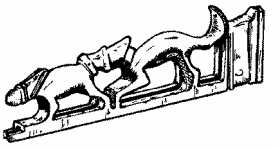
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

Segenhoe Church Revisited

Kevan J. Fadden

2009

Segenhoe Church Revisited.

The photographic survey carried out by the Ampthill & District Archaeological & Local History Society in 1981 was initially put together to demonstrate to the Bedfordshire County Councillors the value we considered the church had to our local history and its potential use as an educational aid. It was a "standing archaeological" approach pointing out features that could be readily seen together with an interpretation relying on accepted church architectural practice.

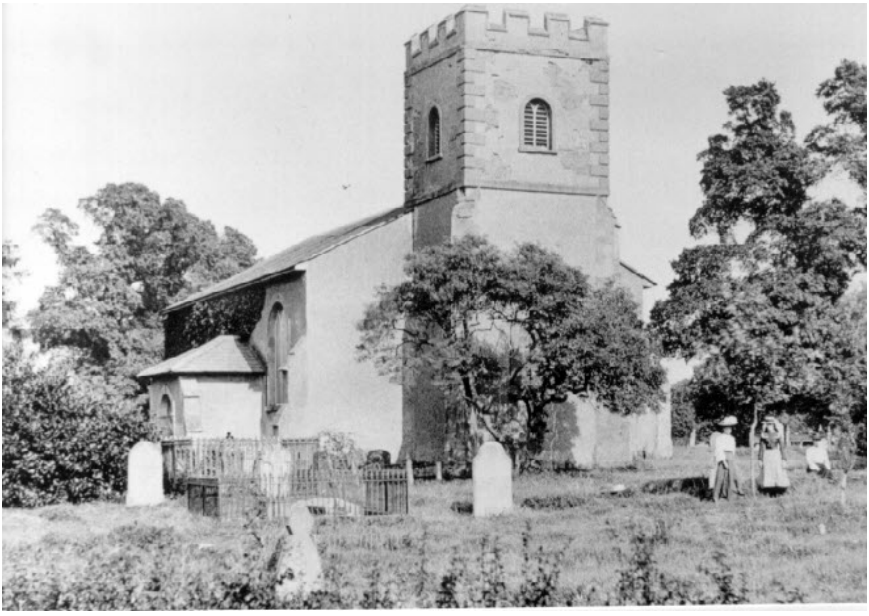


Photo 1 Taken by Jack Sharpe c. 1912.

Since the publication of the report other information has become available which gives us the opportunity of verifying or modifying the suggested phases of development. A collection of "magic lantern" slides was discovered which contained several views of the church between 1901 and 1912. These were published by the Society in 1991 in *Ridgmont: An Edwardian Cameo.* The view photo 1 reflects the Victoria County History description of 1910 "plastered over and modernised". From the West it is a perfectly symmetrical Georgian church with a mediaeval style tower. The porch has a low profile half hip roof with slates. All windows including the tower have round arches in the classical style. The tower is central to the West wall

and the nave roof line is low and symmetrical each side of the tower. The nave roof is covered with slates.



Photo 2 Edwardian Church from Southeast.

The view from the Southeast (Photo 2) clearly shows the chancel off centre to the nave. The windows and priest door in the nave are blocked and plastered over. The roof of the chancel is much steeper than the nave, suitable for supporting tiles, which would have been much heavier than the blue/grey slates. (Blue/grey slates were scattered in the rubble before the clean up) and were still in place in 1962 see photo 3.

The window mouldings are very thin and made of wood; some were still in place in the East window immediately before consolidation.

A painting by G.S.Shepherd dated 1813 gives an interesting comparison to the "standing archaeological" findings. It answers the question of the tower dating posed by Ivan O'dell in 1981.(A teaching aid). The mediaeval type tower was as suggested in the survey built in the 19th Century to replace a modest wooden bell-cote (See Painting 1). Even allowing for a certain amount of artistic licence, (The lake was moved from an adjacent field to improve the picture), a considerable amount of information is available from this painting. The bell-cote was supported on a tile-covered roof while the rest of the nave appears to have been re-roofed with lead sheet. The gable at the rear of the nave was still standing as it is now even though it has been reused in the meantime. The chancel was tiled and clearly central to the nave in line with the bell-cote. The north aisle

