-stone double chamfer; flattened pointed arch inside single chamfer voussoirs; wide internal splay to 40° jambs. Blocked in Chapel IIIB.

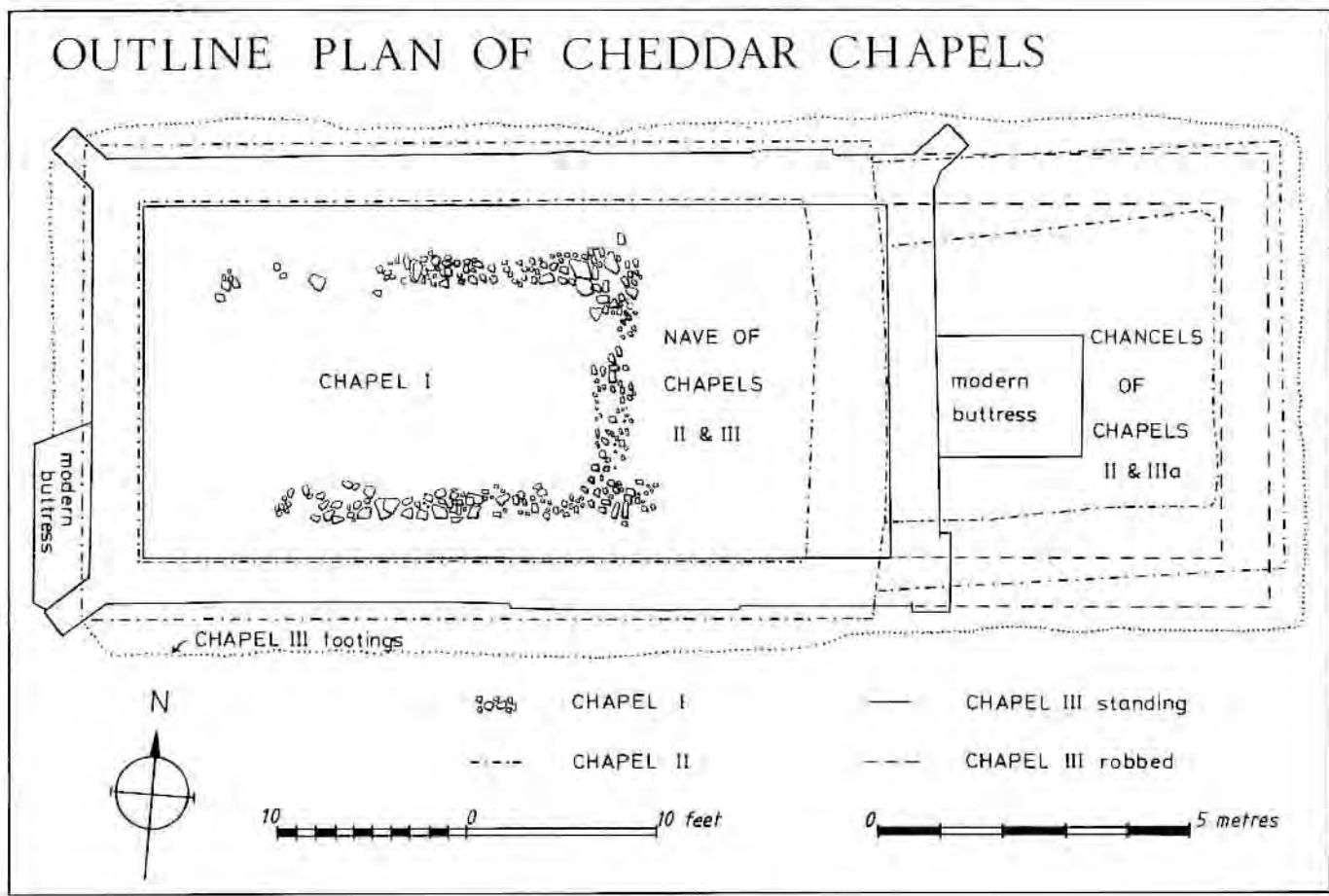


Fig. 1 Outline plan of Cheddar chapels.

