

**BISHOPSTONE  
THE LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT OF A  
RECLAIMED TIDAL INLET**

Integrated project design for a collaborative multi-disciplinary  
archaeological survey of the Bishopstone Valley,  
East Sussex

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# **BISHOPSTONE: THE LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT OF A RECLAIMED TIDAL INLET**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The following sets out a proposal for a multidisciplinary project, to be coordinated by the Sussex Archaeological Society (hereafter the SAS) to explore the evolution of human settlement and land-use within a small tract of coastal Downland focused upon the village of Bishopstone, located in a former tidal inlet between the towns of Newhaven and Seaford in East Sussex. Past work, including a recent programme of fieldwork and excavation led by the Sussex Archaeological Society in 2001 in Norton a hamlet of Bishopstone has highlighted the potential which this block of landscape holds for extending our knowledge of how the South Downs have been settled and exploited during the past (Thomas 2001). A key characteristic of the survey area which distinguishes it from other chalk landscapes which have already received attention, both within Sussex and beyond, is its proximity to the coastal margins of a major river estuary with a complex geomorphological history. As such, the survey area represents a microcosm within which the settlement and resource dynamics of a larger estuarine landscape can be explored with a comparatively small logistical outlay.

The project will aim to place occupation-sites identified through past fieldwork, among them the important multi-period settlement on Rookery Hill (Bell 1977), into their wider landscape context and provide a general framework for understanding how the present-day environment of the Bishopstone Valley has evolved through the interaction of natural and human forces. Through the adoption of an appropriate multidisciplinary methodology, the origin of the present-day settlement-pattern will be explored to test the received wisdom that it superseded an earlier pattern of prehistoric hilltop sites which were abandoned during the Middle Saxon period in favour of new valley-slope locations, a model which recent evidence is already suggesting is simplistic.

Two nested themes within this over-arching objective have been isolated for specific and detailed study to be guided by external specialists. The first takes as its focus the Anglo-Saxon minster church of St Andrew's, Bishopstone, for which there is an exceptional range of topographic, architectural and documentary evidence, including a remarkable 11th-century narrative containing important information on the contemporary topography around Bishopstone and the liturgical arrangements within the minster church. Scrutiny of this material in conjunction with targeted fieldwork, as part of the first coordinated investigation of a South Saxon rural minster, may provide important evidence for the regional diversity of these ecclesiastical institutions. The second theme involves an extensive programme of palaeoenvironmental sampling and analysis in order to reconstruct and model the geomorphological history of the valley, thereby contributing to a number of detailed studies on the evolution of the Sussex coastline.

This document represents an overview of the objectives and methodology encapsulated within the project as a whole. More detailed project designs will accompany each of its targeted components.

## 2 DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY AREA

At its widest spatial extent the project will encompass an 1,820-acre area defined by the boundaries of the 19th-century parish of Bishopstone, formerly within the medieval hundred of Flexborough (Fig. 1). The parish is orientated diagonally across a swathe of Downland which stretches from a N-S ridge capped by Five Lords Burgh in the NE to the east bank of the alluvial floodplain of the river Ouse in what is now Newhaven in the SW. The parish is bisected by the lower reaches of a dendritic dry-valley system which originates 150m south of the north escarpment of the South Downs at Beddingam Hill. Within Bishopstone, the valley system opens out into a broad, sinuous meander located between Poverty Bottom to the north and the course of the A259 in the south, where it finally meets the reclaimed tidal margins of the river Ouse between the fossil cliffs of Hawth Hill and Rookery Hill to the E and W respectively. The valley has a strongly asymmetric profile, its steep western slopes contrasting with the gentle eastern gradients upon which the settlements of Bishopstone and Norton are located.

The solid geology of the survey area consists of Upper and Middle Chalk with extensive outcrops of Clay-with-Flints confined to the eastern ridges and spur tops of Beacon and Hawth Hill. The Geological Survey (Sheet 334) identifies alluvium in the floor of the main valley extending as far north as the midpoint between Bishopstone and Norton, above which it is replaced by Dry Valley and Nailbourne deposits. Test-pits and trial-trenches excavated at Norton during 2001 revealed that considerable depths of colluvium have accumulated on the lower slopes of the valley and in places such deposits overlie extensive and localised spreads of periglacial solifluction material, a standard sequence recognized in several valley locations on the South Downs (Bell 1976). As this previous work has shown, there is considerable potential for encountering occupation horizons both within and sealed beneath the build-up of colluvium, and on the basis of past fieldwalking one might also expect to find complementary evidence for Mesolithic and Neolithic activity on elevated Clay-with-Flint outcrops.

### 3 PAST WORK AND THE EXISTING ARCHAEOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCE

The input of effort during the past thirty years has brought our understanding of the Bishopstone landscape to a threshold. Fieldwork, including the long-term multi-period excavation on Rookery Hill, still arguably one of the most important excavations on the Chalk in SE England, has produced a considerable dataset from which a range of models on past life, settlement and subsistence within the valley and its environs have been proposed (Bell 1977). Excavations on Norton Farm by the Lewes Archaeological Group, and more recently by the SAS, has produced important findings for multi-period valley-slope occupation in the vicinity of an earthwork complex which could represent the remains of a prehistoric landscape 'frozen' within pasture (Thomas 2001). Excavation has been augmented by a number of fieldwalking programmes, most confined to the western side of the valley, which have revealed further evidence for farming and field systems from the prehistoric through to the Anglo-Saxon periods (Allen 1981). Evidence of Mesolithic through to Late prehistoric activity and occupation has been identified on Hawth Hill (Butler & Jarzembowski 1996) and important dated palaeoenvironmental evidence discovered from the fossil cliff below Rookery Hill and in the village during the excavation of service trenches has allowed a geomorphic sequence for the lower reaches of the valley to be outlined (AMS Datelist 13, 285; Jarzembowski 1988). More recently, metal-detecting in the vicinity of Bishopstone has produced a rich assemblage of metalwork and coinage which suggests that the minster church of St Andrew's could have been an important focus for economic activity during the Mid-Late Saxon period (fig. 2).

In addition to a small, but nevertheless important, selection of pre-Conquest sources, a substantial medieval and later documentary archive survives for the manor. The Pelham archive in the British Library and East Sussex Record Office contains a large collection of documents, including a rich vein of manorial court rolls from the 14th to the 20th century. Save for the later material, which has allowed the development of the valley as a Pelham estate during the 18th and 19th centuries to be traced in some detail (Farrant 1976) this archive remains substantially unstudied. In addition to the Tithe and the usual range of Ordnance Survey maps, the parish is reasonably well served by cartographic sources, including some useful 18th-century estate maps and associated terriers, and earlier material which captures the southern, coastal extremity of the parish. Litigation in the 16th century concerning disputed rights to wreck has also produced extensive topographical data which can be exploited to good effect.

