

7. Hope All Saints: A Survey and Discussion of the Ruins and Earthworks

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Introduction

Hope all Saints is one of a number of abandoned churches on Romney Marsh, and is one of four whose ruins remain up-standing. It stands on a small eminence slightly above marsh level two kilometres north-west of St Nicholas, New Romney, and just north of a presumed medieval inlet of the sea (Green 1968).

Documentary and illustrative evidence of this church was provided at earlier dates by Hasted (1790) and Duncan (1921), and a study and interpretation of the church and its surroundings was made by Erwood in 1925. From these sources it appears that the building has undergone continuing degradation through the last four centuries. It was already decaying by the late 16th century. Hasted states there were only four dwelling houses in the parish in 1589, although when he visited it in 1787 the south and west walls of the

church still stood intact. Even in 1921 when Duncan sketched it, and in 1925 when Erwood recorded and photographed it, considerable amounts of the east and south walls were standing. Since then the ruins have suffered further decay as a result of natural weathering, the attentions of grazing sheep and, apparently, vandalism. The present state of the ruins is shown in Figure 7.1.

In 1988 the Romney Marsh Research Trust made a grant to the Field Archaeology Unit of the Institute of Archaeology, University College London to undertake a survey of the remaining fabric of the church before more of it was lost. This was followed in 1989 by a second grant, to record the ground plan of the church and to make a plan of the earthworks which divide it from the surrounding marshland and separate it from the area of



Fig. 7.1. The ruins of Hope all Saints, 1993.

the supposed deserted medieval settlement. This paper describes those surveys and discusses the results in the context of the earlier documentary evidence.

The Survey of the Fabric

Methodology

All the remaining walls of the church were surveyed in detail. These are built mainly of coursed rubble, with a few surviving ashlar quoins. As some stones are comparatively small it was decided, both for ease of

drawing and for clarity of results, to record the walls at the scale of 1:10. Some areas are still covered by plaster or rendering, and these appear blank on the drawings. The lower parts of the walls could be drawn from the ground with ease. The middle and upper sections were reached from a collapsible tower, which was moved and re-erected as required. A datum line was sighted in at a convenient height, and vertical strings suspended at intervals from the top of the walls. Metre-square planning frames, gridded at 20 cm intervals, were then positioned against the walls and each stone was drawn as seen. In all, eleven drawings

