
Statement Heritage

Sawbridgeworth Evangelical Congregational Church, London Rd, Sawbridgeworth, CM21 9EH

Statement of Heritage Significance and Heritage Impact Assessment

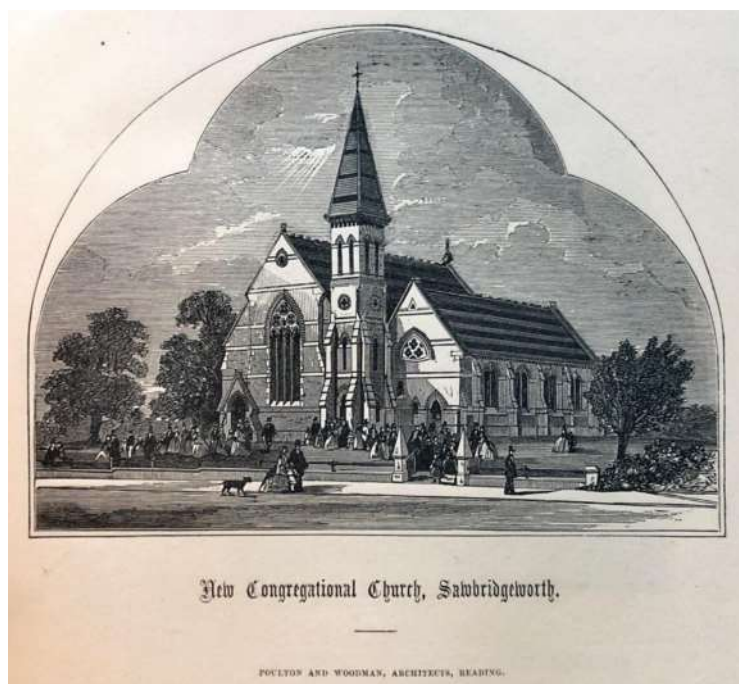
Daniel Ratcliffe MA MCIFA

OSNGR TL 48019 14648

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22/03/2024

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Research and recording for this project were carried out by Daniel Ratcliffe BA MA MCIfA in March 2023

This HIA was prepared in 2024 assessing final plans and adding a rapid appraisal of the archaeological potential of the site.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of Statement Heritage and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available. It should not be used or relied upon in connection with any other project than that intended. The client should note that the nature of archaeological discovery is that it is rarely possible to entirely exclude the potential for discoveries being made in the course of work.

Statement Heritage would like to express thanks to the client team and to LPA officers involved in the preapplication discussions for the collaborative approach taken in this case.

Common acronyms and specialist terms found in *Statement Heritage Reports*.

Architectural terms are generally taken from the Oxford Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture; the glossaries provided by Pevsner Architectural Guides and RW Brunskill's 'Vernacular Architecture'.

Archaeological terminology is generally compliant with Historic England Thesauri available [here](#).

Historic England's 'Introductions to Heritage Assets' and 'Designation Selection Guides' are particularly useful for thematic discussions of heritage asset classes. These may be freely downloaded [here](#).

Archaeological Evaluation. The field testing of land by either remote sensing or direct interventions (digging) to establish the presence / absence, extent, type, date, significance and potential of archaeological features.

Archaeological Interest. The potential for a heritage asset (building, landscape or monument) to hold evidence of past human activity worthy of investigation.

AOD: Above Ordnance Datum. Heights given in 'AOD' are quoted in metres relative to '[Ordnance Datum Newlyn](#)'

CIfA: Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. Professional institute. Individually MCIfA (Member); ACIfA (Associate); PCIfA (Practitioner).

Designated / Protected Heritage Asset. A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated under the relevant legislation.

GI, GII*, GII etc. Listed Buildings and Registered Parks and Gardens are graded according to their importance. GI and II* are the highest grades triggering consultation by LPAs of Historic England and specific protections under the NPPF.

Group Value. The extent to which the exterior of the building contributes to the architectural or historic interest of any group of buildings of which it forms part – *see also* 'setting'. Group value is a consideration in determining whether buildings should be listed.

HE: Historic England. The Government's statutory advisory body on the historic environment.

Historic Environment. 'All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora' (NPPF)

HIA: Heritage Impact Appraisal. A document assessing the presence / absence, significance of, and impacts to heritage assets, usually prepared in preparation of LPA consent processes.

HLC: Historic Landscape Characterisation. A technique of historic landscape analysis based on the identification of areas sharing common features, patterns and attributes related to their historic development.

LPA: Local Planning Authority.

Mitigation. Measures to limit or avoid the harm of an action. Specifically used within archaeological work to refer to the processes of converting *archaeological interest* to an archive to advance understanding of a heritage asset, sometimes known as *preservation by record*.

NA: National Archives. References prefixed 'NA' indicate the reference number of archive documents held in the National Archives.

NHLE: National Heritage List for England. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>. The definitive record of protected (designated) heritage assets in England.

Non-designated Heritage Asset. 'Buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified by plan-making bodies as having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, but which do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets' (NPPF). Buried archaeological remains may fall into this category unless their significance is 'demonstrably equivalent to Scheduled Monuments' (NPPF footnote 63).

NPPF: National Planning Policy Framework. Central Government framework for planning in England.

OS: Ordnance Survey

OS NGR: OS National Grid Reference.

Preservation 'in situ'. The simplest and best form of archaeological mitigation is to leave the evidence undisturbed, i.e., through an informed foundation design.

Setting: 'The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.' (NPPF)

Scheduled Monument: A site designated for its 'national importance' under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

Non-Technical Summary

This project report summarises the results of Level 2 building recording and assessment of the Sawbridgeworth Evangelical Congregational Church, a Grade II Listed Building and adjacent Classroom and Kitchen blocks.

The church (comprising a Sanctuary and Hall – originally an attached schoolroom), dates to 1863 and was designed by W.F Poulton an architect from Reading specialising in Congregational buildings. The building's special historic interest is assessed as lying in its association with the Congregation, who maintain continuity with a continuous tradition of religious dissent at Sawbridgeworth dating back to the 1660. The architectural special interest of the building lies in its simple Gothic form, the stripped-down expression of which reflects the simpler form of the early English period, and in its use of industrial brick. Internally fittings are simple and mostly generic examples of mass-produced late 19th century chapel fittings. Pews are incomplete, and stage, baptistry, screen, pulpit and organ reflect 20th century alterations.

The Classroom block was added in 1911. It is not considered of special interest, being poorly related to the church building and being very altered both externally and internally.

The Kitchen block is of the 1970s, and was linked to the main church in the 1990s and has harmed the northeast elevation of the historic building and the setting of its west end.

The current proposals are assessed. These are advanced by our client in the interests of explaining and modernising the mission of the church, providing more versatile and accessible spaces for community and worship use. These works will both widen appreciation of the historic building and support its ongoing viability in original use, important benefits supported by heritage planning policy.

The classroom and kitchen blocks are proposed for demolition and replaced by a scheme which will deliver a community café and meeting spaces linked to the main building by a glazed foyer (providing opportunities for restoration and display of the damaged northeast elevation of the church), increasing the cast of natural light into the historic building and better presenting the design values of principal and rear elevations.

A flexible hall block is proposed to the rear of the site. This will disturb c.180m² of ground. Rapid archaeological appraisal is presented of a 1km area around the site, noting a raised potential for later prehistoric and Romano British remains in this area.

Various internal works are proposed to the historic buildings, mostly removing early 20th century interventions in order to create a more open and flexible internal space. These works are considered to be justified by the public benefits of the proposal, including those outlined above, and have benefited from mitigation-by-design measures following extensive consultation with the LPA and its conservation advisors.

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1. Introduction and Methods

- 1.1 This **Statement of Heritage Significance and Heritage Impact Assessment** presents archaeological recording and analysis to Level 1-2 (Historic England 2017) of *Sawbridgeworth Evangelical Congregational Church, London Rd, Sawbridgeworth CM21 9EH* (**figure 1**) and assesses the likely impacts (in heritage policy terms) of forthcoming planning matters.
- 1.2 The buildings of the site comprise a **Congregational Church** with conjoined **Schoolroom** of 1863 further connected to a **Classroom Block** of 1911 and **Kitchen Block** dating to the mid-late 20th century. There is a turning area to the front (east) of the church, a small lawn to the front (east) of the **Classroom Block**. To the rear is a **burial ground**.
- 1.3 The building is **Listed GII**. The LPA (East Herts District Council) will have a statutory duty in determining any planning matters to *have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses* (HMG, 1990, s66[1])
- 1.4 Desk based research and analysis has involved:
 - Consultation of historic mapping of the site
 - Consultation of Hertfordshire HER data
 - Consultation of the National Heritage List for England (NHLE)
 - Searches of the archive indexes via National Archives Discovery.
 - Bibliographic and online research
 - A rapid *appraisal* (see section 6) of publicly available archaeological records in order to inform an accompanying statement of archaeological potential.
- 1.5 The author of this report is Daniel Ratcliffe MA MCifA. Daniel undertook an indexed, scaled photographic and annotated survey of the site and its environs on 18/03/2023.

