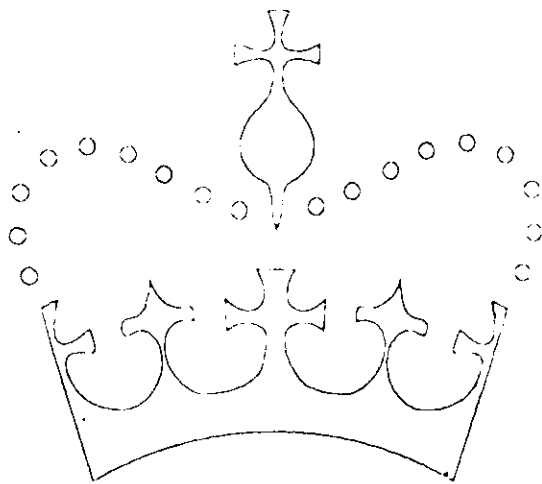


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RCHME SURVEY REPORT



**THE BISHOP'S PALACE,
CHUDLEIGH, DEVON**

An archaeological survey by the Royal Commission on
the Historical Monuments of England

March 1999



THE BISHOP'S PALACE, CHUDLEIGH, DEVON

An archaeological survey by the
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

County: Devon
District: Teignbridge
Parish: Chudleigh
OS Map No: SX 8678
NGR: SX 8660 7887
NMR No: SX 87 NE 6

Surveyed: February 1999
Report by: Martin Fletcher
Investigation: M. Fletcher, S. Probert

Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (Exeter) 5 Marlborough Court, Manaton Close, Matford, Exeter
EX2 8PF

National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon, SN2 2GZ 01793 414700

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Summary

The Bishop's Palace at Chudleigh is a nationally important site although only a few ruined features and low earthworks now survive. The core of the palace is probably the impressive though extensively robbed vaulted lower storey building with a ruined, much altered superstructure, located on the west of the site. Nearby are the fragmentary remains of three free-standing walls, which are parts of the medieval range of buildings. Elements of an enclosure wall also survive. The earthworks are visible as levelled stances with associated amorphous low banks and traces of agricultural activity. These earthworks indicate much surface disturbance but also suggest the potential for the survival of footings and foundations of structures, especially in areas where the soil cover is quite deep. A long standing requirement to fully record this scheduled monument was fulfilled when Exeter Archaeology was commissioned to undertake a measured drawing of the standing structures in February - March 1999. The RCHME Exeter office completed a 1:500 scale survey of the ruins and the earthworks during this period.

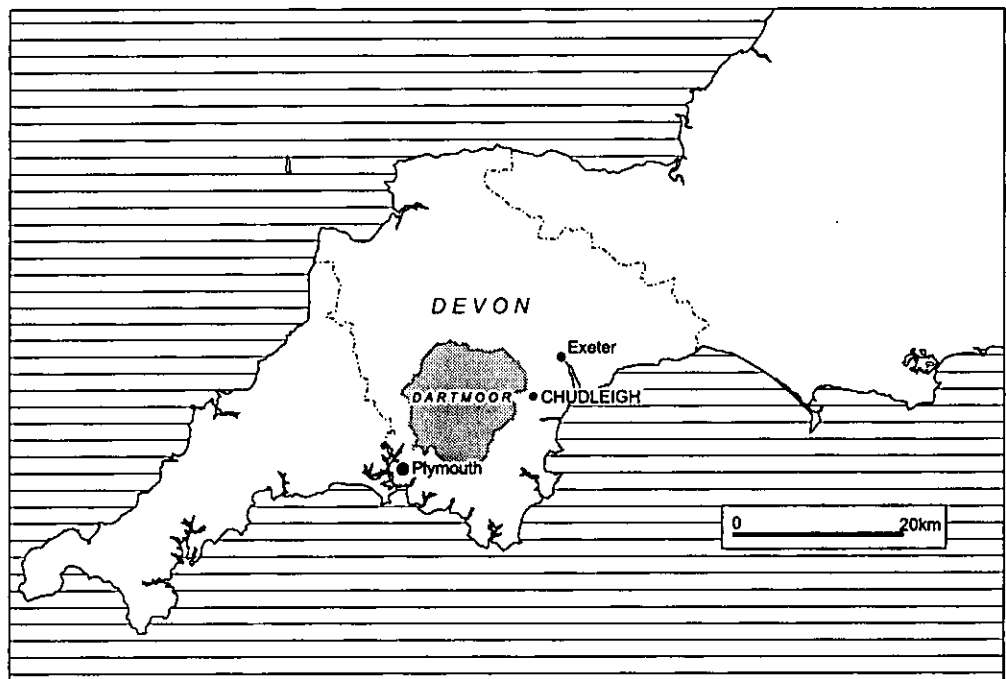


Fig. 1. Chudleigh.
Location map

ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY AND CARTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

The historical background of the site is set out succinctly in the English Heritage Schedule Entry dated 1996. The palace has a distinguished history as one of the nine rural houses in Devon used by the bishops of Exeter at the end of the Middle Ages (Tapley-Soper 1942-6). A licence to crenellate the Episcopal manor was granted in 1379 and the manor was disposed of by Bishop Veysey in 1550 on the orders of Edward VI.