EXTERIOR

0 1 m

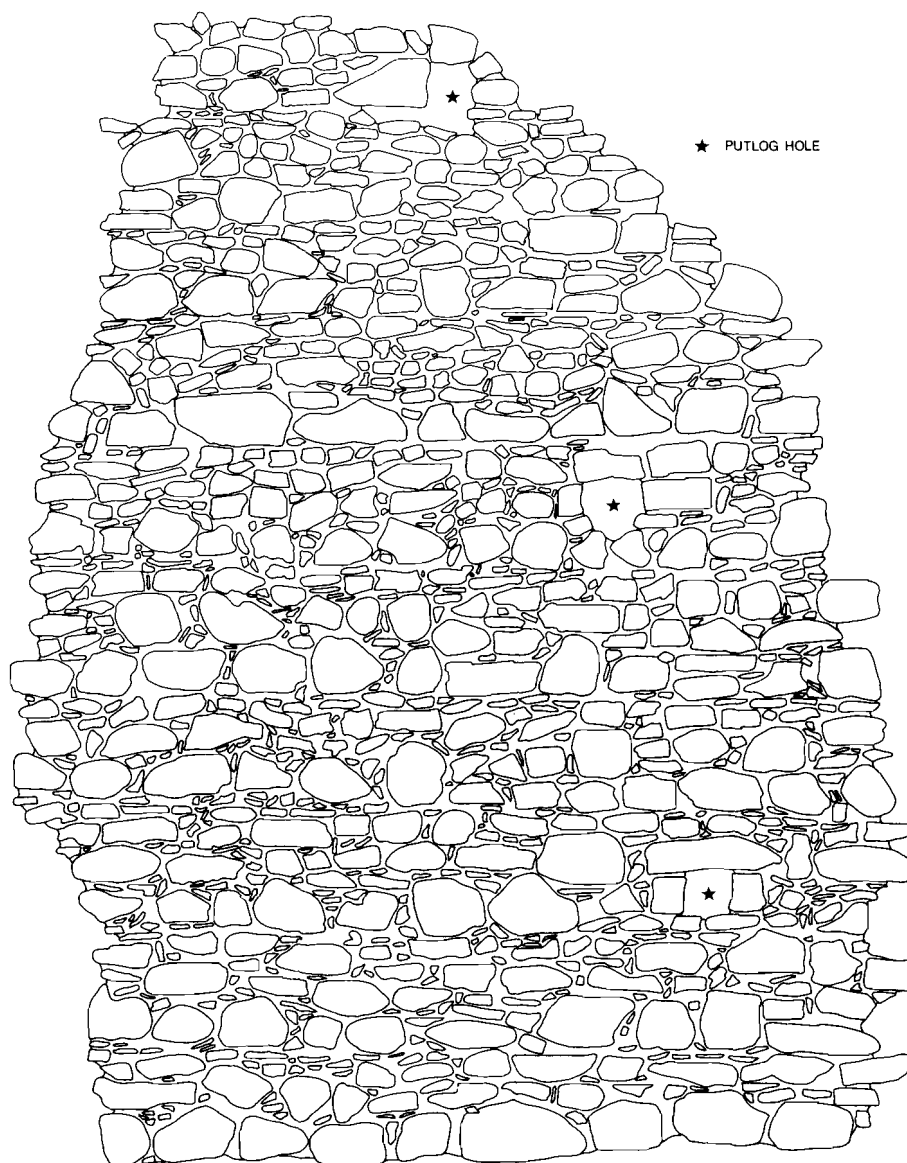


Fig. 7.2. Hope all Saints: Elevation drawing of the fabric of the exterior of the West Wall of Nave, southern end, 1988.

NORTH RESPOND

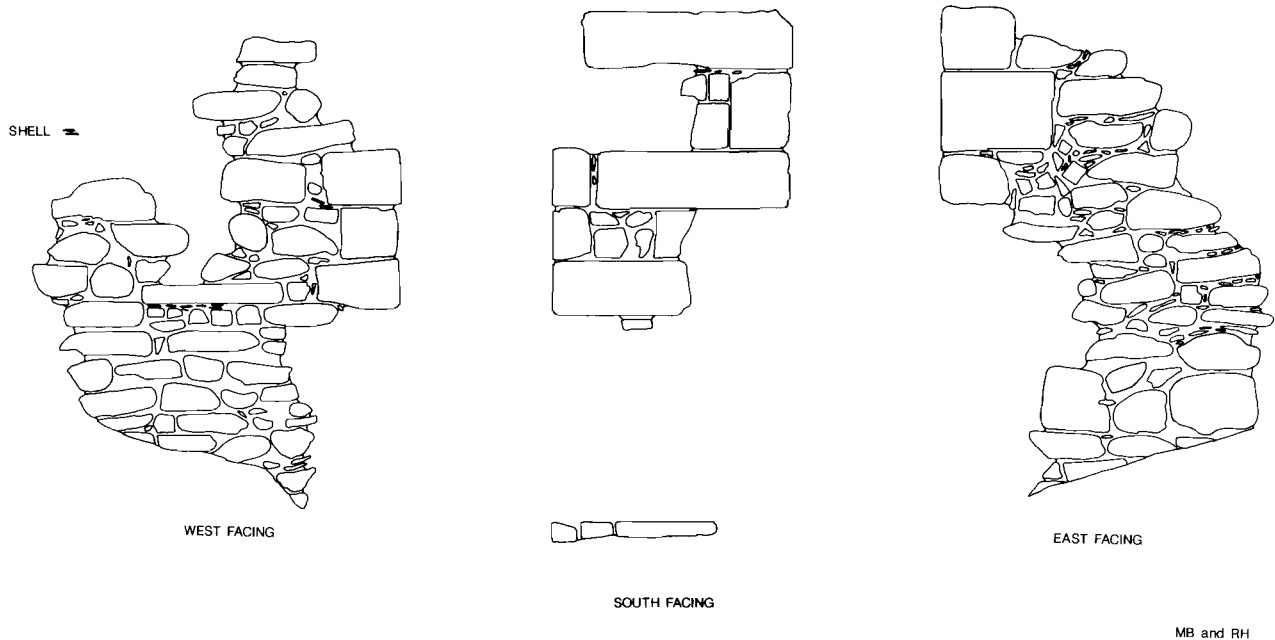


Fig. 7.3. Hope all Saints: Elevation drawing of the fabric of the Chancel Arch, North Respond, 1988.

were produced, and are now lodged with the Romney Marsh Research Trust. Two of these are shown, in reduced size, as Figures 7.2 and 7.3.

