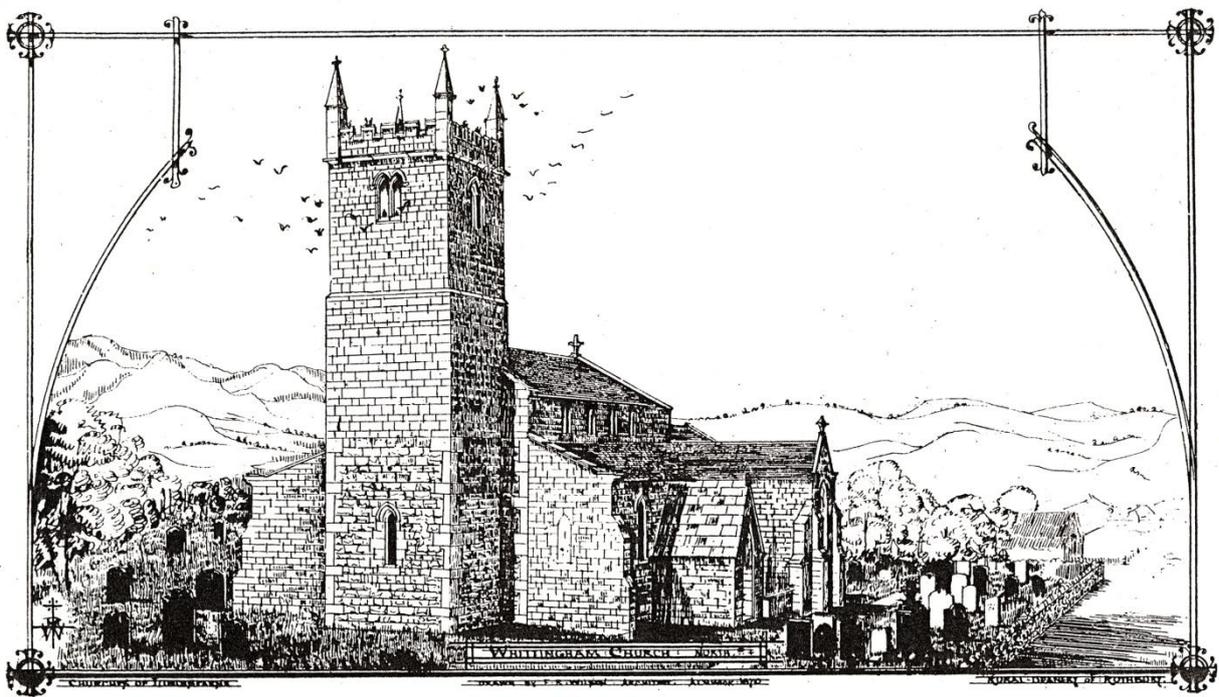


THE CHURCH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW WHITTINGHAM

NORTHUMBERLAND

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT



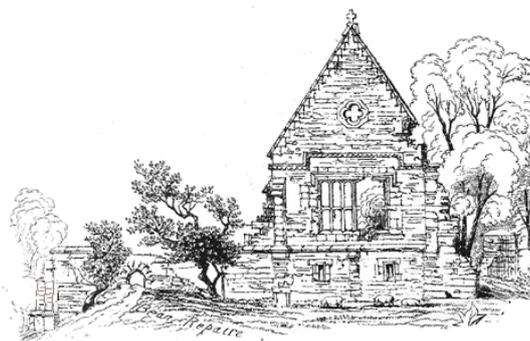
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South-west view of the church in 1870, after F.R. Wilson

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St Bartholomew's Church, Whittingham

Whittingham church stands on a knoll on the north side of the River Aln. It consists of a three-bay aisled nave with a west tower, south porch, transepts, and a choir with a north-western vestry. The church is built of squared and coursed sandstone, of a variety of types, and has roofs of purple Welsh slate.

It is worth mentioning that there are several early historic references that have been linked to the village; it could be the Ad Tuifyrði (on the River Aln) where a synod was held in 684. 'Hwittingham' was given to the Cuthbert community in 737 by King Ceolwulf, and bishop Esred is recorded as consecrating a church here. In 1107 Whittingham was one of four churches granted by Henry I to his chaplain, Richard d'Orival, but c 1122 they were given to the new Augustinian monastery of Carlisle.¹

Description

The Exterior

The **West Tower**, its lower part Saxon and its upper of 1840, has attracted considerable antiquarian attention. It is square, and rises in one unbroken stage up to the belfry; the walling fabric is of roughly-coursed blocks of sandstone, some quite elongate but of no great size, but the western quoins are much larger and of considerable interest. The lower sections, up to c 1.5 m above the ground, are laid in side-alternate fashion, but above this they approximate to the classic Saxon 'long-and-short' form, although somewhat irregular, and with the 'short' stones bonding back on one wall face rather than both. At the foot of the tower is quite a bold plinth, with a chamfer on its upper angle, continued around the west gable of the nave. The NCH account² states that 'at the height of about 12 feet from the ground a course of ashlar forming a sort of string course runs right round the tower and across the nave gable' but neither this nor the slight change in the character of the



masonry which the account describes at this level are readily perceptible.

