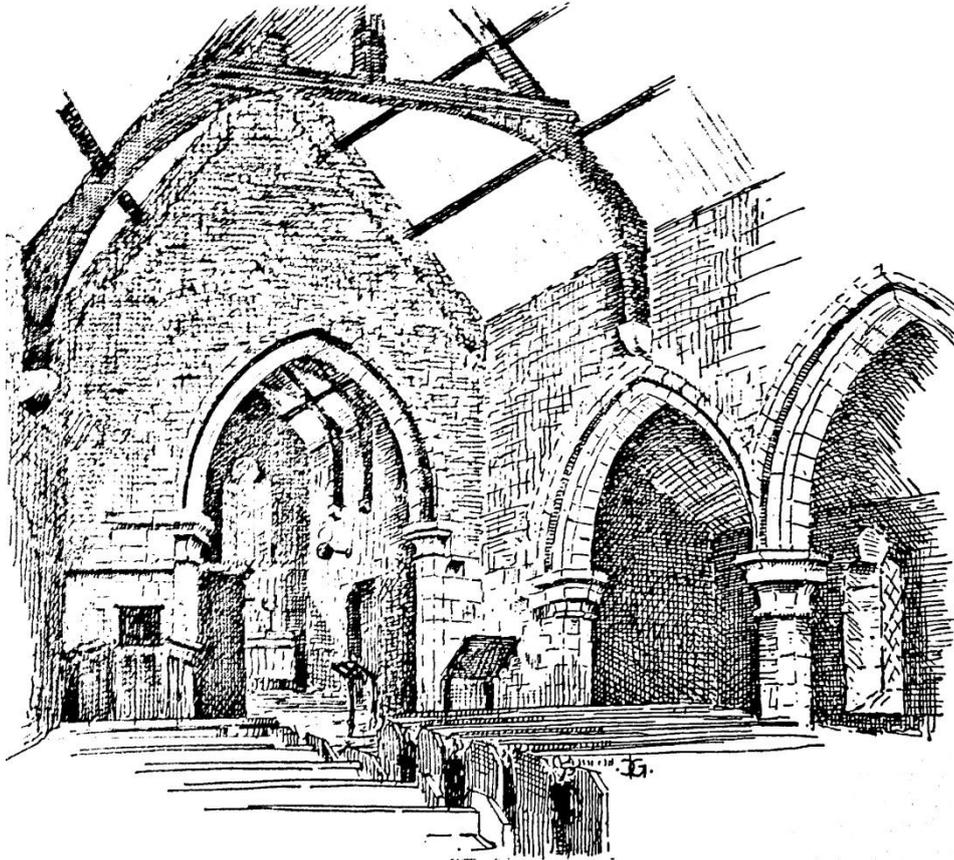


St Mary and St Michael, Doddington

An Archaeological Assessment

August 2017



DODDINGTON CHURCH: INTERIOR LOOKING WEST.

PETER F RYDER

B.A., M.Phil, F.S.A

HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSULTANT

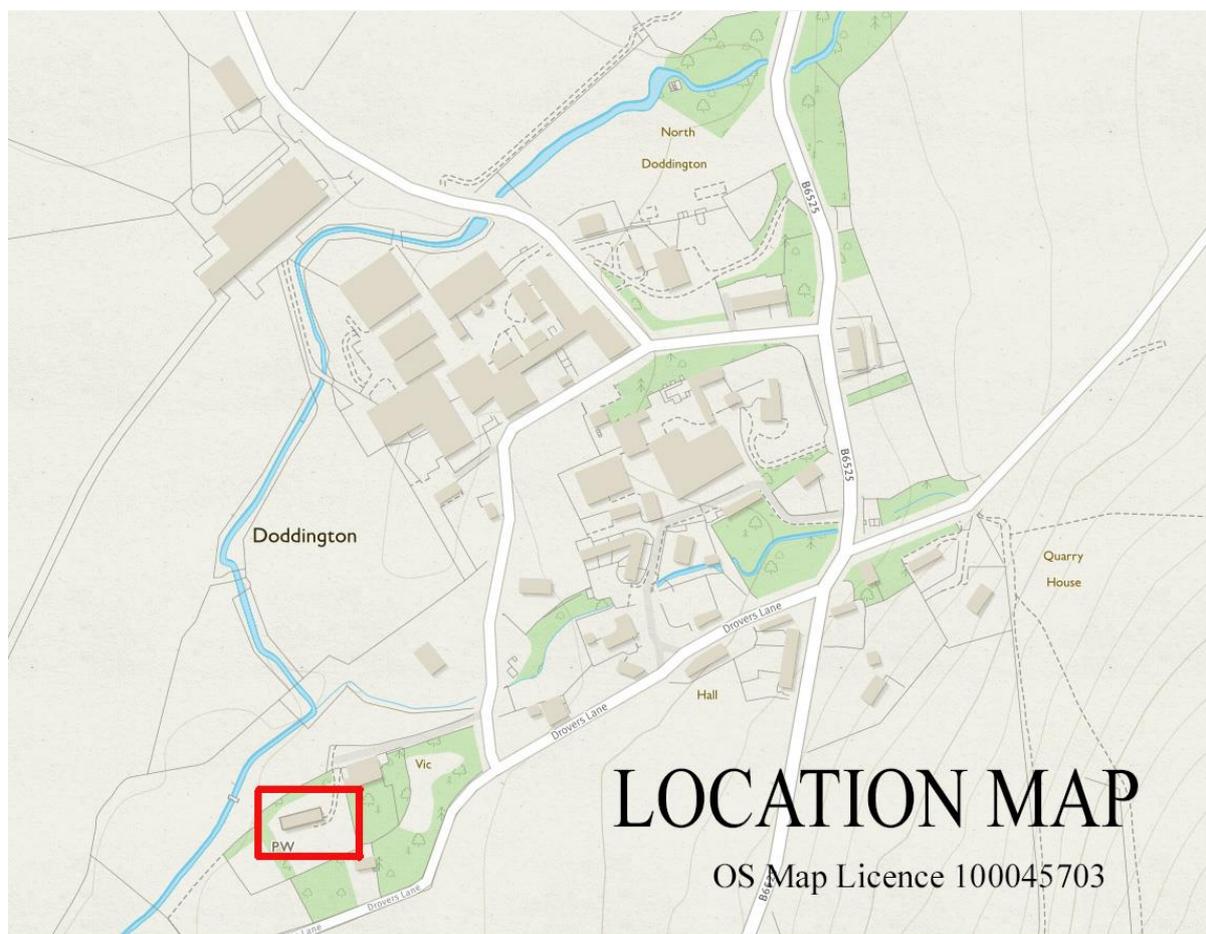
**1 Ford Terrace
Broomhaugh
RIDING MILL
Northumberland
NE44 6EJ**

**Tel (01434) 682644
E mail: PFRyder@broomlee.org**



St Mary and St Michael, Doddington

The ancient parish church of St Mary and St Michael lies to the south-west of the village of Doddington, about 300 m west of the B6525 road, just off the old drove road (now Drovers Lane) which runs south-west from the village down to the River Till, and 360 m south west of Doddington Bastle, the 1584 stronghouse built by Sir Thomas Grey. Until 1870 the church was a chapel of Chatton; there is only one known medieval reference to it (and that by implication) in 1236; the first recorded curate, John Frere, is mentioned in 1578¹



The long axis of church is orientated 15 degrees to the north of east, and it stands towards the north side of a trapezoidal churchyard, which has a watch house of 1826 at its south-east corner, and the Old Vicarage to the east.

