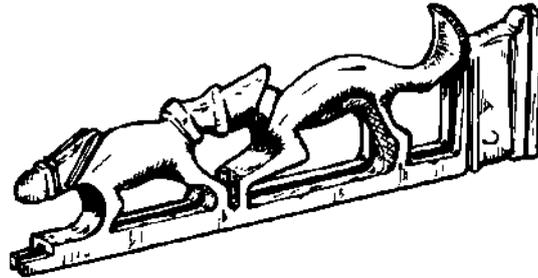


Amphill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

All Saints Church Chalgrave

An Appreciation of its Architecture and
Mediaeval Wall Paintings

Kevan J Fadden FSA

www.ADALHS.org.uk

The All Saints Church of Chalgrave

An Appreciation of its Architecture and Mediaeval Wall paintings

CHALGRAVE. 1846

Few churches present so deplorable an appearance as this. It has been shamefully neglected, and the interior is damp and dirty. One part is appropriated to the reception of ladders, brooms, and various other abominations, most painful to contemplate. It is melancholy to reflect that a church, which even now, in spite of the neglect and abuse it has undergone, contains some beautiful specimens of ecclesiastical architecture, should be in so fallen a condition. The nave is ceiled. Through the roof a hole has been made for the escape of the smoke from a stove, which, as well as disfiguring the inside, exhibits a more unsightly appearance externally. The western light is excluded by some crazy wooden work, and an equally feeble gallery of the worst character." The perpetrators of this annoyance have thought so well of the work as to record their names in front. To remedy the want of light occasioned by this obstruction, three attic windows of the worst description have been made in the roof of the nave - bad enough to view inside, but greatly disfiguring the exterior aspect of the church." The columns, and wherever whitewash could be introduced, suffer under the infliction, by a complete concealment of all architectural ornaments. The font appeared to have been frequently painted. The wooden roof remained in the aisles - repaired, however, with little knowledge; here, also, a very few of the old open sittings remained. The body of the church was covered with very high and ugly pews; and two fine monuments, with recumbent figures, had each one to themselves. The roof of the chancel was ceiled, and the whole thoroughly whitewashed, to the complete concealment of an apparently very ornamental canopy; a paltry table, covered with a scrap of green baize, with a square pew, combined to complete the unseemly appearance of this part of the church. A few of the original tiles remained, forming a marked contrast to the modern manufacture used in reparation. The roof of the nave was of slate; the aisles lead; and the chancel tiled. Sheep were feeding in the church-yard. In passing through the hamlet which is in this parish, we observed a large chapel for dissenters, tasteless enough, but affording, in the attention paid to propriety of appearance, a marked contrast to the neglected church of the Establishment. We were informed that there was no resident clergyman, and where this is the case, it generally happens that the church, as well as the parishioners, exhibit the want of beneficial superintendence.

14 April 1846

W.A.

W. A. was John Martin, the Librarian at Woburn Abbey, who using the signature W.A. wrote a series of pithy articles on Bedfordshire churches for the Northampton Mercury and Bedfordshire Times between 1845 and 1854.

Chalgrave 2012

When visited today, it is difficult to believe that Chalgrave church ever fitted John Martin's description, for it is, neat, tidy and well cared for with a reassuring smell of furniture polish.

The document does however help us to understand the building's architecture and development, especially when seen together with Thomas Fisher's watercolours painted about 33 years earlier.

This survey which was the basis for an address to the Bedfordshire Local History Association Conference in June 2012 uses personal observation and photographs by the author taken in 2001 and historical reference to build up a picture.



Chalgrave Church - Watercolour Thomas Fisher c. 1815

The “attic” windows referred to by John Martin some 31 years later can be seen projecting from the south roof of the nave. Also the trace of an earlier roof line on the east wall of the tower probably altered at the same time as the windows were inserted. The “attic” or dormer windows were removed in 1861-2. When the tower crashed through the nave roof in 1889, the “crazy woodwork” and gallery would have perished. The tower was never restored to its original height but was rebuilt to its present condition in 1931.



Chalgrave Church today

This view shows the stumped tower and the roof line of the Nave extended over the South Aisle in a straight line.



Interior of church - Watercolour by Thomas Fisher c.1815

The “attic” windows and a crown post which were almost certainly put in when the roof line was revised are clearly portrayed. The windows were inserted to increase the light, this was cheaper than building a Clerestory.