2 Description of Site

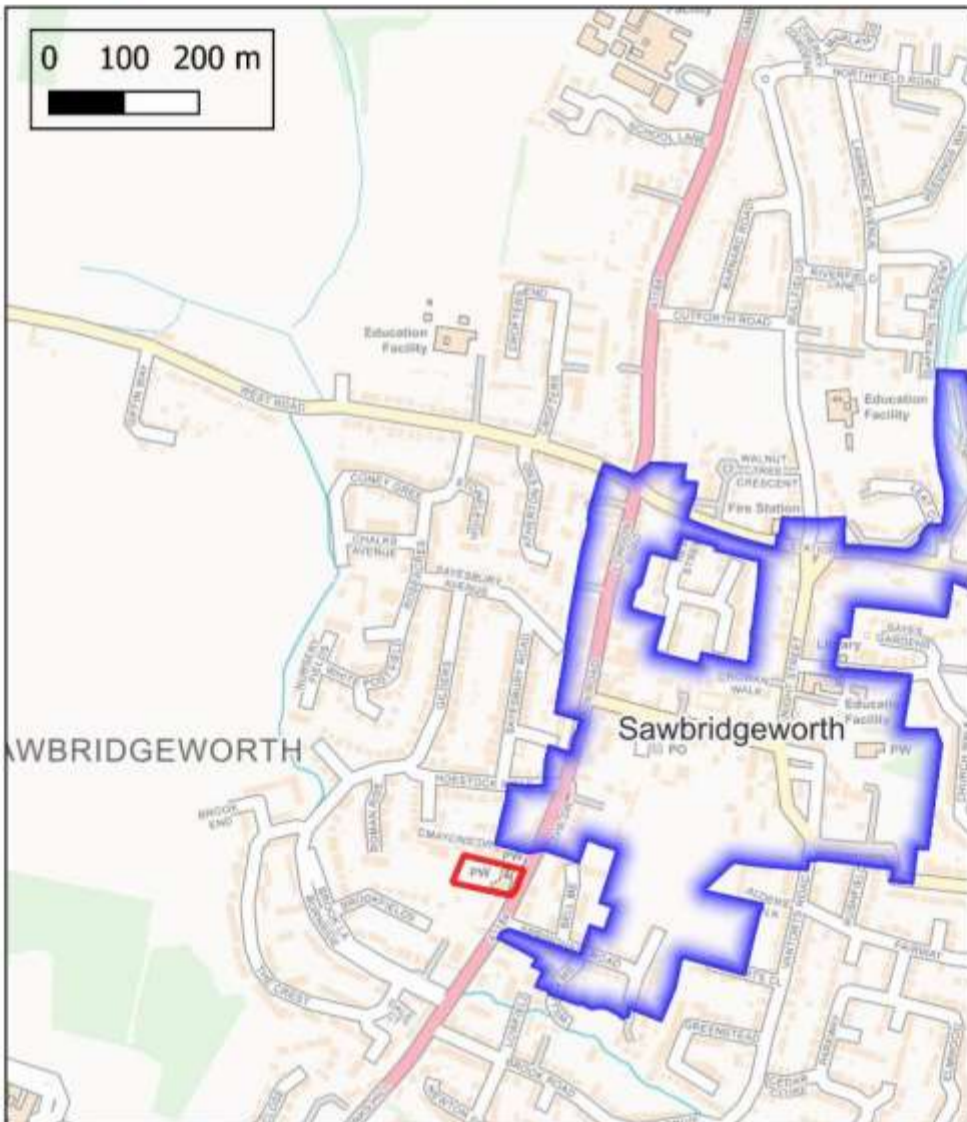
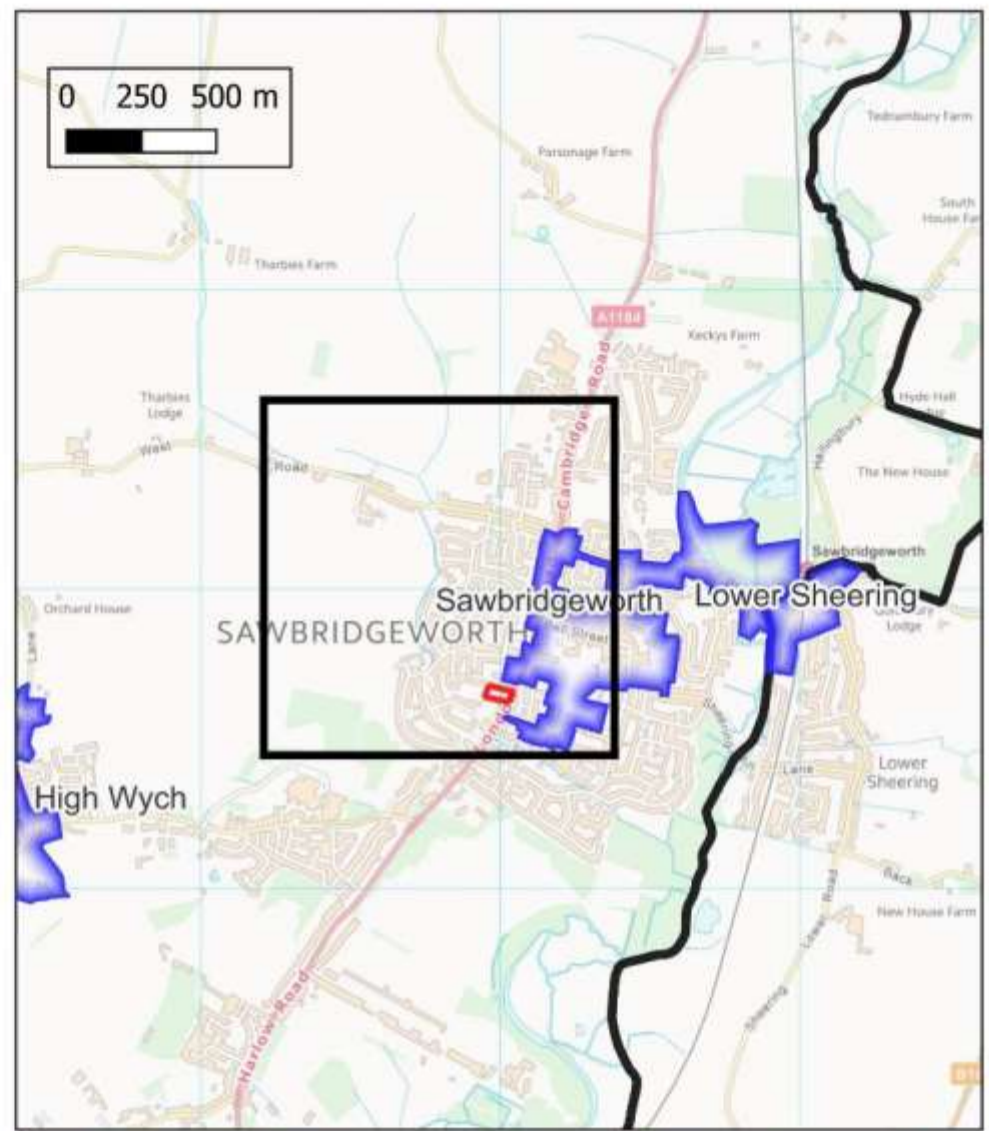
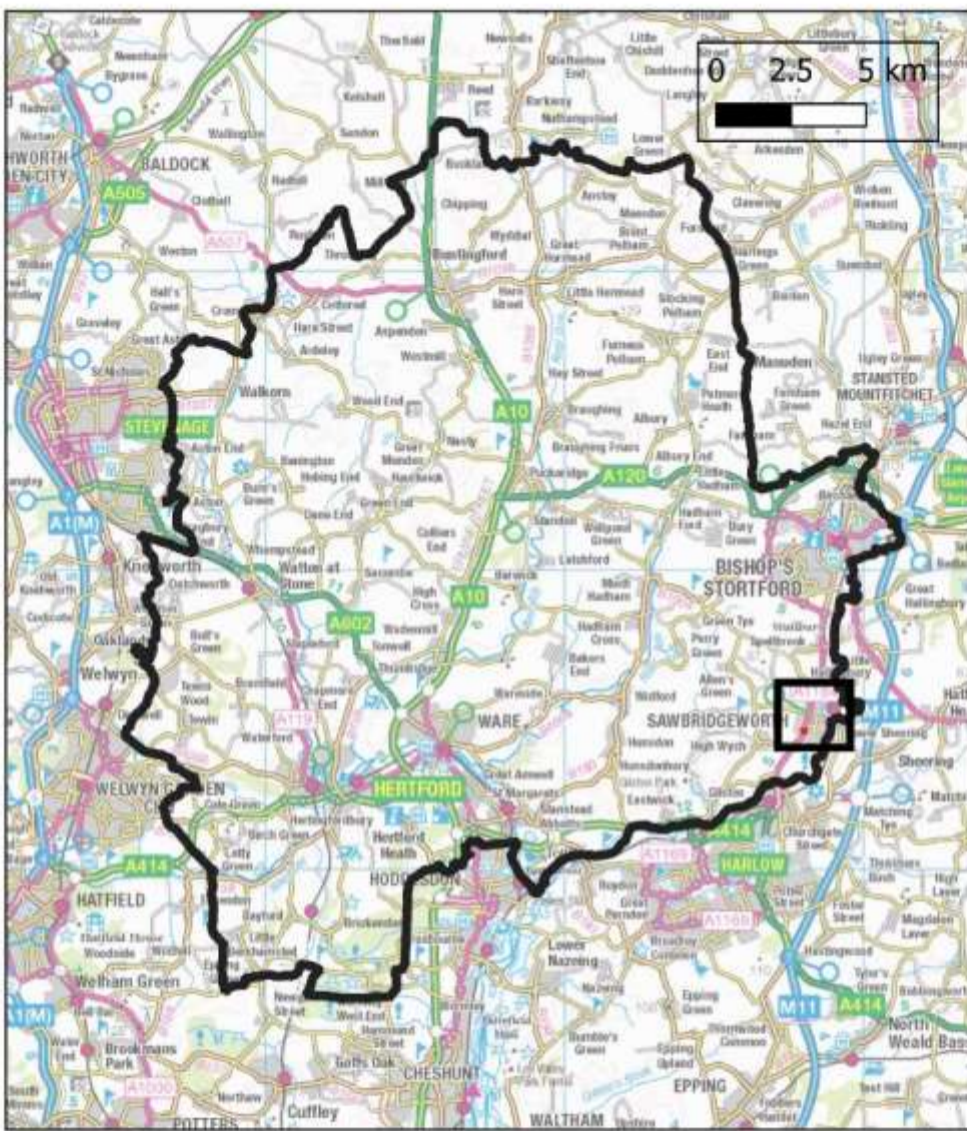
2.1 Location (figure 1)

2.1.1 **OSNGR:** TL 48019 14648

2.1.2 **LPA:** East Herts District Council

2.1.3 **Historic Ecclesiastical Parish:** *Sawbridgeworth*

2.1.4 **Modern Civil Parish:** *Sawbridgeworth*



- Site
- Conservation Areas
- Listed Buildings
- + II

Figure 1: Location

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2.2 Statutory Designations (Historic England, 2023)

2.3 The building was first **listed** GII (NHLE1101650) on 2nd October 1981. The List Description reads, *LONDON ROAD 1. 5253 (West Side) Sawbridgeworth Congregational Church TL 4801 1464:3/13 II GV 2. 1862-3 by Poulton and Woodman, architects of Reading. Opened April 1863 as church and schoolroom. Extension to N1911. Polychrome brick church with bath stone dressings and steep slate roof of 2 colours banded. Early English style. 5 bay church with W apse (organ) and E gallery over entrance lobby. Buttressed square tower with shingled spire rises over NE corner. Lower vestry at SW next apse. Integral 4 bay schoolroom set back on N side with 4 bay arcade opening it up to church. Original sliding screens closing off schoolroom still in use. Linked by arch, 2 storey brick extension to N. Modern hall at rear of extension. 3 part E front to church, centre flanked by narrow recessed parts. Yellow stock brick. White brick plinth offsets. 5 polychrome bands in height of gable and each of 3 courses of white brick with blue brick course above and below. Central quatrefoil datestone below tall E window. Stone plate tracery with 4 lancets topped by blind 6-pointed star and a pyramid of 3 quatrefoils. 3 ring header arch in white brick over stone arch, outer ring has blue header at every 3rd brick. Steep stone copings, kneelers and trefoil finial. Louvred trefoil opening in upper part of gable sunk in stone infill to pointed arched top opening with segmental cill. Steep stone copings to porch on SE projecting to plane of centre. 2 centred pointed arch to door. Stone dressings with 3 ring brick arch. Similar door in base of NE tower of 4 stages with paired buttresses running up 2 stages. It has brick banding linking to centre. Very narrow lancets to 1st and 2nd stage and 2 to 4th stage. Quatrefoil in circular brick opening to 3rd stage. Diminished 4th stage and brick corbelling to base of pyramid spire. Schoolroom set back depth of tower. E front has corresponding plinth and brick bands. Polygonal headed door on right. 2 small lancets rising for stair to church gallery. Large central window with stone plate tracery of 3 quatrefoils recessed in equilateral curved triangle under polychrome brick arch. Small stone triangular vent above and a stone coping. Plank door with decorative iron hinges. Diamond leaded glazing throughout. Flanks of church and schoolroom have plinth and polychrome brick bands and buttresses with stone offsets. 1st buttress on SE has '18 AW 62' cut in brick. Brick eaves corbels. Paired stone lancet windows with diamond leaded lights and pivoted metal opening section in each lefthand light, 2 storey stock brick extension of 1911 on N. Plum brick dressings. Stone coping to front parapet and central gable and kneelers. 2 storey recessed arch feature in centre. 3 light wooden casements. Transoms to Gd floor windows. Rectangular leaded lights. Elaborate foundation stone. 4 bay arcade in church has paired columns like a cloister with C13 style floral joint capitals. Boarded dado with top rail decorated with quatrefoils. Stone corbels support open timber roof of uniform scantling. Central raised pine pulpit with dog-tooth arches and heavy bar mouldings. Old panelled pews are used as dado in schoolroom. Bath for adult immersion installed under dias in 1938. (Pevsner 2nd Ed Rev (1977) 335: WEA II (1967) 51-6: Church Building Centenary booklet (1963).*

2.4 Brief notes on nearby listed buildings **all GII** (see detail map **figure 1**)

To the north

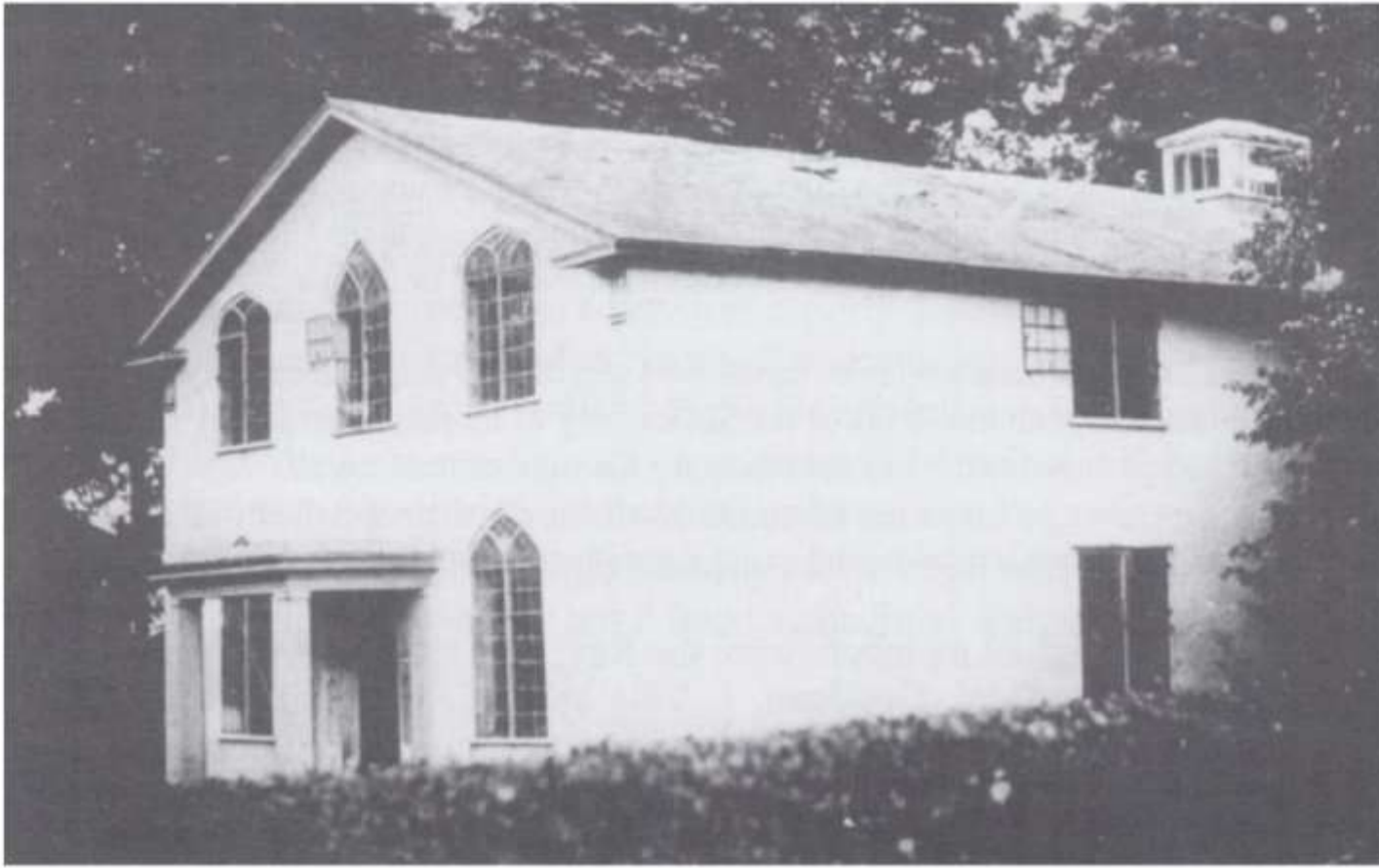
- 2.5 *The White Cottage, 29, London Road (NHLE1307815) C18 with parallel early 19C rear range. Said to date from 1746.*
- 2.6 *The Old Forge, 31 London Road (NHLE134786) C18 with parallel C19 rear range. Said to date from 1746 in deeds.*
- 2.7 *Sayesbury Cottage, 35 London Road (NHLE1101651) Early C18. Timberframed and plastered under hipped old red tile roof.*
- 2.8 *1 Hill Cottage, 37 London Road (NHLE1101652) C18. Double depth 2 storey timberframed house with pantiled gabled roofs and longitudinal valley gutter*