From this résumé it can be seen that the archaeological and historical data for the survey area are both rich and diverse. A carefully planned survey designed to exploit the existing resource as fully as possible and target gaps with fresh fieldwork and research should stand an excellent chance of crossing the threshold and significantly enhancing our understanding of how the Bishopstone landscape has evolved. The remainder of this document will set out how this will be achieved.

## 4 GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGIES

### 4.1 Exploring settlement and land-use

The over-arching objective of the project is to reconstruct the development of settlement and land-use within the survey area. To this end, fieldwork will attempt to identify new sites and enhance the definition and characterisation of existing ones. An obvious beneficiary of this work will be the East Sussex Sites and Monuments Record and in recognition of this, East Sussex County Council has agreed to act as a partner in the project. A key aim will be to trace origins of settlement within the valley by targeting fieldwork both within and on the periphery of the extant settlements of Bishopstone and Norton. The results of this work and previous fieldwork campaigns will form one component within a wider study of the 'historic landscape' which will aim to amalgamate the archaeological, historical, architectural and palaeoenvironmental evidence.

### 4.2 Methodology

#### 4.2.1 Fieldwork

**Fieldwalking:** it is hoped that the three-year period will allow most of the available fields within the survey area to be walked under optimum conditions. Above the 25m contour fieldwalking will concentrate upon the largely unexplored eastern slopes of the valley up onto the fields cultivated on Beacon and Denton Hill and on the slopes of the dry valley tributary, Devilsrest Bottom. All fields will be numbered sequentially and prefixed by the project code 'BV'. Fields will be walked in 20m transects aligned on grid north, and material collected at 20m intervals. Slag, ceramic building material, fire-cracked flint, and glass will be counted and discarded in the field. A grid collection system based upon 10m squares may be used to define concentrated surface scatters.

**Metal-detecting:** over the years a number of important finds, amounting to a significant regional assemblage, have been recovered on an ad-hoc basis at various sites within the valley (see fig.2). Systematic recording and accurate plotting of such material is of the greatest importance if future finds are to be tied to an archaeological context. Responsible detectorists from the local community and the Eastbourne metal-detecting club will be used for the surveys which will be undertaken in tandem with fieldwalking.

**Geophysical survey:** this technique will be used to investigate areas of archaeological activity located by fieldwalking and metal-detecting. The surveys will employ both resistivity and magnetometry equipment to be purchased by the Sussex Archaeological Society early in 2002.

**Test-pitting:** will provide the opportunity for artefact recovery in areas normally outside the scope of non-intrusive fieldwork, i.e. those areas not under cultivation. Within the survey area this includes pasture surrounding Bishopstone and Norton as well as gardens, verges and other green areas within the settlements, all of which

have the potential to produce important evidence for the origins and development of village and hamlet. 1m<sup>2</sup> test-pits, numbered sequentially and prefixed with the site code 'BV' will be excavated by hand. Sampling in gardens and other residential areas is likely to be random although larger areas of pasture may provide an opportunity for systematic sampling on a grid system. Each test-pit will be excavated and recorded stratigraphically using *pro forma* recording sheets. Stratigraphic contexts within each TP will be uniquely numbered and the finds recovered from each context marked accordingly. At least one section of every test-pit will be drawn and photographed and plans produced at 1:10 where necessary.

**Excavation:** open-area excavation will be used sparingly where the complexity of the archaeology demands. Excavation for summer 2002 is scheduled to take place on Norton Farm to investigate a series of Iron-age features identified during trial excavations by the SAS in 2001. All excavations will follow the MOLAS single context recording system and employ environmental sampling using on-site flotation equipment.

#### 4.2.2 Interrogation of the 'historic environment'

**Project GIS:** given the importance of analyzing and presenting spatial relationships in research of this nature, the establishment of project GIS will be essential. The system will use digital mapping licensed by the project partners, ESCC, using MapInfo software based at the SAS. This resource will allow historical maps as well as aerial photographs and geophysical plots to be digitized and/or scanned and overlaid.

**Retrographic analysis:** aided by the above, cartographic sources will be used to build up a chronologically layered picture of the landscape. Features identified as 'late' will then be peeled off to reveal an earlier pattern of field boundaries and settlement features to which will be added evidence gleaned from field survey, documentary evidence, field-names and aerial photographs.

**Architectural survey/tenement analysis:** other than the church, very little work has been undertaken on the architectural history of the properties within Bishopstone and Norton. This would repay even the most basic of surveys perhaps organized around a village event which would encourage residents to open their doors to a buildings specialist for the day, a service which is currently offered locally by the Institute of Archaeology Field Unit's historic buildings division based in Robertsbridge, East Sussex. This would then highlight properties worthy of more detailed research and recording.

## **5 THEMES**

### **5.1 An exploration of a coastal Anglo-Saxon minster (incorporating a research assessment by John Blair)**

#### **5.1.1 Introduction**

Recent research has identified Bishopstone as a neglected but potentially very important Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical centre (Combes forthcoming). John Blair observes, ‘what makes Bishopstone remarkable is that the kind of topographical and field evidence which might be found for other such centres [collectively known as Anglo-Saxon minsters] is in this case combined with a wholly exceptional mid 11th-century narrative, and an unusually well-preserved church building’. Re-evaluation of the former has allowed Bishopstone to be added to a select group of three South Saxon minsters known to have had their own saints, the only one within East Sussex (see appendix). Moreover, we now have direct archaeological evidence for contemporary activity in the form of a regionally-important metal-detected assemblage of 8-9th-century metalwork and coins (fig. 2; Graham-Campbell 1989). As befits a site of this status, the work proposed here goes well beyond a study of the church building in isolation to an exploration of the minster’s topographical setting and economic role during the 7th to the 11th centuries.

#### **5.1.2 Objectives and methodology**

##### **A Recording the topography of the minster site and its setting**

Located on a small west-facing promontory into what may have been a navigable inlet at the time of its foundation (see below), St Andrew’s occupies a classic minster site; locally it is precisely comparable to the sites of other minsters in the Sussex coastal plain, such as Bosham, on the promontory in the braided Chichester Channel, and Steyning, on a feeder-stream of the Adur beside what was known in the 11th century as ‘St Cuthman’s port’ (Blair 1996). These sites illustrate the combination of shelteredness with prominence, of seclusion with proximity to communication lines, which the founders of 7th- and 8th-century minsters seem to have sought out so purposefully.

Research has shown that minsters played a formative role in the development of the Anglo-Saxon economy as centres of production, redistribution and exchange which were positioned to exploit local, regional and in some cases international trading networks. The recent discovery of two 8th-century silver pennies of King Offa of Mercia and Pepin the Short in close proximity to the church indicate that Bishopstone was no exception. The question of the site’s proximity to navigable water during the Anglo-Saxon period is therefore critical.

