Presentation on 16th June 2016

The presentation on the 16th June was given by John Alexander and Josh Paget from Alexander Design. Alexander Design is the appointed architectural practice for the design and rebuild of St Peter's. The following is an interpretation of the presentation as it isn't possible to detail the whole presentation in text here.

The purpose of the meeting was to show everyone the work that had taken place so far, the condition of the remaining building, the meetings that have taken place with interested parties like Historic England, the results of those consultations and to discuss the possibilities for the future. This meeting was part of the consultation process in working towards a plan and proposal.

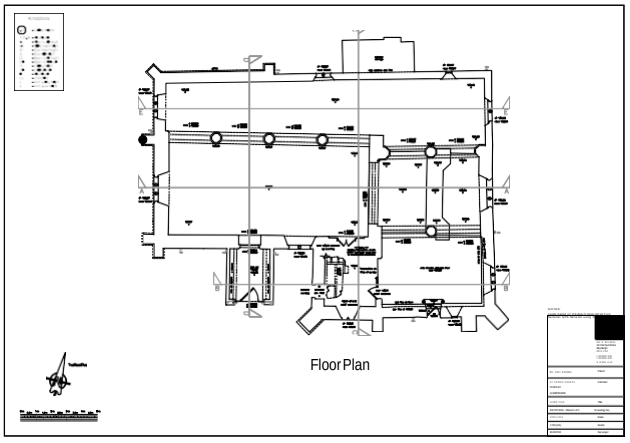
The slides from the presentation are available on the website at www.raisestpeters.uk . Because of the size of the presentation this is shown in video format. If you would like more information on anything, please email to info@raisestpeters.uk .

Over 100 people attended the meeting, including the Archdeacon, the Head of buildings at the Diocesan Advisory Committee and our insurer, Ecclesiastical.

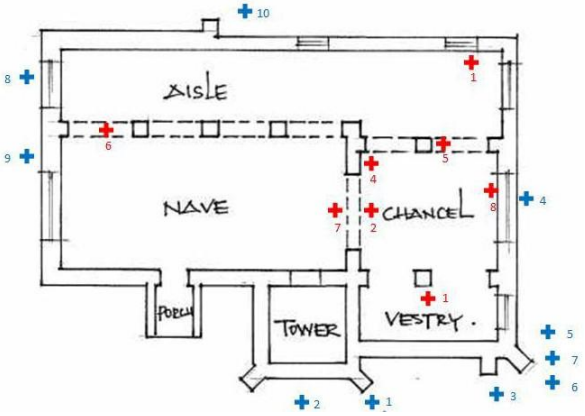
John began his presentation by outlining the historical development of the church building; starting from the small original building in the eleventh or twelfth century, through the many enlargements and upgrades as the village grew and prospered, to the latest modifications at the beginning of the last century. The church has been a single nave with a small north/south transept, been extended to the south east (twice), had a north extension added (twice), had a single roof, had a dual gable roof and a triple gable roof. As seen today, it also had a bell tower added to what was originally the south transept. The oldest remaining parts of the church are in the south wall and the tower and the newest is all of the Victorian building to the north, what was the central arcade, the floor, some of the flint skin, the porch and some of the buttresses.

The church has had many shapes and styles over the centuries but it's development has always reflected the needs of the village and how the congregation was evolving.

John then moved on to talk about the surveys that have been done in evaluating the condition of the building.



Measured Survey



Tomb Location

The first surveys carried out were a laser measurement of the complete site and a ground penetrating radar survey. The measurement survey is invaluable in establishing all of the dimensions and angles of the walls

and surroundings, in full 3D. The GPR survey gave us the first ideas of where tombs or anomalies existed below ground.

The most detailed of all of the investigations was into the condition of the walls and foundations. These investigations included a stone by stone examination of a lot of the building to see which were damaged beyond repair, which could be reused and which could be repaired. There were a lot of slides covering this investigation, showing how the walls were opened up to expose the internal structure and how the floor was exposed to show the foundations.