¹ Historical references from [Northumberland County History](#) XIV (1935) , 143 et seq.

Description

The church consists of a baptistery (into which the south porch opens), a nave with a three-bay north aisle, and a chancel with a north vestry. In many ways it is a fairly conventional building, bar one, and in that it is virtually unique; its orientation is the reverse of normal, with the chancel being at the west end and the baptistery at the east. Whether or not this is an original arrangement remains unclear; this will be discussed in the 'Structural Development' section. The walls are largely of coursed sandstone, and the present roofs of Welsh slate.



South-east view

The **Nave** (which has no external divisions from the chancel to the west) is built of squared and coursed sandstone. The south wall has three windows, from west to east a single lancet, then a double lancet, both with dressings of smooth late 19th-century ashlar, then a broader lancet of earlier 19th century date; it has a hoodmould chamfered above and below, and a steeply sloping sill that projects from the wall face. Below and slightly to the east of the western lancet the lower jambs of a doorway are visible, infilled with slightly more elongate blocks than those in the wall fabric; there are areas of pecked

stone around the western and central windows. A chamfered plinth appears on the western third of the wall.

Very little of the north wall of the nave is exposed externally, except a short step between the aisle roof and the nave eaves; at the north-east corner some roughly shaped quoins are visible, showing that the aisle is secondary.

The west wall of the nave is not exposed at all externally, the roof now extending unbroken over nave and chancel. However the east wall rises above the roof of the adjacent baptistery, with a slab coping, and is topped by a gabled bellcote with a stepped and chamfered base below an opening with a chamfered pointed arch. The gable coping rises to the square base of a finial cross, now fallen²

The **North Aisle** has quite a low outer wall with three 19th-century lancet windows. The wall itself clearly incorporates fabric of different dates. There is an irregular plinth or projecting footing towards the east end, above which the lower wall is of large squared blocks (250 to 300 mm high) up to an intermittent set back which steps down a little below the sill of each lancet.

This is of slight projection except to the west of the western lancet, where it widens to c 250mm and has a roughly-chamfered top. There is also a higher offset between the north-east corner and the eastern lancet, of c 50 mm, c 600 mm below the eaves.

The east end of the aisle (right) is again structurally complex. It has a large chamfered plinth, ending in a ragged break a little short of the north-eastern corner, and further south the remains of an upper plinth, again chamfered. Both plinths



² This was a 19th-century one of bracelet form, and pieces of it lie on a nearby table tomb, along with a couple of fragments of a second similar cross which might be older.

appear to overlap, rather than butt up against, the north-east quoins of the original nave. The wall above is of coursed roughly-tooled stone, with pecked 19th-century stone in its upper courses, with no real sign of the blocked window visible internally.

The west end of the aisle is concealed by the late-19th century vestry.

The present **Chancel** is constructed of coursed and squared sandstone, often purple or brown in colour. There is no clear distinction between the south wall of nave and chancel; the junction between the two came in line with the west wall of a demolished early-19th century porch, the roofline of which remains visible, although the blocks of which the chancel is constructed seem generally to be longer than those of the nave, which are often of the squarish form typical of 12th-century fabric.



Chancel and west part of nave seen from the south. Highlighted in red the roof-line of the 1839-1893 south porch, and the jambs of the medieval south door

The south wall of the chancel has two lancet windows, with simple chamfered surrounds. The western seems thoroughly medieval, the eastern is of 19th-century stone bar its head, and is cut across by the roof-line of the vanished porch; the area occupied by the porch is infilled in coursed pecked stoned of 19th century character.

The west end of the chancel is a mix of two fabric types, red sandstone (most of the central section) and grey (both corners); the upper part of the gable is of pecked 19th-century stone. There is a single central lancet window, in part old, although the uppermost three blocks of each jamb are Victorian ashlar, indicating a heightening of the opening. The head is cut into a single large block with canted upper corners.

The north side of the chancel has a blocked doorway with a two-centred arch, that has a rounded arris to jambs and head; its eastern jamb comes close to the added vestry, but the blocks of its western do not course in well with the adjacent walling, suggesting it might be an insertion. There also seems to be a discontinuity between the north-western quoins and the coursing of the wall – it is not clear whether this is a result of two different phases of work, or a repair occasioned by structural failure.

The **Vestry** on the north of the chancel is of coursed and pecked stone. The short east wall has a shoulder-headed doorway, chamfered round, and the north gable a central lancet window. The west wall has a small boiler room built against it (partly below ground and gained by a flight of steps on the south) and from the eaves above rises quite a tall ashlar stack. All this is of late 19th century date.

The **Baptistry** was built, as a chancel, in 1839; it is recorded that earlier foundations were uncovered at the time, and that the new structure was built on the footings of the original side walls, to two-thirds of its original length. The walls above are of squared and coursed pecked stone. The south and east walls have lancet windows, very like that at the west end of the south wall of the nave, the west jamb of that in the south wall being almost covered by the east wall of the adjacent porch. The coped east gable has a cross fleury finial. One course of large blocks, which look like a cut-back plinth and are presumably medieval, survives over the central part of the south wall, and there is a curious straight joint between c 1 and 2 m above ground level between the south-eastern quoins and the main part of the wall. In the lower part of the east wall, up to the level of the sill of the east window, are five courses of old squared stone; the Northumberland County History plan notes 'old facing stones to sill level' which seem to imply that they are re-used. Towards the north end of the wall a rough square plinth appears.

A chamfered plinth, clearly medieval, runs most of the length of the north wall (seeming to disappear at the west end) with above its eastern section a course of large squared blocks, above which is a chamfered offset (in cement) and then two or three courses of old stone below the pecked 19th-century fabric of the upper wall; there are no openings.