The Walls

The rubble walls are predominantly Kentish Ragstone, with a mixture of other local stones, including large and small beach pebbles. The ashlar quoins are mainly of Reigate Stone or imported Caen stone, upon which tooling marks can still be distinguished. There is a small proportion of non-local stone, the provenance of which is uncertain but which may be derived from ships' ballast.

The only remaining diagnostic feature of the windows and doors is a small section of the splay of the east window, which was measured 90 cms in from the south wall. It was thought that signs of patching and a difference in the mortar could be detected round the area of the splay, as though the window had been inserted into an existing wall.

Putlog holes are a noticeable feature of the walls, including some set at an angle. Erwood rightly dismissed the suggestion that the latter could be squints to the chancel since the upper holes, above head height, are also

angled. They may have had the practical purpose of supporting scaffold planks for the masons, and the most likely interpretation of the angled putlogs is that they were used to carry a continuous board walk around the corners of the walls to facilitate the building operations.

The present survey did not detect any visual difference in building methods between the remaining fabric of the nave and chancel. The drawings reveal a series of 'lifts' (see Fig. 7.2), each of which may represent the construction carried out in one season. In addition, during the time spent recording the stones an awareness developed that there was an underlying pattern in which the courses had been laid. In smaller details, a feeling of increasing familiarity developed as the work progressed. The same stylistic 'signature' was noted by Harris (1990) on the west front of the tower of New Romney, and he suggested that the two churches may have been built by the same team of masons.

Decay of the ruins continues. The large fissure running down the northern section of the west wall of the nave is diagonal and is therefore more serious than is apparent in the elevation drawings. Vegetation on the top of walls penetrates decaying mortar and causes periodic falls of stones. Stones on the ground are disturbed from time to time by human agency.

The Survey of the Earthworks and Plan of the Church

Methodology

The earthworks in the area immediately surrounding the church and the ditch beyond it were surveyed and a ground plan of the church drawn up. This was effected by establishing a base line through the long axis of the church and setting a framework of grid pegs around it from which the walls and footings could be measured by offsets. The earthworks were plotted using a plane table and tapes and the results tied in to the same grid.

As the church is a Scheduled Monument it was not possible to disturb the ground in order to confirm details, or to carry out investigations which might be interpreted as damage to the monument. The ground plan was therefore drawn up from evidence which was immediately apparent,

or could be seen by the removal of a few weeds or the occasional definition of a corner.

Topography

The church stands on a slight eminence and is surrounded by a ditch which is usually water-filled (Fig. 7.4). There is a slight rise in the ground here (classified by Green (1968) as a "mound", which may not be natural, see Vollans, this volume) which would be unremarked in a less low-lying part of the county. There is also the appearance of additional man-made elevation of the central area, which is more than simply the effect created by wall-tumble from the church. The ground rises steeply to the church on the north and west, and less so, beyond a narrow plateau, to the south and east. The church is aligned east-west on the highest point of the eminence: it is not set squarely within the plot enclosed by the ditch.