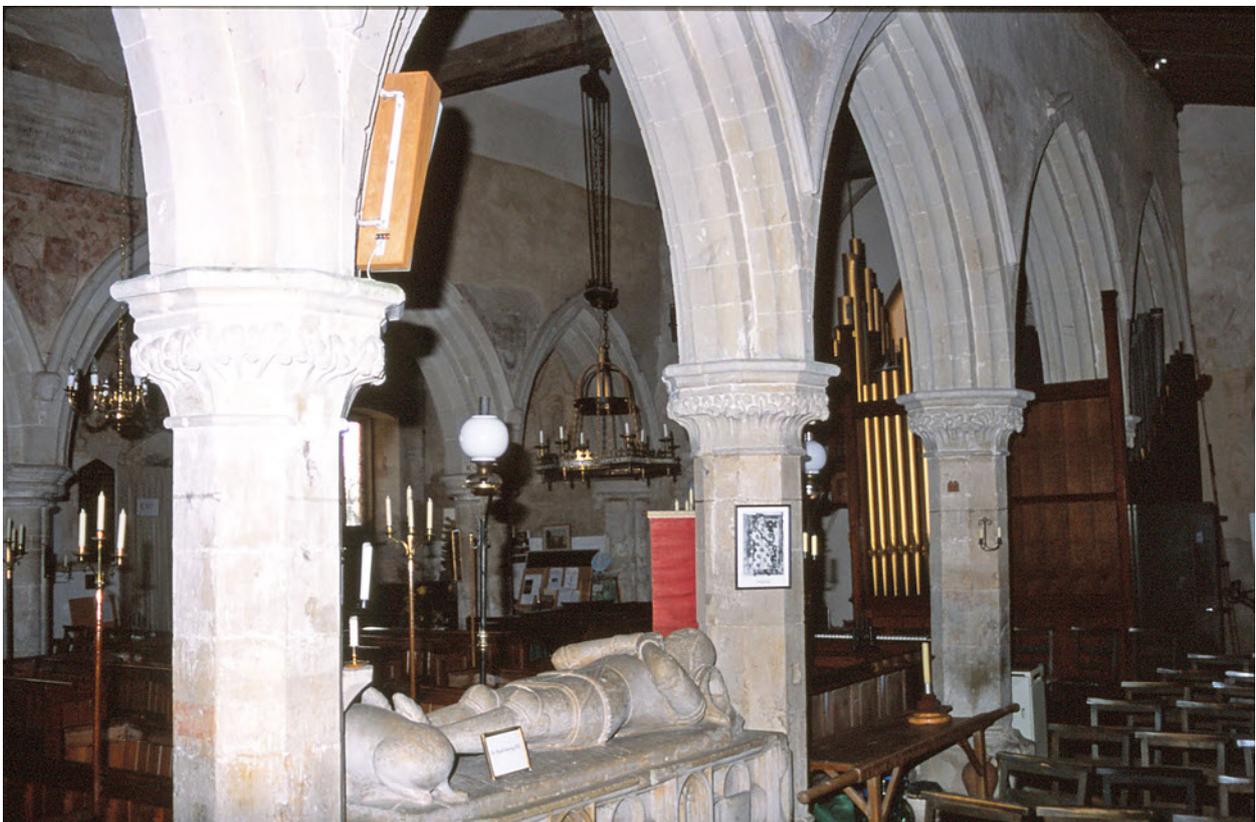
The Royal Arms above the Chancel Arch where the Rood would have been tells us it is post Elizabeth 1. Rather a crude rendering of what appears to be a Lion and a Unicorn fighting for the crown. Texts were on the west wall of the Nave as we shall see later but no sign of wall paintings. They were obviously still covered with whitewash at that time.

The style of the North Arcade appears to be Early English ie 13th Century while the South Arcade is probably about 80 years later.



North Arcade Pillar

Fine quality octagonal North Arcade pillars with stiff leaf decoration definitely 13th Century. There must have been a local school of craftsmen as they are similar to those at Eaton Bray, Pitstone and Ivanhoe churches.



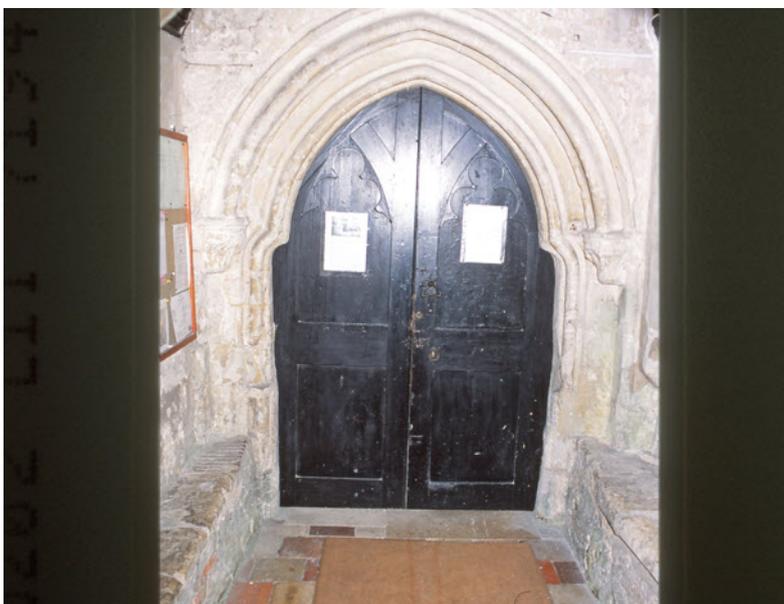
The North Arcade

A recumbent Knight's tomb lies between the pillars.



