

THE CHURCH OF ST  
MAURICE  
EGLINGHAM  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT  
JUNE 2020



*The church from the north-east*

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## St Maurice Eglingham,

The village of Eglingham is situated 10 km north-west of Alnwick, on the B6346 road to Wooler and close to the head of the Eglingham Burn. The church of St Maurice (NGR NU 1061 1946) lies just off the south side of the single street, near the west end of the village.

### Description

The church is quite a large but low building, consisting of a nave with a west tower and a north-west porch, a small north transept (the Ogle Pew) and a much larger south transept, and a chancel with a vestry and outhouse on the north.

The church is one of the few in Northumberland to have had the benefit of a really detailed description and structural analysis, by H.L.Honeyman in the pages of the Northumberland County History XIV (1935), 366-375 and this is referred to several times in the following account.

The **West Tower** is the best-preserved medieval part of the church, being a relatively unaltered 13<sup>th</sup> century structure. It is built of coursed quite large blocks of sandstone, often almost square. On the south and west a number of blocks have cup-like marks, which may result from musket ball impact. There is a tall chamfered plinth, and a chamfered set-back at mid-height (on north, west and south); there is a chamfered over-sailing course at the base of the parapet, which is pierced by four small holes, at mid-height, on each side; these are of especial interest as they may well be gunloops (cf Biggar, Lanarkshire) . From the wall-tops rises the Welsh-slated spire, with a steeply-gabled lucarne on each face, and an elaborate wrought-iron finial cross.



### Location Map

from Ordnance Survey 1:25000 Explorer map 332  
OS map licence 100045703



*The tower from the west; there is little sign of the former west door removed in the 1850s (bar the line of its porch roof, on either side of the restored lower stage lancet). Note the range of probable gunloops in the parapet.*

The west face of lower stage of the tower has an old lancet window; a doorway below it has been infilled, and is now barely discernible on the external face of the wall although the line of the low-pitched gabled roof of its porch is clearer, cutting across the lancet; higher up, above the chamfered off-set, is a square headed light that appears ancient. On the south just above the plinth is a small square window, apparently chamfered round, now infilled, and higher up, below the mid-height set-back, a chamfered lancet. On the north the tower wall is partly covered by a large buttress set in the angle between tower and the west wall of the nave. The relationship between buttress and tower is interesting as it appears from their footings that the former predates the latter – also the fact that the buttress has chamfered off-sets on its west face implies that it was intended to support the structure to the east rather than the tower to the south. At the foot of the north wall of the tower a slightly-projecting square-edged footing is exposed, which includes a long block with what looks to be crudely-incised lettering, suggesting that it is a medieval grave slab.

On the east side of the tower, above the nave roof, the line of the early west gable of the nave, on which the tower was raised, is clearly traceable; its apex comes just below the southern of the twin chamfered lancets, which are set centrally in all four walls of the belfry.

The tower rises from the west gable of the **Nave**. North of the tower the nave wall is largely covered by the buttress just described, with its present sloping top - of ashlar which looks no older than the 19<sup>th</sup> century - partly concealing a blocked chamfered lancet window set high in the wall, in a position typical of windows lighting a western gallery. The square-edged coping and kneeler to the gable also look 19<sup>th</sup> century work.

On the south of the tower the projecting south-west angle of the nave has a broad chamfered plinth, and a chamfered set back at mid-height on its west face, above which, hard up against the tower is a second blocked gallery light corresponding in position and form with its northern counterpart; coping and kneeler are as on the north. However, immediately to the east is a full-height straight joint with quite different fabric, close-jointed masonry of near-ashlar quality, beyond. The masonry on the west of the straight joint is regular

alternating blocks, very much as at the south-west angle, which would seem to imply that this was the end of a buttress rather than a cut-through nave wall<sup>1</sup>.

In the section of close-jointed masonry are two openings, each with a tall sharply-two centred arch. The first has clearly been a doorway, but now has a window inserted in it – this is of two lancet lights with a circular piercing in the spandrel, and is in yellow ashlar of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century date; the original opening has a moulding of a roll and a deep hollow. The second m which has always been a window, has quite a different moulding, technically a cyma recta and a quarter round; it again has mid-19<sup>th</sup> century yellow ashlar tracery.

