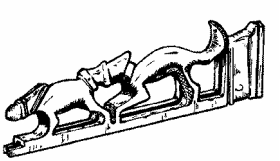
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

A Pictorial Survey of All Saints Church

Segenhoe Bedfordshire

Kevan J. Fadden

&

Brian D. Lazelle

The following photographic survey was carried out by the Ampthill Archaeological & Local History Society in 1981 in an attempt to persuade the Bedfordshire County Council to change their plans to demolish the ruin.

The church had been described in the press as “a building of little historical interest and dangerous to the public”. The Society agreed it could not be left as it was but could not accept it was of little historical interest.

When the meeting to review the the decision took place each councillor had a copy of the survey in their possession. The time restraint meant that the last copy was delivered by hand at 2.00 am on the morning of the meeting.

All photographs were taken by Kevan Fadden

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, SEGENH0E

From the eleventh century the church of All Saints Segenhoe gradually increased in size and developed incorporating different materials and styles of architecture. The last major restoration was in the eighteenth century, when the church was altered and modernised to appear an almost complete Georgian 'classical' building. The walls of the nave and tower were rendered in cement covering the earlier work leaving stark, simple lines. It seems probable that in the nineteenth century, when many churches in mid-Bedfordshire were undergoing restoration, Segenhoe Church was considered unfashionable, for in 1854 the Duke of Bedford built the Germanic All-Saints Church in nearby Ridgmont, designed by Sir G G Scott in late thirteenth century style. The old church was allowed to decay, finally going out of active use in 1927.

The purpose of this short pictorial survey is to show how this church described in the Victoria County History of 1910 as "plastered over and modernised" can now be used as an invaluable teaching aid. It shows development through the ages and leaves many questions unanswered, which should stimulate scholarship and research for years to come. This can only happen if the building is spared and made safe. The neglect of the last seventy years and recent cleaning carried out by the Bedfordshire Environmental Services Committee has uncovered the basic fabric and made this survey possible.

Kevan Fadden.
Brian Lazelle.
1981



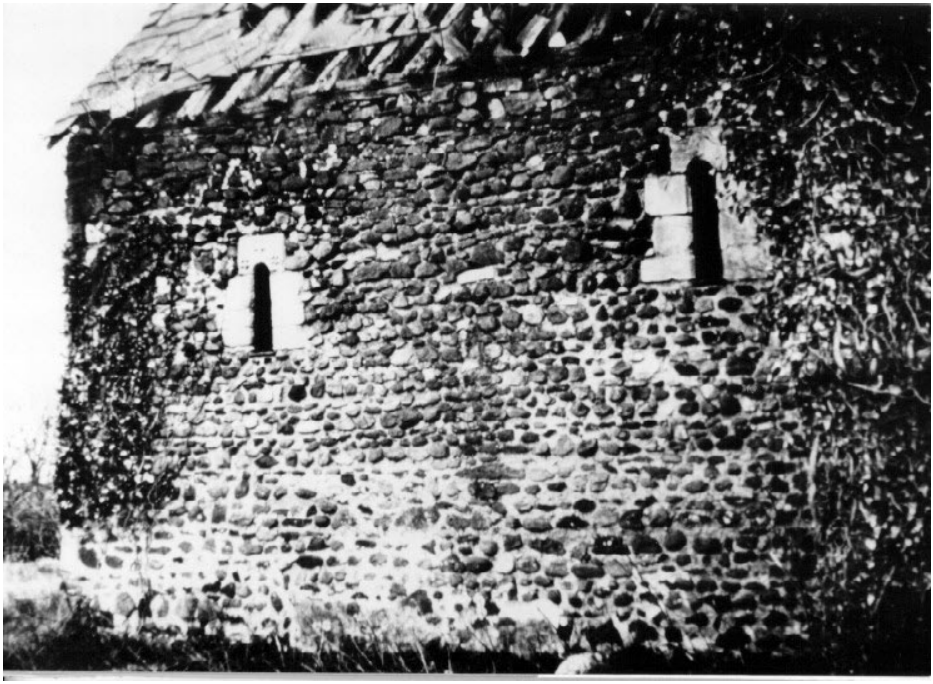
1. South Elevation

The South Elevation shows a conventional layout with a chancel, nave and an embattled west tower. The classical round arches of the windows and door can be attributed to the Georgian restoration.