The **Porch** covers the western part of the south wall of the baptistery; it is built of squared pecked stone, with a chamfered plinth, and has a small single-step buttress at the south end of each side wall. The outer arch is of two-centred form, with a single broad chamfer to the jambs, but a triple chamfer to the head. The coped gable rises to a cruciform-plan finial with a trefoiled arch, topped by a roll moulding.

The Interior

The internal walls of the **South Porch** are of exposed stone; two medieval cross slabs are built into the west wall and one into the east. The roof is of common rafters, with collars and ashlar to the eaves. The inner door is similar to the outer arch, but has two rather than three chamfers to its arch; internally it has a taller segmental-pointed rear arch.

The internal walls of the **Baptistery**, into which the porch opens, are plastered, with scriptural texts painted in a frieze just below the eaves; the windows on south and east have plain pointed rear arches, plastered over.

The Baptistery opens to the **Nave** by a tall and broad arch of segmental-pointed form; this is a 19th-century reconstruction of a medieval opening, the jambs of which survive, of plain square section, made up of large blocks³; the top 0.6 m of each jamb is clearly 19th century as are the grooved and chamfered ashlar imposts, and the hoodmould, but the voussoirs of the arch itself, with a bold roll to each lower angle, look for the most part old.

The south wall of the nave has areas of well squared and lightly-tooled blocks, characteristic of 12th-century work, with 19th-century pecked stonework around the windows. On the north is the three-bay arcade, of two-centred double-chamfered arches, carried on octagonal piers with moulded capitals,

³ The NCH account (p.147) states 'the rude massive responds ... resemble eleventh century work' and state that the original arch was only ten feet high.,

and similar semi-octagonal responds. The eastern respond has a moulded base; little of the bases of the two piers or the western respond are exposed, which would appear to have been at a rather lower level, and to be badly decayed or else partly cut away. The wall fabric above the arcade is of roughly-coursed quite irregular stone, more like the internal north wall of the aisle than the other wall faces in the church.



Looking east from the nave into the present chancel

The west wall of the nave contains the arch into what is now the chancel, a lofty opening of two-centred form, set noticeably north of centre. The arch is of two chamfered orders, without a hood, and springs from semi-octagonal responds with capitals of similar section to those of the arcade; no bases are exposed. On the south the impost, chamfered beneath, is carried back to the south-west corner of the nave, but on the north the impost block is thinner and the chamfer narrower, and stops short of the corner. The Northumberland County History account interprets the southern impost as being a 12th-century feature, a relic of an early tower arch, re-cut in the 13th century but this is perhaps questionable. Below the impost the wall thins back, on both faces of both responds, with a hollow-chamfered course, reducing the width of the respond from c 0.74 m to 0.52 m. The wall above the arch is of coursed stone, with a preponderance of squarish blocks, suggesting that 12th century fabric is extant, into which the arch has been inserted. A range of small sockets around 1m below the apex of the arch must relate to a post-medieval nave ceiling; higher up there is a cut for an older roofline a little below the present one.

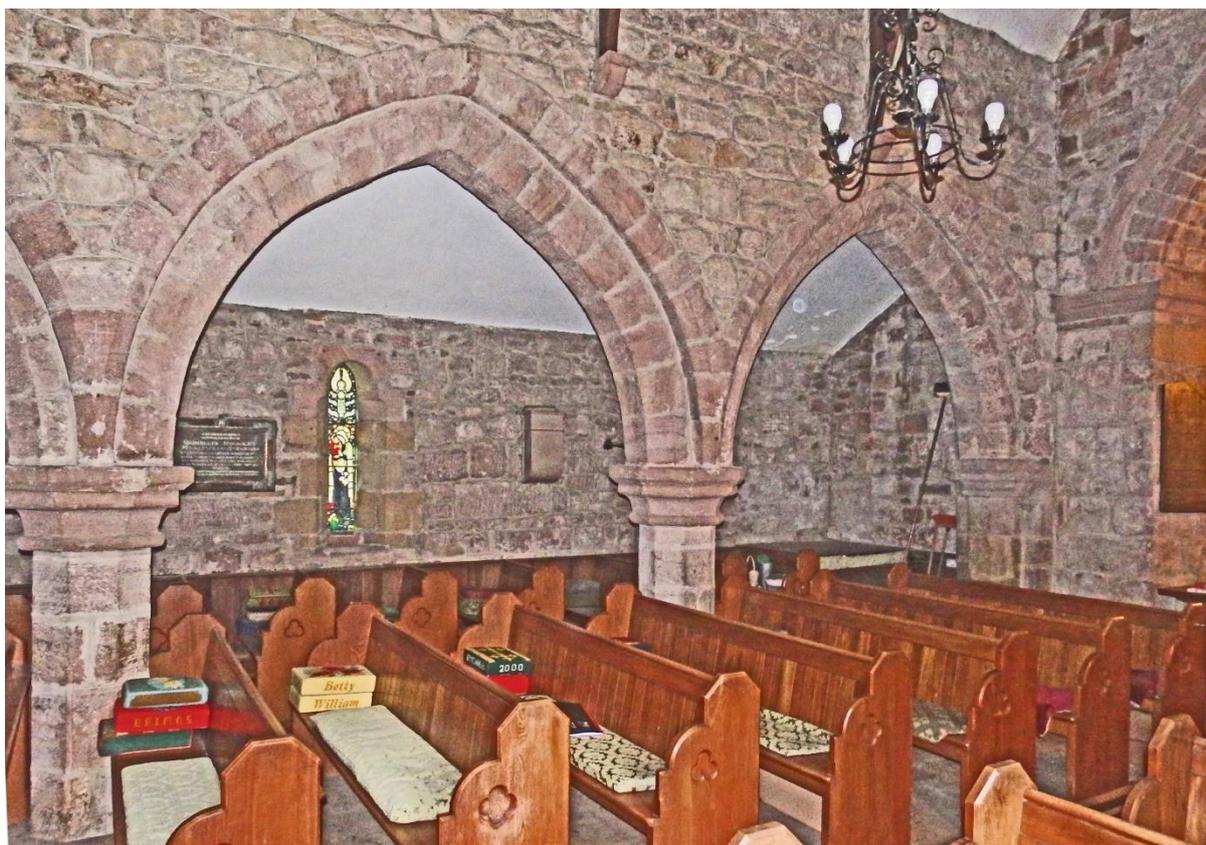
Towards the present chancel the western face of the arch is very similar to the eastern. There are more sockets for a ceiling, but in this case well above the head of the arch, and obvious wear from bell ropes used when the bell-cote was set on top of this wall.