The results of the palaeoenvironmental work detailed in the following section will be key to establishing whether or not Bishopstone enjoyed direct access to navigable waters affording it the opportunity for active involvement in Ouse valley and South Coast trading networks.

This will be supplemented by:

- Contour survey using a Total Station and Vertical Mapper software to reveal the detailed topography of the site and to identify possible water courses and an associated water frontage.
- Geophysical survey and targeted test-pitting to identify archaeological structures/features associated with a putative water frontage.

## **B Identification of the minster precinct boundary and associated structures**

The road which skirts the churchyard and its environs to the north, east and south-east has a markedly curvilinear configuration. This feature has been observed at several minsters, and seems likely to reflect the boundary-ditch of an oval precinct; among known examples Bishopstone, at c. 150m across, would be towards the smaller end of the range. A hypothetical reconstruction, informed by Bampton, Oxon, where the road has been shown to overlie the ditch, suggests that this feature may be preserved in the areas of pasture to the west and south-west sides of the church, including the walled garden formerly belonging to Bishopstone Place (fig. 3). It would be an important step forward in our understanding of the development of the site to show that such a precinct exists, to obtain dating evidence from its fills, and identify any further features/structures located within the enclosure. These objectives will be met by the following:

- A comprehensive geophysical survey of the highlighted area followed by
- Targeted test-pitting and trial-trenching to explore anomalies

## **C Recording the church building**

The first phase of Bishopstone church, long known to be Anglo-Saxon, has been surprisingly little studied (fig. 4). It is a good example of a relatively small church, at the bottom end of the range of pre-Viking minsters, retaining its nave and one (the south) out of what may originally been four flanking *porticus*. The building clearly deserves closer study which could be organised around the following:

- Production of a new ground plan surveyed with the aid of modern technology
- Production of a drawn elevation in advance of restoration work. It is understood that plaster may soon need to be stripped from the internal walls at the west end, and in that event a full archaeological record must be made: important evidence could well emerge, for instance traces of a doorway into a west *porticus* or of a western gallery.
- A geophysical survey of the churchyard focused upon the area outside the north aisle where there is potential for finding a projecting north *porticus*.

- Dependant upon funding, a ground-probing radar survey of the floor within the church to reveal additional evidence for the configuration and liturgical arrangements of the Anglo-Saxon church.

## **D Reconstruction of the parochial organization and estate structure of the Bishopstone territory**

Recent research has begun to unravel the parochial development of Bishopstone and the associated Anglo-Saxon estate to which it was attached (see Combes forthcoming; appendix).

Through the identification of parochial links and tenurial relationships which existed during the medieval period, the historical research and map-regression analysis encapsulated by the first section of the project design should provide further evidence for reconstructing this development. The recent observation that South Heighton owed pension and mortuary dues to Bishopstone, for example, has allowed Bishopstone's parochial jurisdiction and by implication, the bounds of the Anglo-Saxon estate to which it was attached, to be mapped out to the north and north west of the smaller medieval parish.

Ultimately, the 3-year project can but lay the foundations for a survey of wider scope drawing upon detailed documentary, place-name and topographic research for the neighbouring parishes, especially those to the east and south-east where the bounds of the early estate are poorly understood.

## **5.2 The changing geomorphology and hydrology of the valley**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

Before presenting the objectives and methodology specific to this theme it is first necessary to outline, as far as is possible on current evidence, the geomorphological development of the valley as the artificially 'dry' conditions of today are appreciably different from those which prevailed for much of the past.

The general Holocene development of the lower Ouse is characterized by the substantial infilling, by up to 31m of sediment, of an incised valley. Following a period of Late-Glacial to early Holocene deposition of sandy gravels, interbedded organic sediments and clay were laid down between *c.* 6000-3000 BP under mostly perimarine conditions. Soon after 3000 BP, a marine transgression, evident in the deposition of an extensive inorganic layer, flooded the floor of the valley and the levels within flanking minor valleys such as Bishopstone to create a broad tidal inlet (Castleden 1996, 21-7; Woodcock forthcoming).

Radiocarbon-dated samples of marine mollusca taken from a buried wave-cut platform exposed beneath the fossil cliff at Rookery Hill (TQ 46500025) confirm that the Bishopstone inlet was tidal during the Iron Age (*c.* 500-100 cal BC), a topographic indicator of these submerged conditions being the pronounced shelf

which traverses the lower slopes of both Rookery and Hawth Hills at the mouth of the valley (see AMS Radiocarbon datelist 13, 285).

During the Late Saxon and medieval periods the outlet of the river Ouse experienced some major morphological changes which were likely to have had a dramatic effect upon the micro-environment/economy of the Bishopstone inlet. The principal agent driving these changes was the process of longshore drift, which, with the growth of a shingle spit across the estuary, deflected the outfall of the Ouse progressively eastwards across the mouth of the Bishopstone inlet to the point of its medieval outfall at Seaford. The shingle spit would have promoted drier, sheltered conditions within the valley as reflected in the discovery of palaeo-environmental indicators of a low-energy saltmarsh, dated to the 7th century AD (AMS Radiocarbon datelist 13, 285; Jarzembowski 1988) and documentary sources which attest to exploitation of the valley alluvium for pasture (Hazelgrove 1977, 243-5). References to a Bishop's ferry and responsibilities of carrying timber to a boat also suggest that a quay or hythe was located in the manor's demesne, possibly below Hawth Hill, which would have then been adjacent to the north bank of the river on its way to Seaford.

The onset of deteriorating climatic conditions at the end of the 13th century, however, and the eventual suffocation of Seaford harbour as a result of continued longshore drift combined with inking upstream, established a trend of seasonal inundation and prolonged flooding which was set to continue well into the post-medieval era. On a 1587 map of the Sussex coast, for example, the entire Bishopstone valley is marked as saltmarsh bridged between Rookery and Hawth Hills by a narrow causeway (Lower 1870). A short-lived reprieve was bought with the cutting of a new outlet for the river Ouse at Meeching in 1539 which allowed a new phase of reclamation to take place within the valley, as indicated by the field name 'Newlands' on a map of the Lower Ouse Navigation of 1620 (Brandon 1971, fig. 3). This measure was only temporarily successful, however, and before matters were finally rectified at the end of the 18th century with a major new engineering initiative headed by the construction of a western breakwater at Newhaven, the mouth of the Ouse was again forced eastwards, breaching the shingle bar within Bishopstone parish at a point later developed as the site of Bishopstone tidesmills.