To the south

- 2.9 *Vale Cottage, 3 London Road. (NHLE1347862) Late C17/early C18. 2 storey, 4 windowed timberframed plastered house with hipped roof and deep cove to eaves*
- 2.10 *1 The Dell, (NHLE1176604) C18 or earlier building remodelled. Crosswing on E possibly C19. Timber frame with brick at back of crosswing next road, rendered.*
- 2.11 The site lies outside but 22m south of and 45m north of sections of the **Sawbridgeworth Conservation Area** along London Road.
- 2.12 The Conservation Area was designated in on 10th June 1968. The boundary was modified on two occasions, 27th March 1981 and 20th January 1998. It was most recently appraised in 2014 (BEAMS, 2014). The Conservation Area notes the influence of the Church on a key view south along London Road looking out of the main part of the Conservation Area, stating: *The entrance to the conservation area is prefaced by the powerful image of the Congregational Church and from here the area is seen as a landscape of mature trees to the right and a picturesque group of historic buildings to the left fronted by the white stucco and brick chimney stack cluster of No. 29. The view out of the conservation area is to distant landscape dominated by the massive bulk of the church in the foreground, although the immediate setting of this is rather weak frontage adjoining to the north.*

3 Background historic research and map regression results.

- 3.1 *London Road* on which the church stands is part of the historic coaching route (today, at this point, the *A1184*) from London to Norwich with listed building records suggesting ribbon development, mostly along its west side, since at least the late 17th century.
- 3.2 The *Victoria County History* identifies a dissenting community in *Sawbridgeworth* from at least 1669 (BHO 1911) placing the history of non-conformism here close to its most common origins in Britain following the *Act of Uniformity 1662* and the resultant so called *Great Ejection* with as many of 2000 clergymen rejecting the move explicit in the Act requiring episcopal ordination following its abolition (Calamy, 1775).
- 3.3 By 1805 a group of *Independents* and *Baptists* were meeting at the house of *Daniel Brown*, this group building a chapel in the location of the current church in 1814 and in 1817 wrote in the first *Congregational Yearbook at Sawbridgeworth* that '*we formed ourselves into a Christian Church on the most liberal plane*' (quoted in van de Bilt 2018). The original chapel is shown at **figure 2i**. At its founding the church had 63 subscribers and 126 children enrolled in a Sunday School
- 3.4 By 1862 the chapel was in disrepair and meetings were called to consider renovation or extension, both of which were discounted and '*as several liberal promises had been made, a subscription for a new chapel be at once commenced*' (Centenary Booklet 1963).
- 3.5 The Church Building committee visited *Milton Regis, Kent* in order to view the chapel there a church recently erected by the *Reading* based architectural practice of *Poulton and Woodman* (The Building News, March 23, 1860). That building does not survive, but a historic postcard (**figure 2ii**) demonstrates a similar planform consisting of a chapel of Early English detail with bands of brick decoration, set perpendicular to the street with a buttressed tower to its right and then a set-back school building with steps rising internally lit by rising lancet windows to an internal balcony at the entrance end of the chapel.
- 3.6 *Poulton and Woodman* were a prolific ecclesiastical practice specialising in churches and cemetery buildings. *W.F. Poulton* (1820-1900) appears to have taken the lead in the partnership's church buildings, the majority of which were for Congregationalists. Probably Poulton's most notable building is the 2,500 seat *Westminster Chapel* of 1864-5 of polychromatic brick noted by Pevsner for its oval interior, two tier galleries and large roof span (NHLE1220189 GII) which Historic England's *Nonconformist Places of Worship* (2016, 7) was achieved by Poulton's use of cast-iron to '*provide virtually uninterrupted views of the preacher's rostrum*'.
- 3.7 *Sawbridgeworth Congregational Church* was formally opened on 29th April 1863 (Centenary Booklet 1963) although the church had been able to make use of the schoolroom part of the building since January of that year.

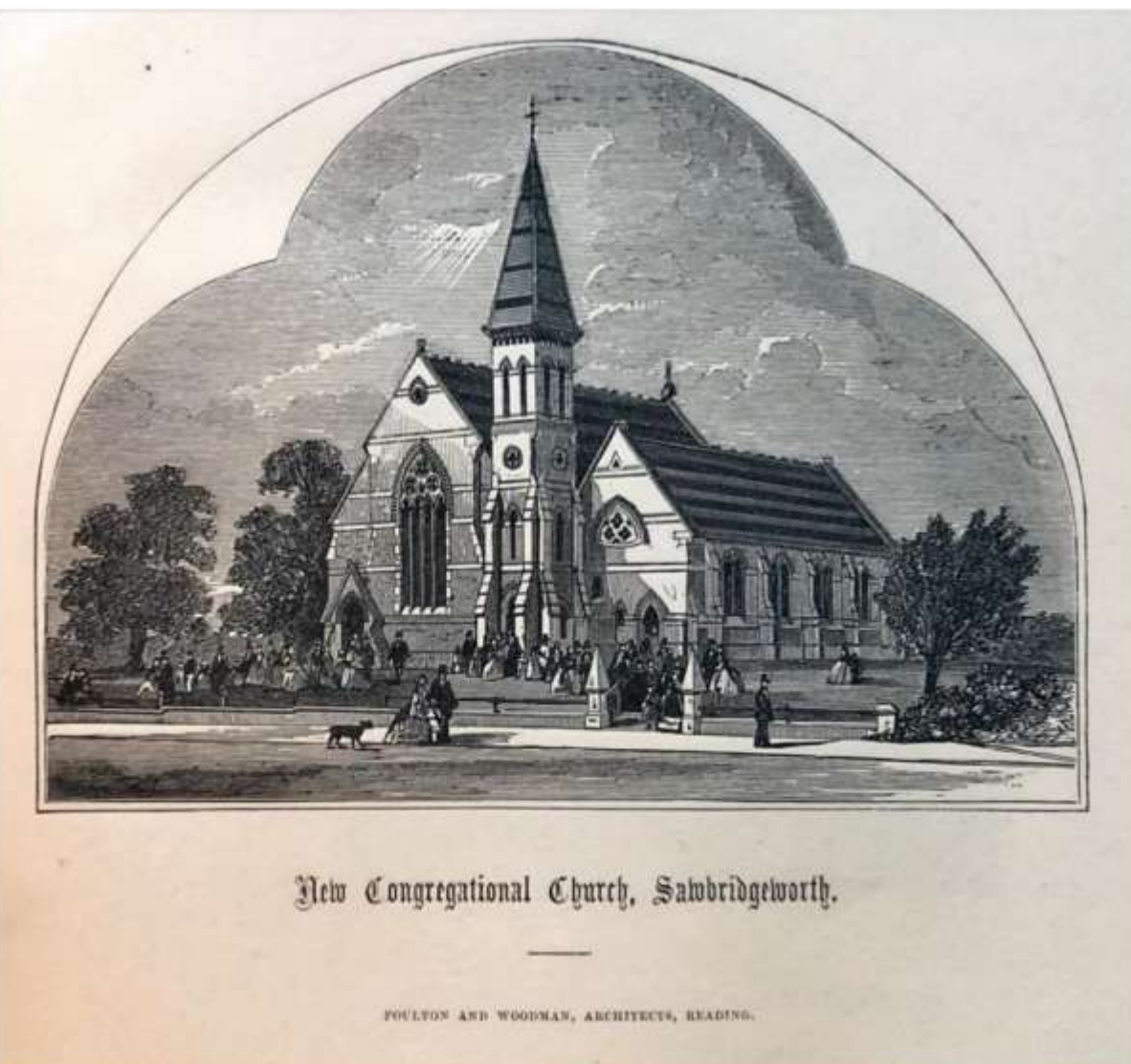


i) The chapel erected in 1814 prior to its demolition



RAMELL] Congregational Church, Milton Regis. [SITTINGBOURNE.

ii) Milton Regis, Sittingborne. An 1860 chapel by W.F. Poulton chosen by the congregation at Sawbridgeworth as a template model for their replacement church



New Congregational Church, Sawbridgeworth.

POULTON AND WOODMAN, ARCHITECTS, READING.

iii) The 1863 Chapel as illustrated on behalf of Poulton and Woodman at the time of its opening

Figure 2: Historic images

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- 3.8 Engravings of the church from an apparently short-run, self-published collection¹ (Poulton 1886) show the exterior and interior of the church, probably as built. The internal engraving is of particular interest (**figure 2iv**). From it we would observe the following:
- The roof of the current chapel retains the original timbers, but these have been strengthened with additional timbers of similar scantling resulting in the rather cluttered form we have today.
 - The auditory apse at the west end of the building originally had a smaller organ or *reredos* feature behind a simpler pulpit that survives today, being a small rail.
 - There is no evidence of the screening now in place between sanctuary and schoolroom.
 - The dado around the external walls with its quatrefoil detailing was in place.
- 3.9 By 1904 the church's school roll had grown to 193 and it was decided to build the **classroom block**, this opening in 1911 on additional land purchase by the congregation to the north.
- 3.10 van de Bilt notes that a new organ, by *Norman and Beard* of Norwich with two manuals and a detached console, was installed in 1905. This instrument is recorded by the National Pipe Organ Register as entry N14148 <https://www.npor.org.uk/survey/N14148> which last received data from the church in 2006 when the instrument was noted as *present and in use* although more recently *van de Bilt* notes that it is *not in use anymore. The costs of repair would be unjustifiably high.*
- 3.11 The National Organ Register lists 115 surviving *Norman and Beard* branded organs (the company traded with this name between c1888-c1920) of which 20 are 'listed' under the non-statutory *British Institute of Organ Studies* <https://www.bios.org.uk> scheme for recognizing instruments of special historic interest. The *Sawbridgeworth* example lies within the unlisted group although constitutes a fixture of the building as listed on the statutory List of Buildings.
- 3.12 An immersion baptistry was created beneath the left-hand side of the stage in 1938.
- 3.13 The **kitchen** block is not referred to in any of the historic documents we have examined but appears on stylistic basis to be of c 1965 date, which would suggest it was added around the time of the centenary of the church in 1963.
- 3.14 In 1973 the congregation decided to remain independent rather than join most of the *Congregational Federation* and *Presbyterian* church to form the *United Reformed Church*.

¹ our copy has no publication details, comprises a number of illustrations printed on a variety of papers and pasted into the volume and is hand signed 'To Henry Poulton from his affectionate Cousin W F Poulton Jan 22nd 1886'

4 Historic Map regression.

- 4.1 **Figure 3** presents a regression exercise of historic maps showing the development of the site.
- 4.2 The **Tithe map** of c1840 shows the ground plan of the 1814 chapel. The burial ground of the site is shown extending less to the east and less to the north than on later maps. Plot 593 to the northwest and northeast is described as *Cottage Allotments: Root field gardens*. Plot 595 to the southwest is described as an arable field of *Great Beazleys Farm* described as *Rookeys and Barn*. 596 immediately south is described as *Vine Farm, Homestead*.
- 4.3 The **1880 OS 25 inch to the mile mapping** shows the original part of the church and its Burial ground, now shown to its current western boundary, but not yet extended to the north. Land to the north is shown as *Allotment Gardens*. The land to the west is now shown as occupied by housing. The former *Rookeys and Barn* is shown as having been converted into a tree nursery.
- 4.4 The **1898 OS 25 inch to the mile mapping** shows no changes to the church building and (as is typical of the 2nd edition *County Series* mapping shows less detail of vegetation (the result of a policy change at the OS rather than reflecting changes on the ground).
- 4.5 The **1920 25 inch to the mile mapping** shows the classroom block for the first time, labelling it here as *Sunday School*. The building is shown as extending slightly into the church plot, but retains a narrow rear garden shown as bounded from the burial ground.
- 4.6 The **1988-1992 1:2500 scale OS mapping** shows the classroom and kitchen blocks with the site laid out as today.
- 4.7 **An extract of current Google aerial photomontage** is provided for comparison.

