



## South Elmham, Suffolk

Συδ Ἐlmenham

Old Minster

Ruins of Anglo-Saxon cathedral

Grid ref .... TM 309 826

### Date

Ruins of W chamber, nave, apsidal chancel – period A3 or B.

*Taylor*

Ruined church in quadrangular enclosure surrounded by bank and ditch possibly of Roman origin of over four acres, known for centuries as Minster Yard.

Date uncertain. Following features suggest early Anglo-Saxon date:

- a Very hard mortar.
- b Windows taller and wider than usual with late Anglo-Saxon or early Norman.
- c Wide W portals with no rebates or splays: not usual in C12 but common in early Anglo-Saxon churches
- d Proportions of nave similar to early Kentish churches
- e Narrow, single-splay windows occur at JARROW and MONKWEARMOUTH and other early Anglo-Saxon churches
- f Large W portal and porch

Following features suggest late Anglo-Saxon or early Norman date:

- a Unrebated jambs of doorways occur throughout Anglo-Saxon period but more characteristic of late than early Anglo-Saxon.
- b Nave walls unusually thick (but c.f. BRIXWORTH, Northamptonshire).
- c W annexe with very thick walls surely intended to support tower, but early Anglo-Saxon churches did not have towers. Annexe definitely the same date as nave. Such unporch-like W annexes unusual in Anglo-Saxon times

Original church consisted of nave, apse and square, W annexe or possibly tower. Total dimensions exterior 101'5" × 35'. Constructed of flint rubble and very hard mortar (characteristic Anglo-Saxon feature). Interior and exterior faced to depth of about 6" with flints and pebble brought to fairly even finish with mortar. This facing and all salient angles extensively stripped off and used as

building material elsewhere. Remains chiefly on upper part of S wall and W annexe and at all re-entrant angles. Whole outer facings of N and lower W walls removed. Queer feature is put-log holes (holes for wooden scaffolding) – all triangular, tapering slightly inwards, about 8" wide at base. Most lower ones point upwards and upper ones point downwards. Unusually close together vertically: four ranges in height of about 14'. All have coating of mortar but none filled in. Suggested by Howlett that this indicated that building was interrupted by pre-870 Danish raids and never resumed.

### Nave

Internal dimensions 38' × 27'. N, S and E walls 3'10" thick. N wall almost entirely gone except for piece of about 6' at W end, which remains to a considerable height, and W jamb of old window.

More of S wall remaining, including fragments of three window openings. E window remains almost to full height, including part of head. SE corners in better condition than the rest of church; about 3" of salient angles gone, overgrown with ivy, but otherwise in good order. Some original plaster of similar, hard quality as mortar remains. Mortar so good that it has not weathered since exposure through removal of facings and still shows marks of bonding ends of flint facings. No indication of special quoins, only flints and pebbles.

Opening to apse 20'9" wide, square responds of nave wall thickness (3'10"); foundations across full width of opening at higher level than presumed and probably floor level of nave. Opening too wide for single arch to be probable. Foundations suggest triple arcade (cf. ST PANCRAS, Canterbury and other early Kentish churches).

### W chamber

Interior 26' square, walls 4'6" thick, including E wall. Thickening of walls suggests they were intended to carry tower. Exterior walls flush with nave walls, thickening being on interior, indicating axial W tower as at NORTH ELMHAM, Norfolk. Tower inferential: nothing remains above about 14'–15'. E wall has central length of walling about 7'–8' wide, on either side of which was opening with square jambs slightly narrower than the

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central pier, each opening 6'8½" wide. Two window openings in each N and S wall. E one on N and W one on S remain to full height except for a little masonry gone at crowns. Windows 5' high to springs of round-heads and 1'7" wide: sight line of sills about 7' above present ground level. Heads, jambs and sills single-splayed, sill splays flatter than others. At jamb joints, sills retain some of the plaster with which whole surface of openings originally covered: no indications of stone dressings in arch-heads or jambs - what remains is of flint rubble. W wall above about 5' less

despoiled than that below: upper part overhangs lower and is held up by strength of mortar.

Part of jambs and springing of large arched central opening plainly visible in W wall, 6' wide and about 10' high to springing: not splayed, evidently W portal.

**Apse**

Foundations only, except short piece at W end of S wall where it is 3' thick. Apse stilted; internal dimensions 24'5" wide × 21'3" deep.



*Photographs by  
Malcolm Eadmund Dunstall*