The north wall of the nave, between the north transept and the porch, is of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, and is in two bays, divided by a 19<sup>th</sup> century stepped buttress in close-jointed stone. Each bay has a lancet window, at first glance medieval but in fact having a moulded surround of the same section as the eastern window in the south wall, and having its head cut into two inclined blocks. To the west of the western lancet a vertical line of three large blocks look a bit like angle quoining; there are two more large blocks low down at the east end of the wall.

The **North-West Porch** in effect clasps the north-west corner of the nave, and is constructed of hammer-dressed stone with diagonally-tooled ashlar dressings, with a chamfered plinth and clasping buttresses, with gables (both with ashlar copings and wheel-cross finials) to both north and west; there are two moulded strings, one just above the plinth and the other (absent on the east) carried up as a hoodmould over the openings, a moulded doorway on the west and a window of two lancet lights with a circle in the spandrel, on the north. Overall it is a piece of unashamed Victorian Gothic, to be appreciated as such rather than denigrated; was F.R.Wilson of Alnwick the architect?

The **South Transept** is built of grey close-jointed ashlar, and has a chamfered plinth, and paired shallow buttresses rising to sloped caps at around two-thirds the height of the wall, at its southern angles. In its south end is a large four-light window, in form consisting of two sets of paired lancets with a circular piercing with trefoil cusping above, under a larger circle with cinquefoil

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<sup>1</sup> Although this would imply a south nave wall inside the present line, which seem very unlikely ; the early gable incorporated in the east side of the tower seem to relate to a nave of the present width.

cupping, within a chamfered arch in the centre of both east and west walls are two-light windows of similar character, of two lancet lights with a circle over. In all three windows the mullions and tracery seem secondary, in yellow stone; the two in the side walls have their pointed arches cut from only two stones, but the wider arch of that on the south has conventional voussoirs. The south gable has a coping with moulded kneelers and a cross finial.

In the angle between the transept and the chancel is a buttress-like feature (right) with off-sets of swept or ogee section (and thus of post-medieval character); the uppermost is set parallel to the transept wall, but the two lower ones parallel to the chancel. At its base the buttress rests on a length of lower masonry which extends another metre or so to the south, and might be a remnant of an earlier and larger buttress, or even of the east end of a lost south aisle, set c 0.50 m outside the present transept wall.



The **North Transept**, or Ogle Pew, is constructed of close-jointed squared stone. Its east wall, above the vestry roof, is noticeably set well to the east of the east wall of the nave (above the chancel roof); the internal faces of both walls are roughly in line but the transept wall is much thicker. The north gable end (left) has a set-back c 1 m above the ground; below at the west end of the wall is a large block with a pronounced diagonal tooling, which

could be Roman. In the gable is a window of two trefoil-headed lights with a quatrefoil over, under a two-centred arch that has a hoodmould with Maltese-cross terminals. As with the windows on the south of the nave and in the south transept its yellow sandstone tracery looks secondary<sup>2</sup>. Below the window there seem to be traces of a predecessor with its sill set at a lower level; within the blocking of this is a stone with a series of seven drilled holes, and below that a large elongate block that could be the lintel of an opening to a vault.

At the north end of the west wall is a two-centred arched doorway with a continuous sunk quadrant moulding; to the south of it the masonry is irregular, with some very large blocks, and is probably medieval.



The south wall of the **Chancel** (above) is built of roughly-coursed and roughly-shaped stone, in a variety of sizes and colours. The lower section of wall (two courses at the west end but about five to the east, as the ground slopes down) overhangs slightly, and above it is a small set-back, the upper wall rising vertically. The uppermost three courses are of a bluer roughly-tooled stone, and are probably a 19<sup>th</sup>-century heightening. Near the centre of the wall is a priest's door with a shallow three-centred arch, cut into a heavy rectangular lintel, with a double-chamfered surround and a moulded hood with turned-back ends; on either side is a square-headed window of three chamfered round-arched lights, under a similar hoodmould.

<sup>2</sup> A drawing in Wilson (1870) shows it without tracery

The east end of the church appears to be a 19<sup>th</sup> century rebuild, and is of coursed roughly hammer-dressed stone with diagonally-tooled ashlar quoins. Set centrally c 1.5 m above the ground is a small barred opening, perhaps to a vault or crypt, and above that an early-20<sup>th</sup> century window of three cinquefoil-headed lights under a three-centred arch, under a moulded hood with turned back ends. The gable has a square-edged coping on moulded kneelers, and quite an elaborate eight-armed cross finial.