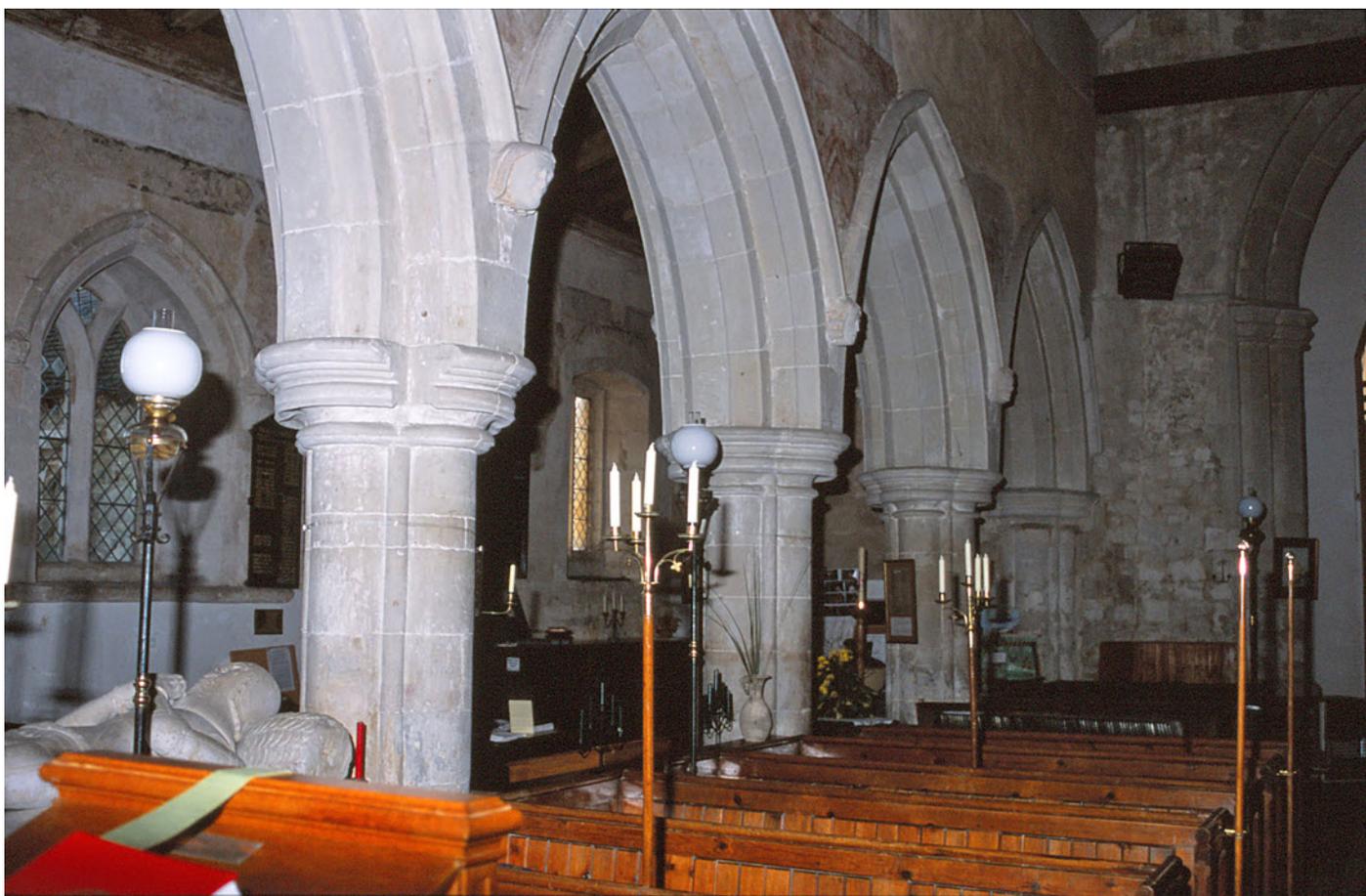
Fourteenth Century Knight

This Knight is believed to have been Sir Nigel Loryng, knighted 1346. One of the first Knights of the Garter his shield hangs over the tenth stall (seat) on the Black Prince's side in St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle. Nele Loring fought at the naval battle of Sluys, the battle of Crecy and at the siege of Calais in 1350. A colourful character, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a very successful historical best seller novel about him called "The White Company".