2. North Elevation

A Georgian Porch of brick and sandstone, with a typical shallow pitched roof. Two windows in the chancel are boarded up for protection.



3. North Wall of the Chancel

A photograph taken in 1960 shows the slate roof and early 11th Century Windows. The lintel stone on the eastern window has three crosses in circles as decoration.



4. Inside the Chancel Window

Although boarded up the lintel and jambs can be seen tapered to form the splay. The opening is approximately six inches wide splaying out to forty-eight inches to allow maximum light.



5. The Chancel Arch

An 11th Century plain arch with zigzag carving on the abacus of the responds. This is probably the finest surviving feature of the church.



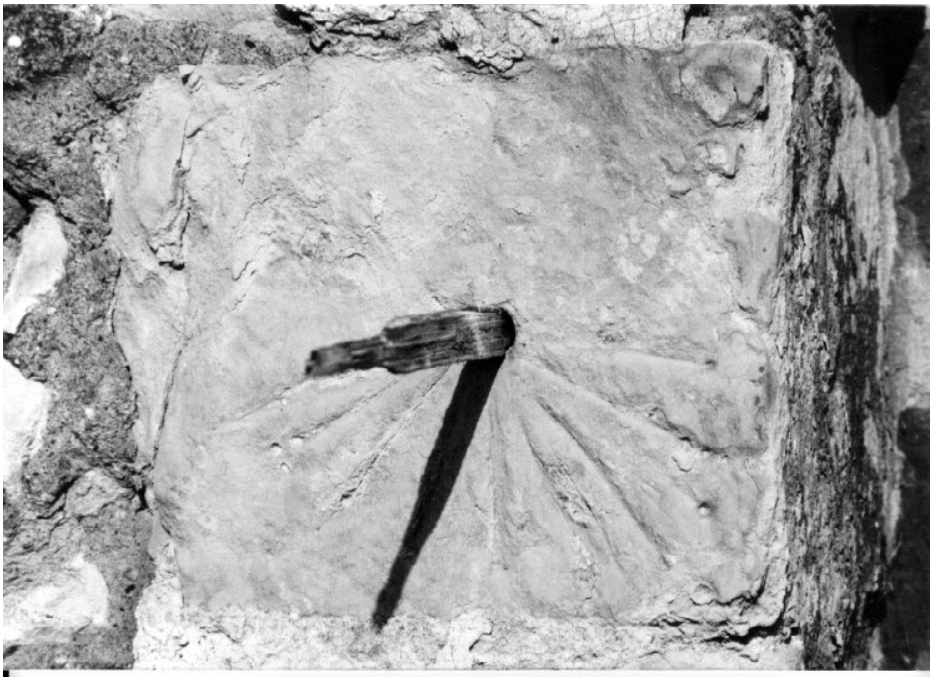
6. Abacus detail

This shows the flat zigzag with a square top face, typical of the period. Several inches of the decoration on the nave side of both abaci have been carved away, this together with the holes in the same plane suggest a later rood screen.



7. Blocked South Door

An 11th Century doorway set in a brown cobble and sandstone wall. It has a simple arch with a segmental cut lintel below the tympanum. A mass dial can be seen on the west jam.



8. Mass Dial

A close up of the mass dial showing the shadow cast by an improvised gnomon. The photograph was taken at 10.00 am.