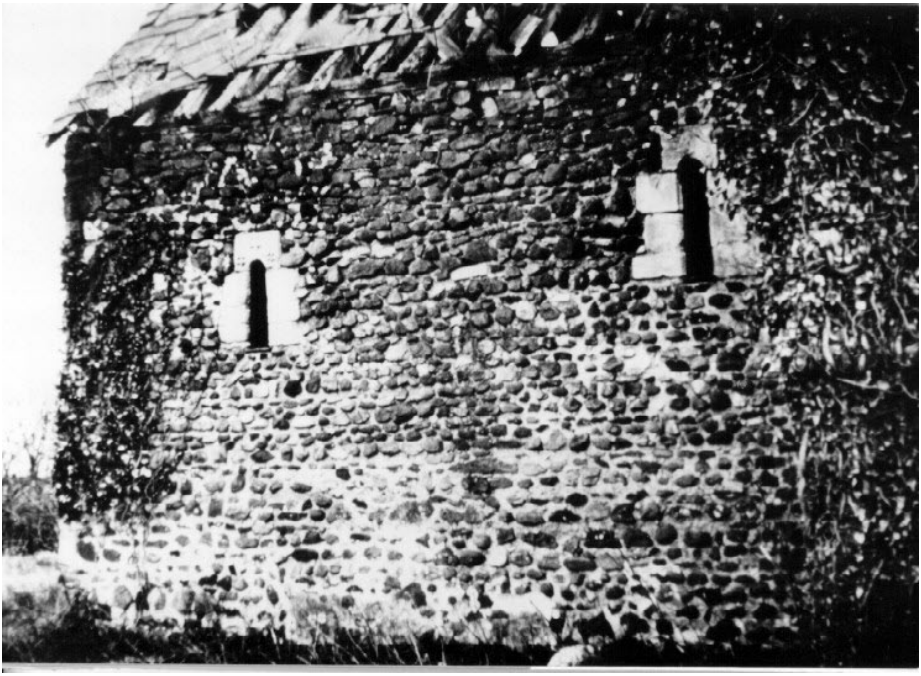


Photo 3 Taken by author c. 1962.



Painting 1 G S Shepherd dated 1813

was the conventional extension to the nave. It had two windows; the west window on the north face coincides with the original chapel and shows perpendicular tracery contemporary with the sandstone arch and niche. The top of the window appears to have been rounded to allow room for the roof; an up-stand covers the join. The window facing west also appears to be perpendicular in date retaining the Gothic style form at the top.

The porch had a tiled pitched roof (Not a half hip as in the last restoration) high enough to be above the aisle roof. On the original painting two dates can be seen over the rounded arch doorway 1751 &1781. This could suggest the "modernising" of the porch had already started although Shepherd was known for inscribing churches and gravestones with his own name and date of painting.



Painting 2 Painted by G.S. Shepherd c. 1813

In the early 19th Century two prominent artists were recording churches and other buildings of note in Bedfordshire George Shepherd (1784 -1861) and Thomas Fisher (1782 - 1836) A preliminary sketch by Thomas Fisher who it is accepted was the more accurate architecturally has been brought to our attention (Sketch 1). The graves are dissimilar to the Shepherd painting but the church images are very consistent including the two dates on the porch. There is no sign of the lake. The basic suggestions for the church development in the survey still appear to hold well but at least two more stages could now be included with yet another roof line and a bellcote.

While investigating Ridgmont and Segenhoe family history, one of our members Peter Wood came into contact with Anthea Fleming of Victoria Australia who was researching her family name of Turney in Bedford-



Woodcarving of Church c. 1815 Samuel Townshend

shire. She mentioned that her cousin Ian Perry who lives in Melbourne owned a wood carving of Segenhoe church which had been handed down through their family.

On the back a label reads "*Ridgemont Church, Beds. carved by Samuel Townshend. Exhibited at Adelaide Gallery of Arts, South London 1835"* Subsequent research revealed that a Samuel Townshend (c.1792-1852) born in St. Mary's Lambeth married Sophia Turney spinster in St. Margaret's Westminster in 1816. He was described as a Carver & Guilder. The catalogue for the gallery confirms an exhibit by Samuel in that year. Sophia was baptized in Husborne Crawley Beds (an adjacent village) in 1791.