### **5.2.2 Objectives**

Several questions of immediate relevance arise from the outline sequence presented above. What effects did the changing geomorphology of the coastline and river Ouse have on the environment within the valley and what were the repercussions for its inhabitants in terms of their economy and access to lines of communication and transport? How far did the tidal waters penetrate, and was the inlet navigable at any period, a proposition which has already mooted for the Anglo-Saxon minster?

Clearly, if we are to answer these fundamental questions, a more precise understanding of geomorphic history of the Bishopstone area is a priority. In pursuit of this goal it will be important not only to establish the internal depositional sequence of marine, terrestrial and colluvial sediments within the survey area but also to explore the relationship between these deposits and those of the Lower Ouse

valley. The identification and sampling of palaeoenvironmentally-rich peat horizons will be integral to this objective.

### **5.2.3 Methodology**

- An extensive programme of coring following both transverse and longitudinal transects to map sediments within the valley. To be augmented by the excavation of soil test-pits to increase sampling of selected sediments.
- Appropriate sampling for pollen, macro-faunal, sedimentological and soil-micromorphological analysis to determine the nature of sedimentation and the erosional history of the valley.
- Computerised reconstruction and modeling of the former landscape and coastline

## 6 STAFFING AND RESOURCES

### 6.1 Coordinating team

The project will be coordinated by the Sussex Archaeological Society through its Research Officer, Gabor Thomas. In addition, a number of specialists will oversee aspects of the work and act as academic advisers, although the level of input will vary from one individual to the next. This team will meet annually to discuss progress.

Name	Institution	Area of expertise/involvement	Level of involvement
Dr Martin Bell	Reading University	Archaeological/palaeoenvironmental methodology; archaeology general	Academic adviser
Dr Sue Berry	Independent	Later history/Bishopstone Place	Academic adviser
Dr John Blair	Queen's College, Oxford	Minster church/Early Medieval landscape	Academic adviser
Julie Bates	Bournemouth University	Environmental archaeology	Supervise sampling and undertake analysis as part of research
Dr Sue Hamilton	Institute of archaeology, UCL	Prehistoric archaeology	Academic adviser
Dr Simon Jennings	University of North London	Palaeoenvironmental analysis/coastline change	Supervise sampling and analysis
John Manley	Sussex Archaeological Society	Roman/Iron-age archaeology; publicity/fundraising	Academic and strategic adviser
Ben Pears	Reading University	Paleoenvironmental reconstruction	Undertake sampling and analysis as part of MA research
Christopher Whittick	East Sussex Record Office	Archival research	Adviser and undertake select research

### 6.2 Other staff and collaborators

- East Sussex County Council will be involved with the development of a project GIS and have agreed to provide digital mapping in return for SMR information.
- The project will buy in finds and excavation supervisors for each summer season of fieldwork.
- The project will aim to draw upon the specialist skills and knowledge collectively embraced amongst the staff and membership of the Sussex Archaeological Society. Voluntary work ranging from fieldwork through to finds processing and archival research will be open to members throughout the duration of the project.
- It is envisaged that formalized training programmes in various fieldwork techniques will be available during the second and third years of the project. These will be advertised widely to undergraduate students and other members of the public.

### **6.3 Involving the local community**

The project is fortunate in being able to draw upon the collective interest and enthusiasm of a community which is passionate about the history of its village and environs. Some local people have been actively engaged in researching the history and archaeology of their environs for decades and the project aims to tap into their detailed expertise of the landscape and the events which have shaped it.

Having completed a 6-week season of fieldwork at Norton in 2001, the Society's has already established itself within the valley and a Forum introducing the proposals outlined here is scheduled to take place in Bishopstone in February 2002. Once the project is up and running further meetings and events will be organised.

More than purely to inform and update the community, the project will encourage active involvement. For example, the metal-detecting surveys will draw exclusively upon hobbyists living locally; individuals will be invited to volunteer for fieldwork and finds processing and undertake research on the history of their properties.

## **7 PUBLICATION & DISSEMINATION**

Interim reports will be published annually in the Society's newsletter, *Past & Present* and on the research pages of its website. Larger articles and specialist reports will be submitted to the editorial board of the *Sussex Archaeological Collections* as will a final synthetic report/s. Project members will be encouraged to publish elsewhere in specialist journals and monographs. The project will close with a presentation of its results to the local community at a convenient location to Bishopstone.

## **8 FINANCE**

A budget for Year 1 has been set at £6240 to include costs for supervisory staff, general operating accruals and post-excavation work. It is expected that at least 50% of this cost will be defrayed by external grants in the first year, the shortfall being met internally by the Sussex Archaeological Society. Applications are being made to specialist archaeological funds to support individual project themes, i.e. palaeoenvironmental sampling, research on the Anglo-Saxon minster. It is envisaged that income generated from training programmes will reduce the reliance upon external funding in the second and third years of the project's duration. The community dimension will also stand the project in good stead for National Lottery 'Your Heritage' funding.

## **9 TIMETABLE**

A detailed breakdown of deadlines will be set at the beginning of each year, that for Year 1 is as follows:

### **2002**

#### **Winter**

- Commence with fieldwalking and metal-detector surveys.
- Hold Bishopstone forum.

#### **Spring**

- Establish project GIS and link to database of existing archaeological finds from survey area.
- Undertake cartographic and air-photographic research – to include visit to NMR, Swindon.
- Commence documentary research, establish base-map and tenement-numbers.

#### **Summer**

- Undertake core sampling and soil test-pitting of valley as part of palaeoenvironmental study.
- Undertake geophysics within selected areas around Bishopstone church including churchyard.
- Commence with test-pitting programme within Bishopstone village to identify minster precinct boundary and associated features.
- Organise one-day building-survey event.
- Run small open-area excavation on Norton Farm to investigate Iron-Age occupation revealed during test-pitting during 2001.

#### **Autumn/winter**

- Continue with fieldwalking and metal-detecting surveys.
- Undertake palaeoenvironmental and post-excavation analysis – production of specialist reports and first interim.

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## Appendix contributed by John Blair

### *The historical evidence for Bishopstone as a minster*

It is possible that Bishopstone church is mentioned in the early ninth century, though unfortunately the texts are ambiguous.<sup>1</sup> A dispute-settlement in 801 shows that land at Denton, formerly part of the endowment of Beddingham minster, had been detached by King Offa and given to an abbot Plegheard, who transferred it to the see of Selsey. The interpolation of the numeral '25' by later Selsey or Chichester clerks indicates that they regarded this as the Bishopstone estate, which appears as 25 hides in Domesday Book. The record of a second synod, held in 825, reports (again with the interpolated '25') that the bishop of the South Saxons was 'despoiled of a certain part of the land of that church which is called Denton (*fuit spoliatus de aliqua parte terre illius ecclesie q<ue> vocitatur Deantone*). But does this mean 'land called Denton belonging to Selsey church', or 'land belonging to Denton church'? The latter involves emending the cartulary scribe's *quod, quod* to *que, quam* (which is entirely plausible); the former is open to the more serious objection that the church of Selsey has not hitherto been mentioned in the document. On balance, it seems most likely that land belonging to a church at Denton is being referred to.

