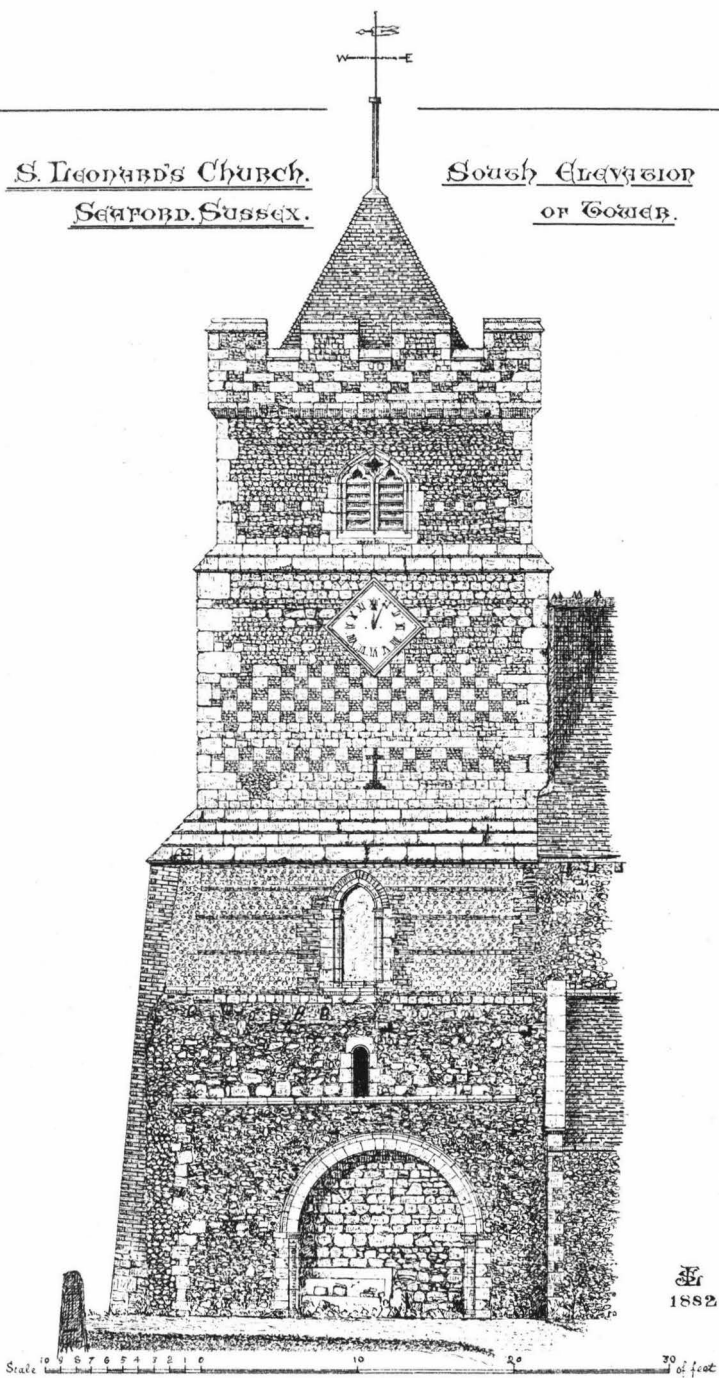


S. LEONARD'S CHURCH.
SEAFORD, SUSSEX.

SOUTH ELEVATION
OF TOWER.



1882

Scale 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 10 20 30 of feet

SEAFORD CHURCH.

BY THE LATE J. S. LEE, Esq.

SEAFORD CHURCH is dedicated to St. Leonard; but there is no emblem or memorial in the building to indicate or commemorate the fact; unless, indeed, two lions sculptured on the capital of the western pier of the south arcade of the nave, are to be accepted as furnishing a punning allusion—in the manner so common with heraldic artists—to the name of “*Leon ard*,” a French saint, whose untiring zeal in relieving prisoners, would seem to entitle his memory to greater veneration than worthily belongs to many a name in the Calendar.

The date of the foundation, and all record of the early history of Seaford Church, appear to be lost; that is to say, there is, so far as I am aware, no documentary evidence existing, to throw light upon these matters, even the historian's usual point of departure fails in this instance, since the building is not mentioned in the Domesday Book.