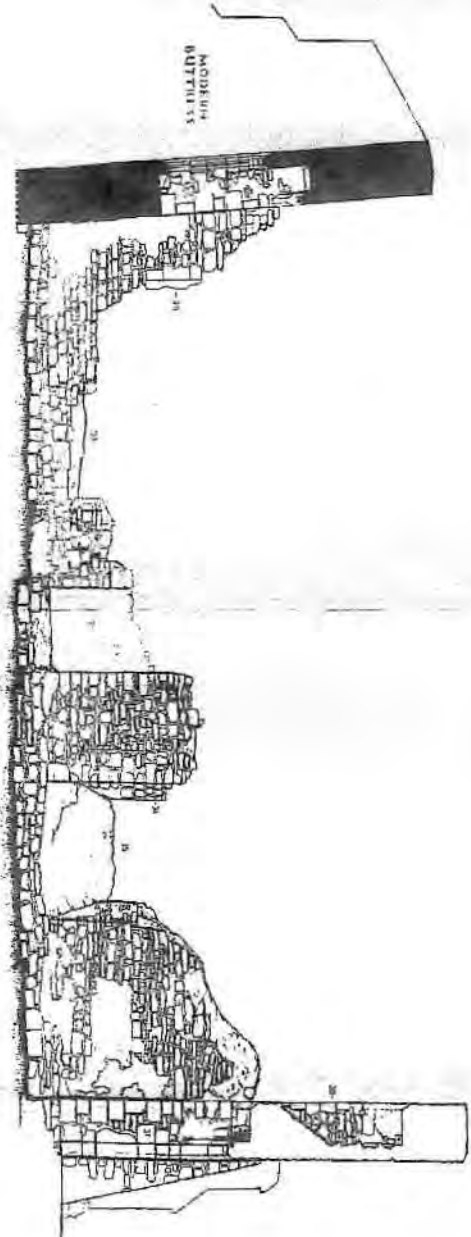
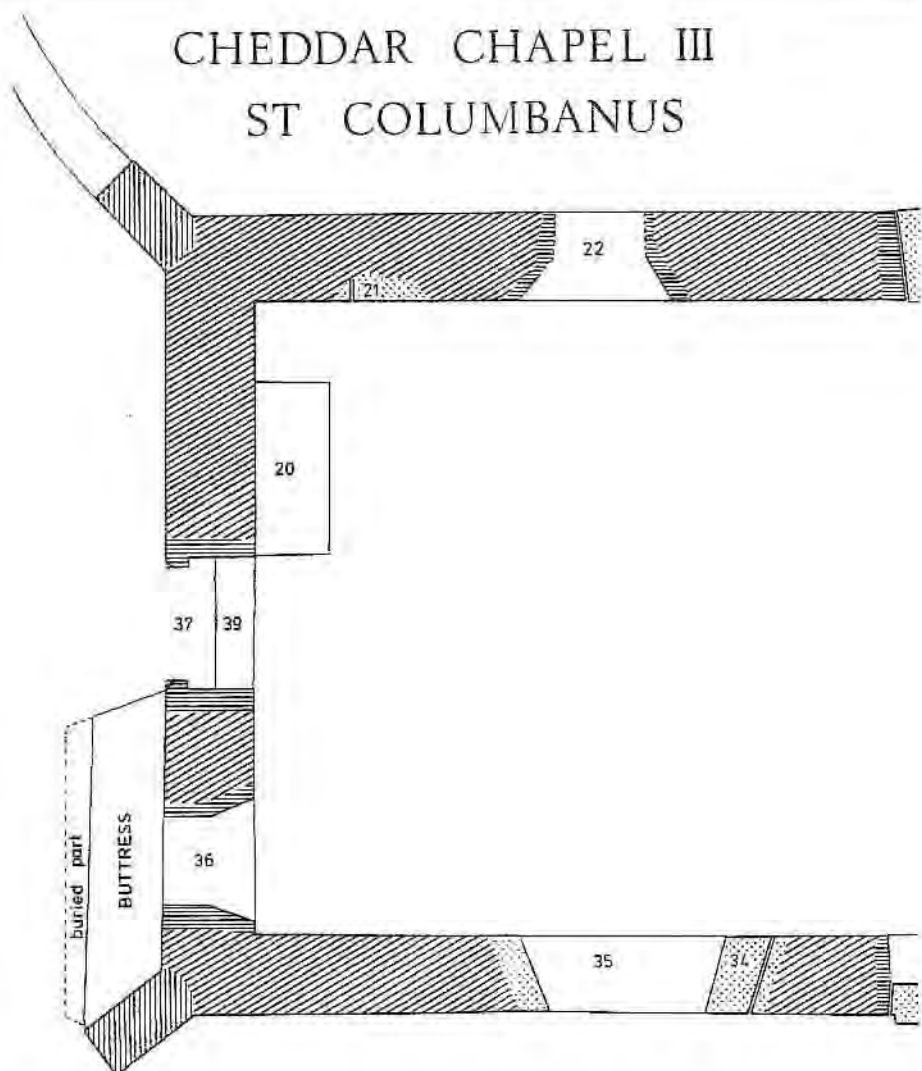