It is relatively easy to explain how the main estate and its church came to be called not Denton but Bishopstone. This name (*biscope's t n*), which obviously refers to proprietorship by the bishop, must post-date the events of Offa's reign. Denton, 'the *t n* in the *denu*', refers to a topographical feature, a *denu* or long, narrow valley. This must surely be the valley which runs southwards via Poverty Bottom, Norton Bottom, Norton and Bishopstone to the harbour, and within which Bishopstone is the focal settlement.<sup>2</sup> The advent of a classically tenth- or eleventh-century proprietary name<sup>3</sup> meant that Denton, once the name of a territory or estate encompassing this whole valley, became confined to one small township within it.

Pam Combes has recently made the important observation that South Heighton, which is separated from Bishopstone parish by Denton, owed a pension and mortuary dues to Bishopstone.<sup>4</sup> The implication - that both South Heighton and Denton were once part of a larger Bishopstone parish - is of course consistent with the argument for a larger Denton estate. If it were to be accepted that Sutton near Seaford was so named as the 'south *t n*' of Bishopstone, balancing its 'north *t n*' at Norton, this would constitute evidence that the early estate, and presumably parish, extended south-eastwards as well as north-westwards. This inference is far from certain; but an estate along the east side of the Ouse valley, perhaps originally extending all the way from Beddingham to the Cuckmere mouth, would make sense topographically.

At least it looks as though Bishopstone had the kind of centrality in a multi-focal territory and parish which former minsters characteristically show. There is scope for further topographical analysis, and perhaps for the discovery of other parochial links.

### *The cult of St. Leofwynn*

Potentially the key text for Anglo-Saxon Bishopstone is the extraordinary *Translatio Sanctae Lewinnae*, a contemporary account of the theft of the relics of St. 'Lewinna' (O.E. Leofwynn) in 1058.<sup>5</sup> It describes how

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<sup>1</sup>S. Kelly, *Anglo-Saxon Charters VI: Charters of Selsey* (Oxford, 1998), Nos. 14 and 15.

<sup>2</sup>It conforms very well to the definitions of *denu* in M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place Names* (Stamford, 2000), 113-21.

<sup>3</sup>For the argument that *t\_n* names of this kind are relatively late, and denote manorialisation rather than settlement, see M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past* (London, 1978), ch.7.

<sup>4</sup>P. Combes, 'Bishopstone: a Pre-Conquest Minster Church', *SxAC*, forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup>*Acta Sanctorum: Julii V* (Antwerp, 1727), 608-27; extracts re-edited by O. Holder-Egger in *M.G.H. Scriptores*, XV.2 (Hannover, 1888), 782-9.

Balger, a monk from the Flemish monastery of Bergues, was on board a ship blown fortuitously into Seaford harbour, visited a nearby minster, and helped himself to the bones of its wonder-working virgin martyr. Frustratingly the church is not named, and previous speculation has tended to favour other local churches such as Beddingham, Lewes and Alfriston.<sup>6</sup> I have become convinced that Bishopstone is the place described, and that the narrative provides evidence - probably unique among minor English minsters - for its late Anglo-Saxon liturgical life.

*Does the story refer to Bishopstone? (Fig. 1)*

The narrative says that Balger's ship was blown into Seaford during a nocturnal storm. In the morning (Easter Sunday) he wanted to hear mass, 'discerned from afar a minster, almost three leagues distant from that port' (*cernit itaque a longe monasterium, pene tribus leugis ab illo portu disparatum*), and set off for it on foot with one companion. Previous commentators have therefore looked for a church visible from Seaford harbour, nearly three leagues (which in medieval terminology often means miles) away, approachable on foot, and dedicated to St. Andrew. No church satisfies these conditions; in fact no church at all can be seen from Seaford harbour except Newhaven (St. Michael), across the Ouse estuary, and Seaford itself (St. Leonard), neither of which shows any sign of pre-Conquest importance.

I suggest that the solution is that in the 1050s the name 'Seaford' did not yet refer specifically to the town, but more generally to a topographical feature. The account of it in the *Translatio* is worth close attention:

A suitable etymology of the name - *Sevordh* in the vernacular - is *Maris-vadum* in Latin: and a ford indeed, for it was a desired ford (*vadum ... optatum*) for those coming to shore. Speaking as I do to those not knowing it, the entrance to this port is so narrow that two ships can scarcely enter it side-by-side. On either side two headlands raised to the sky descend as a steep hill (*bini scopuli versus caelum erecti declive iugum demittunt*), on which every wave breaks when a stormy wind whips up the troubled sea. There no anchor restrains the ships, no rope checks their swaying, but standing stable on their own, they do not fear the east wind, nor the north, nor the south-west.

The *bini scopuli* can only be the twin cliffs of Newhaven Head and Seaford Head. These are 4 km. apart, but running between them is a long, narrow spit of mounded shingle produced by the process of 'long-shore drift' from west to east. The gap two ships wide must have been in this. The name 'Seaford' means what it says - 'a ford in the sea' - and clearly refers to the shingle bar, which although natural would have reminded Anglo-Saxons of the embanked causeways to which they applied the word 'ford'.<sup>7</sup> For Balger, then, the name described not a settlement but a geographical configuration: two cliffs defining the broad estuarine harbour of the Ouse and linked by a 'sea-ford'.

It seems impossible to know where the gap in the shingle bar would have been in the 1050s. Over the centuries 'long-shore drift' pushed the Ouse progressively further east, from a probable pre-Roman outlet at Newhaven to a late medieval one at Seaford, until the making of the Newhaven cut in the sixteenth century restored the status quo. Earlier artificial cuts could have existed, and it is hard to picture the configuration before erosion - which has not merely reduced the cliffs but pushed the shingle bar tighter against the shore-line, cutting off the river-flow eastwards - and continued silting of the harbour and its tributary streams. (That at least is how I understand it as a non-geologist; is there scope for modelling the receding shore-line?) On present evidence, we can only say that the ship could have entered at any point between the two headlands.

Bishopstone church can be seen up its little valley from a point somewhere near the present railway station: if Balger's ship was moored in this area, just inside the bar, he would have had a clear view of it. It is dedicated to St. Andrew, and was certainly a significant church that might have had its own saint, perhaps even offering some architectural pointers in that direction (below). It would have been quite impossible for Balger to see any of the other local minsters without first climbing a hill.