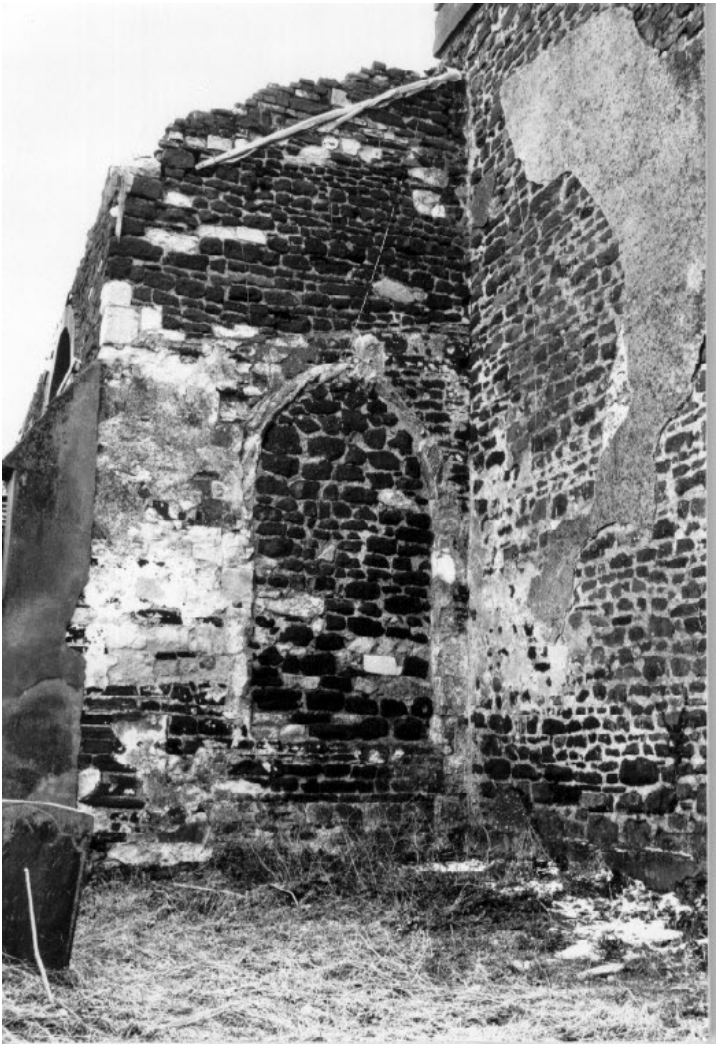
9. North Aisle Cloister

The dark ironstone arch has a hexagonal pillar and can be dated to the end of the 13th Century. Through this arch can be seen a niche of the 15th Century. The other arches were built in the 14th Century. The pillars are of quatrefoil type with four thin shafts in the diagonals.



10. Blocked Window at the West End of the North Aisle

A 14th Century window blocked with sandstone and rendered with cement. This view also shows the round arch of a north wall window made by the Georgians. The Plaster has fallen away to reveal the brickwork.