Fig. 1 Internal elevation of south wall.



Fig. 2 South elevation.

# CHEDDAR CHAPEL III ST COLUMBANUS








-  CHAPEL IIIA - 13th century
-  CHAPEL IIIB - 14th century
-  CHAPEL IIIC - later medieval
-  CHAPEL IIID - post-medieval
-  modern additions

Fig. 2 Ched.

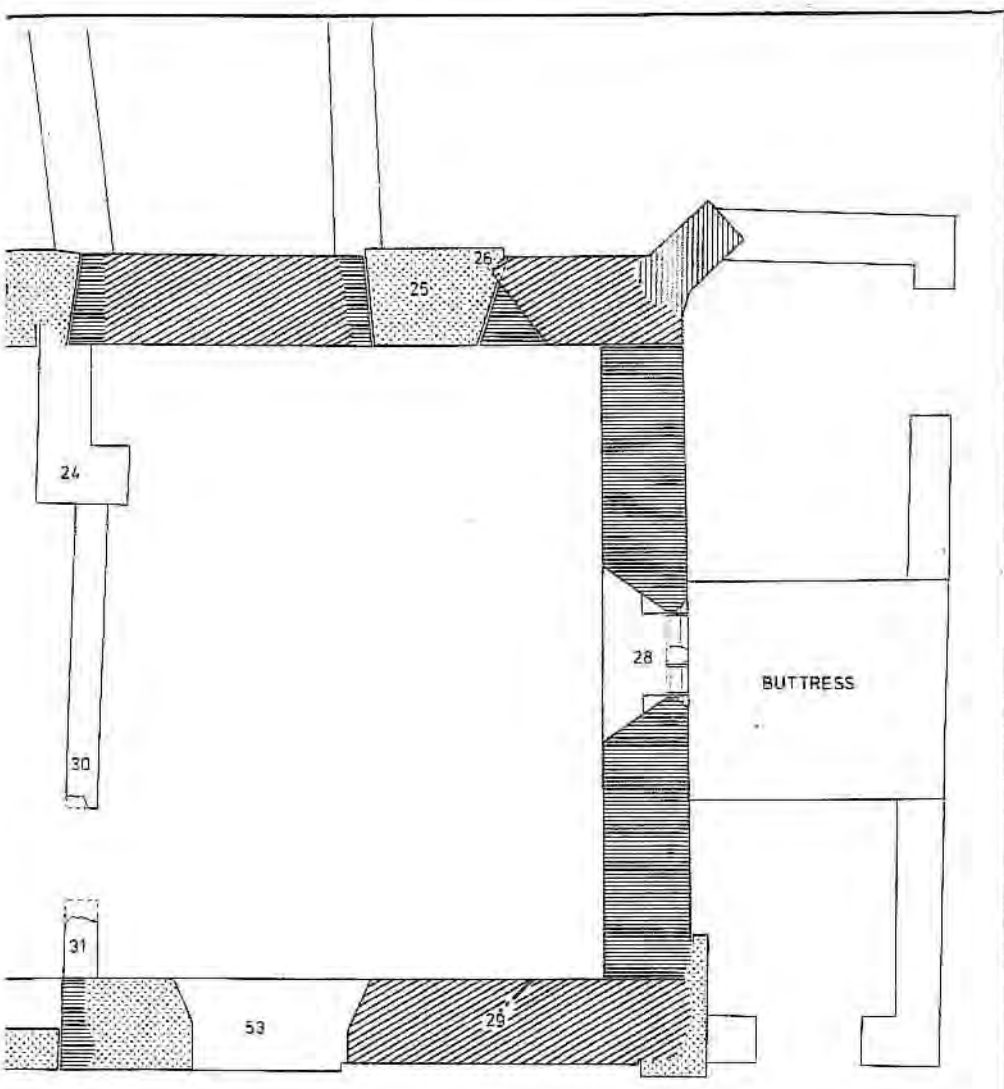


Figure III. St. Columbanus.

26. Window at east end of north wall (Figs. 7 and 8). East side only survives, west side destroyed by IIIB door 25 (see below). Plain chamfer jamb and simple mullion.
29. Window at east end of south wall (Fig. 4). Only survives as fragment of simple chamfered jamb. Blocked later.  
(N.B. For below-ground foundations at east end see Rahtz 1979, 210 and Fig. 75).

### Chapel IIIB

In the 14th century the IIIA chancel was demolished and a new east wall inserted (Figs. 2 and 8). The new work was poor in quality and bonded only with a soft, clayey, orange mortar, with little or no lime. A number of windows and doorways, as follows, were also rebuilt or inserted at this time.

37. The west doorway (Fig. 2) was rebuilt with a two-centred arch on the exterior (Figs. 5 and 7) and a flat single-centred curved arch inside (Figs. 3 and 6).
22. Window in western end of north wall (Fig. 2). Destroyed before elevation (Fig. 7) drawn. Some fragments of single chamfer jamb set in IIIB mortar (see above) had survived.