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<sup>6</sup>W.H. Blaauw, 'On The Translation of St. Lewinna from Seaford, in 1058', *SxAC*, 1 (1848), 46-54 (perhaps Lewes); G.R. Stephens, 'The Burial-Place of St. Lewinna', *Medieval Studies*, 21 (1959), 303-12 (probably Alfriston); L.E. Whatmore, *St. Lewinna: East Sussex Martyr* (Pevensey, 1979), 43-53 (reviews the various possibilities without firm conclusion).

<sup>7</sup>See J. Blair and A. Millard, 'An Anglo-Saxon Landmark Rediscovered', *Oxoniensia*, 57 (1992), 342-8.

The one remaining difficulty is that the church stands one mile, not three, from Balger's putative mooring. To fall back on the excuse that 'medieval estimates of distance were often vague' may seem feeble; this is true nonetheless, and all the other evidence points to Bishopstone. It is certainly hard to think of any other church which looks in any way plausible.

#### *The narrative as evidence for liturgy and architecture*

The circumstantial detail of the narrative probably makes Leofwynn's the best-recorded minor cult setting in late Anglo-Saxon England. The feretory was a substantial wooden box, probably gable-ended since Balger worked loose one of the end panels. It stood on the floor or a low plinth, since Balger lifted it by attaching his belt to either end and bracing it over his shoulders; this also suggests that there were rings or handles of some kind. It sounds in fact very like the surviving feretory of St. Manchan at Boher, co. Offaly, which is wooden box of this shape with metal appliqué, and has metal rings to take poles for carriage in procession.<sup>8</sup> Inside, the bones were wrapped in a red pall, and authenticated with seals and a label (below). The description of the setting is especially remarkable:

Among other things they saw parchment sheets fixed to the wall, and that miracles which almighty God had done through his saint were described in them. And because they were written in English, as is the custom among those people, they could read nothing of them. (*Namque videbant inter cetera scedas membranarum parieti affixas et virtutes, quas per sanctam suam fecerat omnipotens Dominus, in eisdem esse descriptas. Et quia Anglice, uti apud ipsos mos habetur, scriptae erant, minime quidem ab ipsis legi poterant.*)

As well as being an interesting comment on the English love of the written vernacular, this seems to be the only known pre-Conquest reference to a practice known at some late medieval English shrines (for instance St. Walstan of Bawburgh): the posting on the walls or in wooden frames of English-language hagiographical texts. It is tempting to speculate that some twelfth-century saints' lives, which string together miracle stories in a clumsy and sometimes inconsistent fashion, could have been composed from vernacular material of this kind.

Finally, we might guess that the shrine stood in some relatively enclosed place, whether a small chamber or a space defined by wooden screens, where suppliants kneeling before the feretory could read of their predecessors' successful cures.

#### *The historicity of St. Leofwynn*

The narrative relates that when the relics were unwrapped at Bergues they were found to be authenticated by three seals, and accompanied by a label reading:

This is the body of the glorious virgin 'Lewinna' [Leofwynn], who flourished, adorned with many virtues, under a king of the English called 'Eubertus' [presumably Ecgberht of Kent, 664-73], and afterwards in the time of the same king ended her life in martyrdom, in the lifetime of an archbishop named Theodore [of Canterbury, 669-90]. After many years had passed, by a revelation from God her corpse was raised from the ground by Bishop 'Edelmus' [probably Eadhelm of Selsey, [956x63-979x80], with a great multitude of people standing around, and thus with due honour laid to rest inside the minster.

Authentication labels reported by relic-thieves must obviously be regarded with the severest suspicion. It is, however, encouraging that this text mentions a very obscure bishop of Selsey, whose name can scarcely have been familiar at Bergues. A translation in the 970s, following recent practice at major reformed houses (for instance Winchester, where Swithun was translated in 971) is entirely plausible. We can therefore have a degree of confidence in the late tenth-century stage.

Whether Leofwynn was really a seventh-century martyr is of course a very different matter. The references to Ecgberht and Theodore date her putative martyrdom quite narrowly, to 669x73. This was precisely the period of the 'official' conversion of the South Saxons, with the baptism of King Æthelwealh at the suggestion of King Wulfhere of Mercia (d. 674/5).<sup>9</sup> St. Wilfrid's adventures on the Sussex coast only a few years earlier suggest that

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<sup>8</sup>P. Harbison, *The Golden Age of Irish Art* (London, 1999), 276-96.

<sup>9</sup>Bede, *HE*, iv.13.

the pagan South Saxons were eminently capable of creating martyrs.<sup>10</sup> But of course a fictional Sussex martyr would have been located at this date almost as a matter of course, and the reference to a 'revelation from God' - the standard vehicle for the 'invention' (in both senses of the word) of spurious relics - does not raise confidence. On the positive side, a forger drawing on the obvious sources might have been more likely to say 'in the time of King Æthelwealh and Bishop Wilfrid': the reference to the king of neighbouring Kent might just possibly point to some genuinely early source, describing political events now obscure.

At least it looks as though the church was believed in the later tenth century to contain the grave of a pre-Viking female saint, even if her story underwent some improvement. Cults of obscure and ill-recorded seventh- and eighth-century saints are characteristic of Anglo-Saxon minsters, and concentrate in them so strongly as to create some presumption that Leofwynn's church was a minster.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Stephen of Ripon, *Vita Wilfridi*, c.16.

<sup>11</sup>See J. Blair, 'A Saint for Every Minster?', in R. Sharpe and A. Thacker (eds.), *Local Saints and Local Churches* (Oxford, forthcoming).

