

The Parish Church of St Cuthbert, Norham

Analysis of the Fabric and Archaeological Assessment

Norham parish church consists of a five-bay aisled nave with a western tower, a south porch and a north transept, and an aisleless chancel with a north vestry. The building, apart from the eastern bay of the chancel, is in a Romanesque style. Unless otherwise stated all the openings are round-arched, and the string and hoodmould courses square above and chamfered on their lower margin.



The **West Tower** is of unusual plan, being an elongate north-south rectangle, with a small stair turret on the north set in the angle between the tower and the west end of the north aisle. The tower is built of coursed squared stone, the courses varying in height. Many of the stones have a rough horizontal pecked tooling, and they vary in colour from pink and blue to grey, with pink ashlar dressings, some now badly eroded. The

tower rises in three stages, and there are paired pilaster buttresses at the angles rising to the top of the second stage, although those on the east are largely concealed by the adjacent nave and aisles. There is a chamfered plinth, and a chamfered string course of asymmetric section c 3 m above the ground, forming the sill to the lower stage windows, two on the west and one on the south. These are simple round-headed openings with chamfered surrounds and alternating-block jambs, with a second string stepping over them to form hoodmoulds. Then comes the second stage which has a smaller window of the same type on west and south, and remains of a blocked one on the north, partly covered by the later stair projection; on the east a low square-headed doorway onto the nave roof, rebated externally, is set towards the north end of the wall. There is a third string course/set-back at the base of the belfry, which is all of pink ashlar. It has paired pilaster buttresses at each corner, with between them angle shafts with simple cushion capitals. The belfry openings, two separated by a central pilaster on each long face and one in each end, are paired round-headed lights divided by a shaft with a waterleaf capital, with indented hoodmoulds, beneath larger segmental arches; above these is a corbel table and the tower is topped by three inclined courses of stone flags, broken by upstanding blocks of masonry in the centre of each long face.

The stair turret on the north of the tower has a shoulder-arched door in a moulded surround on the north, with a simple round-headed window above it, and a pent roof at the base of the second stage. The west wall of the turret is raised on top of the older vicarage garden wall, which abuts against the north wall of the tower.

The only external walls of the **Nave** are at the eastern angles, and the topmost metre or so of the side walls rising above the aisle roofs; there is no east wall as the low-pitched leaded roofs of nave and chancel being continuous. These walls are of coursed roughly-squared stone, with a simple chamfered coping. At the south-eastern angle the chancel plinth and string courses continue round the nave angle¹, and a shallow buttress at the extreme east end of the south nave wall has been incorporated in the Victorian aisle; this has a little old stone in its lower part, and seems to be a pre-19th century feature (perhaps surviving from the 17th-century reconstruction of the nave). At the north-eastern angle the situation is less clear, and the upper part of the angle of the Norman nave may have been rebuilt; there is however a pilaster-like buttress at the east end of the north wall.. Towards the east end of the south wall the sloping roof-lines of a former south transept are quite clearly visible, its ridge-line well above the present wall top, and on the north an earlier roof line a little above the eastern roof slope of the present north transept, presumably indicating an earlier transept here as well.

The **South Aisle** is of similar fabric to the tower, quite badly worn in parts. There is a chamfered plinth, and pilaster buttresses, paired at the angles and articulating the five bays of the south wall, the westernmost of which is covered by the south porch. There is a string course chamfered above and below at the level of the sills of the windows, which have a continuous chamfer to the inner order and an outer one moulded with a roll between two hollows, carried on shafts with waterleaf capitals and moulded bases; the impost moulding is continued along the wall as a string, and there are hoodmoulds with an indented ornament; there is a billet-moulded eaves cornice. There is a single window of the same type in each end wall.

The **South Porch** looks like a later addition to the aisle; its masonry seems slightly fresher, the ashlar being more green than pink in colour. The outer doorway, set between clasping buttresses, has an arch of three orders, the inner a continuous roll moulding, the outer two with bold chevron ornament, carried on jamb shafts with waterleaf capitals; the impost blocks and hood are chamfered on their lower angle, and there is a round-headed slit above. The gable has a coping chamfered on its lower angle, and a cross finial. The side walls each have one small round-arched light.