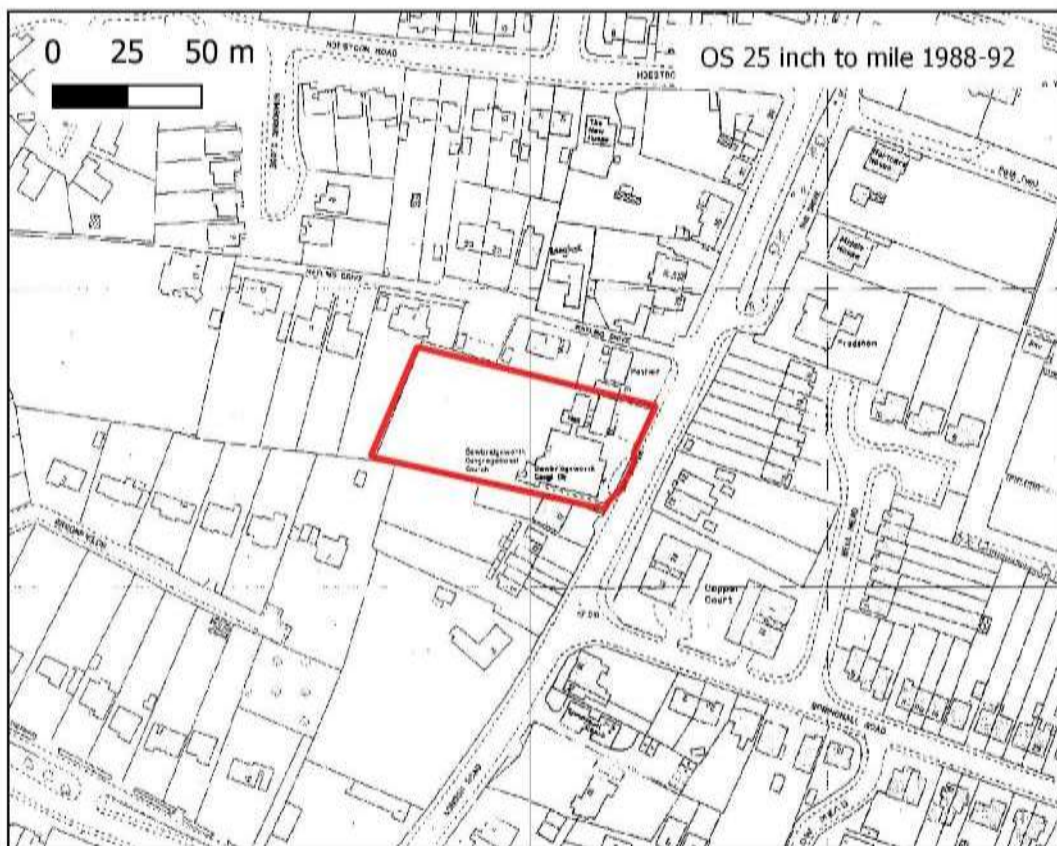
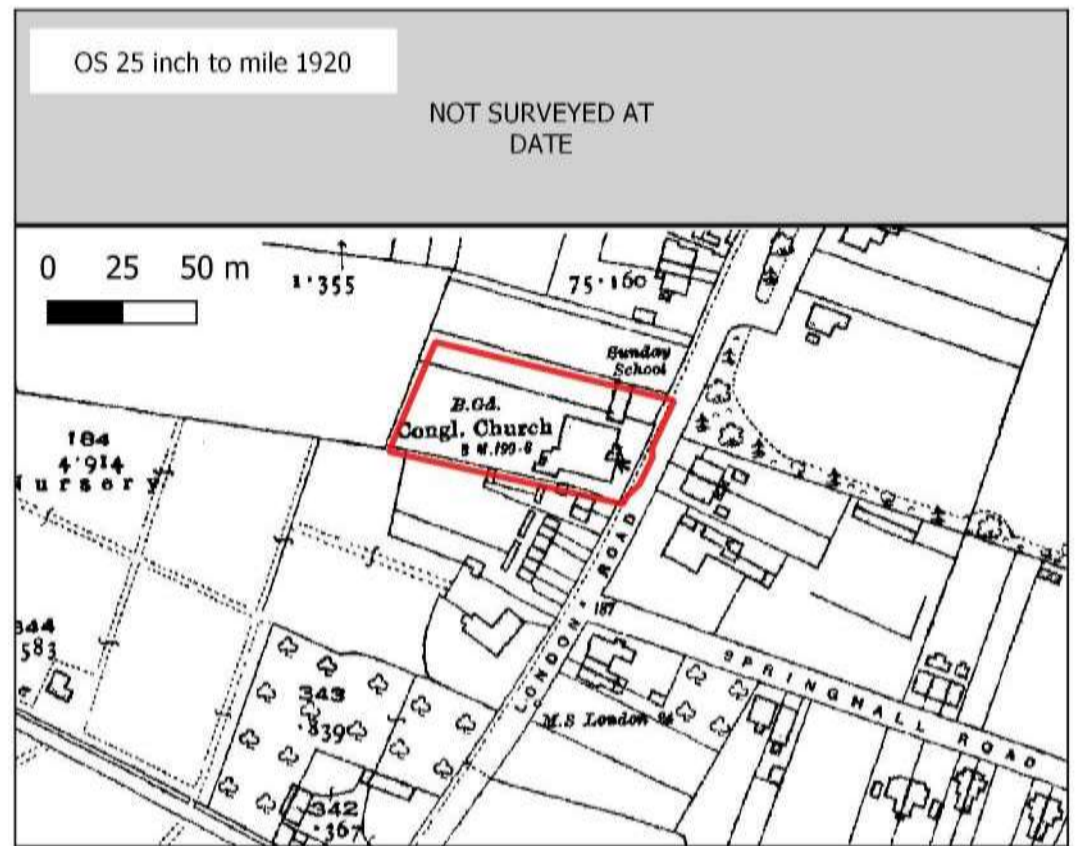
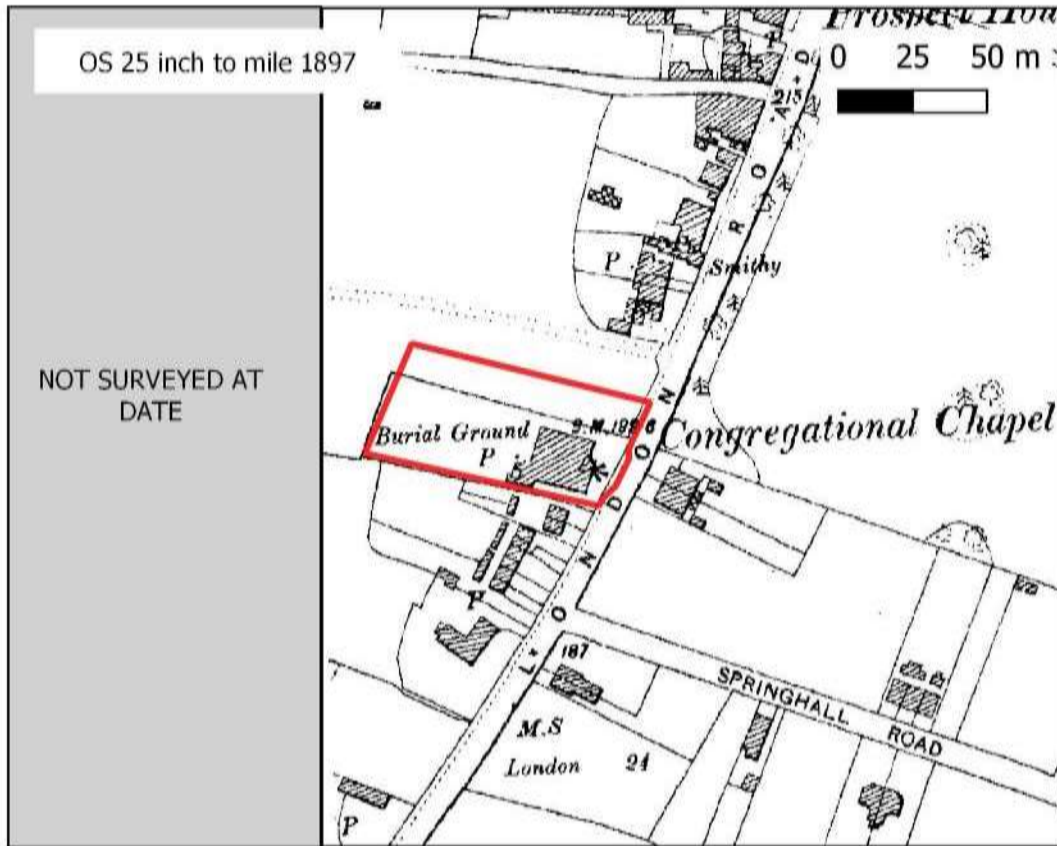
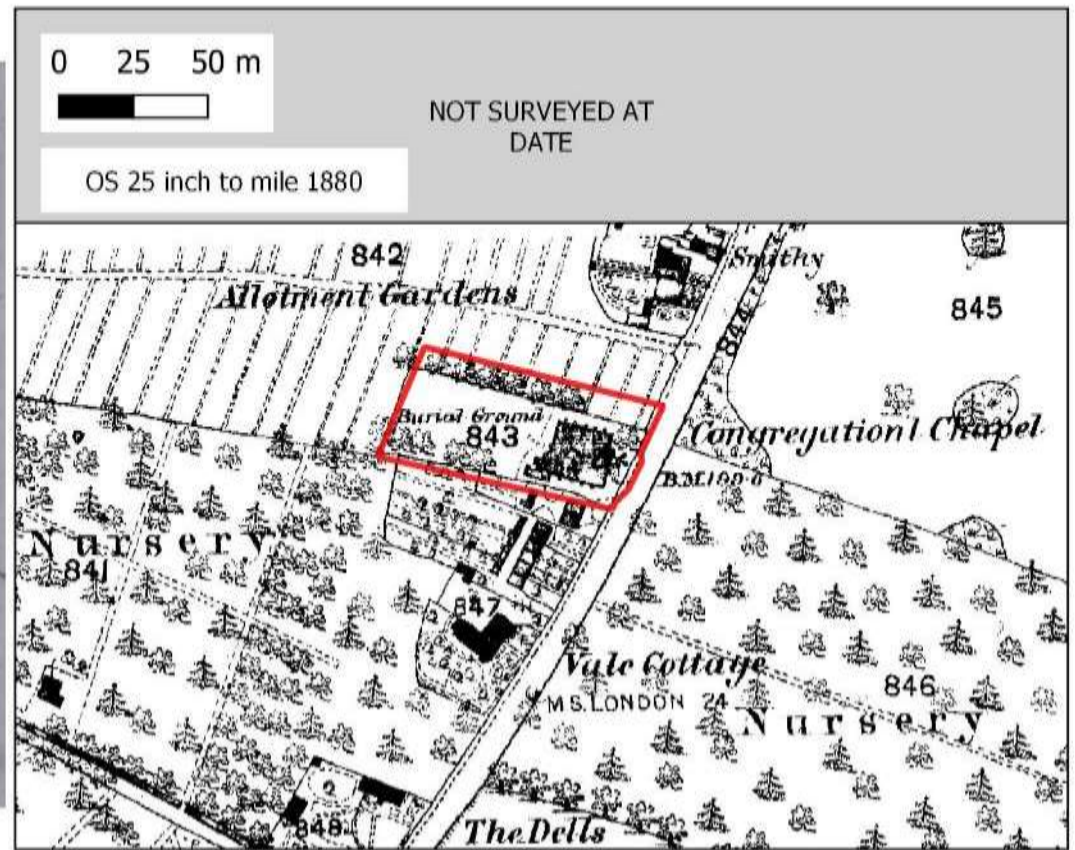


Figure 3: Historic Map Regression

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5 Site Survey

- 5.1 The site was visited by Dan Ratcliffe MA MCifA on 18/03/2023. Survey levels were based on Level 2 as described by Historic England (Historic England, 2016). A photographic archive and written notes were generated and will be retained and maintained on Statement Heritage systems, backed up to cloud-storage.

External

- 5.2 **The east elevation** of the buildings (**figure 4i**) is as described by the List Description.
- 5.3 **The west elevation (figure 4ii)** faces the land to the rear of the church. There is only one window, being a high grouping of three quatrefoil in the Schoolroom.
- 5.4 **The land to the rear** is shown at **figure 5**. The former plot to the rear of the Classrooms / Kitchen preserves 2 terraces above the level of the burial ground and is entirely absent of monuments, suggesting that the earthworks here preserve the historic surfaces of the former allotment gardens from which the site has been taken.
- 5.5 The external **detailing of chapel and school room (figure 6)** are typical of *Poulton's* gothic Congregational work, featuring decorative slate work, substantial, but largely decorative buttresses, and, especially the use of polychromatic brick detailing, executed here in a stock 'gault' brick, with bands of finer, lighter, oxygen-reduced facing brick lined to either side with single courses of Staffordshire engineering brick. Further interest is generated around openings using headers of the facing and engineering brick to pick up the upper courses of arches and with economic use of sandstone for architectural details and to emphasise the offsets of buttresses, which as well as being used to elaborate the tower (to which there is no internal access – the feature is apparently purely decorative) are placed to either side of the windows on the side elevations.
- 5.6 The **classrooms (figure 7)**, are built into rising ground, which results in the ground floor being accessed from its south elevation via a half flight of stairs, at once compromising the accessibility of the building. The relationship of the building to the ground has, evidently (from tar applied to the lower courses to the west of the building and salts on the walls inside) resulted for a number of years in damp ingress problems.
- 5.7 It is a rectangular block under a simple roof, the east elevation given a rather austere classical treatment with a simple parapet wall with a possibly stone, but more likely concrete cornice also used around the central gable with kneelers. Clear references are made to the principal building, through the use of a gault brick (one of lesser quality which is softer and wearing less well), entirely decorative buttresses to either side of the elevation, and purple brick decorative bands, also edging around a central arched panel. Windows are wide with modern UPVC units. There is a central large door opening, now closed with wood panelling and a further wide UPVC window. A side bay is to the left, under a flat roof concealed by a further, simpler parapet. The building is rather clumsily tied to *Poulton's* building with a simple, slightly pointed arch and wall. Its rear elevation is partially built over by the 1970s **kitchen** block.
- 5.8 The historic access into the **chapel interior (figure 8)** is via a pair of doors in the east end which enter into a much modernized vestibule beneath the balcony.
- 5.9 The interior space is very dark, this being the result of the boarding in of the north arcade to the schoolroom with wood panelling and rolling screens, leaving the only natural light – in the absence of a west window – being from the windows in the south wall and the east window which is half obscured by the balcony.