The eastern part of the north wall of the chancel is partly covered by a pent-roofed outbuilding (boiler house), built of squared hammer-dressed stone, which has chamfered square-headed doorways in its east end and at the west end of its north wall, and is divided into two internally by a 20<sup>th</sup> century brick wall. Above the outbuilding roof the chancel wall has a column of 19<sup>th</sup> century stonework associated with a stack, which has an octagonal shaft and a bold moulded cap; as on the south the topmost courses, of bluer stone, are clearly a heightening. Inside

the eastern part of the outbuilding the chancel wall is of courses of large quite square blocks, which Honeyman notes as of 12<sup>th</sup> century character (right). In the western part are what appear to be the jambs of a small blocked window (its head obscured by modern shelving) , with nothing to give a clue as to its date.



The western part of the north wall of the chancel is covered by the pent-roofed **Vestry**, of very similar hammer-dressed stone to the later outbuilding on the east. It had a doorway at the south end of its east wall, now covered by the outbuilding; now blocked, this appears to have been a copy of the priest's door on the south of the chancel (shallow three-centred arch and double-chamfered



surround, and hoodmould); on its lintel, just above the outbuilding roof, is the incised date '1826'. Adjacent to the door on the north, but outside the outbuilding, is a single round-headed light under a square head with a hoodmould with turned-back ends; in the same style is a three-light window near the west end of the north wall.

### **The Interior**

The interior of the **North-West Porch** has exposed stone walls with hammer-dressed stone and tooled ashlar dressings, its twin gables to north and west necessitating a cleverly-contrived arch-braced collar-beam roof with boarding, pierced by geometrical shapes, to the eaves. The inner doorway has a two-centred arch of two continuous orders, the inner with a double and the outer with a single chafer; the door itself, with geometric panels, is a good piece of contemporary woodwork.

The interior of the main body of the church is plastered and whitewashed (except for some exposed dressings, and the east wall of the nave), with a simple panelled dado to the nave. In the nave the north door has a segmental rear arch with a quadrant moulding; the windows all have segmental rear arches, those on the south chamfered, behind plaster. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century tower arch is of two chamfered orders, the outer carried on plain square-section jambs, the inner carried on brackets which have waterleaf capitals and short shafts rising from corbels carved with a cruciform pattern. The arch is now closed by a modern glazed timber doors.

The nave has a roof of seven bays, with collar-beam trusses springing from short wall posts above a moulded wall-plate carried by shaped ashlar corbels, with cusped arch braces below the collars that have upper king-posts and raking struts above them; there are two levels of purlins and a ridge board.

Inside the **Tower** the walls are plastered up to a moulded timber rail which appears to mark the position of a former floor; above this they are of exposed masonry. In the west wall is the internal recess of the former west door, which has a shouldered head in ashlar of earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century character, its extrados cut into by the present sill of the lancet window above it. The only access to the upper parts of the tower is by a vertical metal ladder at the north-west corner. The window at a higher level on the south of the tower has a timber

internal lintel, and a very steep sill, which drops well below the former floor level. On the north at the higher level is a lancet shaped arch, with an external rebate, serving a recess (an aumbry?) in the wall, which it is difficult to closely examine; to the east of it is an area of relatively recent brickwork which seems a little narrow to represent a blocked doorway<sup>3</sup>. At the same level on the east, directly above a horizontal beam, is the chamfered head of a lancet window, cut into a single stone (below) ; the most obvious interpretation of this is that was the west window of the nave, and pre-dates the addition of the tower.



The upper floor of the tower (at around the level of the external set-back) is carried by chamfered oversailing courses on north and south, and east-west beams (supported by a pair of chamfered corbels on east and west walls); both the ashlar work and the stop-chamfered beams and joists look of later-19<sup>th</sup> century character.

(the interior of the upper part of the tower was not examined)

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<sup>3</sup> Wilson's 1870 plan shows a circular stair well within the external buttress here, which seems unlikely but cannot perhaps be totally ruled out.

The arch into the **South Transept** is of shallow segmental form, and of two chamfered orders, the two dying into a single broad chamfer on the jambs. Within the transept the windows in the side walls have shallow segmental rear arches and the larger one in the south end a segmental-pointed rear arch, all with chamfers to their heads only. To the east of the south window is a wall-locker with a credence table beneath it. The transept has a three-bay roof with trusses very similar to those of the nave, except that the upper king-posts have jewelled tops.