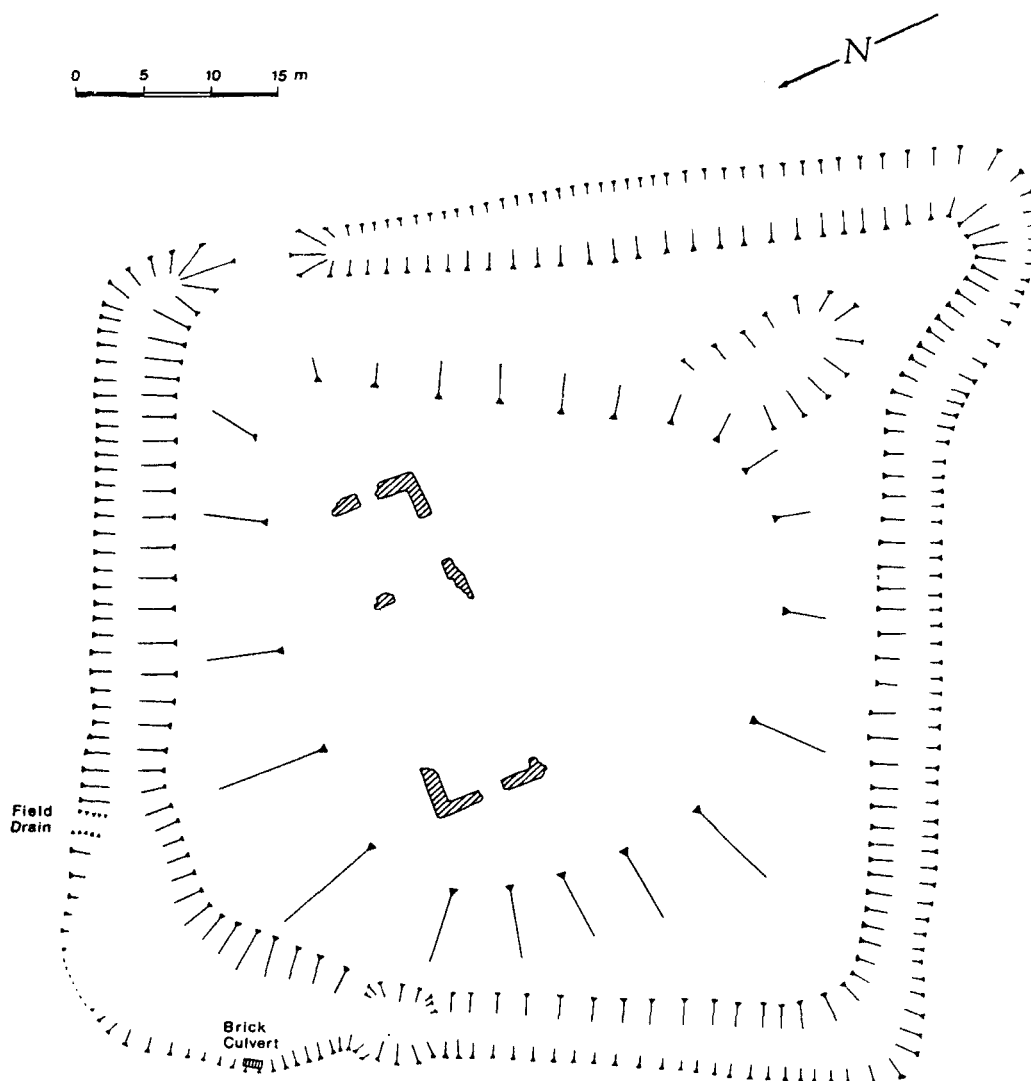


Fig. 7.4. Hope all Saints: Plan of the Earthworks and the Church, 1989.

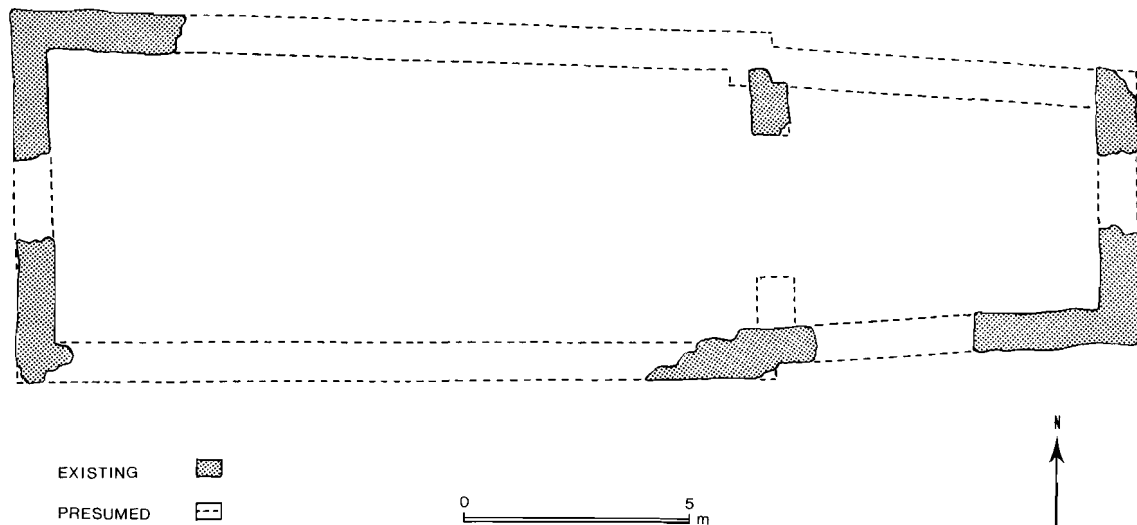


Fig. 7.5. Hope all Saints: Ground Plan of the Church, 1989.