In his *Illustrated Journals* (1789 - 1800) Swete records the ruin of an Episcopal seat in an orchard of a farm called Palace. His sketch of the 'Episcopal Palace near Chudleigh' is however difficult to reconcile with the surviving ruins. It is worth noting that Swete's drawings of the Bishop's Palace at nearby Bishopsteignton contain errors of detail and omission (Laithwaite 1989).

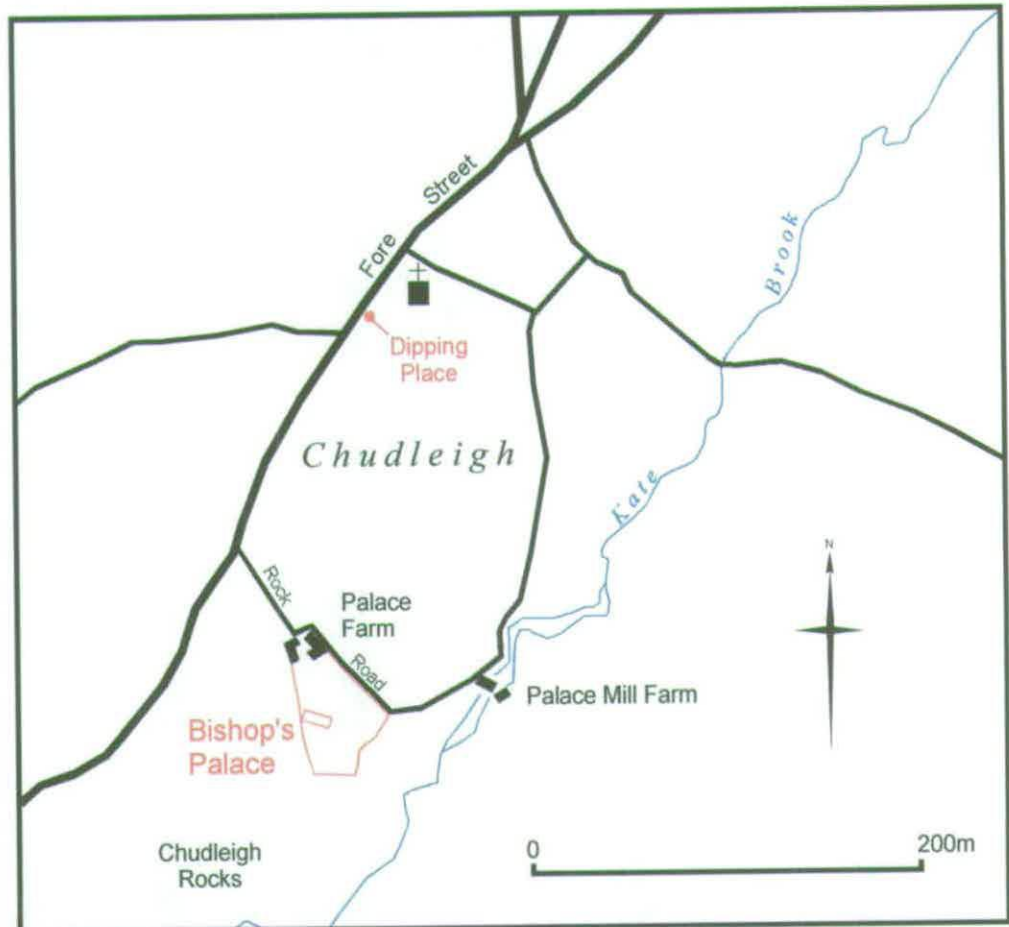


Fig. 2. Chudleigh and its environs

The 1838 Tithe Map depicts the surviving part of the palace as a dotted outline much as it is today (the copy of the Tithe Map in the Exeter Record Office for this portion of Chudleigh is damaged). The Apportionment describes the field in which the ruins stand as orchard along with its neighbours to the north and east. The field to the south, called Chudleigh Rock is designated as quarries. The pasture field to the west is named Third Backsides. A house, yard and its outhouses are depicted where Palace Farm now stands. An adjacent enclosed broad track, or road, is shown immediately beyond the west enclosure wall.

In 1852 Jones noted that a well and a spring in the vicinity of the palace still retain the name Bishop's well and St Mary's spring. She also noted that the principal entrance to the palace was through an arched gateway 'about the site' of the garden of Palace Cottage and that this gateway was taken down in living memory (Jones 1852).

The Ordnance Survey 1:2500 scale first and second editions, dated 1888 and 1905 respectively, share an identical depiction of the site : the palace ruin is drawn as a rectangle, the three free-standing walls are depicted as well as elements of the perimeter wall. Palace farmhouse has expanded in size from the house and yard shown in 1838.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SITE

The undulating site which lies at 61 m above OD overlooks most of the town of Chudleigh and it is located on the southern fringe of the settlement. It occupies the fairly steep north-facing slopes of a major limestone outcrop known as Chudleigh Rocks and it has panoramic views on all but the south side.