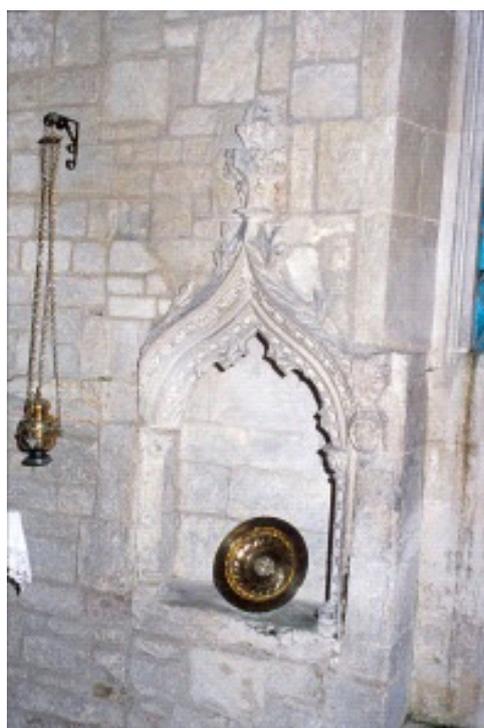
South Door c. 1250

Interestingly this door appears to be Early English but later than the North Aisle Arcade. It is pointed-trefoiled with an odd continuous moulding and in addition one order of columns. This suggests it was probably set in the original south wall of the Nave and moved out when the South Arcade was built.



South Aisle Arcade 14th century

The South Aisle piers carved with four main and four thin diagonal shafts with plain moulded capitals. The arches have two quadrant moldings this dates the aisle to some 80 years later than the North. This is the normal sequence of aisle building as the North ground of the church was less popular for burials where the sun never shone. The effigy of another Knight thought to be Sir John Broughton but this is by no means certain can be seen in the photograph above.



Piscina

A very pretty 14th century (Decorated) Piscina in a fenestella with a ball flower and ogee arch. These were used to wash the holy vessels after Eucharist. A hole in the bottom allowed the water to run onto sanctified ground.