23. Doorway and ?window in middle of north wall (Fig. 2). The doorway is certain, as blocked masonry between two straight joints set in IIIB mortar (Fig. 7). The blocking was only down to the level of the lowest post-medieval floor levels of the 17th century; some IIIB mortar here suggested a robbed threshold. The existence of a window above this door is attested only by the drawing of 1829 (see Rahtz 1979, Fig. 77).
25. Doorway and ?window as 23 at east end of north wall (Figs. 2 and 7). Doorway has straight joints, with jambs set with IIIB mortar (see above) which block IIIA window 26. Doorway blocked later. A possible threshold outside (60 in Rahtz 1979, Fig. 75) is represented by three large pieces of window-head from Chapel I re-used here (ST. 75 and 76 in Rahtz 1979, Figs. 79 and 80).
28. Window in the middle of east wall (Figs. 2, 7 and 8). Exterior has two-light ogee cusped tracery, interior arabesque hood moulding; *c.* 1330 in style (inf. Dr. C.A. Raleigh Radford).
32. Doorway in middle of south wall (Figs. 2, 3 and 4). Jambs set with IIIB mortar; later blocked in outer part leaving recess (Fig. 4), whose stones were covered with the 17th-century floor level.
36. Window towards south end of west wall (Figs. 2 and 6) probably of same form as 22 but more complete. Plain chamfer inside, outside hidden by buttress; flat inside sill.