To those, however, versed in finding “sermons in stones,” there is, fortunately, much in the various portions of Seaford Church that is interesting both to the architect and to the archæologist.

According to “Shobert's Beauties of England and Wales” (published in 1813), Seaford Church may boast of a very high antiquity, since the author says:—“The tower which has suffered less (*i.e.*, from restoration), at the west has a spacious entrance with a pointed arch; above which are remains of another of a circular form, the intermediate space being walled up. A similar Saxon

arch, but entire, occurs at the north-east corner, and a smaller one at the south-east; these are both filled up and denote that the edifice was once more extensive."¹

It is clear, however, that these arches were not Saxon, but Norman, as may be seen by referring to an illustration in Lower's "Memorials of Seaford" (published in 1855), where the arch at the north-east is shown.

Although there is abundant evidence that the Romans were located at or near Seaford;² no remains of Roman tiles or pottery have been found in any part of the church, as was the case when repairs were being carried out in the chancel of the old, affiliated church, at Sutton.³

The older portions of Seaford Church appear to have been built chiefly at three different periods; the first, or most ancient, dates from the latter part of the eleventh century; those portions of the fabric, second in order of antiquity, were probably built some seventy years later; whilst that part of the structure, third in point of antiquity, was probably erected at the latter part of the fifteenth century.

Early in the present century some additions were made to the building, and more recently still, the church has been enlarged and altered.

Before giving details of these successive modifications, it may be well to quote some historical references to Seaford Church.

The first reference with which I am acquainted, is in the "Inquisitiones Nonarum" of Edward III. (temp. 1341), where there is mention made of the Church of "Sefford," but it relates only to the value of the tithes.

In the "Valor Ecclesiasticus" of Henry VIII., the prebend of "Sefford," held by Richard Parkhurst, clerk, is valued at 16s. 8d.

¹ Vol. XIV., page 156.

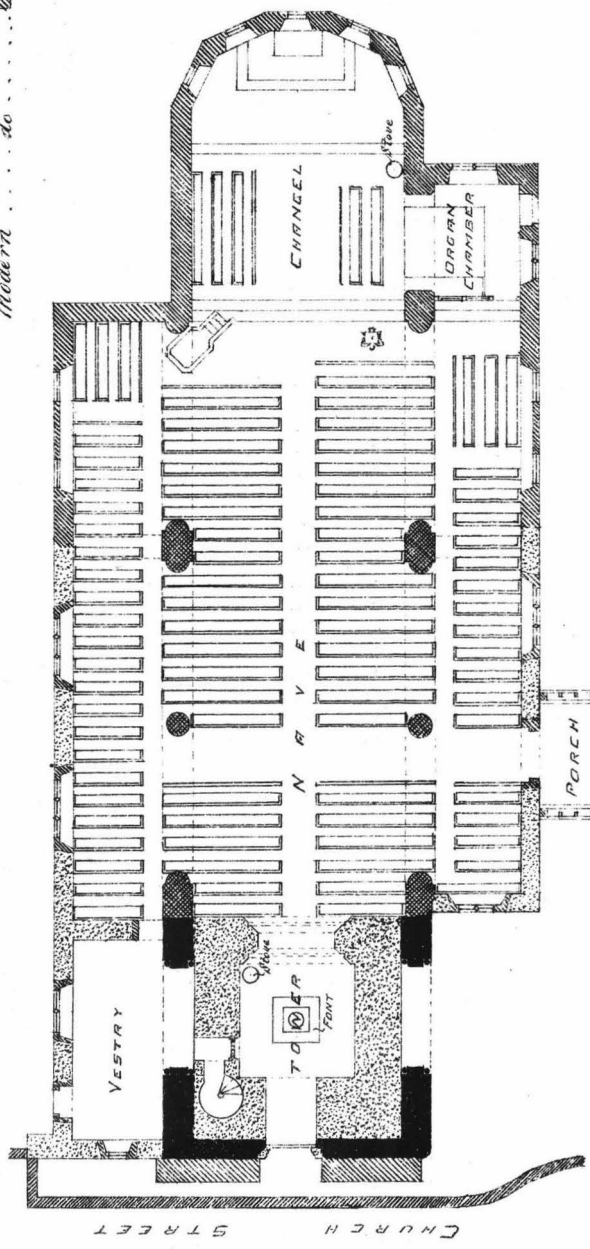
² See "Memorials of Seaford," by the late Mr. M. A. Lower, F.S.A., &c., S.A.C., Vol. VII., also "Excavations in the Camp, the Tumulus, and Romano-British Cemetery, Seaford, Sussex," by John Edward Price, F.S.A., M.R.S.L., S.A.C., Vol. XXXII.