The church from the south-east

The west window is a short Victorian lancet that has a double-chamfered surround and dressings of diagonally-tooled ashlar; each jamb is made up of an upright block with a square one above, and around its head is a patch

of masonry clearly contemporary with it. The taller lancet above it, lighting the first-floor chamber, is rather different; it is in tooled-and-margined ashlar, has conventional alternating jambs and a casement-moulded hood with turned-back ends (typical of many of the 19th century windows of the

¹ Information from NCH14, 483-4

² NCH 496

church). At about the level of the springing of its head one comes to the top of the surviving Saxon work; above this the walling is of more regularly-coursed stone and the well-squared alternating quoins of pecked ashlar.



At the base of the belfry is a string course, chamfered on its lower angle. The belfry has a paired lancet openings on each side, double-chamfered and with hoodmoulds of the type described. There is a moulded string at the base of the embattled ashlar parapet, which has a moulded coping and a slightly-projecting square pinnacle at each corner, with a pyramidal cap; in all an inoffensive and indeed quite attractive piece of slightly pre-ecclesiological Victorian 'First Pointed' Gothic, if one did not still grieve over the destruction of its Saxon predecessor.

The Saxon lower part of the tower (and nave gable behind) seen from the west

The west end of the **Nave** seems of the same build as the tower, with the same plinth, and the same change between side-alternate and an approximation to 'long-and-short' quoins, although this takes rather higher (c 2.5 m) above the ground. The upper part of the gable, at clerestory level, is obviously Victorian, with the same pecked

quoins as the top of the tower, and big moulded kneelers. A few cm of the eastern face of the south-eastern quoin of the nave is exposed in the angle between south aisle and chapel, but difficult to make much sense of, other than that it contains one or two sizeable blocks; a downpipe does not aid close inspection; the upper part of the angle, and kneeler, are again Victorian, as at the north-east angle where the lower part of the corner is now inside the 1906 vestry (see interior description). The 1840 clerestory consists of four pairs of chamfered lancets, spaced so as to have a 'blind' bay over the transepts. On the south the uppermost three or four courses of stone look darker, as if a heightening, but there is no sign of this on the north. The east end of the nave shows the line of an earlier low-pitched roof (pre-1840), cut by the very apex of the present chancel roof; its gable, like those of the transepts, has a square-edged coping of interlocking slabs and carries the square base of a removed finial at its apex.

The west end of the **South Aisle** has a chamfered plinth c 0.20 m below that of the nave, and is of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared medieval fabric, containing a small trefoil-headed window with a monolithic head, its extrados following the pointed form of the arch. Above it is the steep roof-line of the original aisle, heightened in the later medieval period; a stepped buttress at the west

end of the south wall of the aisle is clearly an addition, probably made when the wall was heightened. Below and to the south of the window are the remains of a small square-headed window; one upright rectangular formed the upper part of its north jamb.

The lower parts of the western bay of the south wall of the aisle (west of the porch) are also medieval; there appears to be a break of build marking the top of the original wall (at around the level of the head of the buttress); directly above this there is one unusually elongate quoin, perhaps an are-used grave slab. The uppermost courses of the wall are squared and pecked stone of 1840, with the usual oversailing chamfered course to the eaves. Around 2.5 m above ground level and c 0.30 m from the buttress is an are-used chevron-moulded voussoir (12th century). The NCH description (495) describes this as forming part of the jamb of a 'narrow square-headed opening of sixteenth or seventeenth century date' which, together with the small window low in the west wall, were 'intended to light a stair'. The east edge of the voussoir lines up only approximately with the stones above and below, and there is another roughly coincident joint in the same three courses a little to the east; with the eye of faith these could be interpreted as the jambs of a small window, but there is no sign of a head or sill. To the east is a double-chamfered lancet of the usual 1840 form.

To the east of the porch the lower part of the wall is concealed behind the vault that infills the gap between porch and south transept; the upper is all of typical 1840 fabric, with another lancet window; just above the vault roof is a rough relieving arch, probably relating to an opening into the vault from the aisle (now concealed by plaster).

The **South Porch** is constructed of large squared blocks, with a slab roof, and is clearly of some age. The archway in the south wall has a steep almost triangular head, with a chamfer that is stopped above the bold impost, which are of a distinctive section – a quarter-round with a square step above – that would seem to imply a post-medieval date. There are again stopped chamfers on the lower sections of the jambs. On either side are low stepped buttresses; the steep gable above has an oversailing hollow-chamfered coping, much worn, and a square block sundial as its finial.

The west end of the **North Aisle** is largely medieval, and has a chamfered plinth set c 0.40 m above that of the nave and tower, and a pair of stepped buttresses at its north-west angle. There are no openings: the walling is of coursed squared blocks, with a clear straight joint c 0.40 m short of the buttress at the north end, extending to a height of three courses. The north wall is of two bays, with a 19th century buttress between them. Medieval walling seems to survive (or have been re-used?) in the western bay, which has a chamfered plinth, and a three-light window with intersecting tracery and a simple chamfered hood with turned back ends; the sill, mullions and parts of the jambs look like restoration but the remainder, including the monolithic head, seems genuine medieval work. The walling and window (two lights, with simple Y-tracery) in the second bay all look of 1841; close to the transept the wall is topped by an octagonal chimney stack with a moulded and brattished cap. A sunken boiler room is set in the angle of aisle and north transept.

The lower part of the west wall of the **South Transept**, like the west wall of the porch, is concealed by the intervening vault, which has a featureless front wall c 1.5 m high and a slightly sloping concrete top; the upper part is all of 1840. The lower part of the south wall is however medieval, of large squared blocks, as are the paired stepped buttresses at the angles (except for the tops of the western pair, which have been renewed). There is a chamfered plinth, and a chamfered set-back c 2 m above the ground; the upper wall (except for a little masonry adjacent to the south-eastern buttress) is all of 1840, as is the three-light window which has simple intersecting tracery and the usual hood. There is another identical window towards the north end of the east wall of the transept, which is all of 1840 except for a small section adjacent to the south-eastern buttress and some of the

lower courses (with signs of a possible hacked-back plinth) towards the north end, where there is a straight joint with the south-eastern quoin of the early nave, already described.