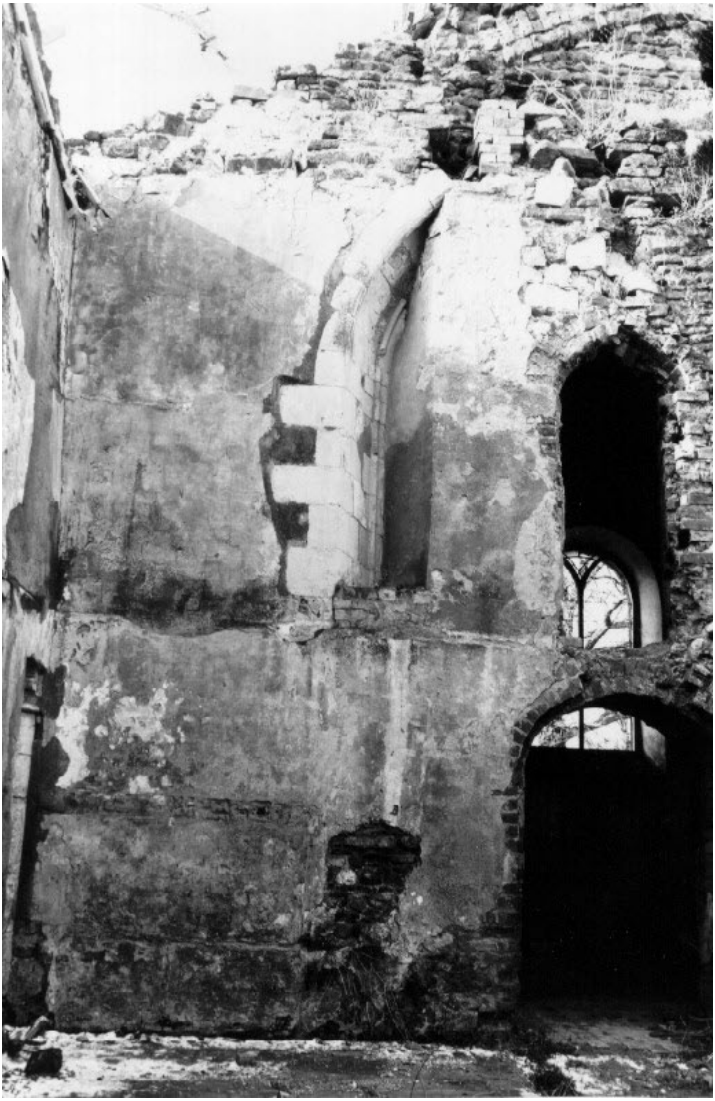
11. Blocked Window from Outside

The different textures of ironstone and the quality of the workmanship clearly shows three stages of work on the north aisle. They are the base wall; the blocked window and the area just above the window. Remains of cement rendering can be seen on the tower and to a lesser extent on the aisle wall.



12. Newel Staircase

This stairway leads from the north aisle to where the rood loft would have been. Remains of mediaeval paint can be seen on the plaster near the doorway.



13. West Wall

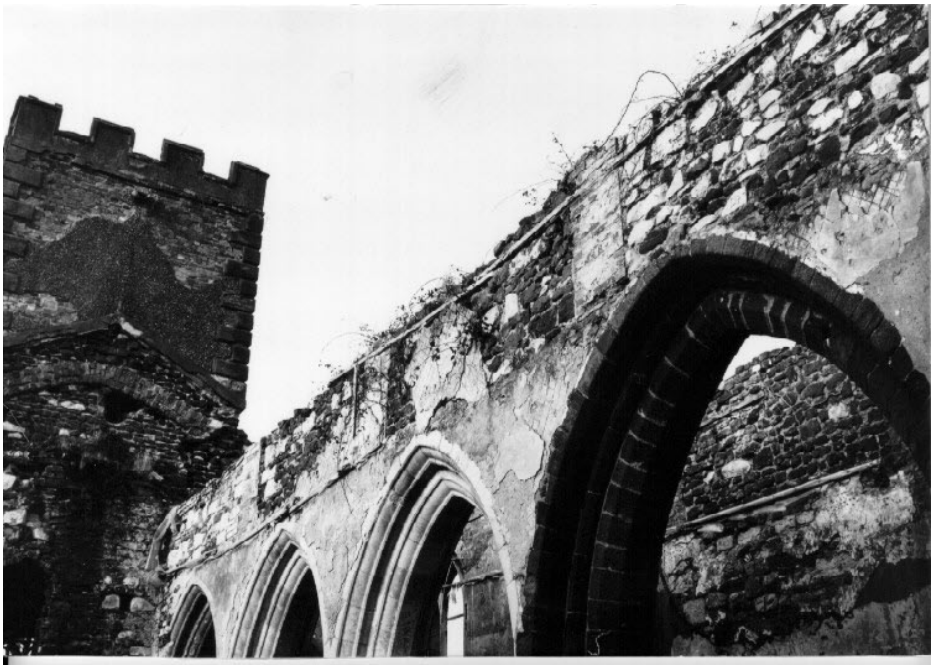
Remains of the large 14th Century window which was blocked off when the tower was erected. The infill was of rubble and brick not designed to take the weight of the tower.

In the south west corner can be seen a pillar of the 14th century.



14. West corner of the South Wall (Outside)

A 14th Century pillar has been let into the wall but not completed.