An arcade pillar

A window

The south east corner

The structural survey work shows that the south and west walls were very badly damaged, the arcade is destroyed beyond repair, the vestry was built on soil with no foundations (nothing to do with the fire) and that the east and north walls had fared reasonably well.

John described the structure of the flint walls within the church as a vertical “pea sandwich”. The peas in the filling are loose and the “bread” on either side is made of more peas that are lightly glued together. All the time this structure is intact, and the force on the wall is vertical, then it is very strong. However, if you remove some of the outer skin layer of the sandwich the “peas” in the middle will run down under gravity and the whole wall will collapse.

When the fire was at its height, particularly at the west end of the nave, the flints and lime mortar in the walls were raised to a very high temperature. This caused damage both to the surface of the flint and chemical change to the lime. When the Fire Brigade later doused the fire with cold water the flints were rapidly cooled on the outer layer. The consequent stresses built up within the flints cracked them both laterally on the face of the wall and horizontally through the wall. To repair this the whole face would need to be removed. From the pea analogy you can probably see the potential consequences of removing this outer layer.

Some repair techniques were tried, including drilling steel ties into the wall and filling with epoxy. Neither of these proved conclusive and, probably, repair would not be successful. There is a video in the presentation showing the fracturing and repair attempts.

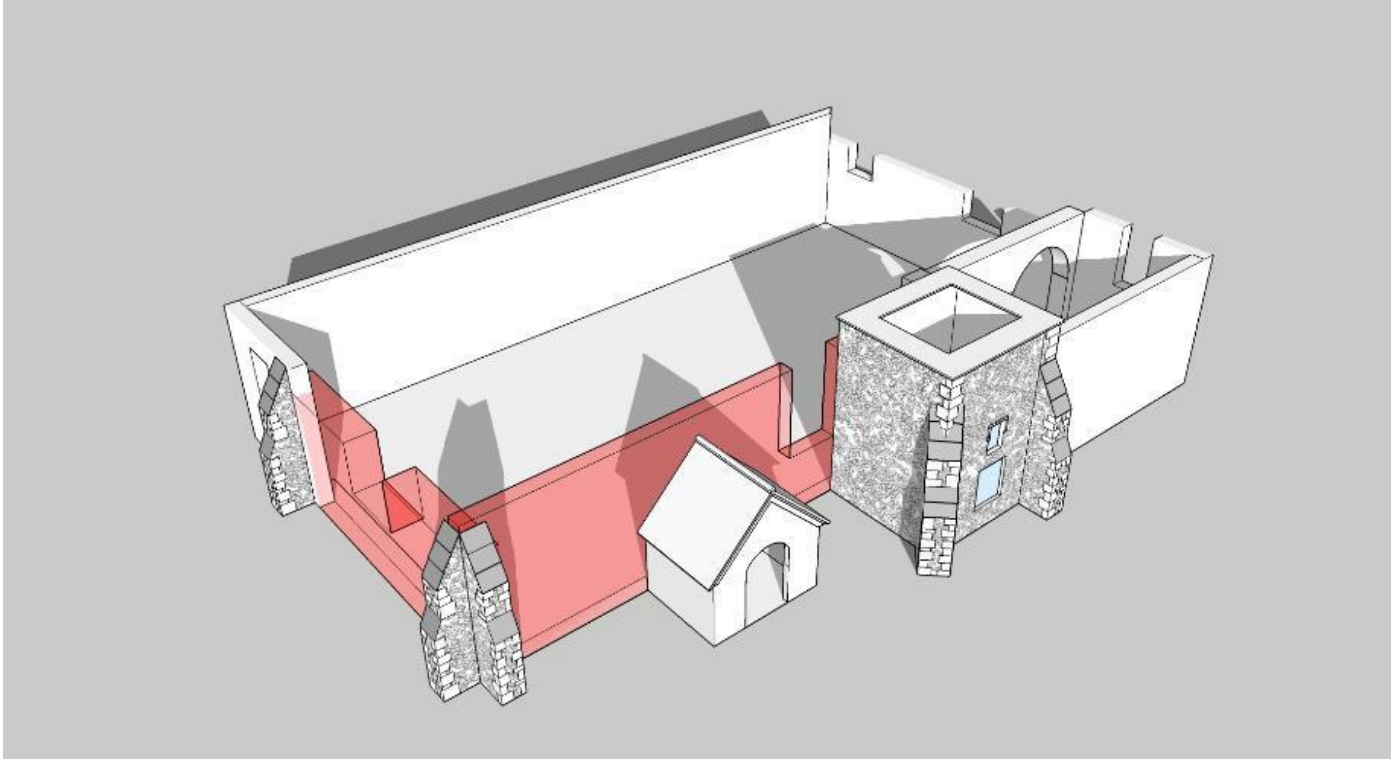
At the end of this part of the presentation John outlined the state of the walls:-