The ditch encloses a roughly square plot with a causeway near the north-eastern corner, and a sunken crossing (trampled by animals) in the north-west. A field drain fills it on the north and it is emptied by another field drain through a modern culvert under a track on the west. The north-west corner widens out to form a pond. At the south-east corner there is a raised promontory or spur with an oval sunken area to its north-west.

The Ground Plan

The plan of the church (Fig. 7.5) is irregular, which is not unusual in medieval buildings. The nave tapers slightly towards the east and the chancel, instepped a little, tapers more acutely. The effect is that the responds for the chancel arch are aligned neither to the east nor the west walls. The present survey found partial bonding of the north respond and a clean edge (i.e. butt joint) to the interior of the footings of the south wall.

There are a few worked stones which are of interest lying amongst the fallen masonry. A door jamb was found near the south-west corner of the church, and could belong to either of the two doors (see below). A partially rounded pilaster found mid-way along the south side of the nave might possibly be a decorative feature of the south door. A chamfered block came from the same area. These are all of Caen stone and would, stylistically, fit a thirteenth-century date. Two sandstone blocks, one part of a cill, and one with a socket 53mm deep were found at the south side of the chancel and might be part of the Perpendicular window reported there in 1925. One worked block has been used to infill an upper putlog hole. During the work of recording the fabric a voussoir stone was found just inside the chancel, beyond the responds. This, a heavy block of limestone 0.5m high, may be part of the Gothic arch described by Hasted. On a later visit it was found that the pile of tumbled

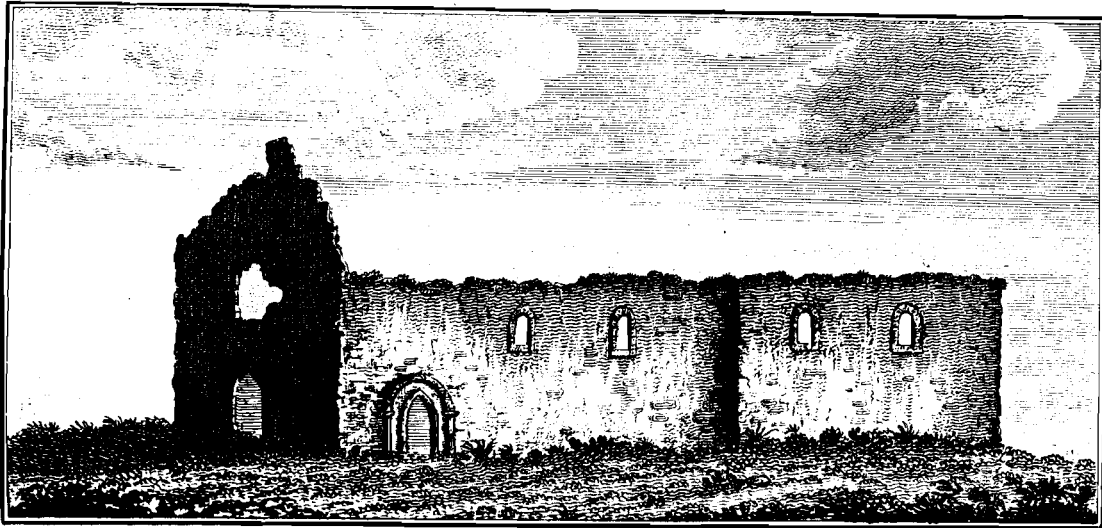
stones at this point had been moved, revealing a sunken area. Another, opposing, voussoir stone was retrieved, and a few fragments of late medieval glazed floor tile, parts of which were also discovered abandoned near the west wall.

Present Results in the context of Earlier Evidence

The method of surveying which was, of necessity, adopted was adequate for drawing a ground plan of the church but was unsatisfactory as a means of observing and understanding the various phases of building.