- 5.10 The windows of the chapel are notably plain, with no stained glass, reflecting the general lack of figurative idols anywhere in the building - very much appropriate to the Puritan roots of Congregationalism
- 5.11 Contrary to the list description the **arcade screen (figure 9)** is not considered to be an original feature. It is not shown on the 19C engraving, its roller track is set into the 20th century concrete floor of the schoolroom, and it includes an early 20th century *moderne* styled fishtail bolt, in contrast to the gothic fittings on the Victorian doors. From within the worship space the screens appear heavily behind the more graceful, paired iron columns of the arcade with their foliated capitals.
- 5.12 The ground floor retains much of its **pews (figure 10)**, which are standard pine designs many still fitted with umbrella stands. They are unremarkable and commonplace, although those in the balcony are more unusual, simple rather more vernacular benches. Some have been removed from the northern rank, their outline exposed in scars into an older low screen of fielded panels – interpreted by the List description as reused pews. This seems reasonable and is also a potential origin for the dado panels which survive all around the external walls of the chapel, which are of a different darker wood to the main pews. Congregationalist egalitarianism is perhaps illustrated by the lack of any pew rent numbering (or evidence for its removal).
- 5.13 The low **stage (figure 11)** at the west (focal) end of the building appears to be a further insertion. The stage is fitted around 2, probably early 20th century, cast iron radiators (understood from a member of the congregation responsible for fabric matters to have been fitted in the 1930s). The level of the stage half buries the dado at this point, and is also built up above the level of the doors in the rear wall accessing the vestry and a small corridor to the modern *kitchen block*. The stage incorporates the 1930s baptistry but this could not be inspected at the time of my visit because of the presence of musical equipment for the church band which has replaced the use of the 1905 organ. Like the organ the current pulpit is not shown on the Victorian engraving. Today it has been given over to a new role housing audio visual equipment (the church is fully wired for livestreaming) and a large video screen now stands centre stage in front of the organ pipes.
- 5.14 The **schoolroom** is shown at **figure 12**. Strengthening of the original roof here has been achieved a little more elegantly than in the chapel, by inserting a ceiling just above the inserted collars. The space has a solid concrete floor and is lit by the high quatrefoil windows to either end, and from paired lancets to north, one of which has been blocked in the 1990s at the time of the construction of the link to the kitchen block against it.
- 5.15 **The classroom block (figure 13)** interior is still more austere than its exterior. Access to the ground and first floor is via a stair in the flat-roofed section to its south. This stair has concrete treads and steel stick balusters with an iron rail – a traditional 19th century pattern but executed in 20th century materials. Internal spaces have little detail. Ceilings are modern replacements and the only internal fabric to have survived are the buildings original 3 panel early 20th century timber doors.
- 5.16 The **kitchen block** now provides the principal access into the building, via a single storey link between it and the schoolroom understood from the congregation to have been added in the

1990s. Access into the flat-roofed building to the north is via further stairs. The building is of a dark, modern pressed brick and it has an uninspiring flat roof. Its construction against part of the north wall of the schoolroom has resulted in the blocking of one of that building's north windows – further aggravating the lack of natural light reaching the historic interior.



i) East elevation from the street



ii) Rear elevation from the part of the burial ground extended c1911

Figure 4
External, general

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i) Burial Ground looking northwest

ii) Burial ground, looking southwest



Figure 5
Land to the rear

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i) Door to south corner of west elevation



ii) door into Schoolroom and lancet windows of balcony stair



iii) typical paired lancet of south elevation



iv) smaller paired lancet of north elevation (schoolroom). note slating detail on roof



v) buttress details on south elevation

Figure 6
External detailing
1863 building

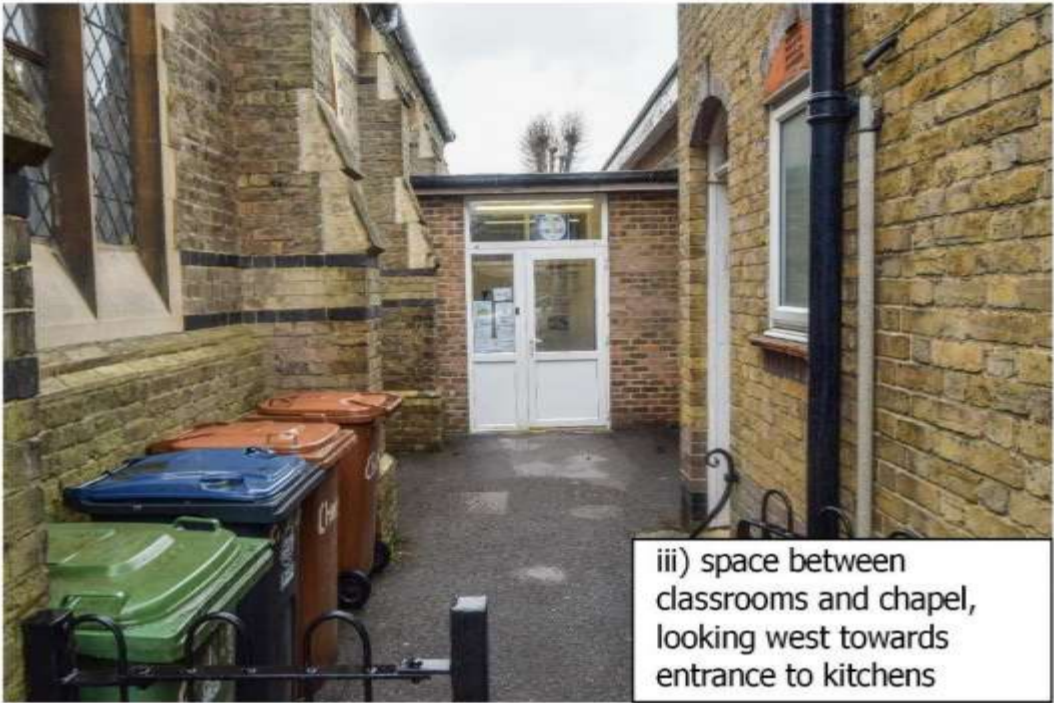
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i) East elevation, classrooms



ii) detail, east elevation, foundation stone



iii) space between classrooms and chapel, looking west towards entrance to kitchens



iv) rear elevation, classrooms and kitchens



v) rear elevation, classrooms



vi) south elevation, door into classrooms



vii) wrought iron boot scraper, classrooms

Figure 7
Classrooms
External

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i) Engraving, presumably as built



Congregational Church, Sawbridgeworth.

W. P. POULTON, ARCHITECT, READING.



ii) Looking west - note insertion of screens much reducing natural light and strengthening of roof structure with the insertion of double collars bolted to either side of original timbers



iii) Looking southwest



iv) Looking northwest



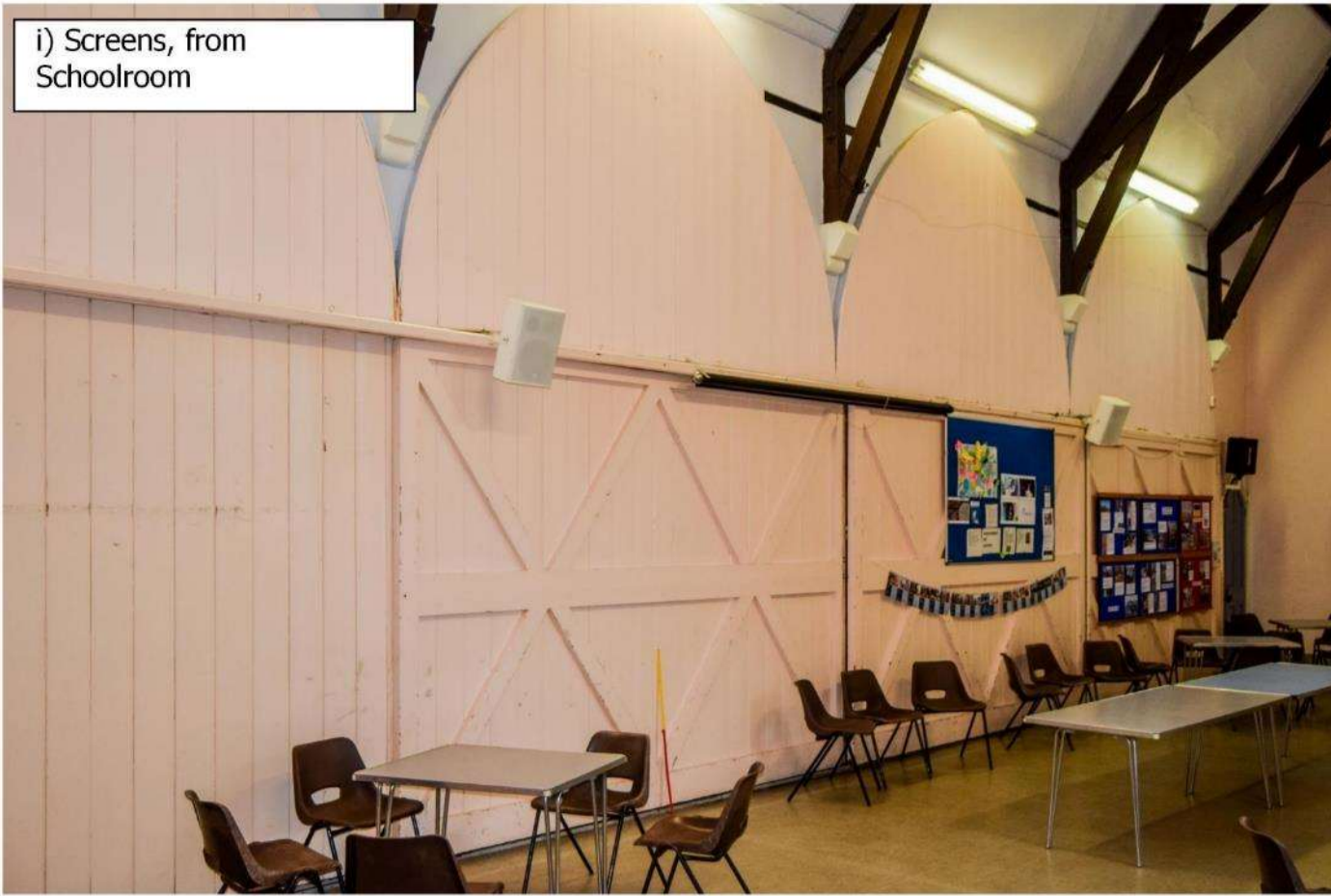
v) Looking east towards balcony

Figure 8
Chapel space
Internal

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i) Screens, from Schoolroom



ii) Screens, open, note rear of dado



iii) Detail, schoolroom side of screen - fielded panels



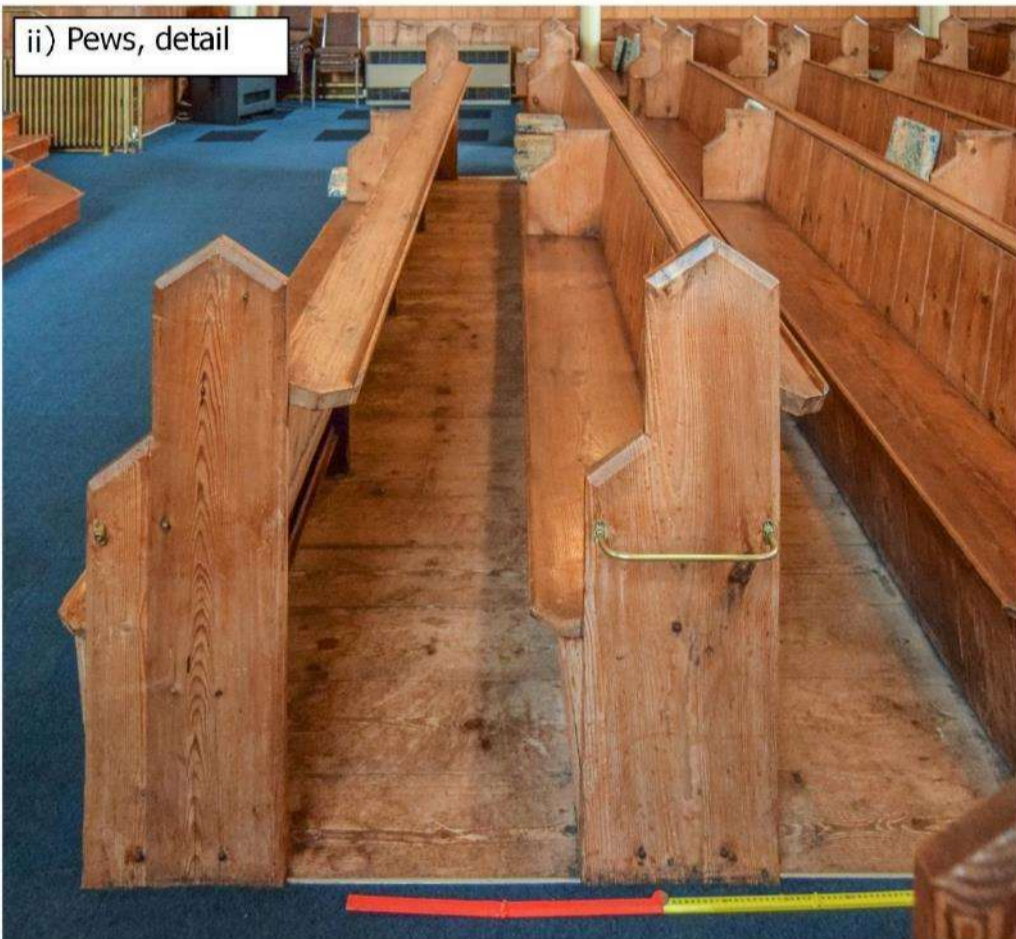
iv) Cast iron fish-tal bolt, screen door