1. West and South walls : flint heat fractured
2. Vestry : no foundation, requires attention
3. North Arcade / Nave : stone heat fractured and spalled beyond repair
4. Chancel Arch : stone heat fractured and spalled
5. Traceries : some sound, but there is spalling and historic cracking to ironwork and heat spalling
6. North wall : sound

7. Tops of gables : unstable and require removal

A short discussion was had on the condition of the tower and, particularly, the timbers. All of the timbers were burned, probably to a depth of one to two centimetres but it is unknown what condition they are in internally and this cannot be correctly assessed until they are removed.

At the end of this section of the presentation John highlighted which parts of the walls would remain. This would be the basis on, and around which, the new building would have to be built.



Retained viable walls (pink shows repaired / replaced)

At this point John moved on to discuss the input from the various consultees. These consultees include, East Hants District Council (EHDC), Historic England (HE), the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and the Victorian Society (VS).

The general brief of these organisations is to preserve the historic nature of the building and to preserve its value and significance. That significance can be as part of the built environment, historical interest, structural design, the importance to the population or any other aspect covering the historical importance of the building. They do not take any account of the costs of rebuild, or the direct requirements of the future use of the building.

The input from the consultees has to inform the final layout and design and will govern what has to be repaired and reused, and the form that the final building can take.

A full presentation was given to the various consultees at the end of March. Their responses have been included in this presentation, so that the public can see what it is possible to do with the design, within the parameters of what we are permitted to do, moving towards planning permission.

To help with the assessment of the significance of St Peter's, the consultees asked us to get a full historical report and, to that end, we appointed Alison Davidson from Axford Heritage Planning. John has also contracted with a structural engineer, specialising in ancient buildings, (Joe Orsi) and with the Scottish Lime Centre to get some definitive answers on what can be done to rebuild the walls.

Initial responses from the consultees suggest that we will need to leave the corner of the vestry unrepaired, reinstate the west wall, repair the south wall, retain the porch and door as they are and reinstate the double gable roof (possibly with one or two pillars). This means that John will need to find another way to make

access to the church, will have to work around the space and sight lines within the building, and work on how to organise the required new facilities (e.g. toilets) within the building.

There were a number of questions during the presentation. Some of these covered technical points on the structure of the building, one on the replacement of the bells (it was stated that the plan is to put them back), on the reasons for the fire starting (the cause isn't known) and on the input from the consultees.

Cathy Roberts from the DAC gave a short response on the role of the consultees (amenity societies). She explained their importance in getting faculty approval from the Diocese Chancellor and EHDC, particularly in the context of the church being a grade II listed building (which happened in 1963).

The design is now very much in progress and the consultations continue as ideas develop.

To make sure that the new design reflects the requirements of the people of Ropley, John would like to get some feedback on the type of facilities that you would like to see in the new church. He may not be able to fit everything, given the constraints of the building, and there are certain to be some conflicting requirements.

Please let him know your thoughts.