The **North Transept** is an addition of 1840, and has the usual fabric and features for the parts of the church that are of this date. There are paired stepped buttresses at the northern angles, and windows of three lights with simple intersecting tracery (like those of the south transept) on north, east and west. The south part of the east wall is formed by the east end of the earlier north aisle; this is largely now enclosed by the vestry, but above its northern roof slope a length of straight joint (over-ridden by three courses of 1840 fabric below the eaves) probably marks the north end of the extant medieval masonry.

The south elevation of the **Chancel** is of three bays. The walling is of close-jointed squared sandstone (including some bluish stone) and is of early 18th century date but the buttresses (and a patch of stonework in the centre bay where there used to be a priest's door) are diagonally-tooled olive stone of 1871. The plinth is interesting, with some parts more steeply chamfered than others; parts are clearly medieval, and it continues beyond the present east end to form the lower part of the south wall of the Clavering vault. What looks like an upper member of the plinth is in fact a bold string course of 1871, with an overhanging lower face, and a steep chamfer above; this string is stepped up beneath each of the windows, which all have moulded hoods with chunky cruciform terminals. The buttresses have lower sections in the form of projecting gables set at right angles to the wall, with roll-moulded cappings with crosses at their ends – all very characteristic of the Geometrical 'Cog Gothic' beloved of the architect, F.R. Wilson of Alnwick. There is a big oversailing hollow-chamfered course to the eaves, again Wilson's work.

The first and third bays of the south wall have windows that are each of two trefoil-headed lights with a big octofoiled circle in the spandrel, and there is a similar one in the east bay of the north wall. The east end has a larger window of five trefoil-headed lights with three big octofoils over, flanked by buttresses similar to those on the side walls, but set diagonally. The gable has a coping that is chamfered on its underside, and carries a ring cross finial with a spiky inner circle like a gear wheel. The north wall is in three irregular bays, the western partly concealed behind the vestry; it is different stone to the south wall, perhaps medieval masonry re-used, with three courses of olive-green stone (presumably of 1871) below the eaves. The narrow central bay has no features, but in the upper part of the wall of the western (above the vestry) there seems to be a straight joint near the east end of the bay, over-ridden by the three 1871 courses.

About 4 m to the east of the north-east corner of the present chancel, some footings are exposed in the path that crosses the churchyard; the individual blocks are quite small, and clearly outline a buttress projecting to the north, and either a counterpart projecting to the east, or a wall continuing east. The NCH interpret these footings as a pair of buttresses at the north-east corner of the medieval chancel; whilst there is a level platform here that would allow for the previous chancel to have extended a bay further, this would be abnormally long, and in any case Archdeacon Sharpe, writing c 1732 (NCH 490) expressly states that 'Mr Clavering's burial vault extends to the utmost bounds of the old chancell' and the vault, a partly-above-ground structure attached to the present east end, is clearly built into the footings of the east wall; a length of chamfered plinth is just visible in the grass.

The **Vestry**, added in 1906, is built of lightly-tooled ashlar; it has a chamfered plinth, and a stepped buttress close to the north end of the east wall, which has a steep-pitched gable with roll-moulded coping, and a window of three lancet lights under a single arch, copied from the medieval one in the east end of the north aisle, now enclosed within it (see interior description)

The Interior

The interior of nave and transepts is now largely plastered and whitewashed in nave and transepts, except for some areas of fabric at the west end – largely those presumed to be of Saxon date – which are left exposed, principally the west wall below the head of the tower arch, and a short adjacent section of the north wall.

The **Tower** opens to the nave by a lofty semicircular arch of a single square order. The jambs, made up of monolithic through stones laid in rough alternating fashion, have chamfered bases and heavy imposts that only project on the soffit; the imposts each have a line of oval pellet-like motifs, and have suffered considerable damage (in fact the whole of the western angles of the jambs has been crudely hacked back at some time). The central section of the arch itself is of recent ashlar – its head was partly cut away when an opening into a former gallery was made; the remaining sections have separate stones to each face, with a rubble core between. Towards the nave the wall fabric above the arch is concealed by plaster, but towards the tower there is a rough outer row of voussoirs. The internal walls of the tower are left clear of plaster, and are very irregular, with much reddening as if there has been a fire at some time; the west window has a 19th-century surround of diagonally-tooled ashlar, and there does not appear to be any evidence of any older structural features. The walls are now only c 0.75 m thick; old plans show them as being considerably thicker, which the NCH (489) saw as ‘the addition of an internal lining of stonework’ which it is implied took place in the later medieval period when defensibility was a consideration, and when the tower arch was walled up and a small doorway inserted; in 1906 when the arch was opened up this doorway was re-set as the entrance to the vestry from the chancel. The ‘internal lining’ of the tower walls seems to have been removed – or possibly the walls simply thinned back – in 1840.