Figure 9
Screen

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i) Pews, general



ii) Pews, detail



iii) Balcony pews



iv) removed pews, north rank, near rear, note scars in dado



v) removed pews, north rank, stage end

Figure 10
Pews

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i) stage, built up around dado and earlier radiators, pulpit is no longer used for preaching now housing AV equipment



ii) 1905 organ console



iii) vestry door from stage, showing how the door is set to the original floor height.



iv) dado, detail

Figure 11
Stage

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i) Schoolroom looking west



ii) Schoolroom looking east

Figure 12
Schoolroom

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iii) Schoolroom looking northwest

i) the classroom block is accessed (to right) from half a storey below its ground floor rooms via a concrete stair.



ii) smaller meeting room, ground floor, no historic details



Figure 13
Classrooms

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iii) larger meeting room, ground floor, no historic details beyond the three panel door



iv) stairs, 1.5 storey landing. Concrete base, iron balusters, iron rail



v) first floor looking south



vi) first floor looking north

6 Archaeological Appraisal

- 6.1 This section reviews publicly available archaeological records for 1km around the proposal site in order to inform decision making in regards of the proportionality of further archaeological work in advance of any development. It comprises a rapid appraisal rather than a fully detailed Desk Based Appraisal, proportionate to the limited area of the proposed impacts.

Methods

- 6.2 Formal requests for commercially licenced Historic Environment Record (HER) and preapplication archaeological advice have been made to the Hertfordshire Council Historic Environment Record by email to historic.environment@hertfordshire.gov.uk on 25th October, 2023 and on 5th January, and by several telephone messages, but no response has been received.
- 6.3 In the absence of access to full, properly licensed HER data the scope and reliability of this assessment is limited and we would ascribe only a 70% confidence rating to its conclusions.
- 6.4 Data used to make this assessment has sought to gather relevant data within 1km of the site including from:
- 6.4.1 The publicly available mapping provided via the [Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record Viewer](#)² (this data is an edited data source)
 - 6.4.2 The edited version of the HER monument data set available via the [Heritage Gateway](#)³
 - 6.4.3 Records of archaeological events and reports as indexed by the [Archaeological Data Service](#)⁴.
 - 6.4.4 Bibliographic sources as referenced within the text throughout this document
 - 6.4.5 The National Heritage List for England
 - 6.4.6 Historic England's Aerial Mapping Explorer
 - 6.4.7 Tithe and historic Ordnance Survey data (see section 3 and Figure 3).

Impact Area

- 6.5 The area expected to be subject to ground disturbance is shown at **figure 14** and comprises c200m² of ground to the immediate rear of the current Kitchen block of the church. The land (see **figure 4ii**) is laid to amenity grass and comprises a level terrace standing c0.5m above the graveyard of the church immediately to its south.
- 6.6 Historic maps (see figure 3) demonstrate that this land was used during the post-medieval period this land was in agricultural use in 1841, as part of a larger area of allotment gardens in 1880 and 1907, before becoming a separate garden enclosure to the rear of the *Sunday School* ('Classroom Block') by 1920. During the 20th century the surrounding landscape to north, west and southwest has been urbanized as a residential area.
- 6.7 The geology of the site consists of the clays, silts and sands of the *London Clay Formation* (|B|GS (2024) overlain by soils of the *Hanslope Formation* – 'slowly permeable calcerous clayey soils (SSEW 1983).

² <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/bd8b25113fd64f308f63594ef00fc877/page/Page/>

³ <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/>

⁴ <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>

Rev	Date	Description
01	07/01/2022	Issue for RFP
02	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
03	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
04	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
05	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
06	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
07	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
08	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
09	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
10	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
11	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
12	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
13	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
14	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
15	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
16	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
17	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
18	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
19	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
20	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP



Rev	Date	Description
01	07/01/2022	Issue for RFP
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06	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
07	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
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11	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
12	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
13	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
14	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
15	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
16	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
17	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
18	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
19	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP
20	10/02/2022	Issue for RFP



These changes will be shown on the next issue of the drawings.



PROPOSED
GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Project No:	DRC22	Scale:	1:100 (B1)
Author:	AA	Checked:	DA
Drawn:	AA	Approved:	DA

SECC:20 /110 L

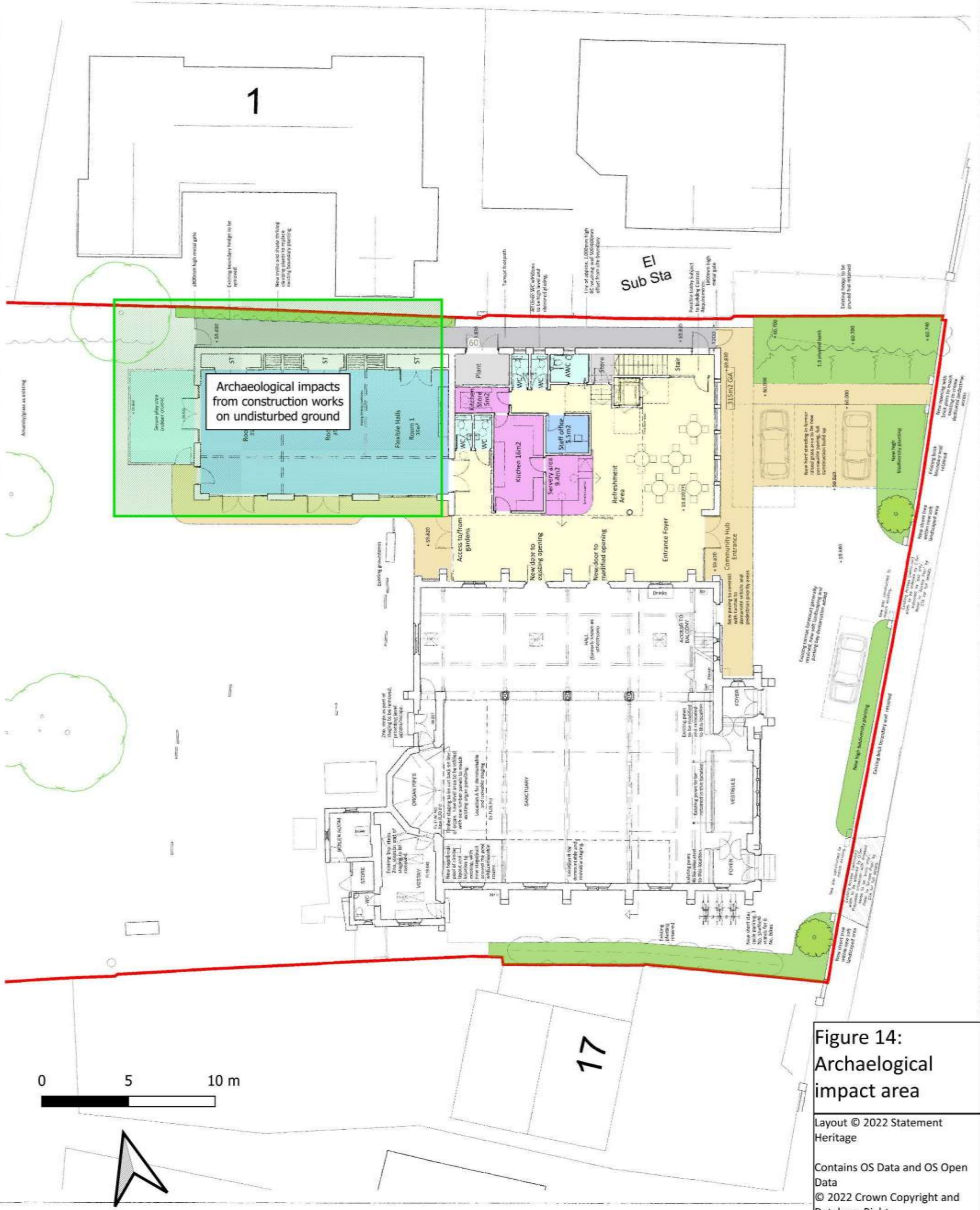


Figure 14:
Archaeological
impact area

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Prehistory: (up to c43CE)

- 6.8 8 sites providing evidence of prehistoric activity are identified within the 1km study area shown at **figure 15**.
- 6.9 **NHLE1016411 Scheduled / MHT7647, MHT2605**. The only scheduled monument within the proposal area is the *Springhall Lane Causewayed Enclosure* (0.75km SE of site) which was first identified by aerial reconnaissance by J.K. St Joseph in 1962. *“The monument includes a Neolithic causewayed enclosure located to either side of Springhall Lane to the south of Sawbridgeworth. It occupies the slope of a slight spur which faces south into the broad valley of the River Stort and over the flood meadows which flank the Stort Navigation. Although no earthworks can be seen on the ground, part of the enclosure's boundary of interrupted ditches (which typify this class of monument) was revealed by cropmarks in the field to the east of the Springhall Lane footpath in 1962. Aerial photographs taken at this time clearly show three parallel lines of segmented ditches, about 10m apart, descending the slope of the spur in a broad curve, starting near the junction of Springhall Lane (now at the southern corner of a modern housing estate) and continuing towards the south eastern corner of the field, altogether a distance of approximately 160m. The ditches in each line measure some 2m in width and are divided into segments which average 20m in length. The causeways which separate the ditch segments vary between 2m and 3m across and, unusually for this class of monument, their positions are closely matched in each circuit. Some of the ditches have slight inturned terminals which are thought to indicate formalised entrances to the enclosure. The extent of the enclosure to the west of Springhall Lane is uncertain. However, as this class of monument invariably takes the form of an ovoid or circular enclosure, it is estimated from the curvature of the visible section to extend some 60m-70m west of the lane before curving southwards towards the flood plain. The flood meadow itself has proven unreceptive to aerial photography, although it is possible that the enclosure lacked a formalised southern boundary and was deliberately sited to utilise the water course or marshes on one side for either practical or ritual purposes. The southern extent of the enclosure is therefore difficult to define, although the waterlogged conditions along this southern side will provide exceptional conditions for the preservation of features and artefacts related to the period of occupation.”* (Scheduled monument description NHLE1016411). Causewayed enclosures are understood as having been constructed around 3650BC being approximately contemporary with the introduction of agriculture and ceremonial monuments such as cursus monuments and long barrows in the middle Neolithic. They constitute the earliest known enclosures of open space in the British Isles. As a site known from cropmarks and geophysical survey the monument's setting does not extend to the proposal site.
- 6.10 **Long Barrow MHT1387** (c850m NE of Site). *‘Four inhumations were discovered in levelling on a building site in 1970’* (HER summary). *‘No associated objects were found. There was a gravel mound which was destroyed before the burials were found so this may have been a long barrow (although the evidence is thin).* Like the causewayed enclosure at *Springhill Lane* the likely location of this site lies just above and to the west of the river valley of the *River Stort*.
- 6.11 Two findspots of prehistoric lithic artefacts are also known just to the west of the *River Stort*, supporting interpretation of the occupation of the river valley from the Neolithic period onwards. Both sites are recorded from the Hertford Museum catalogue with little further information available from the sources consulted to inform on the circumstances of discovery. As such the finds are assumed to have been unstratified recoveries. **MHT2127** (649m south of the proposal