On the south of the chancel are two lancet windows, both with unusual round-headed cusped rear arches; there is a similar opening in the west gable.

Towards the west end of the north wall is a square-headed recess, formed within the rear arch of the blocked doorway visible externally, and then a pair of late-19th century shoulder-arched openings, a doorway to a vestry and a window into it.

Within the **North Aisle** there are traces of blocked windows in each end wall; the three late-19th century lancets in the north wall have trefoiled rear arches copied from those in the chancel.

Inside the **Vestry** the walls are plastered except on the east. The southern part of this wall is formed by the west end of the aisle; some of its angle quoins are visible but no sign of the blocked window visible on the other face of the wall.



The central and eastern arches of the north arcade

The roof structure of the church is all of 19th-century date; the nave has a five-bay roof, and the chancel/western chamber one of four, the trusses all being similar, of collar-beam form with curved feet to the principals, which rest of ashlar corbels; the collars are halved in from the east, and carry upper king posts; there is a ridge and two levels of purlins. The baptistery roof is of three bays, and has arch-braced collar-beam trusses.

Structural History

This is an intriguing building, and not one easy to make sense of. The earlier development of the building must be deduced from an examination of the fabric, from which it appears that the nave walls and lower portions of the side walls of the present baptistery represent a two-cell church perhaps of the early-12th century, with the baptistery representing a conventional eastern chancel. The lower jambs and at least some of the voussoirs of the arch survive, although this was reconstructed in 1839 as a taller opening with a pointed head, when it was almost certainly semicircular in its original form.

It appears as if this church was extended in the 13th century, by the addition of a north aisle and an unusual western chamber the full width of the nave, but separated from it by a transverse arch which seems to have been inserted in the old west wall. The function of the western chamber remains unknown; if it was simply an extension to the nave why was there an arch opening into it? The Northumberland County History account suggests that there was an earlier tower here, on the grounds that the southern impost was identified as 12th-century work, but this seems doubtful. Whilst the impost is a heavier block than that on the north, the treatment of the wall below it – with oversailing hollow-chamfered course on both faces – and would seem an unlikely modification if earlier fabric above were being retained in situ; in addition the wall seems too thin to have supported a 12th-century tower. It has also been suggested that the western chamber may have been intended to be defensible, but there is no evidence of this – unless the later walling-up of the arch recorded in an early-19th century account and shown on Bonomi's c1836 plan was prompted by a need for security. The western chamber, now divided from the nave, became the burial vault of the local St Paul family.

The north aisle also poses problems. Whilst its present north wall is clearly of some age, at least in its lower courses, the 19th-century Proctor MS⁴ explicitly states that the church had had 'a double nave (mutilated, as it still is, in width of half its northern wing or aisle)'. The 16-foot (4.87 m) width quoted for the original aisle is another puzzle - this would make the aisle as wide as the present nave, which would be highly unusual in a medieval church, especially one of a remote village in 13th century Northumberland⁵. There is some evidence that the east wall of the aisle, with its plinths, might once have extended further north. A dowsed plan of the church⁶ does show what is either an even wider north aisle (5.8 m) feet or perhaps a separate rectangular

⁴ Copy in Northumberland County Archive. It refers to the 'present incumbency' which appears to be that of the Rev Proctor, installed in 1834, and is probably the work of his son, another William..

⁵ Wilson (1870) quotes the aisle as 16 feet wide, but this is clearly a misprint for 6 feet, as his plan shows the aisle as it is now. Is this error the source of the figure?

⁶ Bailey, Cambridge & Briggs (1988) Dowsing and Church Archaeology, 137.

structure 3.6 m wide, the same length as and the present aisle and overlapped by its north wall⁷.

Parallels with other village churches in northern Northumberland suggest that the building is likely to have suffered badly during the long period of the Scottish wars, when many buildings lost aisles and transepts, although as often no documentary record of this period has survived. The earliest reference relating to the structure seems to be one of 1727 when Archdeacon Thorpe ordered the repair of the thatch, then between 1763 and 1771 Archdeacon John Sharpe ordered that a new sash window be made in the east wall. More recent sources shed valuable light on the church as it stood before its 19th-century restorations. The Proctor MS provides a description before the 1839 works carried out by the architect Ignatius Bonomi, during the incumbency of the Rev William Procter who was installed in 1834. It refers to the chancel as having been demolished 'although there were men living who recalled its walls standing'; masons demolishing the nave east wall found a low round arch which was 'unhappily quite demolished before Mr Procter saw it' and it had only stood 10 foot above the then floor⁸ Prior to the first restoration the nave floor had been either 3 or 4 feet below its later level, and the western arch had been 'closed up with rude masonry having a square door with steep steps leading down to the mutilated portion of the church reserved for service' (ie the nave). The nave was lit by three square-headed sash windows and one on the east, and the north aisle – which is stated as having been reduced at some time from 16' (4.87 m) to 6'6" (1.98 m) in width – had a casement window at each end. All this is shown on Bonomi's 1836 plan. In the restoration the nave floor was raised 3' and the bellcote moved from the cross wall above the western arch to the west end.

The blocking of the western arch was removed, integrating the western chamber once more with the main body of the nave and a new porch, with twin entrances for parishioners and vicar, was constructed on the south side of

⁷ It also shows two earlier phases of the chancel, a short one with a narrower eastern apse, and one a third longer than at present, which tallies with 19th-century accounts of the foundations seen in 1839 – although the dowser may conceivably have known of this. The writer is not convinced by this technique.