The scant evidence collected in this survey was therefore compared with the documentary and illustrative evidence of Hasted (1790), as shown in Figure 7.6; with the sketch of Duncan (1921); and with Erwood's 1925 interpretation (Fig. 7.7), to see if their accounts could amplify the present information. All these authorities had the advantage of making their observations when more of the fabric was standing. Unfortunately, however, some of their evidence is conflicting and, now that most of the building has fallen, much of it is impossible to check. Duncan may have seen the Hasted sketch but, if so, it seems strange that he did not indicate the position of the south door and made only a guess at the existence of east and west windows which Hasted described or drew. Erwood quoted Hasted and it appears likely, from the echoes in his comments on the putlog holes, that he had seen Duncan's sketch and notes.

Hasted reported on the west door, a south-west door, and the east window. He wrote that "the eastern window is entire, being a pointed arch as in the west door", and showed a window aperture above this door. It is impossible to decide from the drawing whether this is a round-headed or a pointed window, or indeed whether it has been accurately represented. It is likely that its state of



South View of the Ruins of Hope Church.

Fig. 7.6. South View of the Ruins of Hope Church, 1790. Hasted.

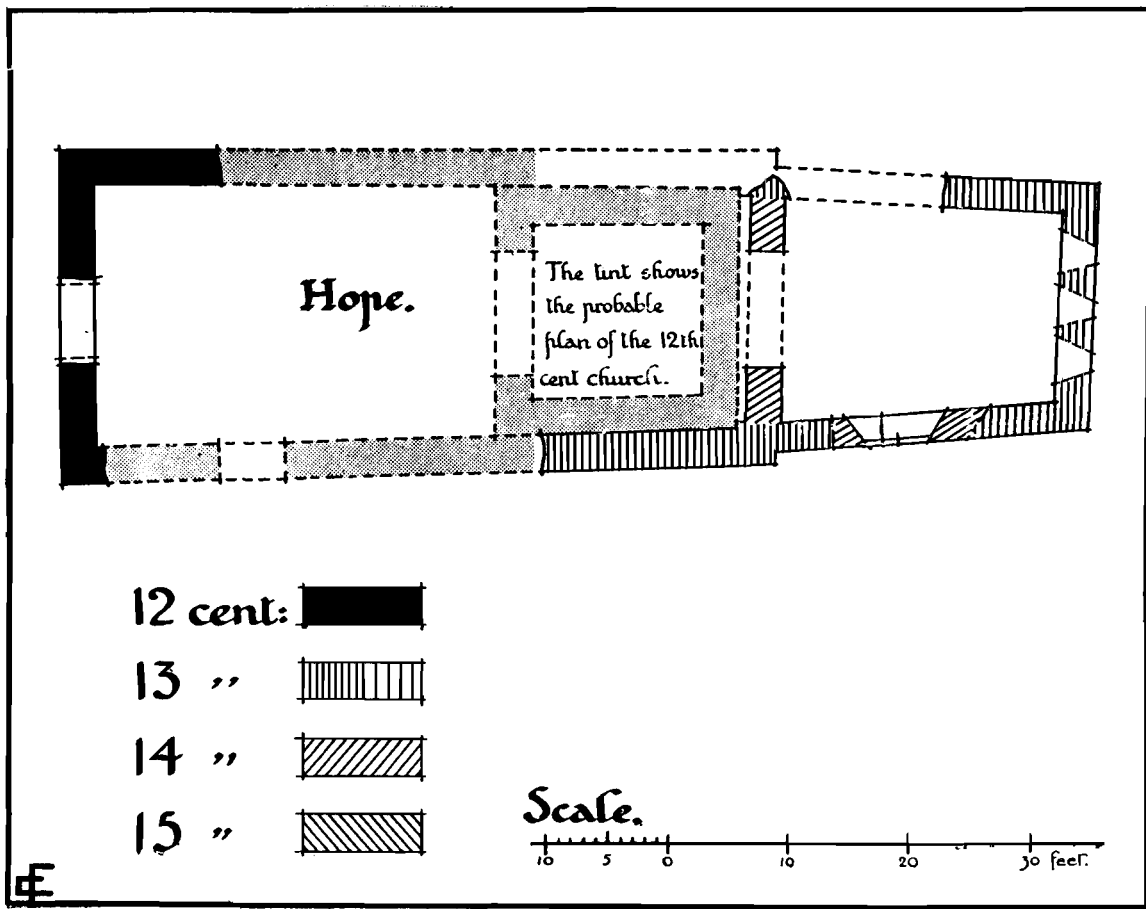


Fig. 7.7. Ground Plan of Hope all Saints Church, 1925. Erwood.
Source: Arch. Cant. 1925.

decay made it unidentifiable, or Hasted would surely have compared the east window to the west window rather than to the door beneath it.