The interior looking west

A 19th-century cast-iron newel stair rises in the south-west corner to the first floor, where the western lancet has a roughly-pecked internal surround, but the walls are heavily pointed; there is no visible evidence of any early features. A steep stair rises against northwards against the east wall to

the clock chamber on second floor (the clock is by W Potts and Sons of Leeds, 1887); at this level the walls all seem to be coursed rubble of 1840. A heavy wooden ladder rises west against the north wall to the belfry, where, rather surprisingly given the vicissitudes suffered by the tower (it is recorded that the Saxon belfry was destroyed using explosives) old short-headed bell frames, almost certainly medieval, have been permitted to survive, carrying two bells (uninscribed; one looks of relatively early medieval character). The belfry openings have timber internal lintels, and their jambs include much rubble and re-used stone. One puzzling feature at floor level is a pair of large empty sockets at the east ends of both north and south walls.

The **Nave** has near-identical three bay arcades, each with a short length of solid wall at the west end. In the internal face of the northern length plaster has been removed to expose the west jamb and three voussoirs of the head of an early blocked arch; neither the blocks of the jamb nor those of the arch have any distinctive features, and patches of small rubble around them make it seem highly likely that they are insertions in an older wall. In the wall opposite there is a recess with its sill c 4 m above the ground, and a pointed head; now blocked on the line of the external face of the wall, this has been a doorway that gave access from a stair in the west end of the south aisle into a gallery within the nave. On the external (south) face of this wall there is an irregular joint c 1.2 m from the west end, which might represent the jamb of a similar opening; the masonry to the east of it certainly looks to go with the respond of the 13th-century arcade.

The southern arcade is largely of 13th century date, although the date '1687' is carved on the south-west face of its western pier, perhaps implying that some restoration or alteration took place at this time; its stonework is rather more close-jointed than that of the eastern, and has a light diagonal tooling absent on the other, but the capital and base look original. The voussoirs of the arches themselves look as if they might have been re-tooled. The north arcade is an 1840 copy of the southern, replacing a Romanesque predecessor. The central bay of each arcade is narrower than the end ones; the arches are pointed, and of two chamfered orders, with a chamfered hood towards the nave that has carved bosses as stops, set well above the moulded capitals of the octagonal piers. The southern piers have rather battered holdwater bases, set on square plinths, but the northern piers have simple chamfered bases. The responds are in the form of semi-octagonal corbels with foliage sculpture, carrying the inner order whilst the outer (and hoodmould) dies into the wall. Above the western pier of the south arcade the outer order has broach stops, but above the eastern there is carved ornament in the form of one and a half large dog tooth motifs; the boss/stop above is in the form of an attractive floriated cross; on the opposite (south) side of the capital is an odd column of (plastered) masonry, apparently marking the springing of a former arch opening from the south aisle into the adjacent transept. The boss above the western pier looks to have been re-cut in the 19th century. Above the arcades the 1840 clerestory windows have simple internal lintels.

The nave roof is of four bays; shaped and moulded corbels carry the tie beams of simple and rather vernacular king-post trusses; raking struts rise to the principals from the jowelled bases of the posts, which are also jowelled at the head; there are two levels of purlins and a ridge board. The bases of the posts are secured by iron bolts passing vertically through the tie-beam bolted into tie beam.

In the **South Aisle** the lower parts of the walls at the west end are clear of plaster. The wall on the north here and its straight joint have already been described. At the west end the west window has a renewed sill and lintel, but the broadly-splayed jambs are old; below and to the left a broad patch of brickwork marks the position of the square-headed window visible externally. On the south the 1840 lancet – like the other windows of this period – has a plain rear arch behind plaster. Just west of the door is a shallow recess, probably for a 19th-century stove, with an iron plate carrying its lintel; its jambs (and the adjacent internal west jamb of the south door) have shallow raised

pilasters, as if to leave their stonework exposed when the rest of the wall was plastered. The doorway has a segmental-pointed rear arch.

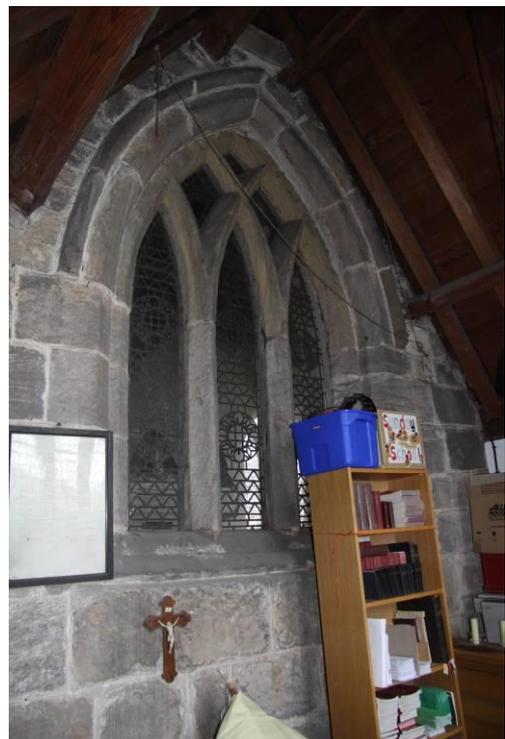
There is little detail in the north aisle; the organ conceals the west wall. Old plans show a recess close to the east end of the north wall, now concealed, which was perhaps made for another 19th century stove. The windows have the usual plastered rear arches.

The **Transepts** have boarded dados, and again there is little exposed detail, except for an old piscina in the south wall of the southern, to the east of the window. This has a trefoiled arch with a bold hollow chamfer, and shaped stops at the base of the jambs, and contains an octofoil bowl. The transept roofs – the south of two bays, the north of three – have the same basic king-post trusses as that of the nave.