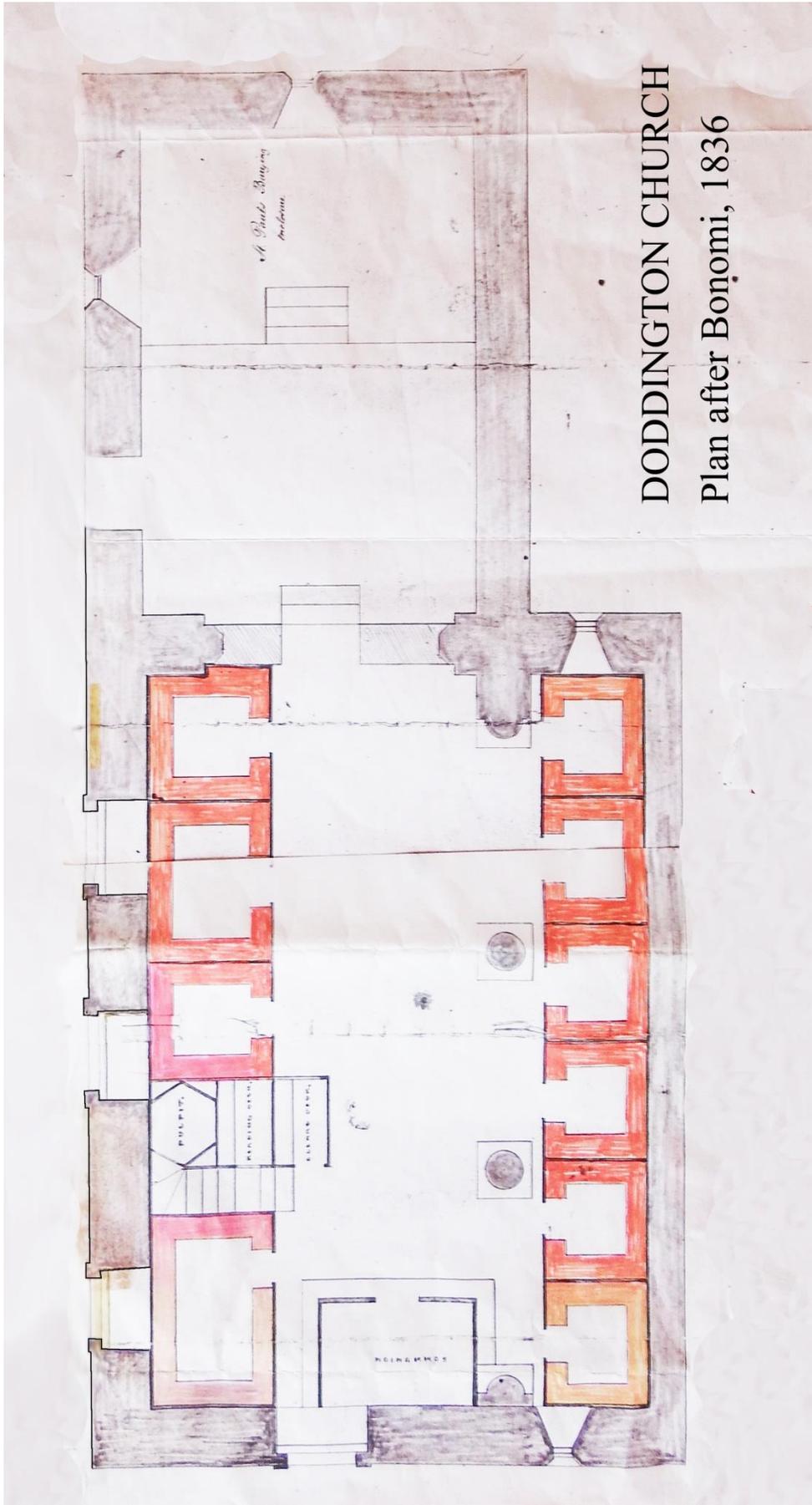
⁸ This is difficult to understand, given the width of the arch indicated by the present jambs, which look to be in situ. Had a narrower and lower arch been inserted between them?

the western chamber, and the bellcote was moved from the cross wall between nave and western chamber to the west end. Within the western chamber a raised area was left at the west end, above the St Paul vault, and this was provided with railings and housed the font⁹. The three sash windows on the south of the nave were replaced with lancets.

Lack of funds only allowed chancel to be rebuilt to two-thirds of its original length, and there were plans to extend it in 1866 and 1888, but they never came to anything. When Mr Lazenby was vicar in 1893 a second restoration took place, and it was then that the building was re-orientated; the Rev Lazenby and his architect argued that the medieval building had its chancel at the west end, and rather surprisingly succeeded in convincing the authorities, although there was local opposition, partly due to the fact that the burial vault of the St Paul family would now be sealed off beneath the re-sited altar. A new vestry was built on the north of the western chamber-now-become chancel, the bellcote was moved a second time, now to the east end of the nave, and the 1839 porch was replaced by one on the south of the former chancel-now-baptistery. Two of the 1839 nave windows were replaced by a taller lancets, paired in one case, and three new lancets were inserted in the north wall of the aisle, previously windowless.

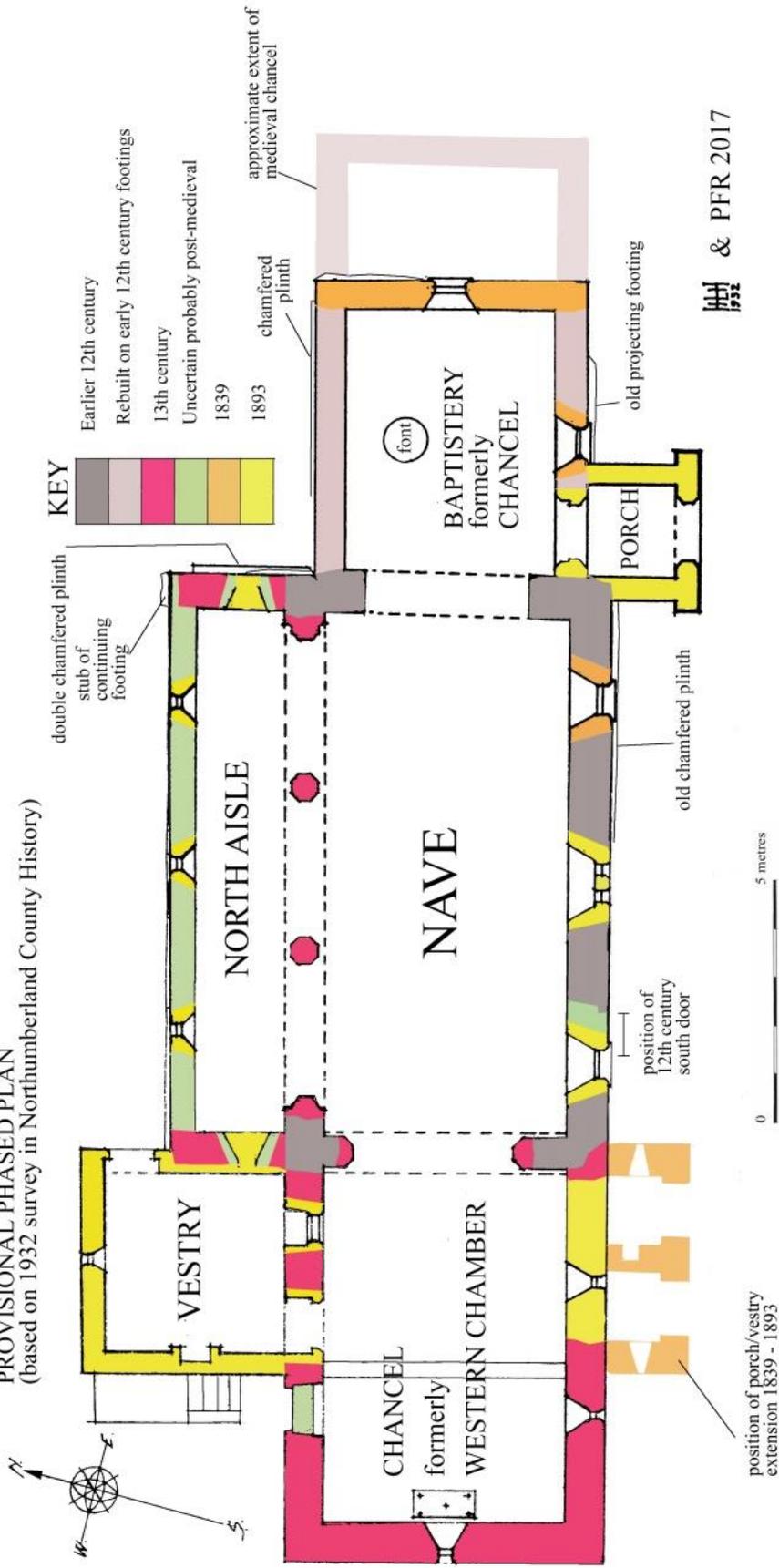
It is not easy to square every detail of the documentary records with the fabric visible today. For instance, the nave floor is said to have been raised 3 or 4 feet, but the base mouldings of the eastern respond of the aisle arcade are still exposed, as is part of the external plinth of the south wall, which one would expect to have been near floor level; perhaps piers and responds had tall plinths. The original chancel arch poses some problems as well; in its original form it is recorded that its apex would have only cleared the (then) floor by 10 feet, but presuming that its responds, over 3 m apart, are still in situ, then it is difficult to see how such a wide arch could be so low. Only a few stones of the original arch are said to have survived the demolition – but the majority of the present voussoirs look old and weathered in contrast to the Victorian ashlar of the imposts and hoodmould.