The **North Aisle** is of four bays, articulated by shallow pilaster buttresses; its fabric incorporates roughly-squared blocks which have the look of re-used masonry. There is a chamfered plinth (made up of tooled-and-margined blocks) and a string chamfered above and below at window sill level, and a double-stepped oversailing course to the eaves. The four windows on the north and single one in the west end have roll-moulded inner and square outer orders; that in the west end, although a close copy of the others, is of c 1884, and clearly of one build with the adjacent stair turret of the tower. In the north wall are two inscribed stones commemorating the 19th-century restorations; one between bays two and three is now difficult to read (the word 'architect' can be made out) but a second at the far east end is partly legible: '..restored....1846....aisle1852vicar... brson... r.smith... .moffat... .churchwardens'.

The **North Transept** is constructed of horizontally-pecked stone with tooled-and-margined ashlar dressings. Its features - plinth, sill, windows and eaves cornice - are all copied from those of the north aisle. A stair descends northwards against the east wall to a square-headed door into the boiler room in the transept basement; there is a single window on the east and

¹As the survival of the arcade shows that the nave had a contemporary south aisle, this angle must be that of a square buttress in the angle between chancel and the east end of the aisle.

another in the north end, under a coped gable on simple quadrant kneelers.

The **Chancel** is one of the most spectacular pieces of Romanesque work in Northumberland, although its original east end, presumably apsidal, has been replaced by the present 14th-century end bay. It is built of coursed neatly-squared stone; there is a clear change from pink to whiter stone above the heads of the windows in the south wall ². The south elevation of the 12th-century part is by far the more elaborate; it



consists of five narrow bays with an additional quarter-bay at the west end, articulated by full-height pilaster buttresses. The plinth has a moulded top member above two chamfers, and there are three string courses; the lowest, chamfered above and below, forms a hoodmould to the plain priest's door in the third bay, the seconds (badly worn) runs below the windows, and the third, with chevron and pellet ornament, forms a hoodmould to the windows. There is also an elaborate corbel table at the wall head. The windows have an inner order with a continuous chamfer, all renewed in pink ashlar, and an outer order with a moulding that is a variant at chevron, with the ornament set at right angles to the wall face, on jamb shafts with waterleaf capitals. There has been some re-facing (there is now no external sign of the low-side window at the west end of the wall) and the priest's door, with a simple chamfer, seems all restoration except for its hoodmould.

The eastern bay, built in more elongate block of purplish stone, is the 14th-century extension. There is a larger stepped buttress between it and the earlier wall to the west. The plinth continues (with only slight variations in its mouldings) and the string at the level of the sills of the earlier windows rounds the buttress and then steps down to run beneath a larger window of two trefoiled lights with a quatrefoil over, in a chamfered surround and under a simple moulded hood with tuned-back ends. It may be a reconstruction of a medieval feature, but all its dressings are yellow 19th-century ashlar. The oversailing parapet is continued across this bay, but on a hollow-chamfered course rather than corbelling.

The east end of the chancel has a pair of clasping buttresses of rather unusual elongate north-south plan. Above the moulded plinth are five courses of large pinkish blocks, and then a moulded string beneath the great east window, of five trefoiled lights with a big circle enclosing three smaller trefoils above, within a chamfered arch with a simple moulded hood with head stops. In its present form it is all of 19th-century date, with some of the tracery being renewed more recently.

²Burton (1976, 189) sees this whiter stone as the same as that used in the nave, and this argues for the chancel being built first.

The north wall of the chancel; follows the same overall pattern as the south - five-and-a quarter bays of original Romanesque work, then a larger stepped buttress and the 14th-century end bay. However, the lower part of the original section is covered by a vestry and outbuilding which are of 19th-century date in their present form but would appear to replace earlier structures, as below a string course at window-sill level - set at higher level than on the south- the wall is quite plain. The articulation into bays by pilaster buttresses only takes place above the string; on this side there are only four windows (the easternmost bay is blank) and they are much simpler than those on the south, having simple chamfered surrounds. Immediately above the string, within each bay there is a chamfered set-back, into which the sills of the window seems to have been cut down. A second string course, chamfered above and below, forms a hoodmould to the windows; the wall-top corbel table is similar to that on the south..