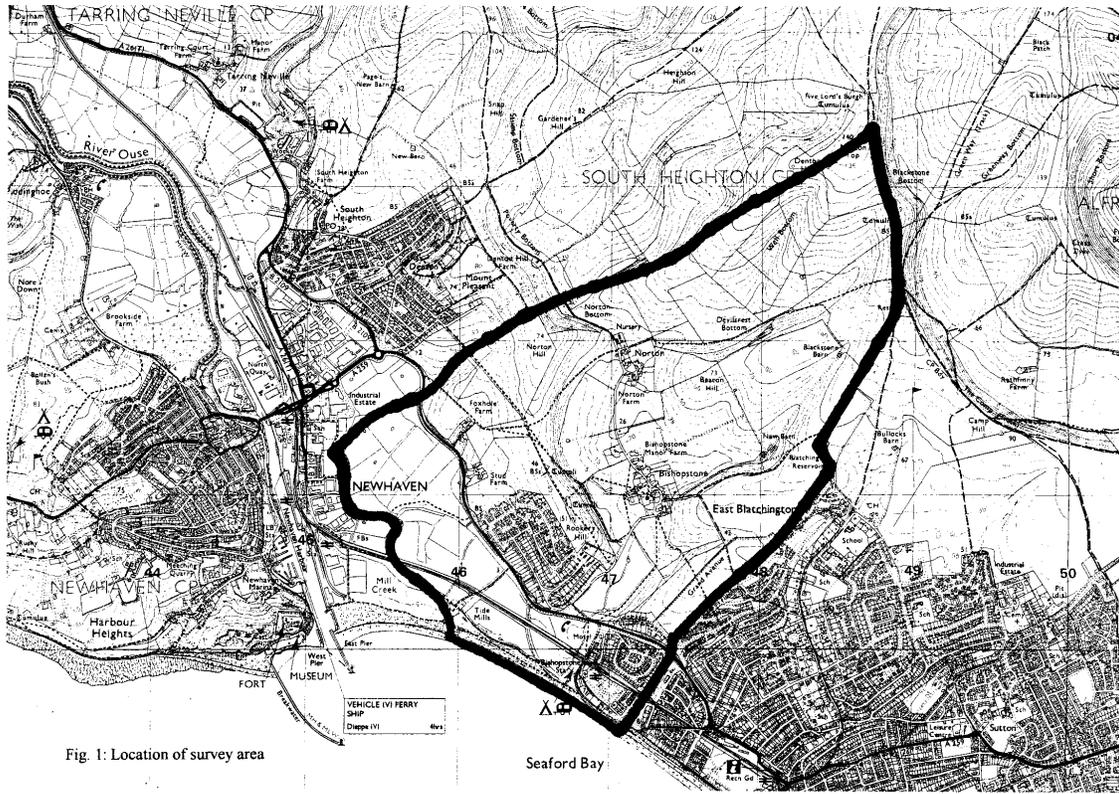


Fig. 1: Location of survey area

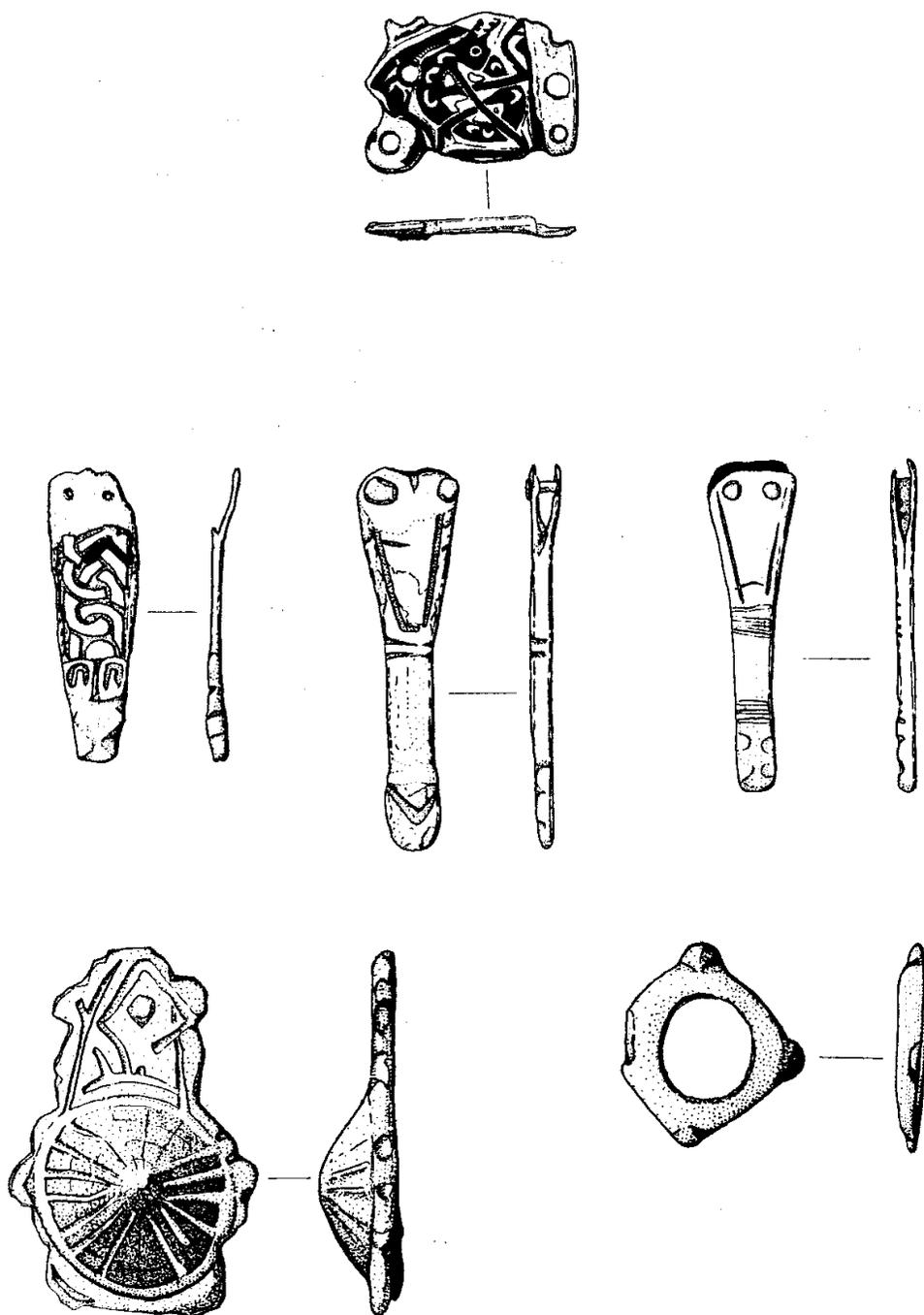


Fig. 2: A selection of the metal-detector finds made within the survey area: top row, late 8th-century gilt copper-alloy mount; middle row, three 9th-century strap-ends; bottom row, 11th-century copper-alloy harness-fittings. Scale x 1.5 actual size