The narrower arch into the **North Transept/Ogle Pew**, which has its floor set two steps above that of the nave, is also segmental, and has a single broad chamfer, with moulded bar-stops a voussoir above the springing. The external doorway at the north end of the west wall has a segmental rear arch. In the floor towards the north-east corner lies an early 16<sup>th</sup> century cross slab grave cover to Mark Ogle. The two-bay roof is rather more elaborate than the others in the church, and has an arch-braced collar-beam truss carried on short posts resting on shaped ashlar corbels, carrying a series of wooden bosses with moulded roundels on their soffits.



*Interior looking east, showing the chancel arch*

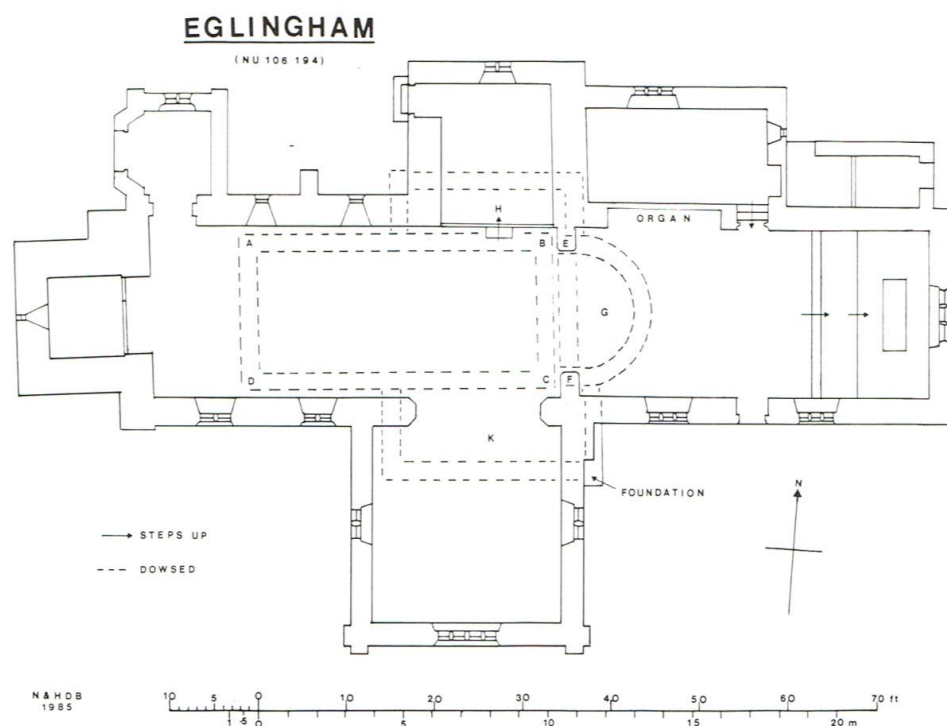
In the east wall of the nave is the **Chancel** Arch, the date of which has aroused some antiquarian speculation, some having identified it as Norman or even Saxon work. It is quite a large arch, roughly semicircular, of a single chamfered order, springing from imposts, chamfered beneath, which are carried on jambs that have a narrow chamfer, and no bases. The voussoirs –a few are through stones- vary in length. It appears that the arch is an insertion in the coursed roughly-shaped stonework of the wall.

On the south of the chancel the priest's door and two windows all have segmental rear arches, and chamfered surrounds, behind plaster. At the west end of the north wall is a large arch to the organ chamber, of segmental-pointed form, with a chamfer stopped at the base of the jambs; alongside it to the east is the door into the vestry, with a very Victorian angular shouldered arch, and again stopped chamfers. Honeyman saw this wall without plaster, and describes some interesting features. East of the vestry door was 'a small opening of uncertain date' and the east respond of a 'very wide low arch'; its form, 'indicated by the line of its defaced hood mould'. Its outline consisted of 'two straight lines connected by curves to its responds' (ie what we might term a 'Tudor' arch); it had been partly destroyed by the organ chamber arch. Above it was 'part of the rear arch of an earlier window which the large arch had cut through'. His plan shows this eastern respond as c 1.6 m east of the vestry door, immediately beyond his 'small opening of uncertain date' which must correlate with the small blocked window visible in the external wall face, from within the outbuilding. Close to the east end of the wall is a plain square-headed recess, behind plaster, not shown on Honeyman's plan and perhaps quite recent. The early-20<sup>th</sup> century east window has exposed ashlar dressings, and a three-centred rear arch with a moulded hood that has turned-back ends.