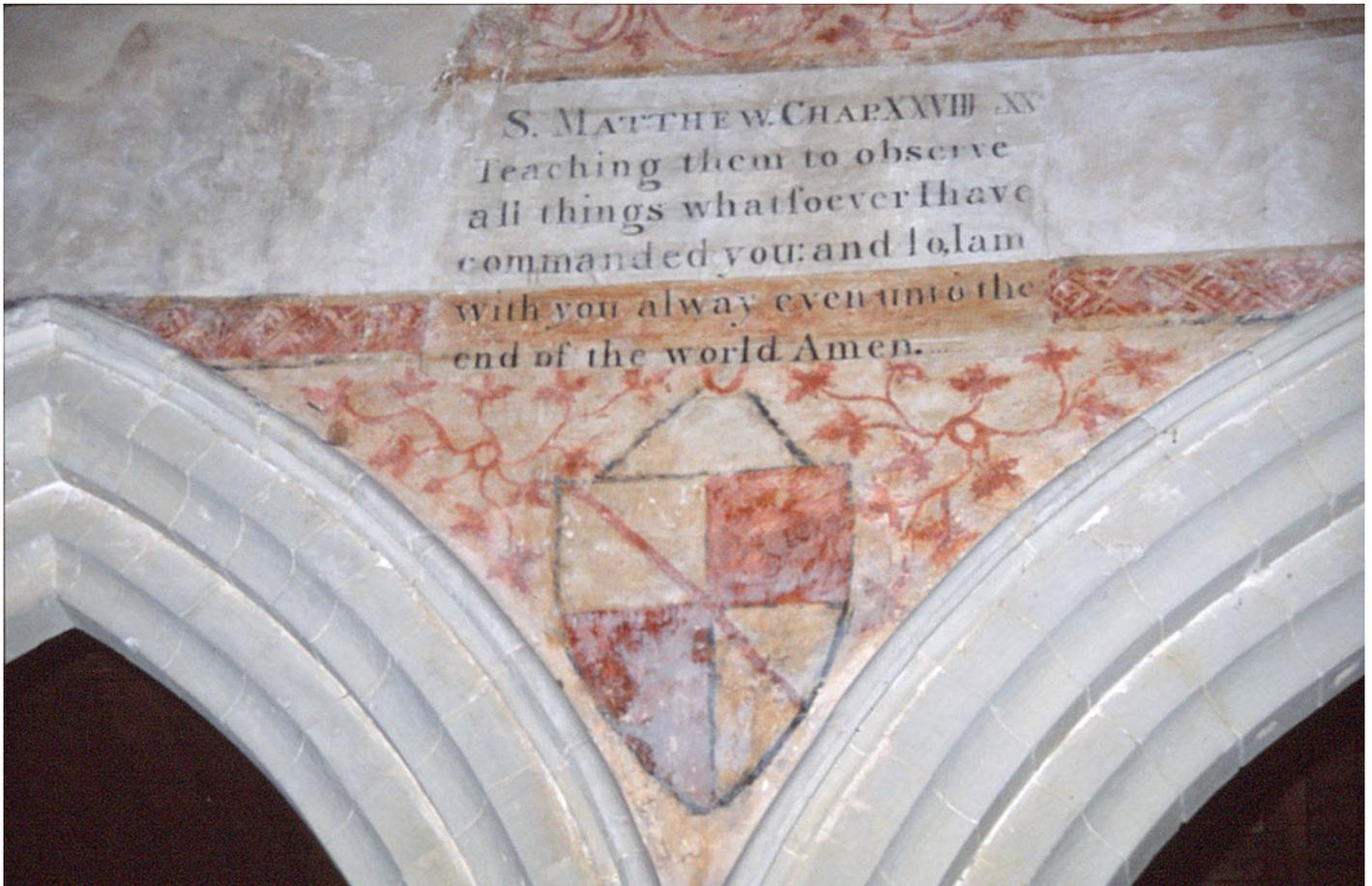
Aumbry

The Aumbry where the altar plate and holy relics would have been stored. No obvious signs of a door.



Crown Post in Nave

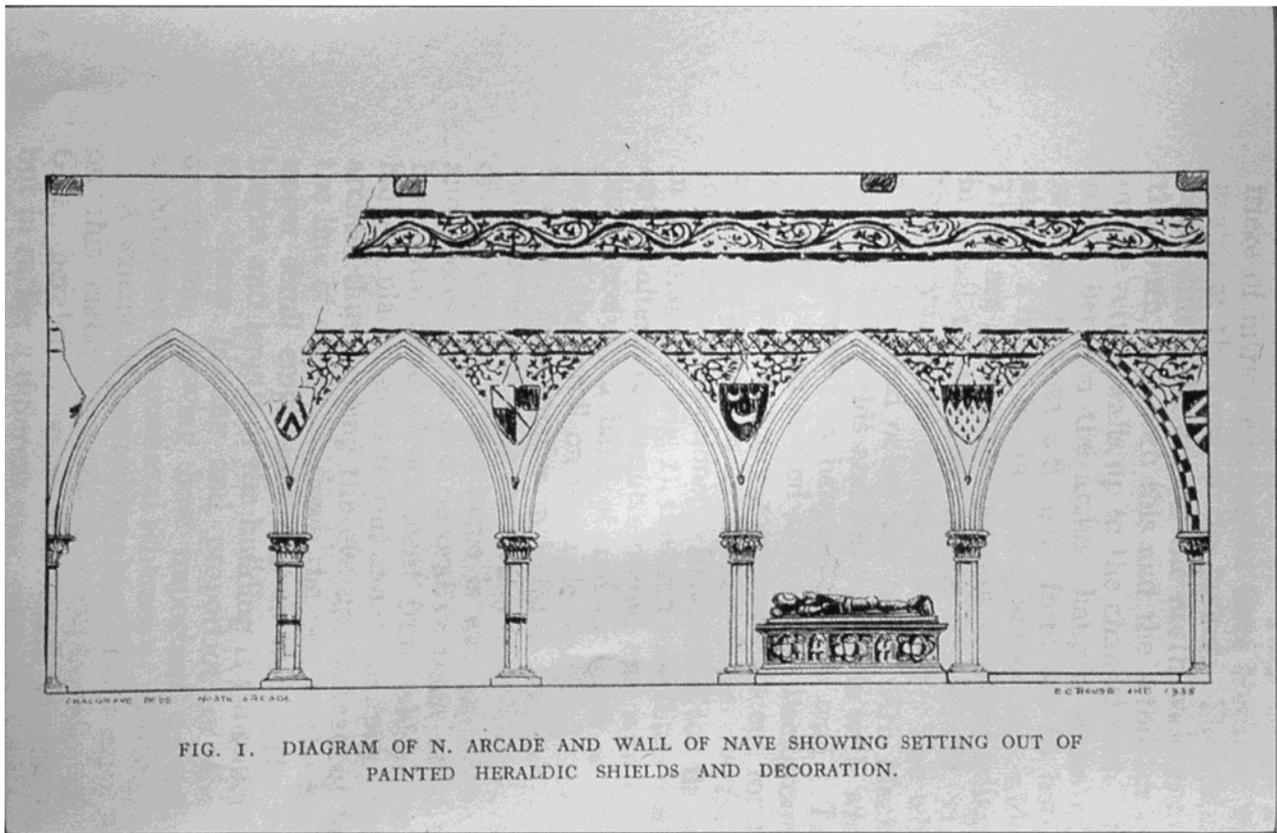
As portrayed in Fisher's watercolour c. 1813. It would be very interesting if a dendrochronology date for this could be obtained.