On this side the eastern bay has a two-light window, rather different in detail from that on the south, set hard up against the stepped buttress, and also a chamfered set-back at about two-third of the height of the window, which has a hollow-chamfered outer frame. As on the south all its dressings are recent, in olive ashlar rather like those of the east window; above, the parapet is again continued on a simple hollow-chamfered course rather than a corbel table

The **Vestry** is constructed of coursed squared stone with pink ashlar tooled-and-margined dressings, with a Welsh slate roof. It has clasping buttresses at its outer angles and pilasters dividing the north wall into three bays, above a chamfered plinth. There are small round-arched windows in the east end and central bay of the north wall. To the west between vestry and north transept is a lower outbuilding with a doorway at the west end of its wall and a small boarded window to the east.

The Interior

The internal walls of the main body of the church are now all bare of plaster.

The Tower opens to the nave by a large arch which is clearly a 19th-century copy of the 12th-century chancel arch; it has two moulded orders and a moulded hood, with two orders of jamb shafts with waterleaf capitals; towards the tower the arch is absolutely plain, of a single square order. Directly above the arch is a small round-headed window to the clock chamber. The lower stage windows have steeply-sloping sills; their rear arches are of Roman cement rather than ashlar. The panelled ceiling is of later 19th or 20th century date.

Access to the upper parts of the tower is by the stair turret on the north, which can be reached either by its external door or by the doorway in the west wall of the north aisle. In its south wall is a recess, the position of a doorway blocked up c1184 when the base of the tower was remodelled. Although here termed a 'stair turret', it simply contains two ladders rising, via a rough wooden landing, to a crudely-cut doorway through the north wall of the tower into the clock chamber. To accommodate the lower ladder the lintel of the blocked doorway has had to be hacked away. Built into the internal west jamb of the small window in the north wall is part of a coped stone with an incised cross shaft or roll moulding on its ridge, and a pair of incised lines - perhaps the blade of a sword - to one side. This has the appearance of being part of a 12th-century grave cover.

The doorway of the clock chamber has an internal lintel which is clearly a re-used stone with

mouldings that have been partly hacked back, although it looks to be of 19th-century date. Inside the chamber the case of the 1887 clock, set centrally against the east wall, hides the small window looking down into the nave; to the north of the clock face a short ladder rises to the low square-headed doorway opening out onto the church roof; at the south-west corner another ladder rises to the belfry. The windows on the south and west have crudely-hacked dressings to their jambs, and rough brick rear arches. Built into the internal walls of the chamber are a number of re-used carved or incised stones:

- (1) In the east wall, 1.5 m above the floor and c 0.5 m south of the clock case. A block with incised designs, perhaps an elaborate mason's mark.
- (2) Above the clock chamber, one of the blocks cut into to house the ends of the one the east-west ceiling beams has a flattened roll moulding at one end.
- (3) Near the south end of the same wall a stone with two deep incised lines.
- (4) A very similar stone in the west wall, c 1 m from the south and c 0.5 m above the floor.
- (5) In the same wall, one of the blocks forming the internal north jamb of the west window has a series of lightly incised letters (the last an 'R'); possibly simply graffiti.
- (6) A little further north and lower down, a very worn moulded fragment.

The internal walls of the belfry are rendered. The bell-frames are rather unusual, having long trusses supporting two bells in mouth-to-mouth pits, with asymmetrical posts and strutting.

The **Nave** has five bay arcades with semicircular arches, the north on octagonal piers and the south on circular. The south arcade is genuine 12th-century work; it originally continued for at least two bays further to the west, so the western respond is actually an encased pier (although there is no clear sign of this). The responds are both half-drums; together with the piers they have moulded bases on square chamfered plinths, and the capitals, which have octagonal abaci, are carved with simple stylised foliage; the arches are deeply moulded, with a moulded hood to the nave and a chamfered one to the aisle; towards the nave there is also a string course with chevron ornament above the arcade. The plinths and bases of the first two piers (from the west) are all restoration. The eastern respond has a semi-octagonal plinth; the moulding of its capital is continued as an impost to the chancel arch, which is clearly contemporary with the arcade.