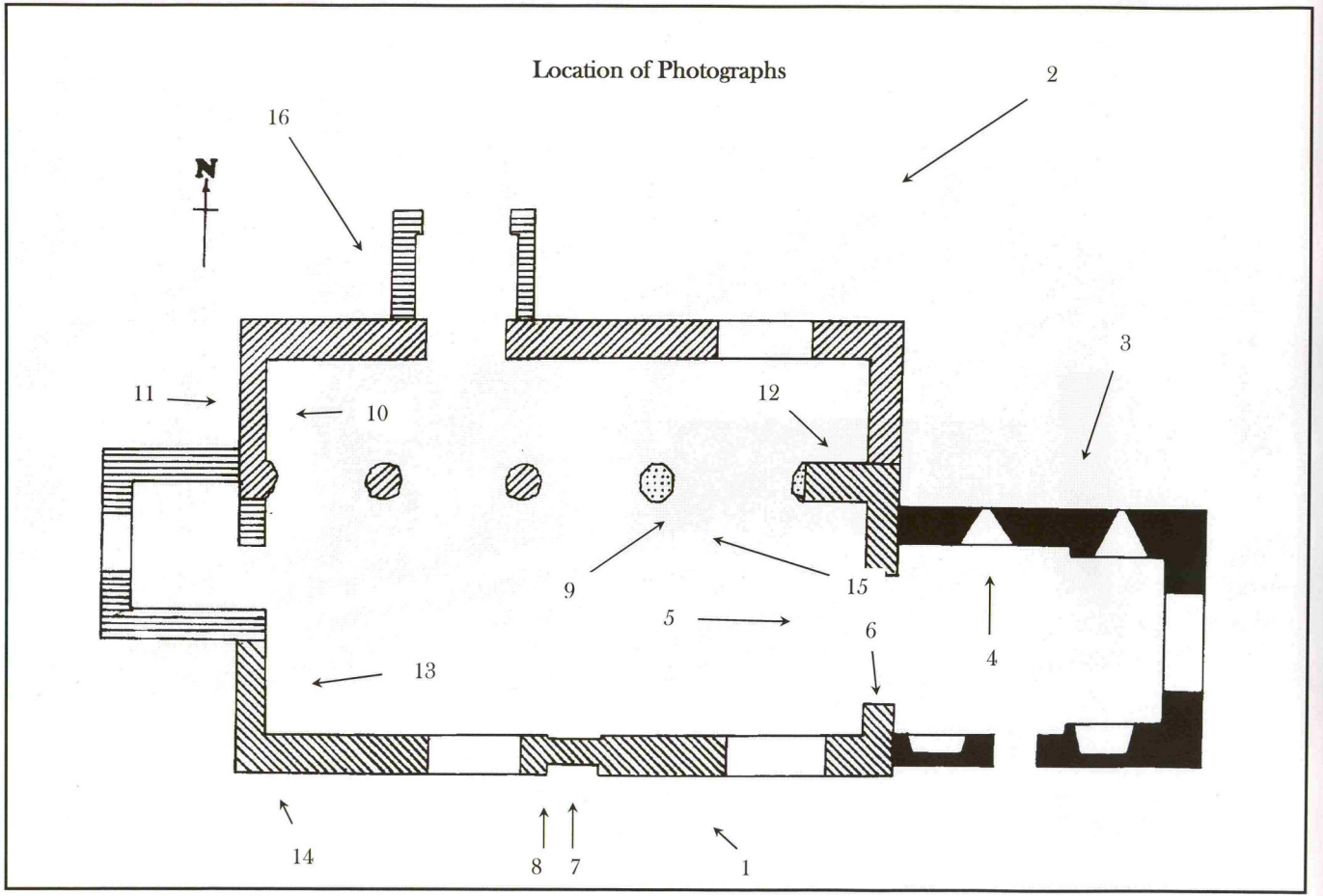
15 North Wall of the Nave

The original wall above the arches was raised using sandstone leaving three window spaces later filled with bricks. The brick top of the tower can be seen in this view. The weight of the east side is taken on a brick arch.