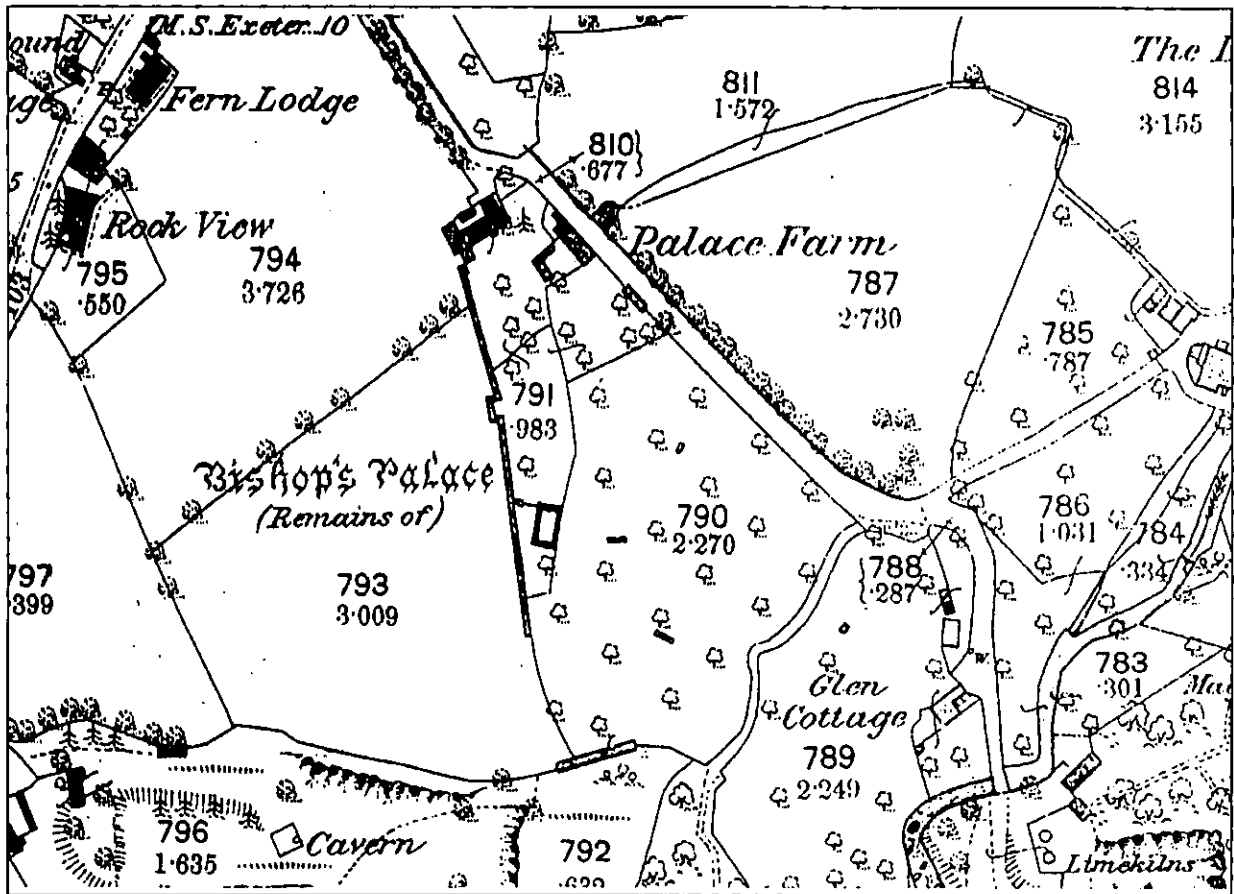


Fig. 3. Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1:2500 scale, 1888

The limestone sub-strata is most probably flawed and faulted here as it is elsewhere on the outcrop as evidenced in the many abandoned quarry faces. No exposed limestone bedrock is visible although in places boulders and stones can be detected below the turf. The slope is covered by fertile soil which occurs in varying depths across the area.

No flowing water in the form of a stream or spring is evident on the site (or on any of the available maps) but this is to be expected given the nature of the sub-strata and also the extensive quarries located to the south and east which may have effected the water table. A strongly flowing stream called the Kate Brook lies in the deep valley to the east.