Inside the **South Porch** the south door has a pointed arch of two orders, the inner chamfered and the outer with a hollow and a chamfer, springing from moulded impost; it all looks of mid-19th century date. The porch itself has 19th-century stone benches with moulded edges, but the walls have a big quadrant-moulded string that stops c 0.40 m short of the north end, and carries the two chamfered ribs of the vault.

The tall arch that opens into the **Chancel** is of two-centred form and of two chamfered orders, with broach stops to the outer; all its stonework is of 1871, but the jambs are older; each consists of a semicircular shaft with a central fillet, with moulded bases (both renewed) and simple semi-octagonal moulded capitals. On the east face of the wall, the line of a lower chancel roof, of slightly shallower pitch, is clearly visible above the arch. The internal walls of the chancel are all of exposed masonry, coursed roughly squared stone; the windows, all of 1871, have chamfered rear arches of diagonally-tooled ashlar. Beneath the western one in the south wall there appear to be traces of a predecessor (a low side?) with its sill set c 0.30 m lower; all that can be seen of the pre-1871 priest's door is a rough relieving arch, with a small medieval cross-slab set into the blocking below. Immediately to the east of it a ledger stone to James Hargrave d.1777 is set upright against the wall. Close to the east end of the north wall is a shallow square-headed recess which looks at first like a blocked door but has in fact been cut into the wall, presumably for another monument of some sort. The only clearly medieval feature is the vestry door, which was moved here in 1906 from the wall blocking the tower arch. It has a two-centred arch with a continuous narrow chamfer, and its heads is formed from two inclined slabs which are cut from a 13th-century grave cover, carved in low relief with a floriated cross rising from a stepped base, and a pair of shears. The chancel roof, of 1871, is of three bays, and has arch-braced trusses carried on elaborately-moulded ashlar corbels.

Inside the **Vestry** the west wall – the external face of the east wall of the old north aisle – is of exposed masonry; above a chamfered plinth are regular courses of large close-jointed blocks, and a three-light window with a monolithic head, of simple intersecting tracery under a chamfered hood with shaped stops (right). Early 14th century in character, this window appears to be authentic unrestored medieval work. To the south of it is a straight joint between the aisle

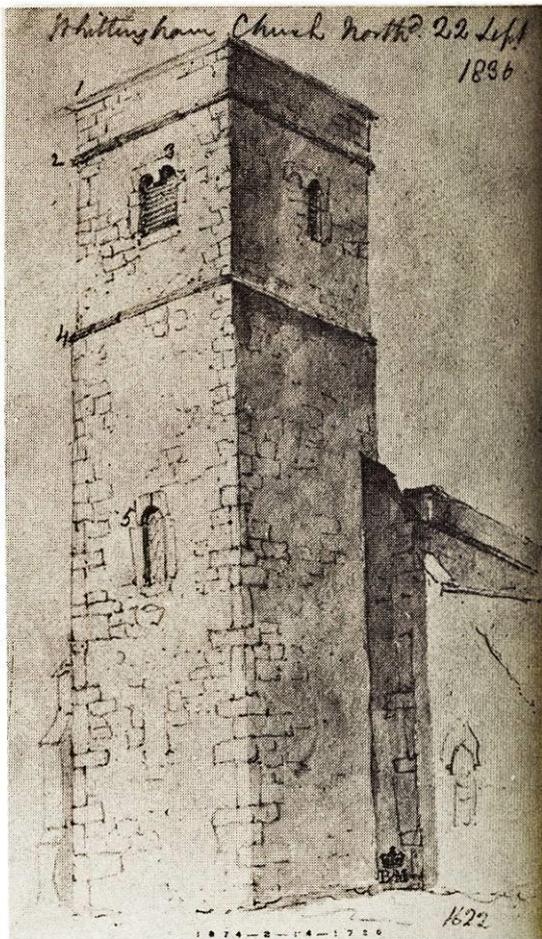


wall and the north-east angle of the early nave; its lower part is concealed by a concrete safe (dated 1983) but above this the quoins exposed are all quite small blocks, certainly not of any distinctive Saxon character. The vestry roof has a ridge board and two levels of purlins, and on the south a wall-plate carried by a series of small ashlar quadrant corbels.

Discussion

This is a fascinating church with a long and complex building history, but in all Northumberland it is difficult to think of a building so harshly treated by Victorian restorers; even at this distance in time it is difficult to forgive the Rev Goodenough and his architect, John Green, for their total disregard (in the face of protests) of Saxon and Norman architectural features. At a rough guess three-quarters of the present fabric is Victorian, along with the majority of the architectural features, and yet the building retains a great deal of interest.

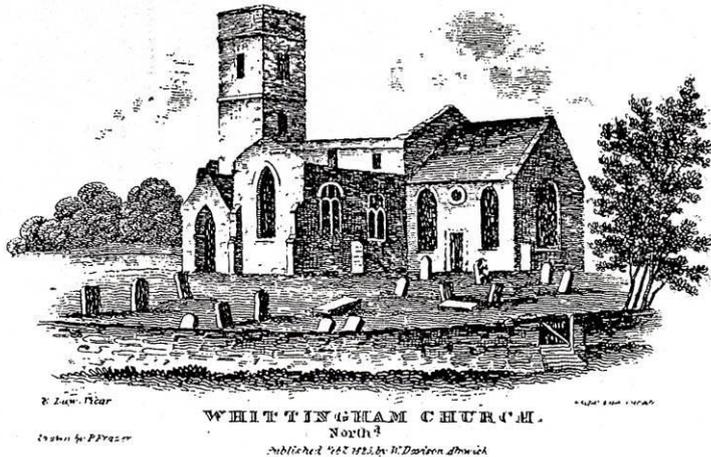
The earliest part of the structure is seen the surviving lower half of the west tower, and in the corners of the nave, and these have attracted antiquarian attention from the early years of the 19th