16. North Face and Porch

A change in workmanship on the north aisle wall shows that it was raised leaving three window openings at a high level. These have since been bricked up. Although similar they do not line up with the openings in the nave wall (photograph 15) A 15th Century window has been reused in the porch wall.


Location of Photographs
N
16
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3
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1

Interpretation of Survey

It can be seen that four basic materials have been used in construction.

1. Brown cobbles

This material has been used in the earliest part of the church (see photo 3) and is consistent with Saxon workmanship. Very little can be found in use elsewhere on the Lower Greensand Ridge in this part of Bedfordshire.

2. Limestone

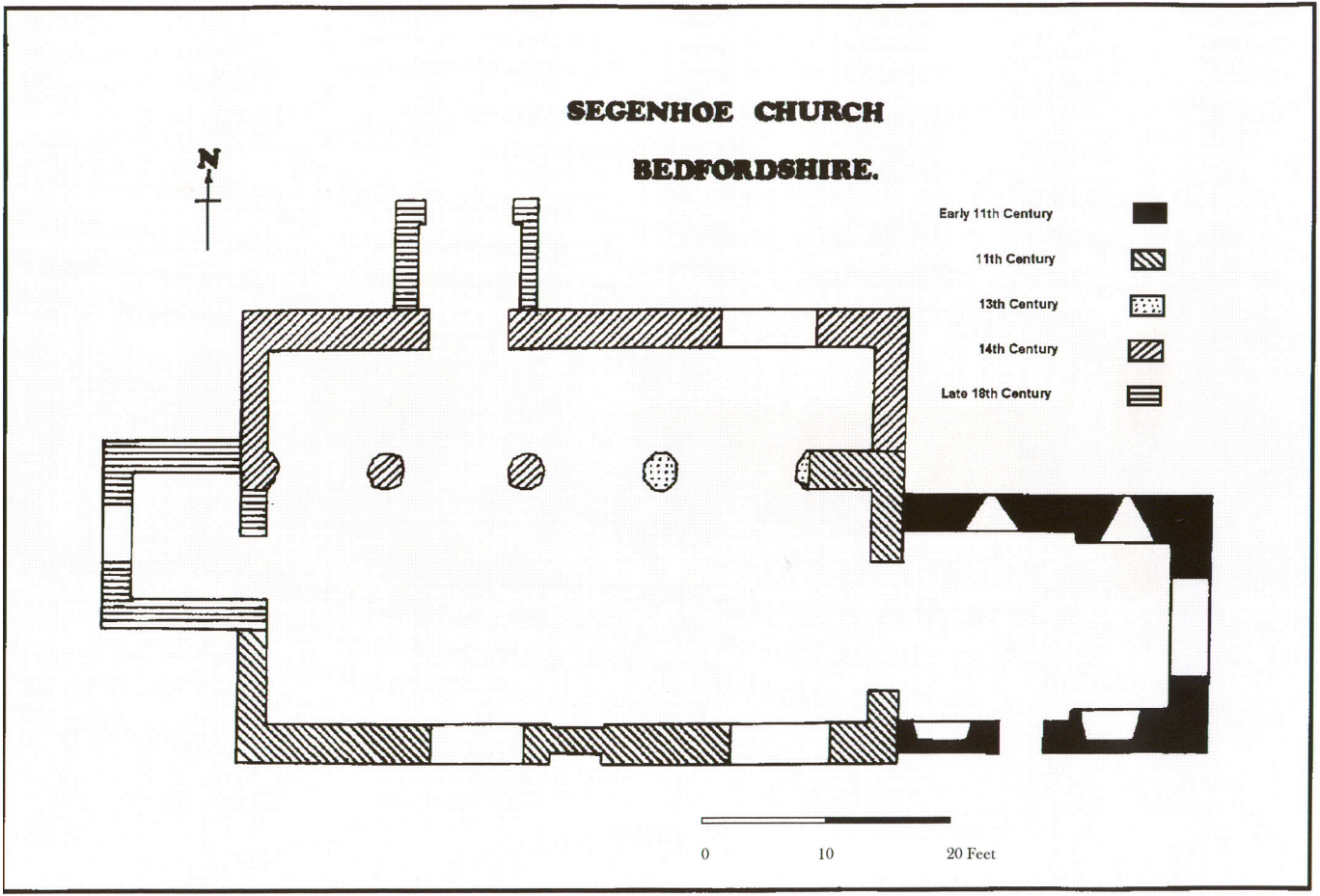
This was used for pillars, arches and mouldings in all periods of development except possibly the last, when cement was used as a poor substitute.