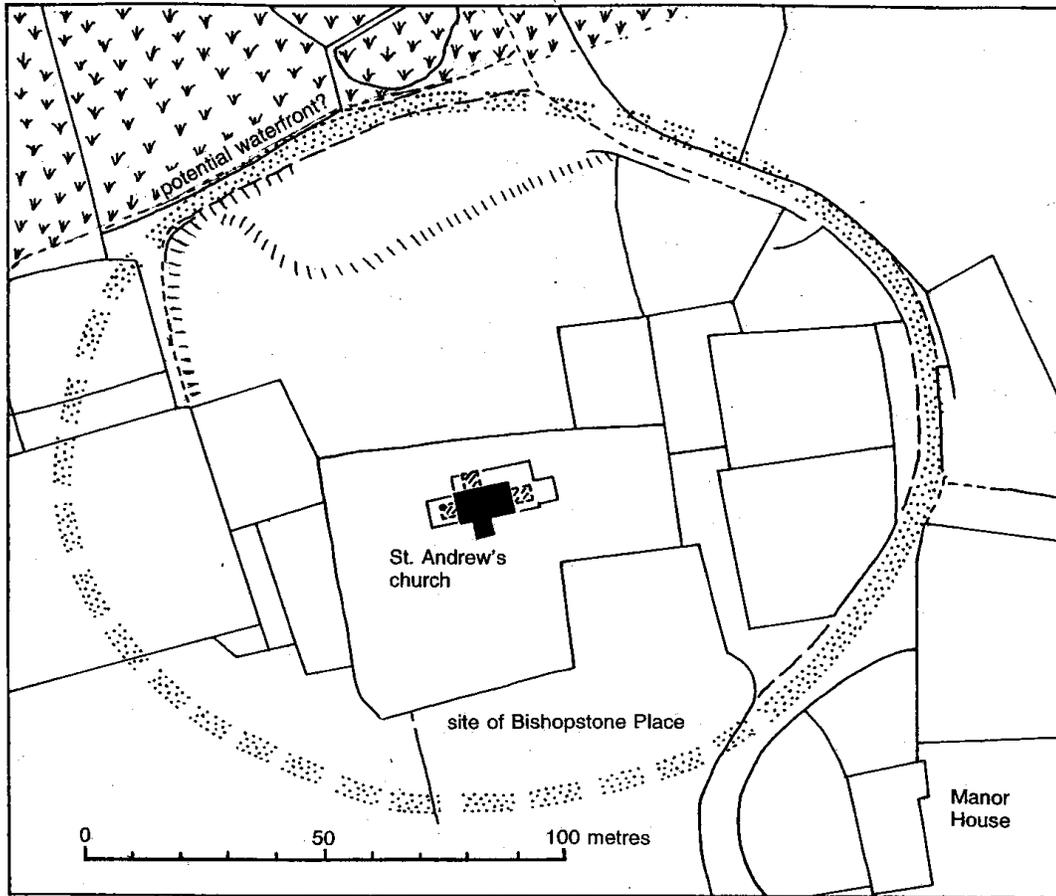


Fig. 3: Bishopstone: sketch-plan illustrating the possible layout of an oval ditched enclosure around the church.

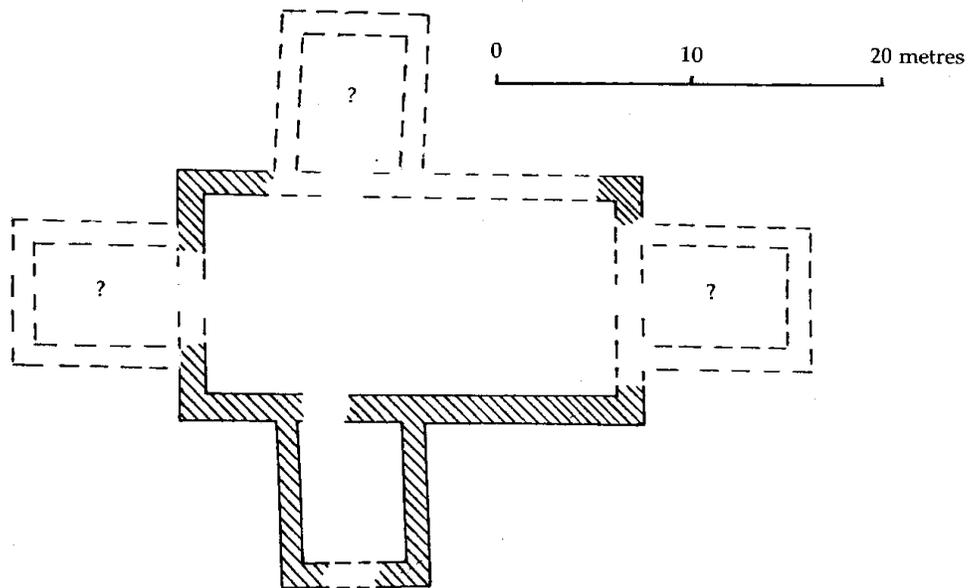
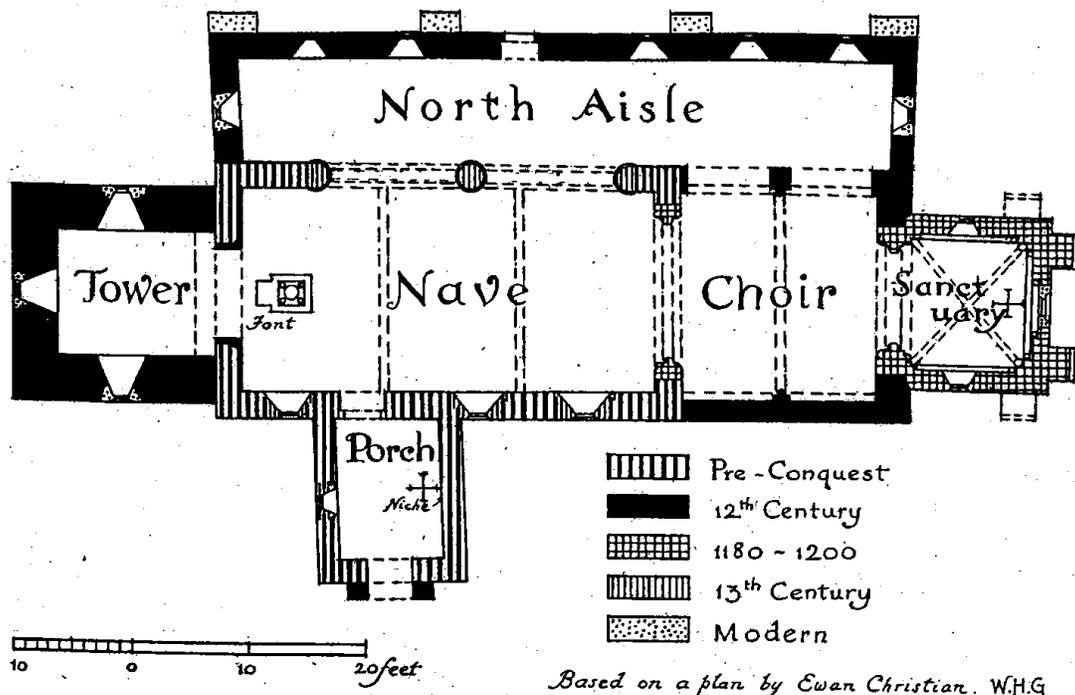


Fig. 4: Bishopstone church: Walter Godfrey's plan of the church as existing (above); possible reconstruction of the original Anglo-Saxon plan (below).