### Chapel IIIC

Chapel IIIC is represented only by the addition of diagonal buttresses (bonded with hard red mortar) which survive at all but the south-east corner (see Figs. 2-8). The buttresses suggest a date of late 14th or 15th century for this phase.

### Chapel IIID

In the 17th century the chapel was adapted for domestic occupation. Earlier doorways were blocked and a new window and doorway made in the south wall. Later the building was subdivided by the insertion of a partition wall with a doorway; the south-east diagonal buttress was replaced by a square one and other buttresses were subsequently added to east and west; details of these features are as follows:

21. Blocked ?window at west end of north wall (Figs. 2 and 7). May be only a recess.
53. Window in east end of south wall (Figs. 2-4). East side IIIA masonry, west side rebuilt in IIID; probably glazed with leaded lights.
- 34 & 35. Doorway in middle of south wall (Figs. 2-4). 34 is a later rebuild of the original east side of 35 in harder mortar. There may originally have been a window here, later changed to a doorway; later still blocked (see Fig. 4).
24. L-shaped wall (Figs. 2 and 6) running south from middle of interior north wall.

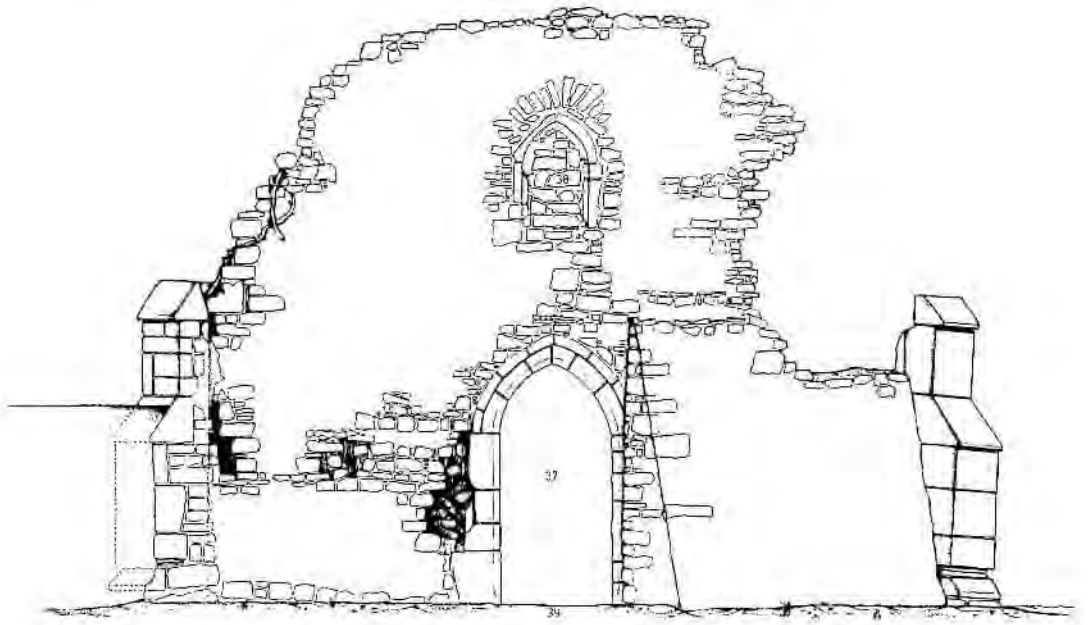


Fig. 5 West elevation.