The palace ruin and the three widely spaced free-standing walls (which might once have been linked or otherwise connected) are the only surviving above ground evidence of what must have been an impressive range of medieval buildings. They stand within a sub-triangular-shaped parcel of land of just over one hectare in area, which is now sub-divided into paddocks of permanent pasture. Whether this land parcel constitutes the extent of the original palace grounds is uncertain. It is now enclosed to the north-east by a modern housing estate; to the south-east by a massive, disused, quarry; to the south by a bungalow with an adjacent substantial, abandoned quarry and to the west by a pasture field itself sub-divided into paddocks with houses beyond. The fact that the area is now 'hemmed in' by housing estates and abandoned quarries renders the landscape context of the site difficult to interpret but it is not unreasonable to suggest that the palace grounds may once have extended further to the north-east towards Palace Mill and perhaps also eastwards to the Kate Brook

The site is now demarcated by either substantial and uncapped stone walls or stony banks. The following description of the boundaries is based on the visible evidence although most of the features are hidden under dense vegetation or ivy growth. The majority of the west side has a well constructed perimeter wall. It is uncapped, between 0.8m and 0.9m wide and on average 1.8m high. At least five splayed arched loops are extant although some are blocked; a possible sixth window can also be identified along with other indents in the wall. This impressive wall does not share the same orientation as the line of the adjacent palace ruins but it is probably a precinct wall. Towards the south-west corner of the site the western boundary comprises a 1.2m wide stony hedge bank which may overlie the foundations of a wall. This wall appears to cut through the earthworks visible on its west side and although some are clearly of natural origin there is a hint of a continuity between the slopes on each side of the well. Ground surface levels have in some places been significantly raised perhaps by the addition of imported soil.

Much of the southern boundary is composed of a fairly crudely built and repaired stone revetment which retains the rising ground to the south, here occupied by a bungalow with numerous 'shanty' outhouses and enclosures. The revetment is of mixed quality - both drystone and mortared random rubble construction - and it is a maximum 2.0m high in places but elsewhere it averages 1.4m high. It exhibits numerous repairs and rebuilds and for the most part does not represent a well-constructed perimeter wall. The upper part of a vertical mortared wall was discovered during the digging of a cesspit adjacent to the bungalow in the 1960s (Boulton, pers comm). It seems likely therefore that the southern boundary of the site follows more or less the existing line but that the crude revetment hides part of the original wall.

The present eastern extent of the site is now defined by an uncapped wall which sinuously negotiates the fairly steep hillside. It is 0.5m wide, a maximum 1.8m high but on average 1.3m high, of mortared random rubble construction. Beyond this wall is a narrow footpath with, immediately to the east, a precipitous vertical face of an extensive limestone quarry. The footpath has been worn down to the limestone bedrock and the depth of adjacent soil cover is approximately 0.5m. The authenticity of this wall as the eastern boundary of the palace grounds is open to question because some earthworks appear to extend beyond it and also it is much thinner than the perimeter wall marking the western side of the site. The 1838 Tithe Map depicts a slightly straighter wall positioned more or less on the same line, however the later editions of the OS maps show two parallel sinuous walls with an inter mural footpath and an orchard - which apparently predates the deep quarry-beyond. The date of this now abandoned quarry is uncertain : it is not depicted on the Tithe Map or on the 19th or 20th century Ordnance Survey maps.

On the northern side of the site a short length of what appears to be part of the perimeter wall is an uncapped random rubble wall some 1.8m high and 0.8m thick. Elsewhere a 1.2m wide stony hedge bank forms the boundary with a tarmac road beyond; this was widened before 1838 to facilitate access to Palace Quarry (located to the east across the Kate Brook). Beyond this road the area is occupied by a housing estate built in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The Bishop's Palace, Chudleigh