- site) describes a 'Neolithic axe' found in *Pishiobury Park* not far from the causewayed enclosure), whilst **MHT2128** (c800m east of the site) is recorded simply as a 'prehistoric flint'.
- 6.12 From the early 21st century onwards more detailed mapping of aerial photography has been undertaken as part of the English Heritage / Historic England funded *National Mapping Project*. Site **MHT7646** (570m WNW of the proposal site) records a trackway revealed by this project.
- 6.13 Large scale residential development to the immediate north of this site at **Chalk Farm** has been informed and mitigated by a programme of archaeological work (Davies, 2018; Jones 2019). Geophysical survey in 2018 revealed a '*double ditched rectilinear enclosure, additional rectilinear enclosures and a potential ring-ditch, along with a curvilinear trackway extending to the east.*' (Davies 2018, 4). Subsequent field evaluation works at the site in 2018 and 2019 identified that the site was initially settled in the later Bronze Age- early Iron Age, with expansion in the later Iron Age, when the large rectilinear double ditched enclosure with its funnel entrance was established, with '*The quantity of finds recovered, as well as the fresh nature of the pottery sherds, from many of the excavated ditches are a strong indicator that settlement is located in very close proximity. Areas of intercutting pits provide further indicators for the longevity of the settlement.*' (Jones 2019, 5). Occupation of the site continued into the Romano-British period, as demonstrated by further pits and ditches *containing large quantities of early Roman pottery which displayed little evidence of abrasion, suggesting they were deposited in close proximity to the settlement from which they were associated*'. The latest evidence for occupation of the site dated to the 2nd century CE.
- 6.14 A separate site at **West Road** was investigated by magnetometry in 2016. '*[S]everal anomalies were identified with a concentration found towards the north-eastern corner of the site*' (Sabin 2016). The results were tested by field evaluation in 2018 (Sparks, 2019), indicating that the features in the north-east part of the site, originally interpreted as potential enclosures, were geological in origin, whilst four NW-SE aligned ditches were identified in the south-western part of the site *two of which may form a trackway*. The features predated other linear features corresponding to historic boundaries shown on the Tithe map and were interpreted as prehistoric. Following the findings from *Chalk Farm* not far to the southwest of the site further evaluation was undertaken in 2021 providing further information about the enclosure ditches revealed in 2018 (Dodd, 2021). This work identified continuations of these ditches, and a limited assemblage of late Bronze Age – Early Iron age and Romano British ceramics. The report concludes that '*The archaeological remains are suggestive of a trackway and agricultural activity that was probably peripheral to contemporary areas of settlement recorded to the southwest at Chalk's Farm, providing limited further insight into the activities and industries that may have taken place at the site during the later prehistoric and early Roman periods. Nevertheless, the evaluation results provide additional information about the scale of activity within the landscape during these periods and confirm that the trackway and adjacent ditches formed part of a broader field system and wider connections within the landscape. The lack of discrete features identified on site and the limited quantity and range of finds recovered from the enclosure/field boundary and trackway ditches are also demonstrative of the largely agricultural nature of*

activity in this part of the landscape, suggesting that the settlement activity revealed at Chalk's Farm did not extend as far as the West Road site '.

- 6.15 **Potential** : The sites identified within 1km of the site suggest occupation of the area from the middle Neolithic onwards although the earliest evidence appears to be closely related to exploitation of the area around the sides and base of the *Stort* valley. By the late Bronze Age and Iron Age periods the recent results from *Chalk Farm* demonstrate that the heavier clay soils to the west of the area were part of a settled agricultural landscape. The evidence of this activity takes the form of ditches and pits cut into the subsoil which have survived the impacts of later agricultural activity. The visibility of this later prehistoric landscape is only hinted at by features occasionally forming cropmarks but large area geophysical surveys using magnetometry have demonstrated their potential here to reveal much, but not all, of the detail of the surviving features. The majority of this hidden landscape, which may extend into the area of the proposal site is likely to be agricultural in character, although is likely to contain dispersed settlement sites such as that indicated to be close by to the site at *Chalk Farm*. Whilst there is a moderate potential for the proposal site to contain further remains of the hidden prehistoric landscape the limited sample size presented by the impacts of the current scheme suggests that the potential for significant remains to be encountered is low, whilst the contribution of any such remains would be limited by their lack of wider context, given the likely loss of archaeological remains around them to housing development during the late 20th century.



HERno	Name	Type	Period	Summary
MHT7646	CROPMARKS OF A TRACKWAY, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	Trackway	Prehistoric	Transcribed by the National Mapping Project (NMP) from aerial photographs. Probably related to the features investigated at Chalk Farm to the north.
MHT2127	NEOLITHIC AXE, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	FINDSPOT	Prehistoric	Neolithic
MHT7647	CROPMARKS OF LINEAR DITCHES, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	LINEAR FEATURE; DITCH	Prehistoric	Early Neolithic . Features aligned on the causewayed enclosure
MHT2605	CROPMARKS OF PROBABLE CAUSEWAYED ENCLOSURE, NEAR SPRING HALL, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	CAUSEWAYED ENCLOSURE; RING DITCH; LINEAR FEATURE; MULTIPLE DITCH SYSTEM	Prehistoric	Early Neolithic Cropmark of three concentric circuits of interrupted ditches - SCHEDULED
MHT2128	FLINT, 100 SHEERING MILL LANE, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	FINDSPOT	Prehistoric	Lithic artefact recorded from Hertford Museum catalogue in 1967 and presumably an unstratified chance find

Figure 15
Prehistoric Sites

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Romano-British 43CE-410CE (figure 16)

- 6.16 The landscape revealed at *Chalk Farm* and *West Road* continued into use into the 2nd century CE.
- 6.17 Two further sites are identified by the HER within the 1km area.
- 6.18 **MHT9074** (87m to the west of the west end of the proposal site) records '*The partial skeleton (no bones from the torso were recovered) of a young female (?) were found during road building work in April 1994. The stratigraphy is unknown as the ground was extensively disturbed by the work. The skeleton was thought to be Roman, due to one small sherd of pottery and one tiny fragment of lava quern being found in association. The bones were reburied on site and sealed beneath the road surface*' (HER entry).
- 6.19 **MHT1752** (c800m NNE of site but poorly located, probably in the garden of 21 Barnard Road) records an '*unidentified coin, found in a garden*' by a schoolboy in 1950. The find was *lent to Hertford Museum for identification and then mislaid*'.
- 6.20 *Margary* (1955) suggests that the A1184 may represent a Roman road (Margary 328x – i.e. a spur of *Stane Street* M.32) but there is little evidence beyond the name *Thorley Street* to the north and the inference drawn from its route between *Harlow Temple* (NHLE1002182) and *Stane Street* at *Bishops Stortford*. 6.15
- 6.21 **Potential:** The proximity (within 100m) of the partial skeleton observed to the west of the site reinforces the likelihood of settlement activity of this period within the vicinity of the proposal site. The potential for deposits of this period is considered moderate.



HERno	Name	Type	Period	Summary
MHT9074	PROBABLE ROMAN INHUMATION, ROMAN RISE, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	INHUMATION	Romano British	Part of a human skeleton, apparently dated by a few sherds of pottery
MHT1752	PROBABLE ROMAN COIN, 21 BARNARD ROAD, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	FINDSPOT	Romano British	NULL



Figure 16
Romano British sites

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Early Medieval to Medieval (410CE-1540CE) (figure 17)

- 6.22 *Sawbridgeworth* was recorded in the *Domesday Survey* (1086) as the manor of *Sabrixworde* consisting of 24 and a half hides held by *Geoffrey de Mandeville* having been previously held by the Saxon lord *Esger (the constable)* of *Earl Harold* (Open Domesday⁵). The manor consisted of 40 ploughlands, 20 ploughs of meadow and woodland enough for 300 pigs. The survey notes a mill and church, implying a substantial organised settlement of early medieval foundation.
- 6.23 The distinctive square plan of the medieval core area of the town has been suggested as an example of formal medieval planning in the early 13th century (Curtis, 2017; Slater 2014, 7).
- 6.24 Trench evaluation at 21 Knight Street (Slater 2014) identified ditches containing 5-9th century and 11-12th century pottery. The ditch was interpreted as a possible extension of *Sawbridgeworth's* manorial complex.
- 6.25 The medieval economy of the town was founded on the trade of saffron, the Conservation Area appraisal noting that the only other planned medieval town in the region is *Saffron Walden* (BEAMS 2014, 12)
- 6.26 **Potential:** The known medieval evidence comes from several site investigated within the area of the town generally understood to have been planned in the 13th century. The proposal site lies well outside this area and is likely to have lain in agricultural land. The potential for medieval sites within the proposal site is considered low.

Post Medieval (1540-2023) – figure 18.

- 6.27 Like most towns *Sawbridgeworth* saw extensive rebuilding in the 17th and 18th centuries, whilst its economy continued to be based on its agricultural base, with a move from the saffron trade to one where malting became particularly important (ibid, 16).
- 6.28 *London Road* was improved by a turnpike trust from 1744, likely stimulating ribbon development from the town along the road towards the proposal site.
- 6.29 As already discussed above, the first development on the site of the current chapel was the development of an earlier congregational chapel in 1814-1817. The 1841 tithe map (see figure 4) shows this building and its associated graveyard as occupying the site of the current church and burial ground. The area now proposed for development of 'flexible halls' lay within tithe plot 593 described as *Cottage Allotments: Root field gardens*. These allotments are mapped as such on the 1880 OS mapping, but may have reverted to farmland by the second edition of this mapping in 1897.
- 6.30 **Potential:** The area of the site proposed for disturbance to create a new 'flexible hall' likely lay within agricultural or horticultural land during this period, with the current levels of the ground, which form a terrace above the current graveyard, following the line of the rear garden created for the *Classrooms* in the early 20th century. The church have no records of burial activity in this area during the 20th century. There is considered a negligible potential for significant archaeological remains of this period.

⁵ <https://opendomesday.org/place/TL4814/sawbridgeworth/>



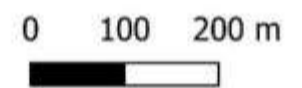
0 100 200 m

HERno	Name	Type	Period	Summary
MHT13144	MEDIEVAL POST HOLE, BEHIND 21-23 BELL STREET, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	POST HOLE	Medieval	Single post hole predating the 15th century house
MHT30858	EARLY MEDIEVAL DITCHES, 21 KNIGHT STREET, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	DITCH	Early Medieval	Two ditches, with a few sherds of Saxon and Saxo-Norman pottery
MHT9882	DITCH AT SITE OF SAYESBURY MANOR, THE FOREBURY, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	DITCH	Medieval	Large ditch containing undated domestic refuse, adjacent to the site of the medieval manor
MHT9533	SITE OF MARKET PLACE, THE SQUARE, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	MARKET	Medieval	Marketplace of unusual square form, west of the parish church
MHT12542	FAIR GREEN, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	COMMON GROUND	Medieval	NULL

Figure 17
Medieval Sites

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MHT13144	MEDIEVAL POST HOLE, BEHIND 21-23 BELL STREET, SAWBRIDGEWORTH	POST HOLE	Medieval	Single post hole predating the 15th century house
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Figure 17
Medieval Sites

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7 Statement of Significance

Historic – the Characteristics of Congregationalism

Sawbridgeworth Congregational Church was built in 1863 to the design of *W.F. Poulton* of Reading practice *Poulton and Woodman*. *Poulton* was one of the most notable specialists providing buildings for Congregationalists in the middle years of the 19th century.

The present congregation represent a continuous tradition of religious dissent in the town since the 1660s- often seen as a seminal decade in the growth of non-conformism following the 1662 *Act of Uniformity* which resulted in the departure or ejection of around 2000 ministers from the established church. The schisms of that period reflected those more broadly in English society following the Restoration, as the state sought to reject the Puritanism and egalitarianism of the Commonwealth and reimpose state hierarchies. For the Church of England this included a reintroduction of Episcopalian governance (i.e., by Bishops) and compulsory infant baptism. Calvinists like the Independents, Reformed Baptists and Brownites rejected this in favour of what they felt were more direct forms of worship involving *direct* local and voluntary *covenants* between local congregations and their God.

The congregation at Sawbridgeworth grew from members of *Independent* and *Baptist* traditions that met in private houses through the 18th century before founding a chapel on this site in the early 19th century. The date of the establishment of a chapel in 1814 is likely to relate to the passing into law of the *1812 Toleration Act* which permitted as many as 20 people to gather for worship in an unregistered chapel for the first time.

Distinctive historic aspects of Congregational practice include an avoidance of elaborate decoration, ritualistic practice and hierarchical structures – each church is its own polity and chooses its own relationship with God. Consequently, there tends to be an absence of ‘set’ forms of worship, such as conditions the architecture, layout and form of church buildings in many other denominations. Communion is often brought out to communicants in individual glasses – inverting the usual pattern of movement in the ceremony in Church of England and Catholic liturgy, and has particular consequences for the hierarchy of seating arrangements and processional routes which are quite irrelevant to the Congregational patterns.

The congregation remains strong here with attendances of between 80-120 still commonplace. The church building represents not only the link of that community with its forebears but also their continual personal investment in new facilities to carry on their mission.

Architectural- *Poulton’s* brief at *Sawbridgeworth* was a simple one, with contemporary documents indicating that the congregation essentially chose a design ‘off the peg’ using a recent church by the architect as a template brief for the building. As such the building’s exterior and planform has much in common with the church which the congregation sought to copy – being the now demolished Congregational Church at *Milton Regis, Kent*.

The building reflects Congregational practice in the simplicity of the Gothic form chosen. At a time when the High faction of the Church of England was developing the highly *Decorated* Gothic buildings with richly flowing *curvilinear* tracery, of the later 13th to late 14th century, the style favoured by *Poulton* here is more redolent of the *Early English* style current from the late 12th to late 13th century. Decoration is sparse, almost entirely restricted to the simple, probably cast foliage of the capitals.