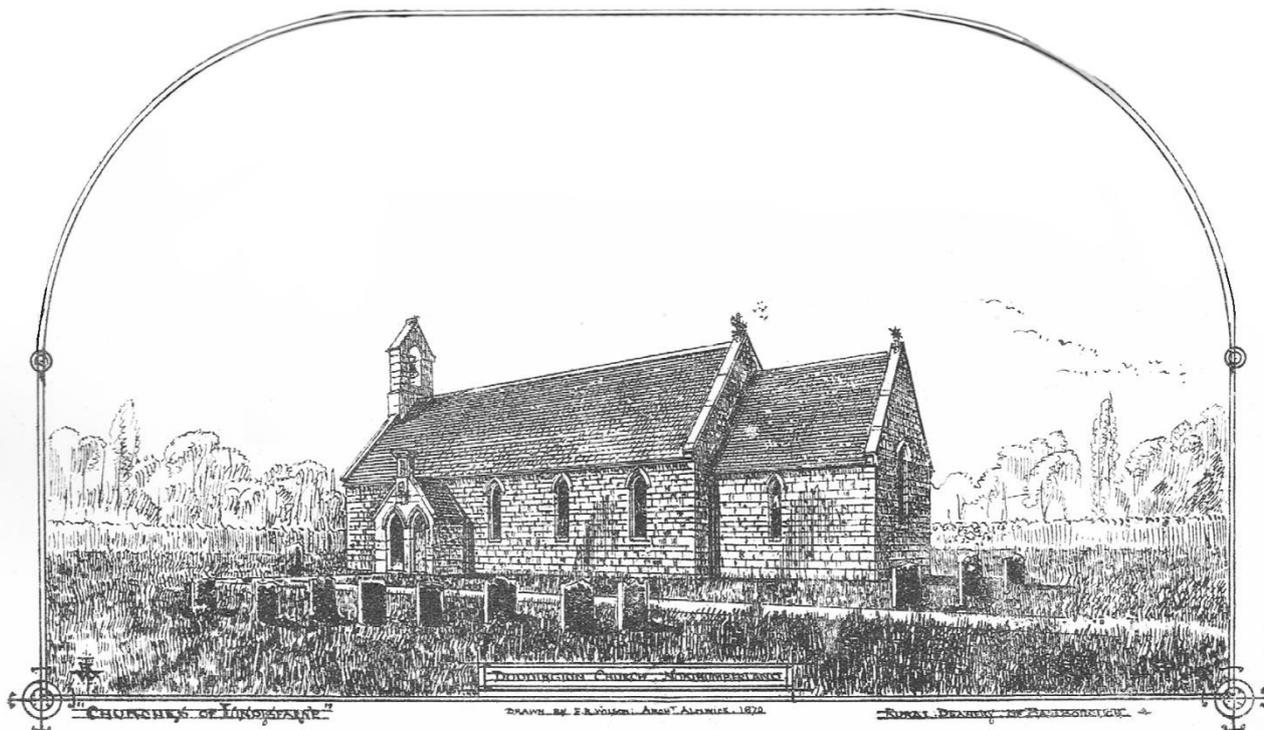
⁹⁹⁹ As can be seen in drawings in F.R.Wilson (1870) *The Churches of the Archdeaconry of Lindisfarne*