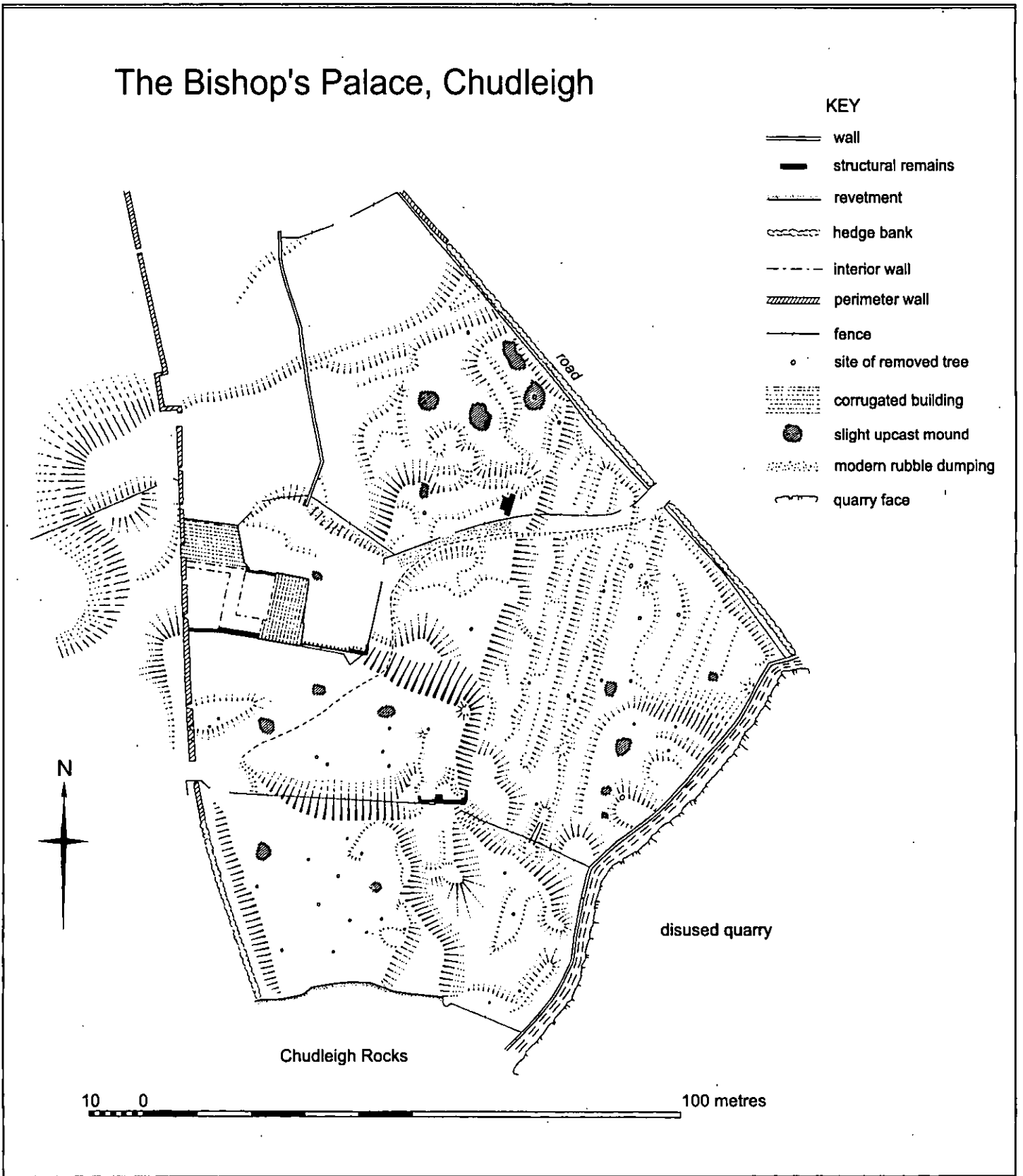


Fig. 4. RCHME 1:500 survey (reduced) of the palace and earthworks

THE RUINS

The remains of the palace comprise an impressive lower storey vaulted building with the vestiges of a much altered superstructure. Also, to the east, three free-standing walls which are probably the fragmentary remains of associated buildings. One wall is identified by Jones (1852) as the remains of the chapel dedicated to St Michael.

These structures and parts of the perimeter wall have been measured and drawn by Exeter Archaeology.

THE EARTHWORKS

The site has either been intensively occupied or farmed for hundreds of years and some of this activity is indicated by the earthworks. Given that the hillslope is probably composed of a faulted and flawed limestone sub-strata the origin and function of the earthworks must be interpreted with caution. It is however clear that the contour-following slopes, even if they are natural features, have been graded or refashioned during at least one phase in the occupation of the site. Also some linear slopes are the result of the destruction of, and stone robbing from, various buildings.

Prior to its present use as paddocks the majority of the site was planted and replanted with orchard trees over a period of at least two hundred years. The few surviving orchard trees were cleared in the 1980s but numerous shallow depressions (on average 1.0m across) indicate the locations of some of the trees. A number of these depressions have associated low turf-covered and spread mounds which are clearly upcast heaps, whilst some depressions occur within other similar mounds. When some new orchard trees were planted in the 1950s the opportunity was used to dig the pits deeper than necessary to "search for buried features" (Boulton, pers comm); this almost certainly accounts for the presence of many of these low mounds.

The RCHME survey reveals a number of linear slopes which appear to sub-divide the site into distinct parcels: some suggest the presence of building stances, others, enclosures or plots.

Three well defined levelled areas form the western part of the site. The upper, in the south-west corner is bounded by the perimeter revetment to the south, the 0.7m high linear slopes against the hedge bank to the west and 1.2m high slopes to the east. Apart from numerous 'tree holes' and a few low amorphous mounds this area which slopes very slightly to the north is featureless; it may have once been a garden or plot. It is separated from its neighbour to the north by a broad spread slope up to 1.1m high, partly marked by a modern paddock fence.

The adjacent, lower levelled area also has some 'tree holes' and mounds visible. The footings of a wall diagonally bisect the area but no other earthworks are perceptible. The west side is defined by the enclosure wall, the east and north sides by a pronounced scarp up to 1.2m high. The eastern part comprises a well-defined building platform associated with the free-standing ruined structure and its adjacent infilled and roofless sub-terranean vault. The eastern slopes adjacent to the ruins are very ragged - most probably the result of stone robbing. The north part of this area backs on to the remains of the palace at first floor level: the uneven floor of the vaults is some 2.8m below. The present retaining wall on the north side is composed

partly of a 1.6m high mortared stone wall (one of the free-standing walls depicted by the OS), partly of a concrete block wall up to 2.8m high, and partly (within the present building) of a substantial wall of random rubble construction.

The impression gained on the ground is that part of this level area behind the palace ruins has been created by infill against the vaulted structure and that the original building may once have extended further south into this area, perhaps only at the first floor level. The occupants of any building here would have enjoyed commanding and panoramic views across the town and surrounding countryside.