Notably none of the windows are stained (a tradition being revived by the medievalists of the later 19th century).

Of particular note is the external detailing of the building in the use of brick and external buttresses, again referencing the Early English style.

Internal fittings make much use of essentially generic, mass-produced chapel fittings, but nevertheless most of the original gothic doors and their fittings survive here and add authenticity and quality to the building.

The pews of the main chapel are less complete, and likely to be from a specialist workshop mass producing chapel seating. with a number removed from the north rank already, although those in the balcony are complete and good examples of more original simpler, probably locally made woodworking.

A number of internal fittings are not original and so may be of less special interest, including the stage, baptistry, pulpit, organ, and most of the screen between main worship space and schoolroom. Most of these features date to the early 20th century.

Organ: Our initial assessment noted that the pipes of the organ and its case add to the aesthetic interest of the west end of the building but are not original to the interior of the building. The British Institute for Organ Studies state in respect of the historic and technical interest of pipe organs that *Organs of the period 1850-192 survive in somewhat greater numbers, but... their preservation and restoration should normally be the rule.* We recommended further specialist assessment of the instrument's values.

The instrument has since been further assessed by *Harrison and Harrison*⁶. Their report indicates that the instrument is a good example of a small organ by *Norman & Beard* but is in poor, unplayable condition, requiring comprehensive restoration to make it playable. They have advised this work would be prohibitively costly due to the complexity of the original pneumatic mechanism and of the intricate work that would be involved in re-siting the console, currently linked by lead piping beneath the dias.

The organ has not been used in church worship for over 10 years and would not be used if in serviceable condition.

Not of special architectural interest

The 1911 *classroom* extension to the building is considered to contribute some *less than special interest* to the historic and architectural values of the church through illustration of the ongoing, developing social and educational provision of the church. It is of poorer material and design quality in comparison to the original Poulton building. It is also very altered, particularly its windows, but also

⁶ [About Us – Harrison & Harrison Ltd \(harrisonorgans.com\)](http://harrisonorgans.com) *Harrison and Harrison*, established in 1861 are accredited by the Institute of Organ Building and were the builders of the organs in Westminster Abbey, the Royal Festival Hall, Kings College Cambridge and Coventry Cathedral.

internally, where little of historic character survives. Consequently, it is considered to fall clearly short of indicative attributes of special interest for a school building of this date⁷.

The *kitchen* extension is manifestly not of special interest and has clearly harmed the north elevation of the original building.

Communal and evidential value:

The building is rich in community value at the local level, representing the container for a living tradition of dissenting worship on this site for more than 200 years, and within the town for nearly 400. The value is illustrated both in the principal listed building, and in the attendant *classroom* and *kitchen* blocks, both of which help to illustrate the continuous renewal of the mission of the church, to which the congregation continues to bear witness through the use of these buildings to provide a community kitchen and services to the Ukrainian refugee community. These values do not however attract the *special interest*, which is conferred by listing only on fabric of architectural and historic national interest. These values are amenable to conversion into historic archive records, through processes of archaeological and oral history recording, in the event of planning decisions which fall in favour of their loss.

⁷ In forming this view we have taken into account the text at page 17 of Historic England's Listed Selection Guide : Educational Buildings (2017, 17) <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-education-buildings/heag111-education-lsg/>

8 Impact Assessment.

8.1 The initial draft of this document was produced in Spring 2023 and informed pre-application designs and discussions. The client team has since engaged with the LPA and made a number of changes to the scheme. The following assessment is informed by the following supplied drawings.

- SECC.20-110L - PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR PLAN.pdf
- SECC.20-111G - PROPOSED FIRST FLOOR PLAN.pdf
- SECC.20-120F - PROPOSED ELEVATIONS - EAST AND WEST.pdf
- SECC.20-121E - PROPOSED ELEVATIONS - NORTH AND SOUTH.pdf
- SECC.20-125E - PROPOSED SECTIONS.pdf
- SECC.20-140A - PROPOSED 3D VIEW 1.pdf
- SECC.20-141 - PROPOSED 3D VIEW 2.pdf

8.2 **Need for Change.** The way in which the congregation at Sawbridgeworth uses its buildings both for worship and for its wider work has changed immeasurably since 1863 and indeed since the buildings of the site were expanded in 1911 and c1963. The current proposals are aimed at producing more accessible facilities for the church, which is continuing to grow in response to its active mission, which includes work with *Harlow Food Bank, TGL Make Lunch, the Haley Centre* and other initiatives. The new facilities will provide facilities suitable for a variety of new services including a *pre-school nursery, a meeting place for older people, and a facility for children's services.*

8.3 Adapting the site to meet the current requirements will:

1. Ensure that the site remains in its original use. Keeping heritage assets in their original use is the best way of ensuring that their historic, and particularly their *communal historic* values are maintained.
2. Ensure that barriers to access (primarily a lack of level access) to the services provided by the buildings and their congregation are removed.
3. Strengthen the architectural values of the site by ensuring that their attributes can be related to a living community and their practice.

Capacity for Change.

8.4 At the core of the approach of our engagement with this project has been the desire to seek the particular significance of this site in order that the capacity for change can be best understood. The Statement of Significance set out at Section 6 above sets out **what matters and why** bringing attention to how specifically Congregational practice and non-conformism has influenced how it is built, laid out, detailed and used. This understanding lies at the heart of the following observations which were communicated to the design team in Spring 2023:

*The structure, plan-form and external and internal detailing of the 1863 building as designed by W.F. Poulton lie at the core of its architectural special interest.
Changes to the original Poulton design, for which we have strong evidence, include.*

- i) the introduction of a later sliding screen which has reduced the aural, visual and physical connection between the schoolroom and chapel as well as the penetration of natural light.
- ii) the introduction of a slightly raised stage at the western end of the chapel and the introduction of a baptistry beneath (proposed for replacement in the current proposals due to the leaking of the current unit.
- iii) the development of buildings in 1911 and c1963 which have harmed the integrity (completeness) and visibility of the north elevation
- iv) minor changes to the vestibule area of the chapel
- v) the replacement of the organ in 1905 and subsequent moving of the console more recently.
- vi) the redundancy in current service practice as agreed by the congregation of the pulpit, probably of early 20th century date

8.5 The heritage significance of the newer buildings to the north of the church has been considered. The *kitchen range* is a harmful intervention of no special or other heritage interest. The *classrooms* are considered to have some less than special interest in terms of illustrating the historic development of the church, but to fall well short of indicative criteria for *special interest* as given by Historic England (2017, 17). It is noted that Historic England pre-application advice to the client team has indicated that these buildings are not in their view subject to the provisions of the 1990 Act by virtue of curtilage or connection.

Assessment of Specific Impacts.

8.6 The principal characteristics of the proposals externally are as follows:

8.7 Demolition of the Classroom and Kitchen Range.

Impact: These buildings date to 1911 and to the 1970s respectively. Neither are of special interest. The classroom block is poorly scaled and related to the *Poulton and Woodman* work and of poorer material quality and design and is much altered due to the replacement of its windows and internal modification. The kitchen range is manifestly not of interest and harms the north elevation of the historic buildings. Removal and replacement of these buildings presents a clear opportunity to enhance the architectural values of the 1860s buildings, outweighing the loss of buildings of less than special interest.

Mitigation: Care should be taken to ensure that original north elevation and gable details are accurately reinstated on removal of later fabric. The LPA may wish to consider proportional archive recording of the Classroom further to NPPF P211

8.8 Development of a two-storey Community Hub building on the footprint of the buildings to be demolished.

Impact: The proposal, which is considered very clearly justified within the submitted Design and Access Statement, is considered to constitute clear enhancement to the architectural values of the 1862 building, by virtue of: its lower height and better judged mass in comparison to the current *Classroom*; the high quality approach to detailing, referencing the banded brickwork of the historic buildings, whilst adopting a contemporary aesthetic that ensures legibility of their temporal relationship; the degree to which the building will support the

viability of the historic building in their original use, through improvements in access, energy efficiency, useability, and wider community mission, considered likely to bring more people into contact with the heritage of the site.

8.9 Development of a 1.5 storey glazed link between *Community Hub* and the 19th century

Schoolroom. This intervention provides a visual transition between the old and new masses, provides central, accessible entry into the buildings, and reinstates lost light into the *Schoolroom*. It is considered to enhance the architectural values of the historic building.

8.10 Development of a 1.5 storey *Flexible Hall* space to the rear of and attached to the

Community Hub, extending into the former garden plots to the north of the current cemetery. This new mass will be developed within the setting of the west elevation of the historic building, being sited on a raised terrace slightly above the historic graveyard of the church. Our assessment and field visit indicated that this land was acquired by the church at the time of the development of the 1911 *Classroom* and that it retains the earthwork characteristics of the former allotment gardens from which it was taken. There is no evidence that this land has ever been used for burials. The space will provide a flexible hall space, opening via large, glazed doors into the graveyard to south (providing opportunities for users to appreciate the architectural values of the west elevation of the historic buildings) and to a secure play area to west. The proposal is considered to present a neutral impact on the setting of the west elevation of the listed building. The development will require the disturbance of approximately 180m² of ground. Initial archaeological appraisal of this land (see section 6) suggests a low potential for burials, and a low to moderate potential for prehistoric remains of moderate significance, although the limited size of the intervention limits both the potential of the site and the likely interest of any results. It is suggested that the LPA may wish to consider the proportionality of requiring archaeological monitoring of this aspect of the development via a watching brief secured by condition per NPPF P211.

The principal characteristics of the proposals internally are as follows:

8.11 Existing staging and pulpit to be removed and replaced with demountable and movable staging.

Impact: The current stage / dias, is a non-original element of the interior and not assessed to be of special interest. Its loss is assessed here as resulting in negligible less than substantial harm, which may be weighed against the wider benefits of the scheme as a whole. Records of pre-application discussions with the LPA indicate that they have supported this aspect of the scheme, which would be replaced by movable staging, but have requested consideration of the relocation of the pulpit elsewhere in the scheme. It is not considered that additional archival recording of these works would meaningfully advance understanding of the listed building's heritage values.

8.12 Organ console to be dismantled and stored with reuse of organ pipes and timber panels within auditory apse at west end. Records of pre-application discussions with the LPA indicate that they have accepted this aspect of the scheme, which we would assess as amounting to negligible less than substantial harm (taking account of the retention of pipes).

- 8.13 Replacement of existing baptismal pool.** The current pool is not original to the building and is not considered of heritage interest.
- 8.14 Removal of most pews from Sanctuary and Hall (former Schoolroom).** Balcony pews to be retained *in situ*. The pews are considered original features of the building and so their loss will constitute moderate less than substantial harm to the architectural values of the interior. Through negotiation with the LPA it has been agreed that representative examples will be fixed to the Sanctuary side of the vestibule panelling. Archive standard photography of the interior in its current form is held by Statement Heritage and suitable for deposit as part of a more detailed archival record if deemed proportionate by the LPA. The more interesting pews of the balcony are to be retained *in situ*.
- 8.15 Removal of the timber screen currently between the two spaces.** This element is not shown on a Victorian engraving of the interior and is considered a later addition. Its removal will improve the natural lighting of the interior and has been agreed in principle with the LPA during pre-application discussions. Its loss is considered no more than minor less than substantial harm and may be mitigated via archival photographic recording.
- 8.16 Creation of 2no doors within existing window openings between the Hall (Schoolroom) and new Foyer.** These windows are assessed as containing original leaded glass (one currently boarded over). One may be relocated in the existing opening between Sanctuary and Hall. This impact will create symmetry along the north wall of the Schoolroom and support the connection between the historic building and new entry foyer. It is assessed as constituting minor less than substantial harm which should be weighed against the overall benefits of the proposals.
- 8.17 New solid timber balcony guarding stained to match existing.** This intervention is justified in order to make the balcony safe. It has been previously agreed in pre-application discussions which have agreed that *design would need further consideration at technical design stage* and may be agreed by condition.
- 8.18 Replacement heating system.** This intervention is not considered relevant to the special interest, assuming the reuse of existing underfloor voids and like for like replacement (where necessary) of existing floorboards and finishes.
- 8.19 Replacement lighting system.** Details to be conditioned.
- 8.20 Introduction of secondary glazing to historic building.** Preapplication discussions has indicated that this intervention should be achieved via designs which are fitted within the window recess, respectful of existing mullion / transom patterns, and painted an appropriate (not white) colour. Details to be agreed by condition.
- 8.21 Replacement of 1no door and refurbishment of 2no of the east doors of the historic building.** It was agreed at preapplication discussions that the double doors to the west lobby were of lesser historic significance and could be replaced. The vestry and doors to the base of the balcony stairs appeared to have interesting and assumed original hinge features. These doors should ideally be retained and refurbished, rather than replaced.

9 Archiving.

- 9.1.1 The archive for this recording and assessment exercise, suitable for deposit if required by planning condition, is currently maintained by Statement Heritage and consists of:
 - 9.1.1.1 Annotated plans and field notes (A4 sheets x2)
 - 9.1.1.2 Photographic Register (A4 sheet x1)
 - 9.1.1.3 Digital photographs (.jpg x 70)
 - 9.1.1.4 Copy of this report in .pdf format

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