³ See S.A.C., Vol. XV., p. 243, Vol. XIII., p. 309, also Vol. XXXII., p. 167.

S. LEONARD'S CHURCH.

SEAFORD, SUSSEX.

11th Cent^h work is shown thus
 12th Cent^h do
 14th & 15th Cent^h do
 Modern do



1882

SCALE OF FEET

In the same valuation, the benefice of "Sutton cum Sefford," then in the hands of Thomas Gerrard, clerk, vicar of the same, is valued at £11 14s. 1½d., in addition to several pensions to the Bishop of Chichester, the Prebendary of Sefford, and the Archdeacon of Lewes.

From a Terrier, dated 19th September, 1635, it appears that the Vicar held "a house, a little barn, and a backside of land of half an acre, als a little piece of land," which was the churchyard of Sutton, "containing"

Seaford Church consists of a nave, chancel, north and south aisles of nave, tower at west end, vestry north of tower, south porch, and vestry south of chancel. The accompanying plan shows the building as it now exists: the order, in point of time, of the component parts being indicated by different shades.

There is some difficulty in arriving at the original form of the building; the late Mr. Mark Anthony Lower, whose intimate acquaintance with the history of Seaford is well known, and entitle his opinions upon the subject of this paper to the greatest respect states that Seaford Church was originally cruciform, and that what is now the nave, was at one time the choir; but notwithstanding the source whence they come, both of these statements appear open to considerable doubt.

Judging from the existing remains of Seaford Church, there are no indications that the building was cruciform; but the position of the arches mentioned by Schubert undoubtedly denote that the edifice formerly extended eastward, and that it had a chancel, and chancel aisles.

A further proof of the correctness of this supposition was furnished recently by the discovery of some massive foundations, which were exposed to view during the progress of excavations made to the east of the church, under the direction of the present Vicar of Seaford, the Rev. W. H. Meade Buck.

From some cause, which cannot now be ascertained with certainty, although the probability is that it was due

to fire, the church was—at a very early period in its history—partially destroyed.

It appears from an examination of the structure, that the earlier church—a very small building—was either never finished, or that it was mutilated and nearly destroyed soon after its completion, whilst the second, or twelfth century, church was upon a much larger scale than that which preceded it. The sub-joined extracts will show how dilapidated and ruinous the building became in the eighteenth century. The following is from the “Answers” of Bishop Bower’s visitation in 1724:—“The church wants beautifying, and has some dangerous cracks and other defects in the outside walls, five bells new cast, no chancel.”

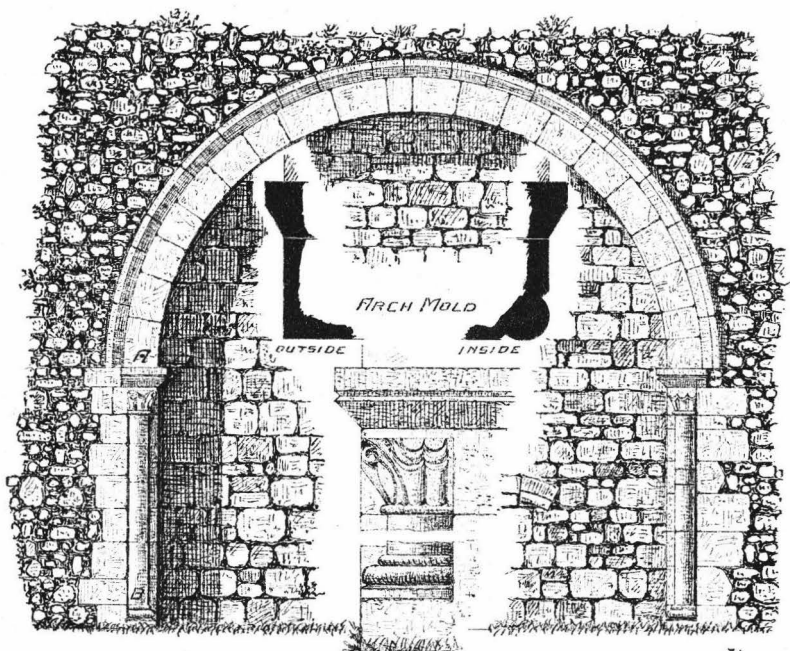
In the Additional Burrell MSS., now in the library of the British Museum, there is a sketch and several notices of Seaford Church. The sketch is by James Lambert, it was taken in 1785, from the south-east. “At that time there was no chancel, so that the chancel, shown in Mr. M. A. Lower’s ‘Memorials of Seaford,’ and which was pulled down in 1862,” was built subsequently to 1785.