The surviving palace ruins are 'encased' in two large corrugated iron buildings (post-1955 in origin). A tall 'tower' of masonry, part of the upper floors of the palace (photographed by the Ordnance Survey in 1953) was dismantled in the 1960s (Boulton, pers comm) and there have since been numerous alterations and repairs to the remains of this superstructure.

The lower of the three level areas, partially occupied by the palace ruins, has been heavily disturbed by agricultural activity and drainage works. There is evidence of levelling visible as surface debris and the sharp linear scarp along its northern fringe. To the east this level area is demarcated by a low wall 0.6m high of concrete blocks built on stone footings of uncertain age.

The hillslope which falls away from the palace on the north side, once crossed by an access track from the farmhouse (OS 1:2500 scale map 1955), is now occupied by a small paddock and the smoothed lawned garden.

To the west, the perimeter wall which has the curious sub-square projection is pierced by a field gate which might or might not occupy the site of an original passage although no gap is depicted on the 1888 OS map. There is also a blocked 2.0 m wide gap in the wall within the corrugated building structure to the north west of the palace ruins. To the north the enclosure wall is pierced by a modern garden gate 0.8m wide.

The free-standing ruin located to the north-east of the palace seems to lie roughly east to west and apparently shares a similar orientation to the axis of the palace. No foundations are visible and the earthworks associated with the ruin present an inconclusive picture: there is no clear evidence of a building platform however extensive stone robbing has most probably disturbed the earthworks. The low and very spread earthworks to the north of the ruin offer a very fragmentary and confused pattern of land use in this paddock. Numerous tree holes and low mounds are evident, these coupled with some low sinuous earthworks indicate much surface activity and dumping. A number of linear scarps which extend under the field hedge on the north-east side have been cut by the road. There is no trace of a planned layout of paths or plots in this gently sloping area.

The eastern part of the site is composed of slight level stances of uncertain origin and function located on the fairly steep natural slope, some apparently overlaid by the eastern boundary wall. Jones (1852) notes that the burying ground of the chapel lay in the eastern corner of the orchard and that some skeletons were dug up 'when the road to the quarry was recently widened'.

The level area in the south east corner of the enclosure is partially embanked but again its function is unclear.

A series of at least six substantial linear ridges extend up and down (rather than along or across) the hillslope within a natural fold in the slope. They appear to belong to an agricultural phase in the life of the site. Whether they represent ridges created for tree planting or crops is not clear, however they appear to be of some antiquity as at least one is overlaid by the foundations of a ruined wall.

The foundations of this wall comprise limestone boulders and stones follow a very sinuous route across the site from west to east significantly between two gateways. Its date and function are not known and it is not depicted on the available maps however it may mark the line of a track which once either served or crossed the site.

DISCUSSION

The location of the palace on the crest of rising ground overlooking the settlement of Chudleigh must have presented an imposing sight to the travellers of the adjacent ridge route and also to the occupants of the town (the Chudleigh charter for a market and fair was granted in 1309).

The parish church is clearly visible across the slight valley to the north of the palace. The link between these two ecclesiastical sites was probably very strong as indicated in 1368 when Bishop Grandisson bequeathed 'two large bells of my chapel at Chudleigh to the parish church'. The origins of both buildings are unknown but the church was dedicated in 1259 and had further rebuilding works between 1300 and 1350.

The architecture of the church tower, which is unusual in this part of Devon, with its corbelling, battlements and small windows, looks, according to Pevsner (1989), 13th century in date. Could the design of this tower have mirrored some elements in the design in the palace (or visa versa)? Could perhaps parts of the two buildings share similar methods and dates of construction? Certainly both structures share a common use of imported stone, most notably the distinctive red sandstone which features not only as quoins in the church tower and as stones in the vaults of the palace but also as random rubble in both buildings. Its inclusion in other, later, parts of the fabric of the church suggests that it may also have been reused. Volcanic trap or basalt probably from the quarries of Dunchideock as well as limestone have been used in the mouldings and chamfered stone footings in both buildings (although granite figures prominently in the later mouldings and windows in the church).

The extent of the palace precinct cannot be identified from the visible evidence. The western wall is probably a precinct wall but it is not clear which, if any, of the other walls or even the fragments of the free-standing building/walls mark the extent of the enclosure. The function of the sub-square structure in the west wall is not clear. It does not appear to be a tower, as has been suggested, but it is situated at a distinct change in the alignment of the wall. This west wall with its slit windows and apparent strength may have been the subject of the licence to crenellate granted in 1379, rather than the actual buildings. However at the Bishops's Palace

at Nettleham in Lincolnshire the licence granted in 1336 was to crenellate the manor and surround it with a stone wall (Everson et al 1991).

A leat, which according to tradition (Jones 1852) was built by Bishop Lacey (1420-55), brought spring water to the palace from the Haldon Hills. It ran via the town where the townspeople could draw pot water (Chudleigh Guide Book, undated). This leat was cut by the construction of the Chudleigh by-pass in 1972 and its course through the town has probably been destroyed by the housing: it is not depicted on the early OS maps. The nearest evidence of this leat is the infilled 'dipping place' for pot water in Fore Street, near the church. A route for such a leat can be postulated via Palace Farm and down to Kate Brook but a route to serve the palace buildings on higher ground would have required a significant embankment or launder across the shallow valley to the north-west of the farm.