century. Thomas Rickman described the church before the 1840 restoration, and gave a print of the tower, which Taylor & Taylor (1965, 659) believe is based on a pencil sketch by William Twopenny (which they reproduce) (left), although there are considerable differences between sketch and print, eg the former shows a band below the belfry, and also makes it clear that each belfry opening was of two lights, although that on the south was partly blocked, and that on the west had lost its central shaft; the print shows the western with a central baluster shaft, and the southern as a single light. Of later workers, Honeyman in particular (Honeyman 1935 and in the NCH account made much of changes in the fabric in early parts of the building, going as far as suggesting that five pre-Conquest references to the village might relate to five different phases which he perceived, which seems hopelessly over-optimistic. More realistically, it has to be stated that tower and nave look of the same build, and that it is currently held that the great majority of 'Saxon' towers actually post-date the Norman Conquest, and were built in the late 11th or early 12th century.

Rickman describes the early north arcade destroyed in 1840: 'one arch of what appears to me to be the original nave remains; it is very plain, has a large rude abacus or impost and a plain square pier; it is now stopped and forms part of the vestry. The next arch eastward on the same side is a common Norman one with the usual round pier and a capital with a sort of bell and a square abacus'. Archdeacon Singleton in 1828 commented 'the pillars in the church are curious' and in 1841 lamented 'Alas! These pillars have been removed'. Thankfully the faculty drawings for the 1840 restoration survive (www.churchplansonline.org); the supposedly Saxon arch that Rickman describes is incorporated in the south wall of the vestry (which occupied the west end of the north

aisle) and is followed by a wider arch, then two circular columns and a square. What remains of the arch is undatable, although it does look to be an insertion in the presumably-Saxon walling; the rest of the arcade has completely gone, and all we can say is that antiquarian opinion saw it as ‘Norman’, ie 12th century. The jambs of the chancel arch are of later 12th or 13th century date, and the south arcade of the later 13th century; its hoodmould stops/bosses are closely paralleled at Embleton and the big dog-tooth – characteristic of the early 13th century work at Tynemouth Priory – on a pier at Whalton. The south transept is probably of the same date (the NCH account sees it as of c1300, but the fact that the eastern arch of the arcade is wider than the central one seems to suggest that arcade and transept go together); its only surviving feature is the piscina in the south wall, which could date from around the end of the century. The north aisle is seen as being rebuilt c1300, to judge from the simple tracery of its two remaining windows. The chancel may have been rebuilt at the same time as well, but nothing now survives other than the footings of its north-east corner.



There were other quite typical late medieval changes, which have left a little fabric but not much evidence of specific date. The south aisle was heightened – as evident in its west wall, and several windows were inserted. Davison’s 1823 illustration (left) shows two windows with ‘Perpendicular’ (15th century?) tracery in the east wall of the south transept, but the c1840 plan only shows one, and a clerestory was

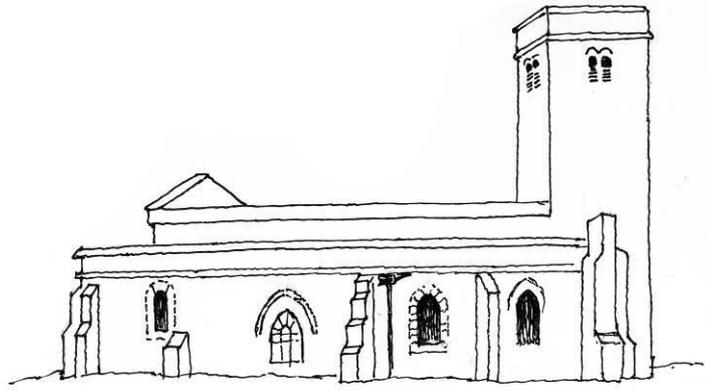
added to the nave. It is probably in this period that the west tower seems to have been adapted to provide a defensible retreat. The internal walls may well have been thickened (unless, as already suggested, this was simply a response to fire damage) and the tower arch was certainly blocked up, and replaced by a small doorway (re-using a 13th century cross slab, cut into two halves, in its head), secured by a draw bar; its stout oak door (removed in 1840) apparently had a bullet hole in it; a local legend told of the short being fired by a mosstrooper who had pursued a villager into the church.

The south porch has puzzled antiquaries. Some features – the low buttresses flanking the outer arch, and the rib-vaulted roof, look medieval (13th/14th century) but others – the quadrant mouldings of the imposts of the outer archway, and of the string from which the vaulting ribs spring, are more suggestive of a post-medieval (17th century?) date.

Unlike many churches in upland Northumberland, which often lost transepts or aisles, other than the possible burning of the tower there seems no direct evidence of damage to the fabric in the troubled later medieval centuries.

Later post-medieval changes are, as usual, better documented. We know that the medieval chancel was taken down and rebuilt, in a truncated form in 1730-1731 – in fact Archdeacon Sharpe records that ‘in 1730 Col. Lyddel and Mr Clavering began to rebuild the church from the ground and finished it before Easter 1731, in a very handsome manner’. Davison’s 1823 print shows the chancel with two tall arched windows on the south, with a square-headed priest’s door between them and an oculus above it, and a broader round-arched window in the east gable. At some post-medieval date the western bay of the north aisle was walled off to form a vestry, with a fireplace set diagonally at its north-west corner’ the 1840 plan shows it in this condition.