His description and drawing of the ornate door towards the west end of the south wall shows a Romanesque arch infilled with a later pointed Gothic arch. Its position is shown on his plan. Erwood stated that this feature was confirmed by a photograph which showed that the doorway still existed in 1806. It has not been possible to locate this photograph, but it is thought to be of one of the collection of water-colours of Kent and Sussex churches painted in the early nineteenth century by Henry Petrie, some of which are now in the United States.

Evidence about the south wall of the chancel is confusing. Hasted shows it with two small round-headed windows, which he drew identical to two windows in the nave and described them as "like those in Canterbury Castle". Duncan and Erwood both describe a succession of alterations and blockings. That Hasted did not see these does not necessarily cast doubt on his evidence, since he was a "curious antiquary", and looked at the church only as an attractive ruin. He was not concerned with dating and phasing.

All three early observers agree that the responds for the chancel arch have been modified. The footings of the south respond were still visible in 1925 and Erwood, suspecting that both responds had butt joints or only partial bonding, drew them both as butt joints. Duncan noted a piece of re-used Caen ashlar. At an earlier date, Hasted had noted that "in the wall between the aisle and the chancel, there is a fine circular arch with zig-zag ornaments, which is filled up, and a more modern small Gothic arch built underneath it". He described it as similar to the south door.

Interpretation

Erwood attempted an unnecessarily complicated reconstruction based on slender evidence. His interpretation was that a twelfth-century oratory (occupying the present nave) was enlarged in the thirteenth century by the building of the chancel, and alterations were made to the windows and chancel arch in the fifteenth century. Admittedly the junction between the nave and chancel is awkwardly arranged, but Erwood suggested a similar in-step for his presumed early oratory. He argued that the reason there is no break or butt joint in the wall at the point where the chancel and nave meet (confirmed in the present survey) is that the thirteenth-century wall is wrapped around the existing twelfth-century chancel. He suggested that the fact that the south wall had "broken off at the precise spot where ... the junction would have taken place" lent some kind of confirmation to his theory. It would be uncharitable to think that the dimensions of his putative early chancel fit the available length of standing wall too conveniently.

The present survey, combined with those observations of Hasted which seem most likely to be reliable, does not

support this premise of two main phases of building. It suggests rather a twelfth-century church with thirteenth-century refenestration and alterations to the doors and chancel arch. Whilst there is no evidence at present that the church is not of one build, there are a number of flaws in Erwood's suggested phasing.

The present survey did not detect any visual difference in building methods between the remaining fabrics of the nave and chancel. Although the splay of the thirteenth-century window was observed, it was thought that signs of patching and a difference in the mortar could be detected in the area of the splay, as though the window had been inserted into a pre-existing wall. Analysis of the mortar might confirm this.

The full history of the chancel arch cannot be deduced. The north respond contains re-used blocks of worked Caen stone and has been patched with shell in places. This patching suggests late, superficial, work. When Hasted saw the church in 1787 he was impressed by the arch with its chevron design and inserted Gothic arch. He described it as similar to the south door, so it seems reasonable to presume that the Romanesque arch existed here also. If one follows Erwood, how is one to explain a Romanesque arch with typical late Norman decoration at the entrance to a thirteenth-century chancel? And even if one discounts this arch as a detail remembered incorrectly, the heavily decorated and important south door appears too elaborate for the simple twelfth-century oratory which Erwood proposed for his first phase.

Conclusions

A mid-twelfth-century date is suggested for the whole church, or certainly a date in the first three quarters of that century, a similar conclusion to that reached by Tatton-Brown in 1979. The insertion of Gothic arches into the doors and chancel and the refenestration probably took place early in the thirteenth-century. Limited excavation could confirm or refute this interpretation. Excavation within the chancel might locate part of the decorated Romanesque arch and establish whether the chancel was contemporary with the nave or, more simply, exposure of a length of the footings of the south wall might show them to be continuous.

Acknowledgements

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