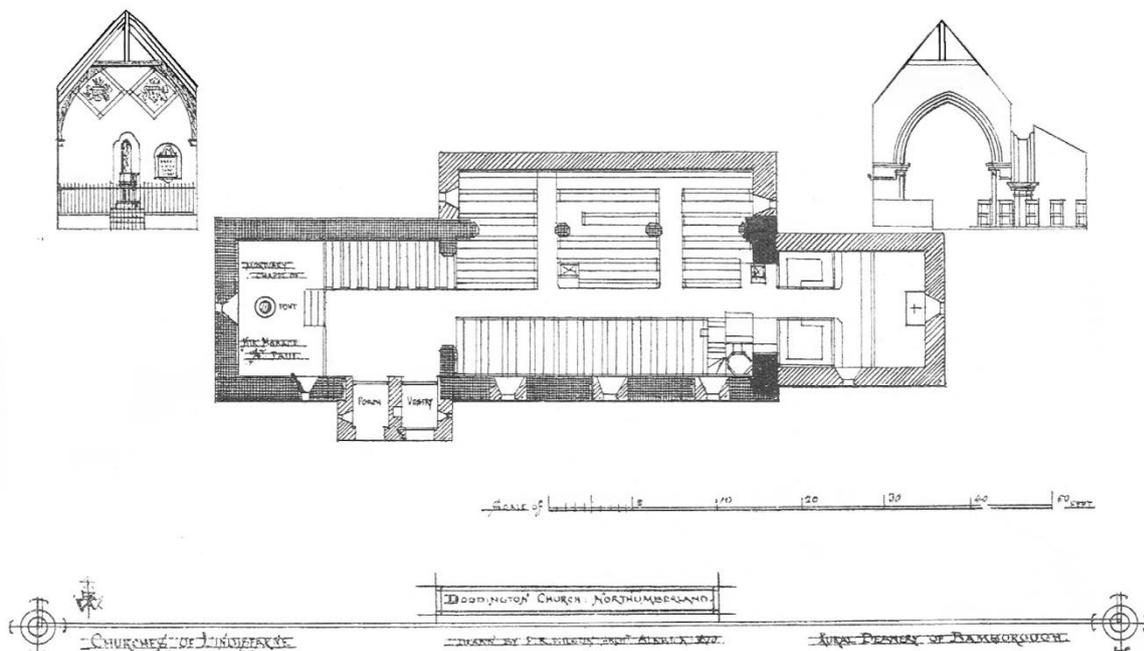
ST MARY AND ST MICHAEL, DODDINGTON

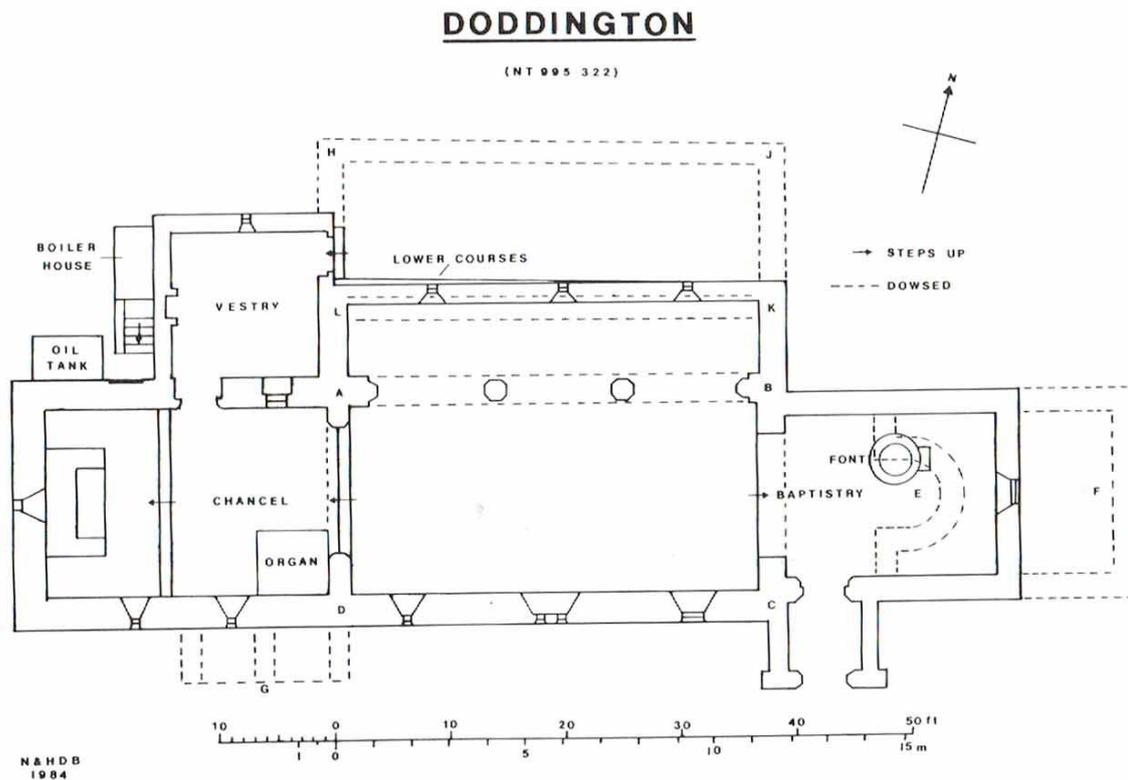
PROVISIONAL PHASED PLAN
(based on 1932 survey in Northumberland County History)





Drawing and Plan of the church as it stood in 1870, after F.R. Wilson





Dowsed Plan after Bailey, Cambridge and Briggs (1988)

Archaeological Assessment

This is an unusual and interesting church which poses several unanswered questions. The walls of its medieval parts are all now bare of plaster, so remains of medieval wall coverings and paintings have probably gone; nevertheless their fabric is of considerable interest, and any works which disturb it will require archaeological motoring. This is also true of any works that disturb the floors. The St Paul burial vault underlies the present altar, and is presumably of post-medieval date, but it could be that there are earlier remains here; a reason for the mysterious western chamber-now-chancel remains to be sought, and it could have had a funerary function. In the nave there is good documentary evidence that the floor has been raised by a metre or so, although it is difficult to tally this

with the visible evidence relating to the level of the bases of the arcade (or at least the eastern respond) base mouldings, and the plinth of the south wall visible externally. There is also some question as to the original width of the north aisle, but here evidence is probably to be sought outside the building, as it is at the east end where it is known that the 1839 chancel (now baptistery) was only rebuilt to two-thirds of the length of its medieval predecessor. In short, archaeological vigilance needs to be extended to the churchyard around the building. The profile of the ground here suggests that the surface has been lowered to assist in drainage and it is possible that medieval structural remains survive at shallow depth, so again any proposed ground works will need to be accompanied by, at the least, an archaeological watching brief.

Although strictly separate from the church, the 1826 Watch House at the south-east corner of the churchyard is a building of considerable interest in itself, and currently in poor condition, It would merit a proper archaeological recording, especially if a programme of repair/conservation becomes possible.

Quite a number of the medieval cross slab grave covers recorded from Doddington (admittedly as long ago as the 1880s) have now 'gone missing' and may be buried – when last seen they lay outside the east end of the church. It is interesting to read that they were found in the 19th century at a depth of around two feet, which was taken as evidence of a general rise in ground level due to continued burial, although it could be argued that, with the decay of buried coffins and the usual processes such as worm action, the stones may have sunk rather than the ground surface risen. It is possible that modern geophysical investigation might reveal buried monuments.