3. Ironstone

Used from the twelfth century in this building and is the normal fabric for churches along the Lower Greensand Ridge, as it is readily available. A friable material ranging from brown with a greenish hue to a rust colour, it varies in hardness and durability depending on where it is quarried.

4. Red hand made bricks

These were used in the Georgian restoration. It is noticeable that the cement rendering has tended to remain in place on the bricks longer than the other fabrics.


SEGENHOE CHURCH
BEDFORDSHIRE.
N
Early 11th Century
11th Century
13th Century
14th Century
Late 18th Century
0
10
20 Feet

The plans show the suggested dates for the various parts of the church and possible sequence of construction. It should be emphasised that other reconstructions can be made to satisfy the facts.

Early eleventh century

It seems probable that the chancel was once a chapel with two windows in the north wall, filled with oiled cloth or just boarded up when necessary. Its construction was of brown cobbles and limestone.

Eleventh century

The main nave was built on the west end of the chapel, symmetrical to the chapel. This was made from brown cobbles and limestone blocks.

Fourteenth century

A north aisle was constructed from local ironstone. The north wall of the nave was raised and the clerestory windows added. It could be argued that a thirteenth century chapel preceded the aisle, but no archaeological evidence is visible other than the ironstone arch.

Eighteenth century Phase I

Both the outer wall of the north aisle and south wall of the nave were raised to the same height. The building was re-roofed with a lower pitch. Three windows were put in at a high level on the north wall. The original clerestory windows were blocked off.

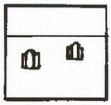
Eighteenth century Phase II

The main windows were raised and given round arches. The small upper windows were filled in. The west wall windows were also blocked and the tower constructed centrally to the combined nave and north aisle. The porch was built reusing a fifteenth century window. Finally all the walls were rendered with a coat of cement to give the "modernised" building a uniform appearance.

Suggested Phases of Segenhoe All Saints Church

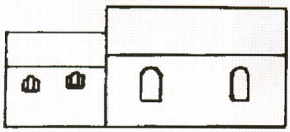
View from North

View from West



Early
11th Cent.

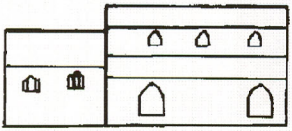


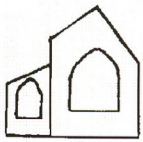


11th Cent.

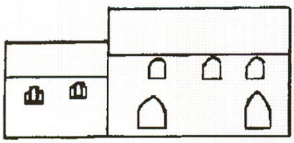


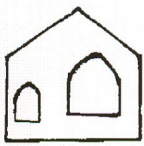
14th Cent.



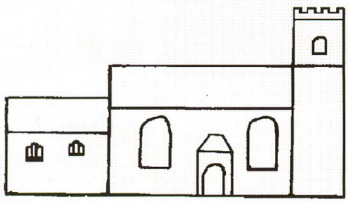


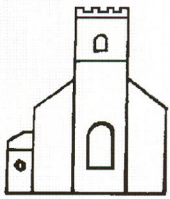
Early
19th Cent.





19th Cent





One intriguing question remains unanswered. Why was the pillar inserted in the south wall?

It was normal practice, when extending a church, for a pillar to be inserted into an existing wall to take the weight of the roof before building a new aisle and demolishing the original wall*. This allowed the church to remain in use during reconstruction Obviously the south aisle was never completed in this church. Did money run out or was it the Black Death of 1340 that stopped the work?

*Ref. (Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal Volume II *'An Investigation beneath the floor of St Andrew's Church, Ampthill.*)