An 1836 drawing of the church by T.B.Richardson³ (right) shows a north view, from which it is clear that the north aisle windows had been altered in the post-medieval period; the tall stack at the north-west angle of the aisle served the vestry fireplace.



Whittingham Church from the north in 1826, after a sketch by T B Richardson
Woodhorn Archive ref SANT/BEQ/15/3/15/A

In 1816 (NCH; Wilson (95) gives '1826') a new western gallery was inserted; the high-level doorway cut through the south wall of the nave to the west of arcade is correlated with this, as is the cutting away of the central section of the head of the (then blocked) tower arch. An 1828 account of the church⁴ states that 'Mr Atkinson of Lorbottle has lately obtained leave of the vicar to form a vault in the outside of the eastern wall of the South Porch', which presumably relates to the low structure between the porch and south transept.

There may also have been early-19th century changes to the chancel, as the priest's door which appears in the 1823 print is not figured on the 1840 plan. This plan survives from the faculty granted for the disastrous 'restoration' already mentioned, when such mayhem was wrought by Green and Goodenough in the interests of producing a building of relatively uniform architectural style. After this it would appear that the base of the tower became the vestry; Wilson's 1870 plan shows it with the walls thinner than in 1840, but with a diagonal block of masonry in each corner (the south-western containing a fireplace); these were removed in 1909. In 1871 Wilson remodelled the chancel – it is not quite clear how much of the Georgian structure had survived the Gothicising zeal of 1840 – and refurnished the whole building. Further works followed in 1909, by Hicks & Charlewood, when the western gallery (already reduced in size, perhaps in 1870⁵) was removed. By then the gallery stair was in the south-west corner of the nave; the 1870 plans show it in its earlier position at the west end of the south aisle. At the same time the tower arch reopened and the present vestry built.

Archaeological Assessment

In assessing the archaeological potential of a church, one usually deals first with the underfloor areas and then the above-ground fabric. A church with such a long and complex building history as this may clearly have much significant material surviving beneath its floors, both in the form of the structural remains of earlier phases, and their associated stratigraphy, although inevitably there will have been much disturbance from many generations of burial. There is often additional disturbance/destruction occasioned by the creation of underfloor heating systems in the 19th and 20th centuries, but this is difficult to assess here; the present floors are largely of concrete, of no great age; whilst the present hot water pipes are above the floor. However there could well have been earlier pipes, or hot-air ducts, beneath the floors – although Wilson's 1870 plan seems to show two stoves as performing the heating requirements then, the faculty for the 1909 works as a plan which shows 'Cistern to Heating Apparatus' at the north-west corner of the nave. Despite such

³ Woodhorn archive ref SANT/BEQ/15/3/15 A. Richardson's drawings are normally accurate, but he does not show the band at the base of the belfry, depicted by William Twopenny, or, more surprisingly, the chancel.

⁴ Woodhorn archive ref SANT/BEQ/18/7/4/683 p.175

⁵ The faculty for the 1909 works, Woodhorn \archive ref DN/E/8/2/2/349, has an internal elevation showing the gallery with an elaborate Gothic front, very much in Wilson's style.

disturbances it remains highly likely that there will be buried structures and deposits of considerable archaeological significance, so any disturbance of sub-floor deposits will need to be accompanied by an archaeological watching brief.

The remains of the medieval chancel, beneath the churchyard to the east of the present building, are of special interest; its chamfered plinth survives on the south and east virtually at the present ground level; with little effort this could be cleared and displayed, by the removal of a few cm of grass and soil, and would form an interesting feature that would help visitors understand the development of the church.

The two vaults, the 18th-century one to the Clavering family outside the present east end, and the early 19th century Atkinson vault between the porch and south transept, are themselves of considerable archaeological interest; if there were ever cause to open access to these, proper recording would need to be carried out.

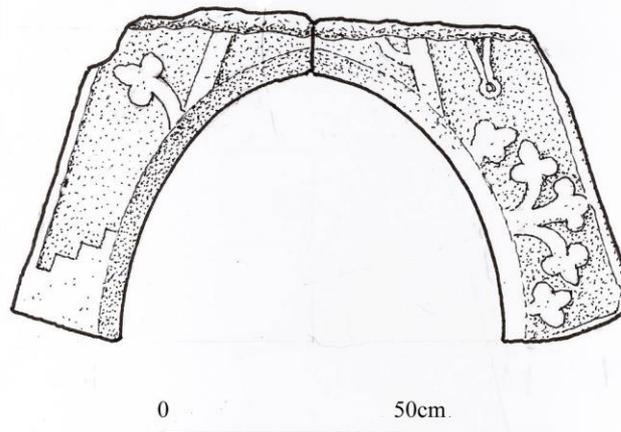
Much of the above-ground fabric is of post-medieval date; of the internal wall faces covered by plaster, medieval fabric only survives in the nave walls, the lower part of the south wall of the south transept, and both end walls of the north aisle. It is possible that this plaster may conceal structural features, or even earlier plasters with remains of mural decoration; any disturbance of plaster in these areas should be carefully monitored.