It is quite remarkable that three artist of their undoubted quality should be recording this very remote church in the heart of Bedfordshire at that time. The Shepherd painting is dated 1813 and Samuel was married to Sophia in London in 1816. It would be quite romantic to believe that Samuel met Sophia while he was in Ridgmont executing the carving. The question is, who commissioned Samuel to travel to remote Bedfordshire to record a partly ruined church and why? There is no known link other than opportunity and timing but it is possible that Dr. Thomas Potter Macqueen (1791 - 1854) who owned Segenhoe Manor at that time could have been responsible.

Dr. Macqueen was a well known politician and colonizer who advocated and organised planned emigration, especially to New South Wales in Australia. In 1823 he obtained a grant of 10,000 acres (4047 Ha) with a provisional reserve of a further 10,000 acres in NSW. The next year his venture was to send the first direct shipment of free emigrants to the Colony; experienced farmers and artisans together with bloodstock and the capital necessary for progressive farming. Between 1825 and 1838 he spent at least £42,000 on plant, stock and improvements on an area he called Segenhoe. The estate also employed 160 convicts. Macqueen later took out some of the wives and families of the convicts, a number became tenant farmers on the estate. His political life did not run smoothly however and at times he became deeply in debt.

Did he commission the carving as a portable memento of his home in England and then not pay the bill, leaving it in the hands of Samuel and Sophia? If so it is yet another coincidence that their youngest daughter Lucy should emigrate to Australia in 1857 taking the carving with her for it to be handed down to its present owner Ian Perry of Melbourne.

Ian sent us the following description of the carving and supplied the photograph. The inside dimensions of the frame are 157 mm x 124 mm. The outside of the frame and glass is 225 mm x 175 mm and the depth is

23 mm. The out side frame is painted black. The carving is unpainted and is made from unidentified fine grained wood. The side lighting for the photograph tends to exaggerate the depth of carving.



Sketch 1 Preliminary Sketch Thomas Fisher c. 1814



Painting 3 by unknown Artist 1865. Clearly shows modernised church

The Village Celebrates Victory

Saturday 26 th June 1982 was the day of Ridgmont village fete. This Society ran a stall and an exhibition, explaining the background behind the fight to save the church. We were very pleasantly surprised at the enthusiasm of the villagers for the project. On Sunday 27 th the Rev. Huband organised a "Segenhoe Evening", It started with Evensong at the "Modern church" with our member Ivan O'Dell giving an address then the whole congregation walked to the old church for a conducted tour.It was a was a beautiful evening and was enjoyed by all.

Four years later the church again celebrated by staging The York Mystery Plays.

The drummer called the population into the church where they were sent according to their sins either to Heaven or Hell. The good people were sent to the Chancel while the rest of us went to the tower .



Photo 5 The Drummer Simon Wilcox

The good people of Ridgmont showed little concern for those banished to everlasting fire and damnation.



Photo 6 The population in Heaven

Items of general interest



Photo 6 Iron Grave Marker
Photograph taken c 1980
Rare cast iron grave marker, the legend was painted on and is largely illegible but the date of 1905 can be seen. The casting includes IHS with a tree of life? growing through it.
Possible acronym of the latin Iesus Hominum Salvator.
Jesus Savior of Man.
Or IHS the first three letters for Jesus (Greek).
Searching through the grass showed evidence for at least two other similar grave markers which had been vandalised.

Photo 7 Grave Stone

The legend on this conventional grave stone reads in large letters

JAMES BOON

died August 13 AD 1854

AGED 100

Quite an achievement in those days

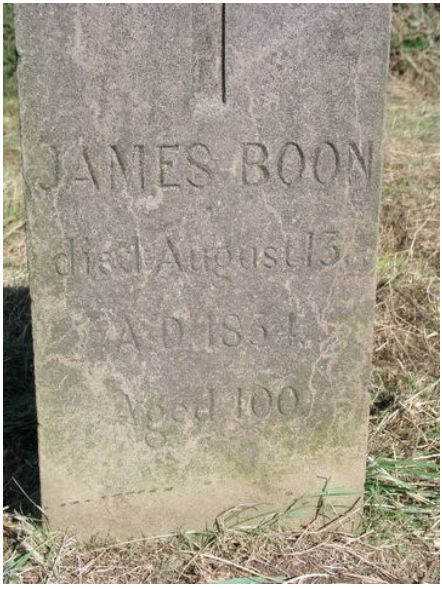




Photo 8 taken in the Nave of the church c. 1962 showing fallen roof timbers with an interesting mortise & tenon joint .