The south aisle of the nave was a flat-roofed erection, apparently very poor in character; there was a south porch, also very poor, and there was a south aisle to the tower with a lean-to roof.

No tradition remains whether the chancel was burnt by enemies or accident, the former is more probable. The body of the church is evidently of Norman structure. Coffin stones were found in digging up the ancient foundations of Seaford Church in 1778, “one had 16 skulls in it and many snails, but no aperture till broken open.”⁴

In “Parry’s Coast of Sussex,” page 193, is the following notice of Seaford Church:—“The church is the nave only of one of the old churches of Seaford, with a tower and a small rebuilt chancel. A strong pointed arch opens

⁴ See Additional Burrell MSS., No. 5676, fol. 76.



DETAIL OF CAP AT A AND BASE AT B

31



NORMAN ARCH S. SIDE OF TOWER

into the tower, above which, however, are the traces of a Norman one."

The writer probably alludes to the western doorway.

Mr. M. A. Lower, in his "Compendious History of Sussex," Vol. ii., page 144, says:—"There is a tradition that Seaford formerly had five churches, though there is now no evidence of its having ever formed more than one parish, except that it was early united with the adjoining parish of Sutton, which is now absorbed by it, the ecclesiastical designation being Sutton-cum-Seaford." Mr. Lower explains that there may, however, have been five ecclesiastical establishments in the united parishes, the particulars of which he gives.

I will now proceed to give in detail, the architectural features of Seaford Church as at present existing.

It has been already observed that the first church probably dates from the latter part of the eleventh century; of this period are the exterior faces of the tower on the north and south sides, comprising an archway on the south side and a similar one on the north, both having semi-circular heads and detached shafts in the jambs, with moulded bases and cushion caps of an undoubtedly Early Norman type.

Above each of the archways, and of the same period, is a small semi-circular-headed window, and under these windows there still exists part of the original stone housing-course of the original aisle roofs.

From these remains it is easy to deduce that the eleventh century church was of very small dimensions; the height of the aisle from the floor to the roof-plate was only $19\frac{1}{2}$ feet. There are no conclusive indications that the church of this period had any transepts or that it was a cross church with a tower at the crossing.

The portions remaining which belong to the second period, comprise two bays of each of the north and south sides of the nave with thin arches, clerestory windows, a window in the south side of the tower—in a line with

the clerestory windows—fragments of a similar window on the north side of the tower are still visible.

Under the windows in the tower there remain some of the corbels, which probably supported the aisle roofs of this period. Some of the corbel stones of the eaves of the nave externally are also twelfth century work, whilst the fragments of an arch still to be seen over the western doorway are remains of a doorway built at the same time.

The stone—a variety of Caen stone—used in the dressings of the eleventh and twelfth century churches has most of it proved to be very durable, the original tool-marks are still perceptible.⁵

The part of the church next, or third in order of antiquity, was built—as already remarked—probably at the latter part of the fifteenth century; and consists practically of the fabric of the tower, built inside, and almost independently of, the more ancient nave walls of the Norman churches, so that the outsides of the lower stages of the tower walls, are of eleventh and twelfth, the insides of fifteenth century work, whilst the upper stages are entirely of the fifteenth century.