The present road to Palace Farm which descends from the ridgeway route to Chudleigh was almost certainly the formal approach to the palace grounds.

The site of the arched gateway can no longer be traced although the farmhouse appears to occupy the ideal position for such a structure. The farm lacks many of the usual barns or farm outbuildings although in 1888 (OS first edition) some buildings are depicted on the opposite side of the road.

The enclosed track or road, depicted on the Tithe Map leading up the west (outer) side of the enclosure wall may be the early access route to the palace enclosure; this might help to explain the presence of the sub-square structure in this wall. Although most of the track has been effaced part of its course near the farmhouse is perpetuated as a right of way.

No finds of archaeological significance were discovered during fieldwork but exploratory digging in the area in the 1950s by local men resulted in some finds being deposited in Exeter Museum.

FURTHER WORK

A geophysical survey of the area around the standing fabric would most probably reveal evidence of wall footings and foundations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

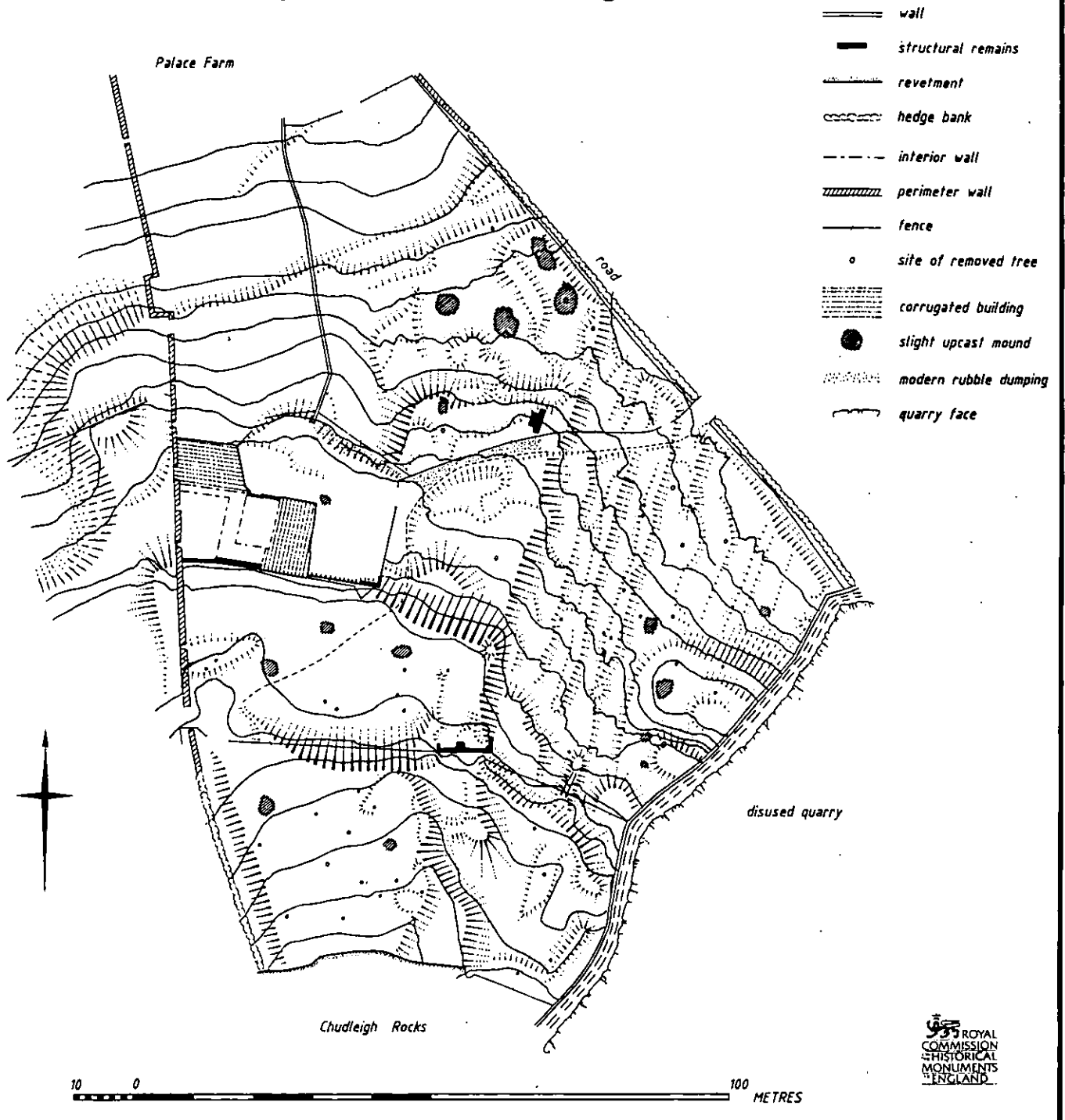
Thanks are due to the owner of Palace Farm, Susan Thompson for her help and interest and also for permission to survey the site. Rob Wilson-North contributed to the discussion.