The chancel has an early-20<sup>th</sup> century wagon roof carried by collar-beam trusses, set on corbels carved with a motif similar to St Cuthbert's pectoral cross.

## Structural History

It is hard to disagree with most of Honeyman's scholarly reconstruction of the building history of the church, although there are one or two points that might be queried. Eglingham is probably a very early ecclesiastical site, and there are medieval records of 'Eagwulfincham' being given to the Lindisfarne community in 737, and of a church there being consecrated by a Bishop Esred (830-845). Honeyman comments that he found a single stone with Roman broaching in the south wall of the chancel – this is now plastered over, but here is a possibly-similar block which he did not notice in the external face of the north wall of the Ogle Pew. Since Honeyman's time a dowsed survey<sup>4</sup> of the building traces the outline of a typical Saxon church, with a nave flanked by broad porticus and an eastern apse, with the south-east corner of the southern porticus still visible as the foundation beneath the buttress in the angle of chancel and south transept.<sup>5</sup>



*Dowsed plan (after Bailey, Cambridge and Briggs 1988)*

<sup>4</sup> Bailey, Cambridge and Briggs Dowsing and Church Archaeology (1988) Intercept, 122-123, 140

<sup>5</sup> In the writer's opinion dowsing remains a very questionable technique; whilst elements of some of the dowsed plans (notably the apse at Woodhorn) have been confirmed by subsequent investigation, others have been shown wanting.

The earliest surviving parts of the present church appear to be parts of the north wall of the chancel (on the strength of the character of its masonry) and the west end of the nave. Honeyman suggests that the north-west buttress of the nave related to a former north arcade. The remaining head of a lancet window, above the tower arch, clearly opened west and thus pre-dates the tower. Then comes the tower, which is very much of 13<sup>th</sup> century character. There is no real evidence now of the next two or three centuries. Honeyman is uncharacteristically vague about the dates the north wall of the nave and the side walls of the Ogle Pew which he sees as 'uncertain, 1300-1533).

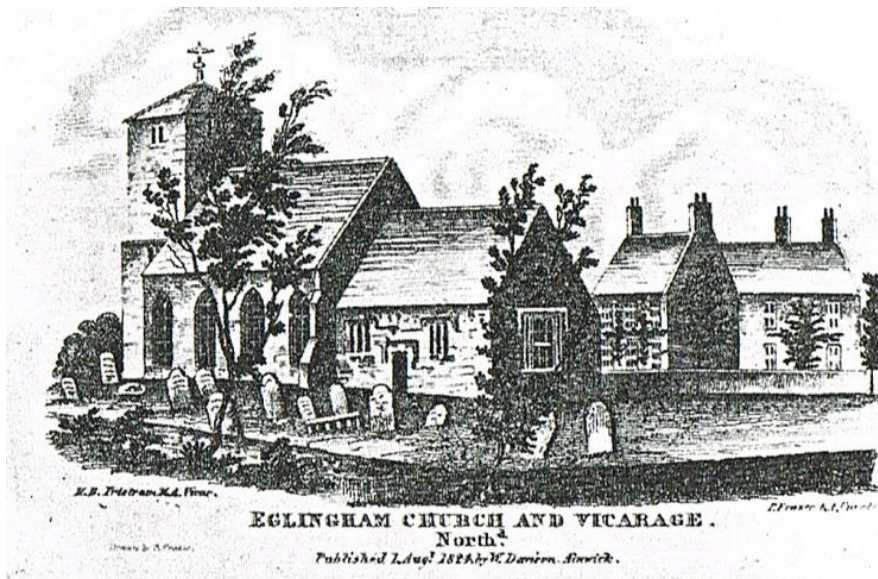
The arch that Honeyman saw in the north wall of the chancel he suggests opened into a chapel founded c1520 by Henry Ogle. One problem here is that there is no trace of this arch on the external face of the wall, exposed inside the 19<sup>th</sup> century outbuilding/boiler house. Admittedly the western part of the outbuilding/boiler house is rather cluttered with fittings – and the eastern respond of the arch might just possibly be concealed by the thin modern cross wall inside the outbuilding - but his interpretation may perhaps be questioned. Could the arch have been that of a broad tomb recess?