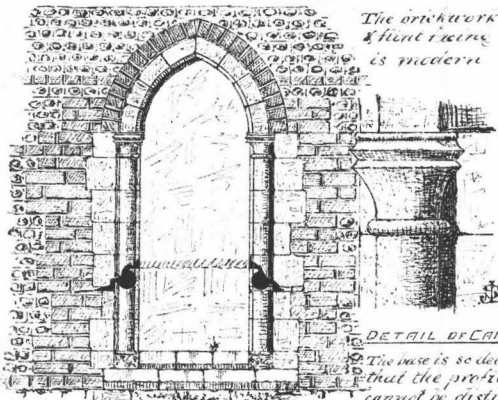
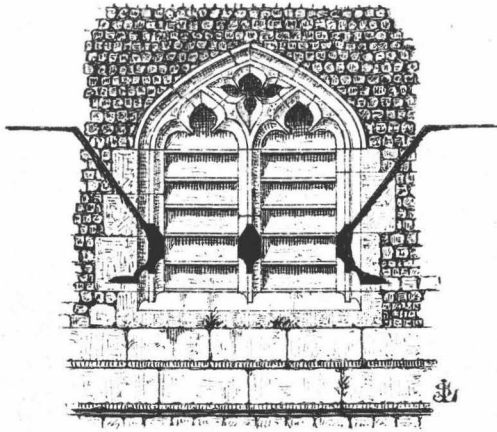
The window on the north side of the tower next above the vestry roof is an insertion of the fifteenth century in the earlier clerestory window of the twelfth.

The west doorway is an insertion of the fifteenth century, in what was probably the west end of the earlier church.

The wooden three-light window over the west doorway is modern; it is a rude imitation of a stone one, that was inserted when the tower was built.

The lower part of the west front of the tower was cased, early in this century, with brick and flint work,

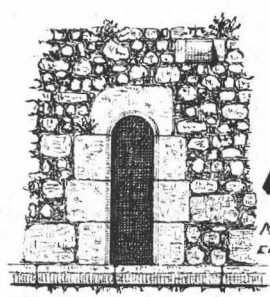
⁵ Some remarks by Somers Clarke, Junr., Esq., F.S.A., upon the curious contrast between the durability of the Caen stone employed by the architects in the Middle Ages, and the perishable nature of some recently imported specimens of the same kind of stone, will be found in S.A.C., Vol. XXXII., p. 45. Speaking of the Caen stone used in the erection of S. Paul's Church, Brighton, in 1848, and in the restoration of S. Nicholas' Church, Brighton, in 1854, Mr. Somers Clarke states that it "has perished to so great a degree that much has already had to be replaced by a more durable material"



The archwork & lintel tracery is modern

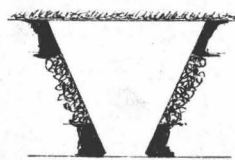
DETAIL OF CAP

The base is so decayed that the profile cannot be distinguished



SIDE OF CORBEL

MOLDING ON EDGE OF JAMB



PLAN

built battering with a view to strengthening the tower. This casing, besides being both unsightly and unnecessary, entirely conceals and destroys the effect of the earlier work which probably formed the west end of the Norman church.

Seaford Church, in spite of this drawback, presents a pleasing feature in any view of the town from its simple, massive, and yet excellent proportions.

Some repairs have become necessary as the upper part of the tower is much decayed, and it was moreover damaged during the destructive gales in the winter of 1881, a part of the parapet being blown down, and some more of it had to be removed on account of its dangerous condition. Steps will no doubt be taken to repair these damages, the stone-work of the belfry windows also needs renovation, as it is very much decayed, and the windows are blocked up with unsightly wooden louvred frames.

It is much to be desired that the battering brick and flint work, already mentioned, should be removed, so that the original eleventh or twelfth century work might be restored to view.

In or about the year 1862 Seaford Church was altered and enlarged by subscription. The rebuilt chancel shown in some of the views of the church was pulled down and the present apsidal chancel built. The two transepts were added at the same time, as were also the south-east vestry, the south aisle and the south porch. The roof of the north aisle was brought into its present form and the windows of the north aisle were inserted.

These alterations brought the church into the form in which it now exists. The cost of the work was £2,300, the architect was the late Mr. Billing.

Most of the works executed in 1862 were of modern design, and were not restorations in any sense of the earlier churches; whilst the archways spoken of by Shobert as existing at the eastern end of the north and south aisles, were completely removed.

In bringing these remarks to a close, I may say, that I have abstained from entering into the ecclesiastical history of Seaford Church as that part of the subject was ably dealt with in Mr. Lower's "Memorials of Seaford," which appeared in Vol. VII. of the S.A.C., and in contributions to subsequent volumes, especially Vol. XVII. There are also some particulars relating to Seaford Church in Mr. Lower's "Compendious History of Sussex," Vol. ii., page 145, which will be found of interest.