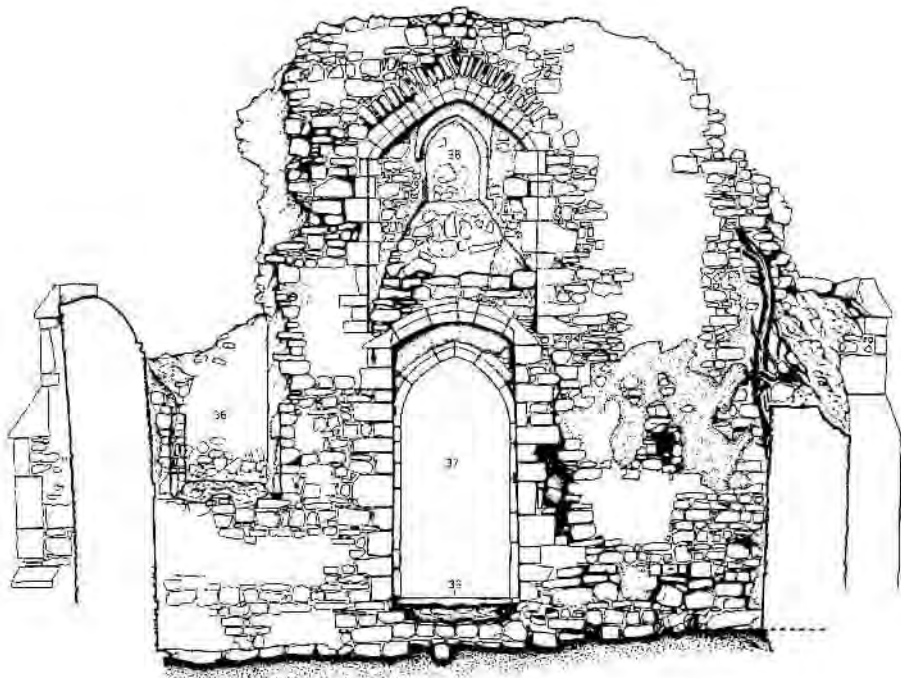


Fig. 6 Internal elevation of west wall.

30. Wall foundation running N-S added to south end of 24 (Fig. 2).
31. Stub wall in line with and to south of 30. Gap between 30 and 31 is doorway (Fig. 2).
39. Upper west step inside west door (Figs. 2, 4 and 6); limestone slabs inserted into jambs with hard whitish mortar; probably post medieval. Bedded on dirty soil and level with present ground surface outside.

Local information suggests that the chapel was used as a barn until *c.* 1800 but was then divided into two sections with two separate south doors. By 1829 the building had two chimneys (Fig. 9). At the beginning of this century it was lived in by two families of farm workers. After the roof was stripped in *c.* 1910, the chapel became derelict and much of the superstructure collapsed. The only repairs done were on the occasion of Rogation Day processions. The state of the west end of the chapel in 1962 is shown in Rahtz 1979 Pl. XIV, but since then it has been made secure and is a welcome feature in the layout of the new school.