Many Northumberland churches suffered damage during the medieval period from Border hostilities, but the two documented events at Eglingham are both really post-medieval, the sacking by the Scots in 1596 and again by General Leslie's Covenanter troops in 1644. It would appear that much of the present building is the result of repair and reconstruction after one or both these calamities. The south wall of the chancel (above its lower courses) looks of late-16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century date, and fits with a reconstruction after the first attack. The north wall of the nave (which Honeyman sees as of uncertain medieval date, with its windows as later 17<sup>th</sup> century insertions) is interesting – a useful parallel that does not appear to have been cited is with the north wall of the nave at Bellingham, which was wrecked by the Scots at a very similar date, in 1597 when the Earl of Buccleugh spoiled the town and church on Fair Day, and the church was used as a centre for defence by the townsfolk<sup>6</sup>; it still lay in ruins in 1610, but seems to have been repaired soon afterwards. The

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<sup>6</sup> Brooke, C (2000) Safe Sanctuaries: Security and Defence in Anglo-Scottish Border Churches 1290-1690, John Donald, 126

tower parapet seems to have been reconstructed, with its probable gun loops. The old north aisle (evidenced by remains of its arcade) was lost, and replaced by a thick wall with lancet windows which almost exactly parallel the work at Eglingham, where there may have been a very similar story. In construction the windows at Bellingham and Eglingham (below) are almost identical – their heads are cut in two inclined slabs – but whereas at Bellingham their surrounds are chamfered, here they have the same simple Classical moulding as seen in the much larger windows on the south of the nave, which is of thinner and of much better-quality close-jointed stone. The Ogle Pew has thick walls as well (although of better quality stone) and may be of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century as well; as Honeyman suggests, it may have been vaulted. Honeyman is uncertain about the date of the south nave wall; he sees similarities with late-18<sup>th</sup> century Gothic work (as at Fowberry Tower) but also wonders whether it could be earlier, and perhaps of well. 1653 when it is recorded the nave was re-roofed - this would ally with a rather belated reconstruction after the 1644 destruction. The earlier north nave lancets might possibly have been given their mouldings at this date as well.



*1824 Davison print of the church, before the addition of the South Transept and the rebuilding of the east end.*

From this we come with some relief to more recent changes to the fabric which are all fairly well documented. New sashes were put in the windows in 1779, and 1826 the chancel was restored and the vestry built. At some stage a ‘great gloomy gallery’<sup>7</sup> (Wilson) gallery had been inserted in the west part of the nave, accessed by a stair in the tower and lit by the two small windows high in the west wall of the nave,<sup>8</sup>. According to Honeyman the Rev. Henry J. Maltby (who became vicar in 1837) and his successors ‘devoted their energies to turning a valuable post-medieval building into a sham medieval one’, the architect John Green of Newcastle being employed to re-roof the church, reconstruct the gable ends and a little later to add the south transept. Between 1853 and 1870 the nave windows received their 13<sup>th</sup>-century type tracery, and the doorway in the west wall of the tower (thought to be no great age) was replaced by the present north-west porch<sup>9</sup>. The pyramidal roof of the tower was replaced by the present slated spire. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the east window was replaced, and the present chancel ceiling constructed.

### **Archaeological Assessment**

This is an important church that potentially stands upon a very early site, and its surviving fabric, albeit much-altered, retains evidence of a complex medieval and post-medieval history. Further evidence must survive beneath its floors, although structural remains will no doubt have been impacted both by generations of burial and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century creation of an underfloor heating system (a system of underfloor ducts seems to underlie the whole church). There is almost certainly a vault beneath the Ogle Pew, probably of early post-medieval date, and if the opportunity arises this would merit recording. Any proposed works which entail disturbance of floors will require archaeological monitoring, as will any that entail removal of wall plaster, both to record earlier platers and possible remains of mural decoration, or, in the chancel (which was bare of plaster in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century) to make a proper record of the structural features, observed by Honeyman (but not, apparently, drawn or photographed) .