The archive is held at the NMRC, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ. The plan and report are RCHME copyright.

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The Bishop's Palace, Chudleigh



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Fig. 5. Topography as shown by form lines.

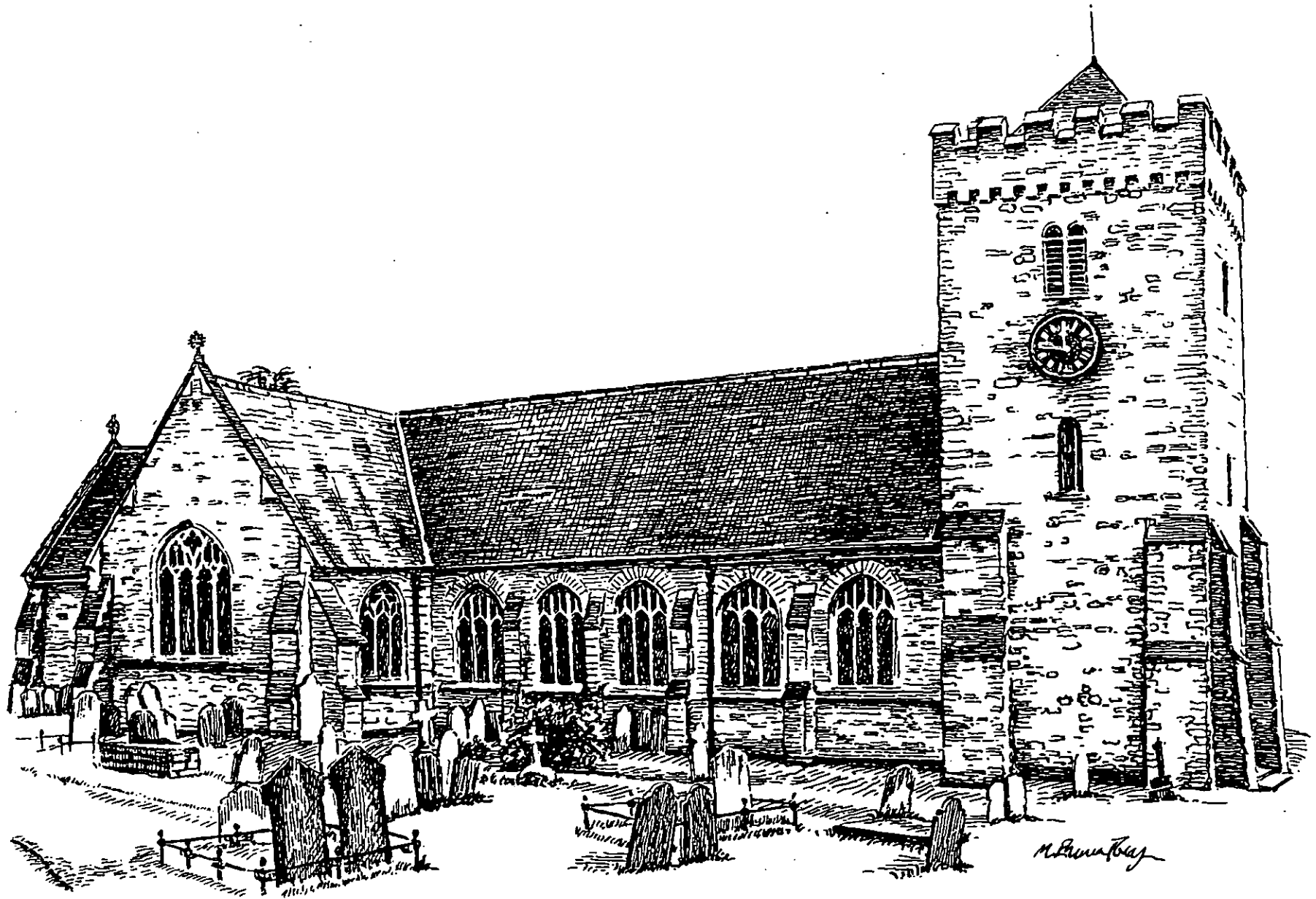
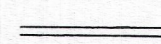

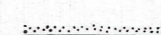





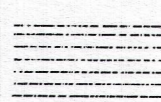

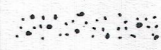
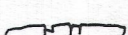


Fig. 6. St Martin's and St Mary's church, Chudleigh showing the distinctive tower.

The Bishop's Palace, Chudleigh

-  wall
-  structural remains
-  revetment
-  hedge bank
-  interior wall
-  perimeter wall
-  fence
-  site of removed tree
-  corrugated building
-  slight upcast mound
-  modern rubble dumping
-  quarry face





*The National Monuments Record contains
all the information in this report – and more:
original photographs, plans old and new,
the results of all RCHME field surveys, indexes of
archaeological sites and historical buildings,
and complete coverage of England
in air photographs.*



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