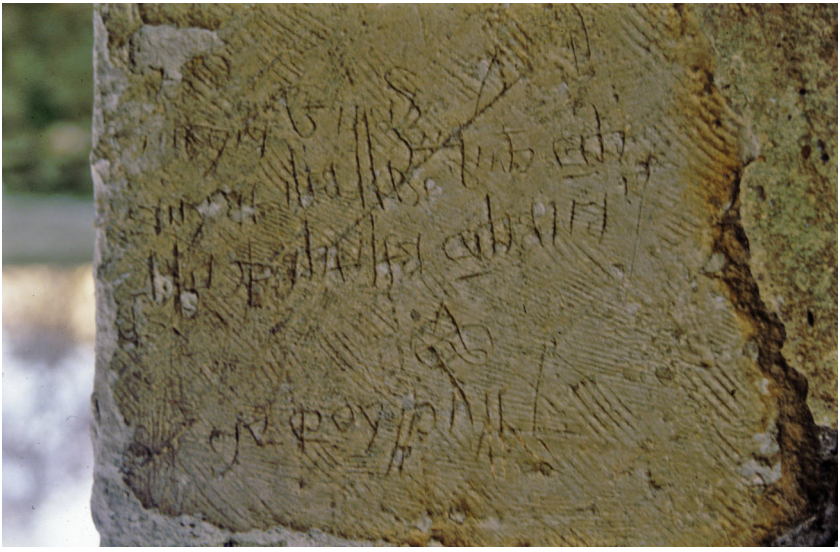


Photo 9 Graffiti in Nave of church .

To date we have been unable to decipher what this means - if anything.

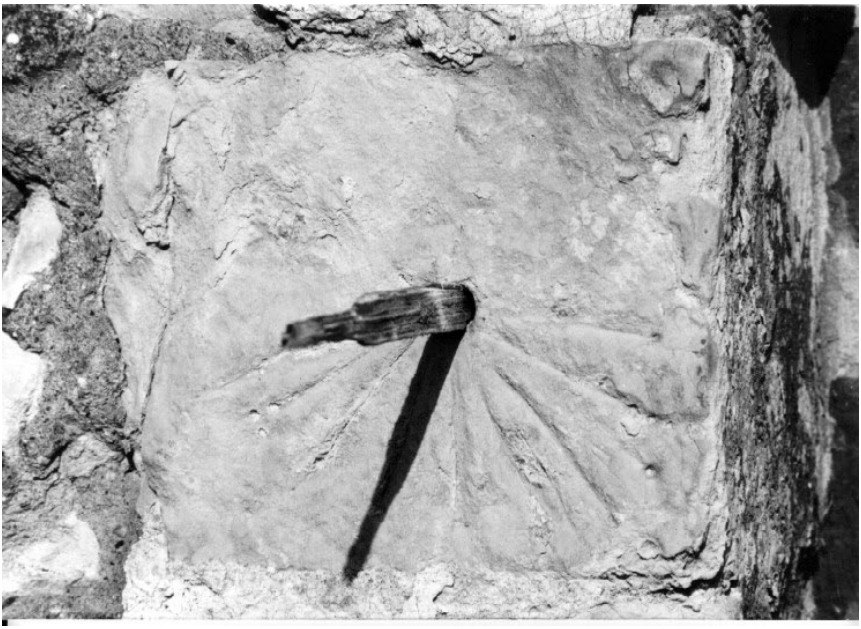


Photo 10 Mass Dial 1981



Photo 11 Mass Dial completely eroded February 2009



Photo 12 Consolidated Church February 2009 from South.



Photo 13 Church from Southwest February 2009

A visit in February 2009 showed disturbing degradation to parts of the Monument, particularly the Totternhoe clunch. The Mass Dial had completely disappeared, this in 28 years following a period of nearly 1000 years of existence. The pillars are similarly eroded, was it caused by cleaning off the patina when the building was consolidated or by modern pollution? The Iron grave marker had disappeared with out trace.

Kevan Fadden.

Chairman

2009

The Society are grateful for the help of the following in compiling these notes.

Mr. & Mrs. Brian Fleming of Victoria Australia.
Mr. Ian Perry of Melbourne Australia.
Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Services.

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