**Peter F Ryder June 2020**

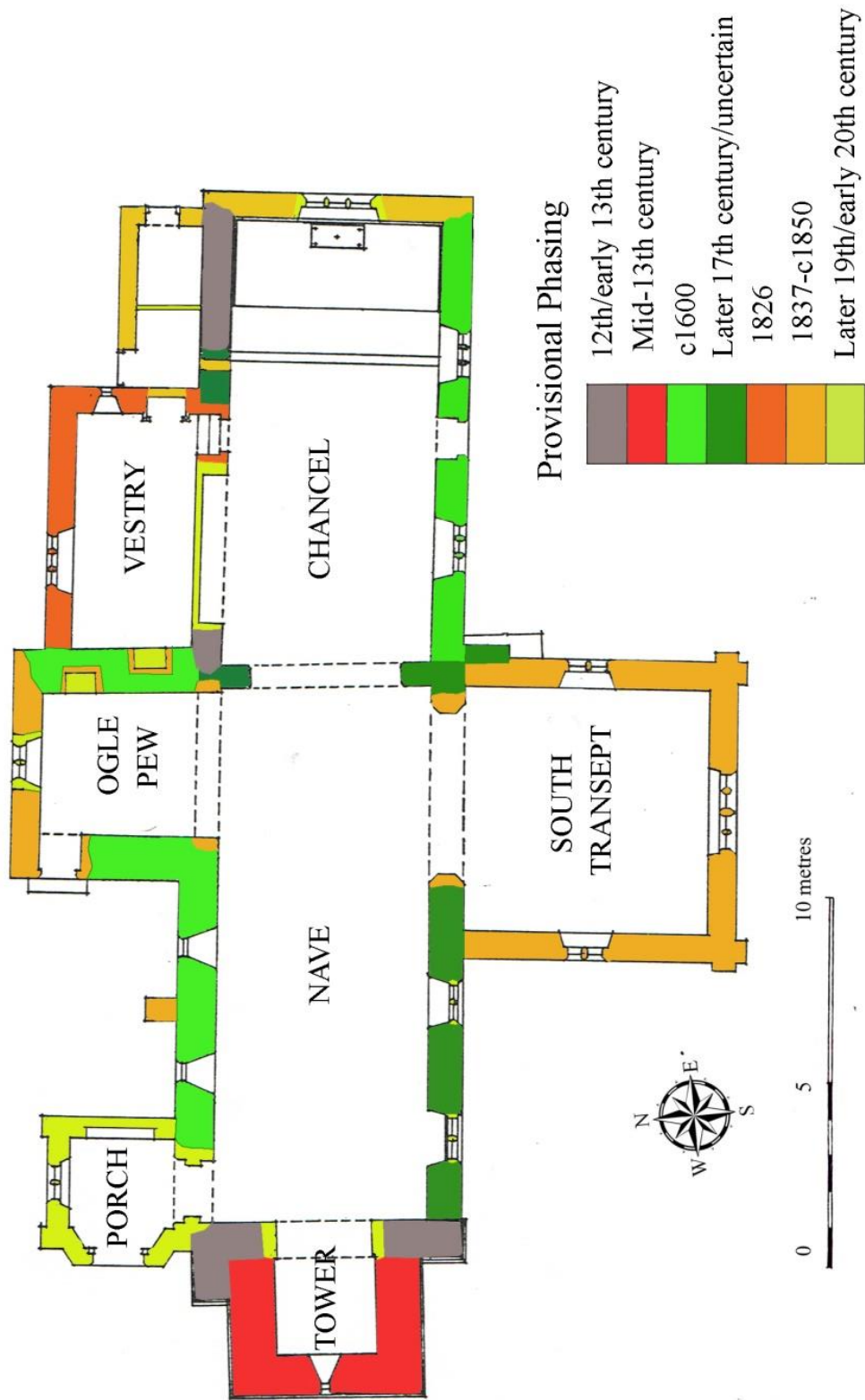
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<sup>7</sup> F.R.Wilson (1870) *Churches of the Archdeaconry of Lindisfarne*, 83.

<sup>8</sup> Honeyman states that the northern of these was inserted by John Green in his restoration, citing a reference in the churchwardens’ accounts, balancing the one on the south of the tower which he saw as a genuine 13<sup>th</sup> century feature. I suggest he is in error here; both windows look identical, and of early 19<sup>th</sup> century character.

<sup>9</sup> Possibly the two-centred archway, with the same moulding as the nave windows, now set in the churchyard wall west of the tower.





Plan H L Honeyman amended PFR