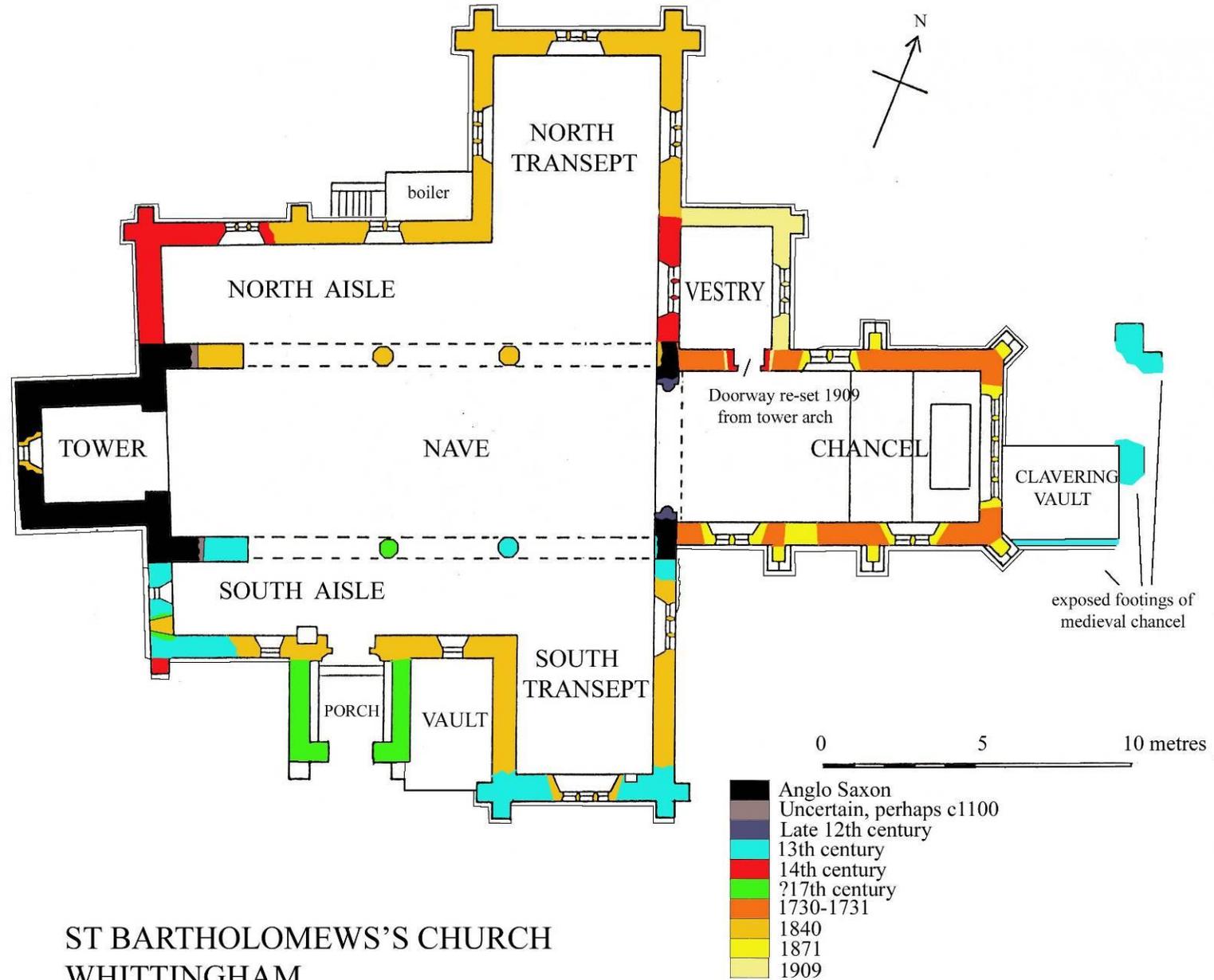
Peter F Ryder March 2011

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St Bartholomew's Church, Whittingham
Medieval Cross Slab re-used as head of doorway, now entrance into vestry





ST BARTHOLOMEWS'S CHURCH
 WHITTINGHAM
 Provisional Phased Plan

PFR 2011

Appendix. A Note on the Furnishings

The fittings and furnishings of a church are normally outside the scope of these assessments, but in this case some comment has been asked for as to the significance of the pewing in the nave.

The pewing in the nave survives more or less unaltered from the restoration carried out by F.R. Wilson in 1871, when he more or less rebuilt the chancel. Wilson was an Alnwick architect and his work, both architectural and as regards church fittings, is very characteristic, loosely based on 14th century 'Decorated' Gothic but with what bordered on an obsession with geometrical patterns, in particular as regards foiled circles, and stopped chamfers. Quite a number of the bench ends have contemporary painted numbers, or inscriptions. It is very typically Victorian; even in the 1935 Northumberland County History account it is easy to detect a note of relief when it is recorded that his chancel fittings were 'turned out' to be replaced by 'very attractive fumed oakwork'. Although the period when work such as Wilson's would have been regarded with something bordering on horror is slipping away, it could hardly be argued it possesses any great beauty; what merits it has is in being individual and quirky, especially in the treatment of the bench ends pierced by various Gothic motifs – no two are the same. The rather brutal brattished dado has suffered the loss of quite a number of its crenellations, and in its mutilated condition has become something of an eyesore.

Whilst it would seem harsh to argue for the retention of the extant Wilson furnishings – especially as they are no longer part of a complete suite – they are certainly of sufficient interest to merit a proper programme of recording, which should include a plan, drawings of some representative sections, and a full photographic coverage.

Peter Ryder