Arms of Sir Nigel Loryng in North Arcade

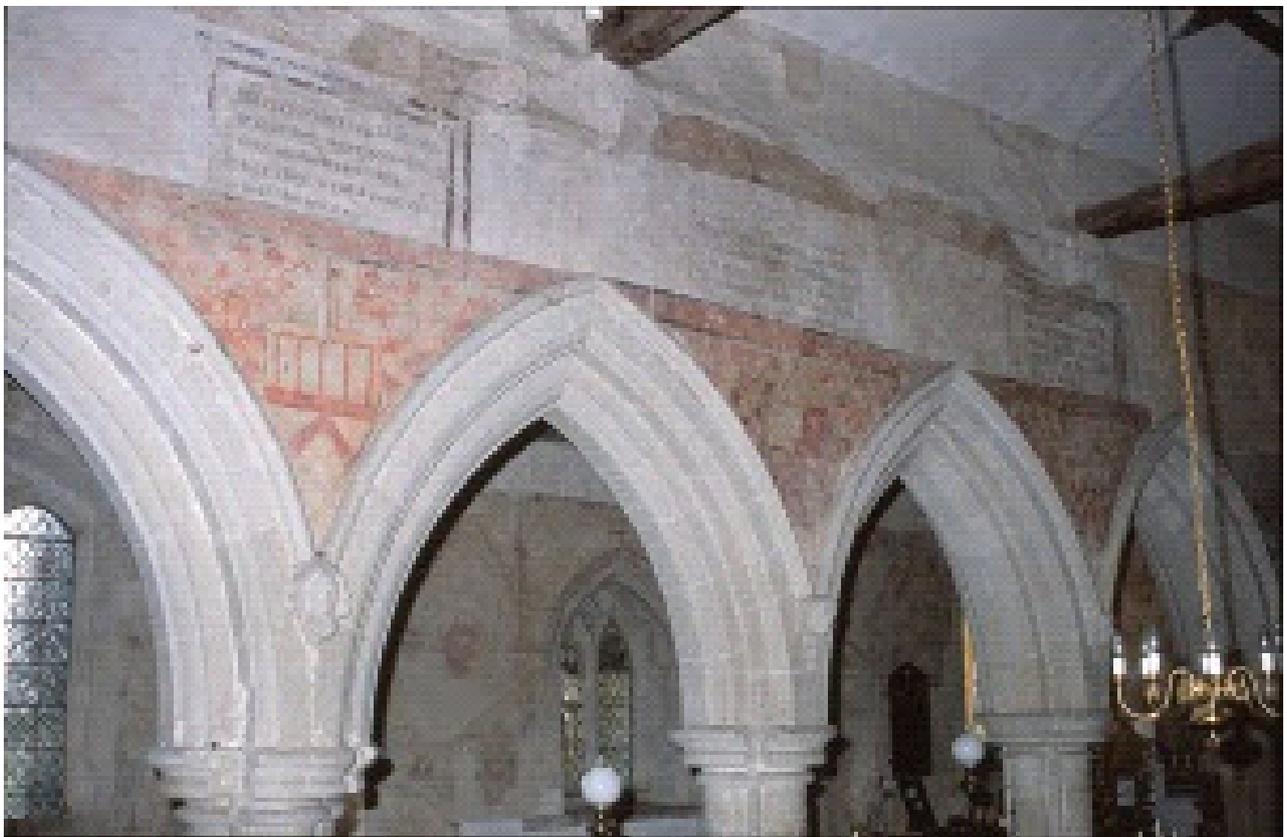
Quarterly argent and gules, a bendlet gules. Painted as though hung on cords (guiges) and set between the Early English double hollowed and chamfered arches. The background decorative work is thought to be contemporary with the shield. The verse above is 17th century, similar verses are visible in the Fisher watercolour.

It was Dr. E Clive Rouse, FSA who really awakened the Society's interest in Chalgrave Church, the author met him in the late 70's when he was introduced as the foremost expert on Mediaeval wall paintings. At the mention of Chalgrave he became quite excited, he told us that he had spent two very cold winters in the church in 1932/3 restoring the paintings with Professor E W Tristram. After cleaning, they gave them the then approved treatment. A fine covering of white beeswax dissolved in turpentine, applied hot. Apparently the immediate results were excellent but the wax sealed the wall surface which over time put the paintings at risk from the natural moisture in the stone which caused the surface to lift. He went on to say that although retired he would give his advice free if they could be re-cleaned. He had a conscience about them. This information was passed to the County Archaeologist and the work was carried out in 1985.