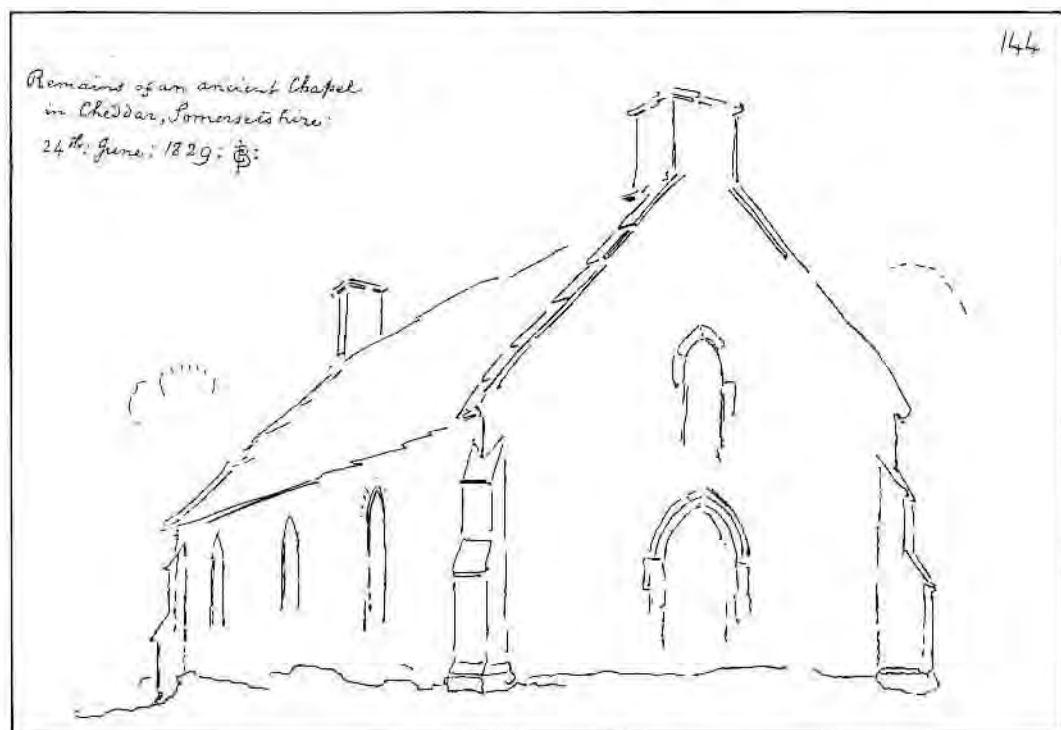


Fig. 9 Cheddar chapel 1829.

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#### *Bibliography*

Rahtz, P.A., 1979. *The Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar* (British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 65).





Fig. 7 Internal elevation of north wall.

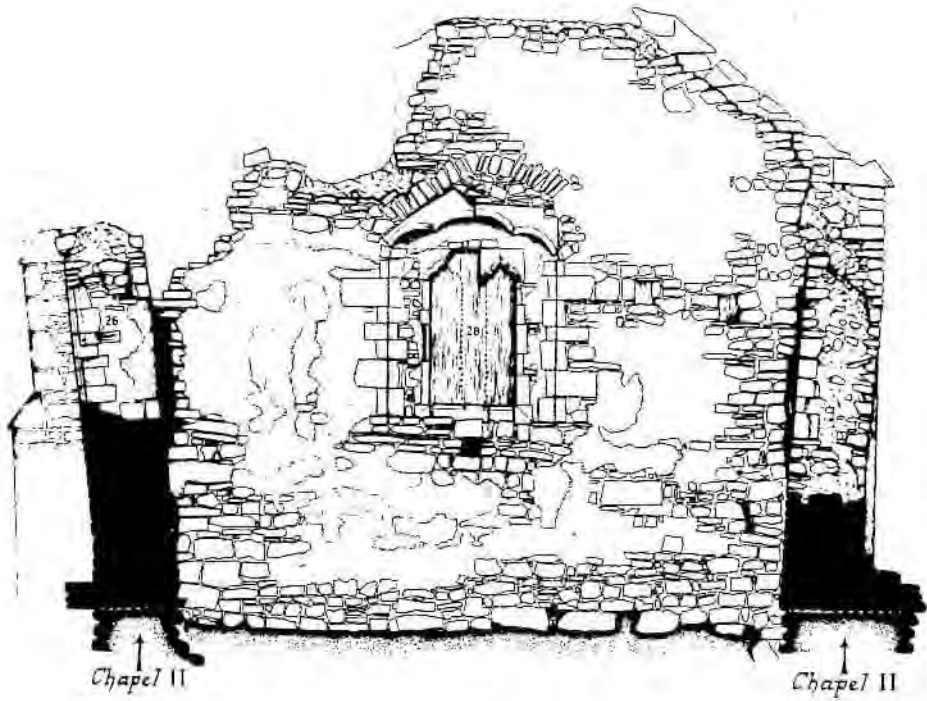


Fig. 8 Internal elevation of east wall.