Peter F Ryder August 2017

Appendix 1. Medieval Cross Slabs at Doddington¹⁰

- (1) Tapered slab of reddish sandstone built into internal face of west wall of porch. Cross head with fleur-de-lys terminals, the leaves linking to enclose heart-shaped 'bracelets', carved in relief in sunk circle. Remainder of design incised: cross shaft, with fleur-de-lys at top, rising from stepped base with sword on l. Thirteenth or fourteenth century.
- (2) Complete small tapered slab of purplish sandstone built into interior of east wall of porch. Very simple equal-armed cross with a pair of shears below. Date uncertain.
- (3) Fragment of incised sandstone slab built into upper part of internal face of west wall of porch. A series of circles with various curved lines apparently form part of a cross head. Early to mid-twelfth century?
- (4) Tapering recumbent slab of brown sandstone in the south-east part of the churchyard, c. 2 m south of a north-south row of three table tombs; incised design with a broad marginal chamfer. The cross head is represented only by four incised circles (*cf.* slab (3)), the upper two largely erased by the secondary initials 'R L', evidence of post-medieval re-use (*cf.* several slabs at Newbiggin). A sword is substituted for the cross shaft, as at Chillingham, North Gosforth and elsewhere. Probably twelfth century.
- (5) Slab built upright into the internal face of the south wall of the churchyard, just beyond the junction between the original yard and a more recent extension. The only motif is an incised sword, set l. of centre; the present arched top of the slab cuts the pommel of the sword, and must be secondary. Date uncertain.

Slabs (6) - (12) are now lost but were illustrated in one of the Robert Blair sketch books (Blair *n.d.*, III, 182); the sketches, with dimensions, are dated 11.9. 1882:

- (6) Rectangular slab, labelled 'in church' with incised design. Plain cross rising from stepped base; on each side a sword with down-turned quillons, accompanied by a smaller dagger to its l. An appended note states that the l. sword was 'apparently of a later period'. Date uncertain.

Slabs (7) - (12) are labelled 'in churchyard at E end of church'.

- (7) Small slab with plain equal-armed cross at head, similar to slab (2) but without any emblem. Date uncertain.
- (8) Near-complete slab carrying cross with ring around head and sunk triangular panels between arms, rising from stepped base; sword on r. Perhaps twelfth century.
- (9) Complete slab carrying cross with ring around head, and sunk panels between arms, rising from stepped base. Shears on l. of shaft. Perhaps twelfth century.
- (10) Fragmentary slab carrying some form of ring-headed cross, its shaft rising from stepped base. Date uncertain.

¹⁰ From Ryder, P.F. (2003) Cross Slab Grave Covers in North Northumberland. *Archaeologia Aeliana* 5th ser. XXXII, 97-8, 124

- (11) Fragmentary slab with similar cross to slab (9) but with most of head missing; no emblem visible. Date uncertain.
- (12) Fragmentary slab, damaged on r. side, with similar cross to slab (8), rising from stepped base. No emblem survives. Twelfth century?

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CROSS SLAB GRAVE COVERS IN NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND

Doddington (St Mary and St Michael) The scale-bar only applies to slabs 1-5.

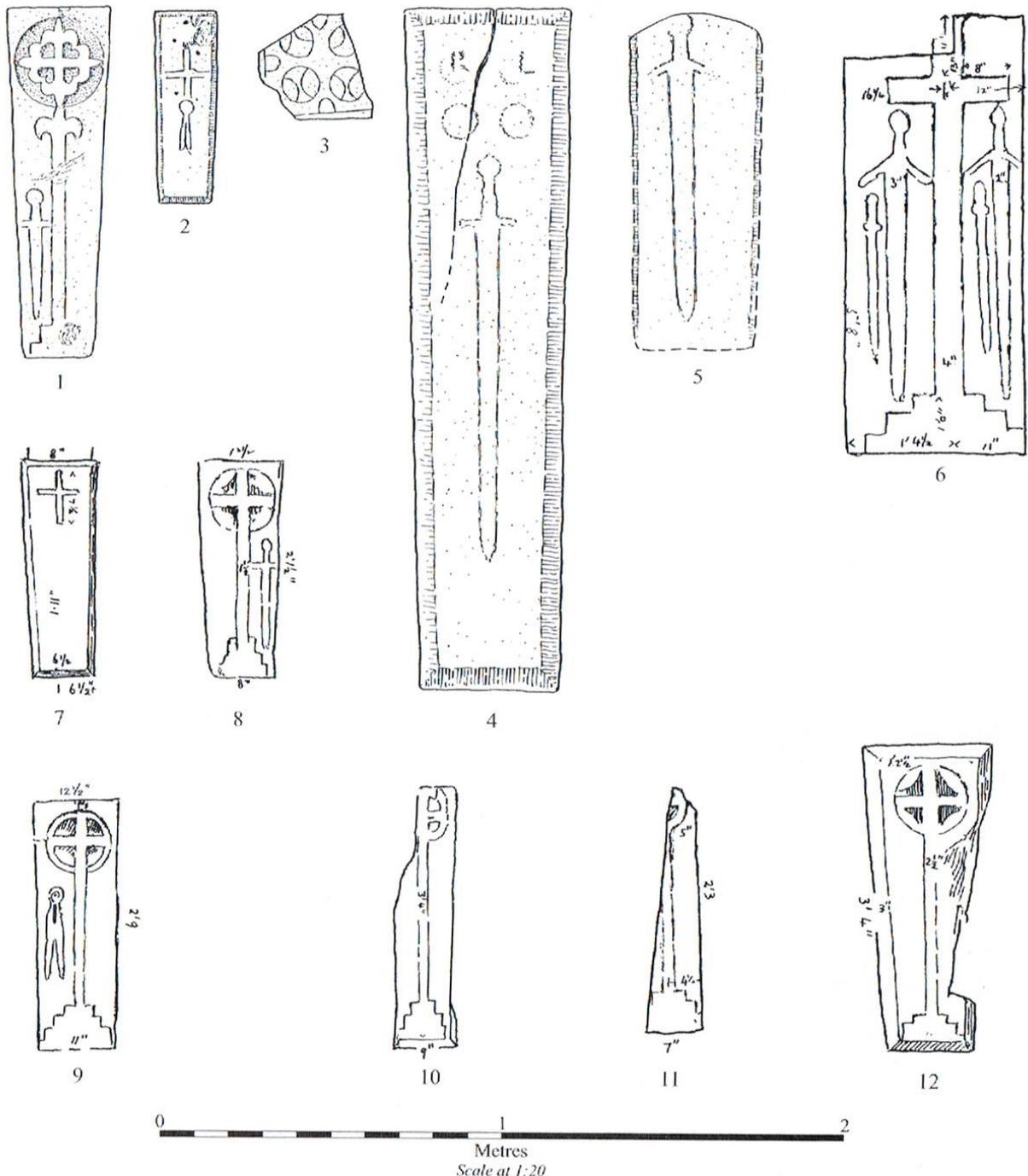


Fig. 13 North Northumberland cross slabs, cont.