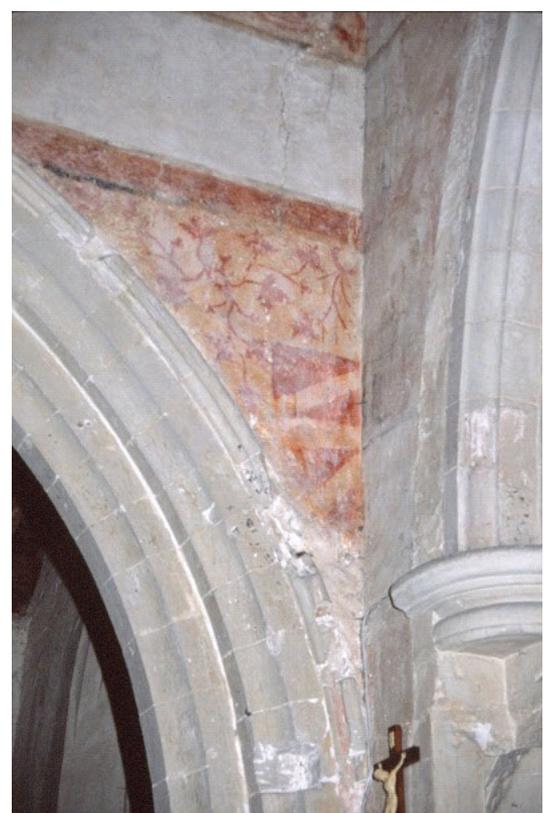
Drawing of the North Arcade 1932

A drawing from a report by Clive Rouse on the work carried out in Chalgrave Church. *Archaeological Journal Volume XCII for 1935*



South Arcade

Heraldic Shields and 17th century texts. Splendid carved heads are set above the pillars.

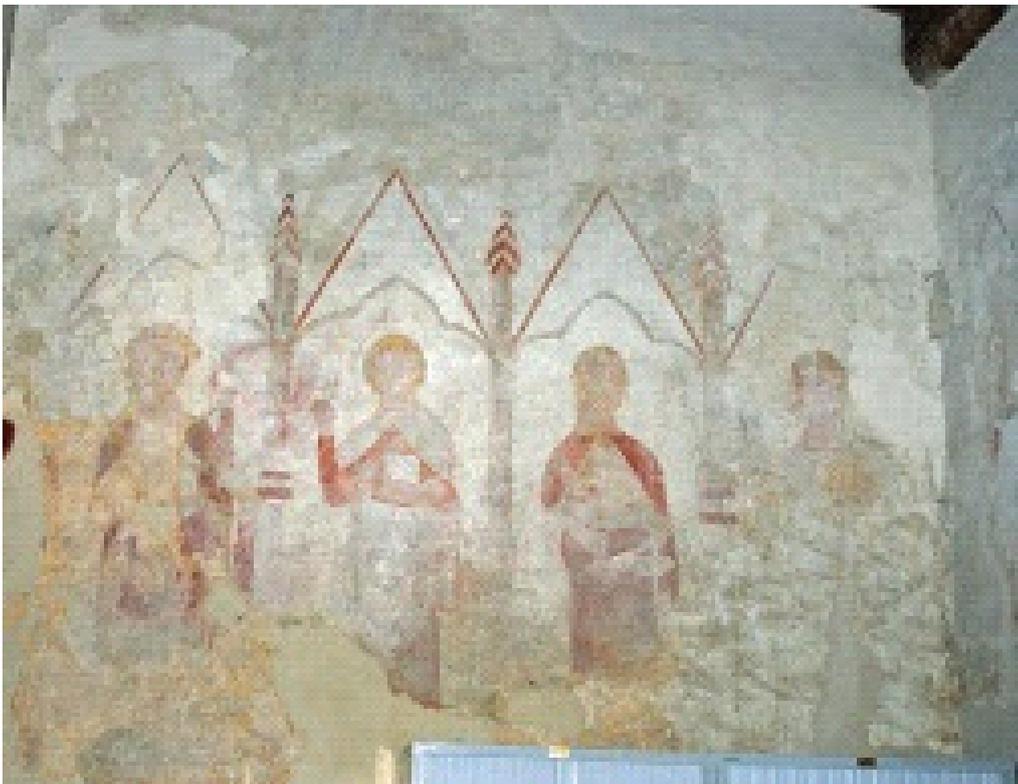


A selection of the 18 surviving shields from the estimated 21 originally around the church, they are of the Loring (Loryng) or other important families from the surrounding area who probably contributed to the work. They have been dated between 1352 and 1382, together one of the best collections in the country particularly for such an early date.



Three Apostles West Wall South Aisle

Around the church there is evidence for the twelve apostles, early 14th Century, in niches with canopies buttresses & pinnacles, eight survive, the others were destroyed when fifteenth windows were inserted. Above the figure on the right, bearing a sword is thought to be St. Paul.



Four Apostles West Wall North Aisle, third from the left holding a cup is possibly St. John.



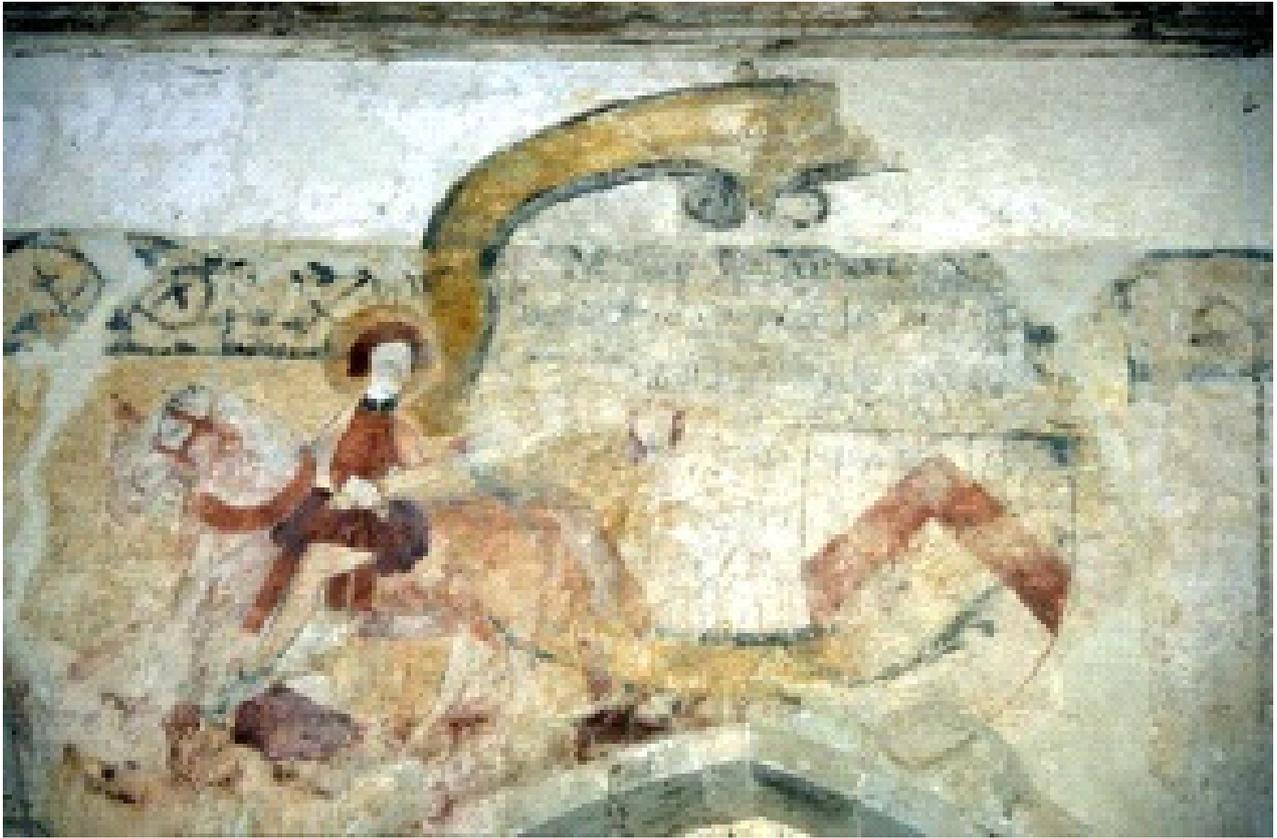
Paintings of three periods above blocked off door in North Aisle

On the left the eighth remaining apostle, St. James, 14th century, centre St. Thomas of Canterbury late 14th century and right fragments of St. Christopher 15th century. This makes an interesting study of changing styles and durability of paintings in similar conditions. The architecture depicted in the apostles niches reflect the soaring buildings of the time.



The Annunciation East wall of North Aisle

Angel Gabriel, upper half defaced, clad in a red mantle salutes the virgin with a scroll in his hand inscribed AVA MARIA. Mary has a white veil and a dark red mantle. Her right hand is raised in salutation and she holds a book in her left. A smaller painting, it suggests a lady Chapel in the North Aisle.



St. Martin of Tours South Aisle wall

The main painting is of St. Martin of Tours astride his horse, cutting his rather large cloak with a sword to share it with a beggar at the gates of Amiens. One half of the cloak flies high while the other drapes over the horse's rump. The beggar has all but disappeared except for his head. Once a very popular saint, surviving paintings of St. Martin are very rare. St. Martin's head was clearly painted over a late 14th century attractive black scroll with a wavy line top and bottom. The scroll originally ran round both Aisles beneath the wall plate.



Large coffin lid 11th - 12th century

Recently found in the churchyard, the earliest object visible in the church.

Acknowledgements, documents & sources

The Archaeological Journal Vol XCII for 1935 Part 1

Bedfordshire Churches in the Nineteenth Century Volume 73

Bedfordshire Historical Record Society 1994

ISBN 0 851550 568

Bedfordshire Huntingdon and Peterborough Nikolaus Pevsner

ISBN 0 14 0710.34 5

Stephen Coleman, Central Bedfordshire Council