The 19th-century north arcade has simpler arches of two chamfered orders, with a chamfered hood both to nave and aisle; the capitals are modelled loosely on those of the south arcade. The responds are both semicircular in plan, and both incorporate parts of the bases of those of the original 12th-century arcade; part of the original plinth of the second pier survives as well, projecting on the north side of its successor.

The nave has an eleven-bay ceiling with cambered tie beams carrying boarding, with roof lights in the fifth bay from the west, and against the east end.

The internal wall faces of the **South Aisle** are of ashlar; there is a string below the sills of the windows, which have chevron surrounds to their rear arches. The south door has a segmental rear arch. The roof is of nine bays with an additional; half-bay at each end, and has big corbels

carrying arched principals with Romanesque billet ornament, which is also used on the single purlin.



Interior looking east

The internal walls of the **North Aisle** are of re-used squared stone, with a sill string below windows that have plain semicircular rear arches; at the south end of the west wall is a round-arched doorway with a continuous roll moulding, giving access to the stair turret. The roof is identical to that of the south aisle.

The **North Transept** now serves as the organ chamber; it has a very simple roof without trusses.

The internal walls of the **South Porch** are of tooled ashlar, with a chamfered oversailing course at eaves level, and a simple collar-beam roof. The south door is of three orders, the inner with a continuous moulding and the outer two with chevron, carried on shafts with scalloped capitals; there is a hoodmould chamfered on its lower angle.

The **Chancel** is entered under a large Romanesque arch of three richly moulded orders, all on jamb shafts with waterleaf capitals, with an elaborate impost moulding (continuous with that of the south arcade) and a moulded hood moulded bases; in total contrast, the face of the arch towards the chancel is of a single square order, with a simple chamfered hood that may be restoration. The remainder of the arch seems genuine 12th-century work, with the exception of the inner order of the south jamb which has been renewed.

The south wall of the chancel has a string course of the usual type below the windows; a similar

string at a higher level steps over the windows as an internal hoodmould, but otherwise the openings are very plain internally, in contrast to the rich architectural display of their external faces. Below the string course there is a recess at the west end of the wall with a segmental-pointed rear arch, almost certainly a low-side window, obliterated externally by re-facing. The priest's door has a tall semicircular rear arch; to the east of it is a fine 14th-century tomb recess, rising high enough to over lower part of C12 window above. It has a moulded segmental arch with a steep gable above filled with open tracery under a crocketed arch with elaborate foliate finial, flanked by big pinnacles with carved heads and other ornament. The whole composition is set in an ashlar panel, with a coved top ornamented with carved flowers.

Further east, the discontinuity between the 12th and 14th century phases is quite clear in both side walls; the toothed nature of the break (best seen on the north) seems to imply the removal of a wall that returned at right angles, from which the putative apse would have broken forwards. The walls of the eastern bay are in rather white masonry (probably re-used) in contrast to the pinkish fabric of the 12th-century section. The south wall contains a piscina with a moulded two-centred arch with a projecting semi-octagonal bowl. The upper string has been continued to form an internal hood to the two-light window above, but all its stonework seems restoration.

The north wall of the chancel is very plain. The doorway to the vestry, opposite the priest's door on the south, has a tall round-headed arch with a later moulded hood that has turned-back ends; it seems a genuine 12th-century feature, and opened northwards into what must have been an original vestry or sacristy. To the east of it is the mural tomb of the Rev Stephen Gilly 'vicar of Norham, canon of Durham and friend of Vaudois' in a rather brutal Romanesque style, and east again, in the added 14th-century bay, a square-headed aumbry. Higher up the wall there are string courses below the four 12th-century windows, and forming their hoodmould. The upper string is continued east to butt up in a rather clumsy manner against the internal hood of the two-light window in the added bay, but all the visible stonework here is restoration.

The east wall of the chancel has no string courses; the large east window has an internal moulded hood; as on the exterior, all its stonework seems restoration.

The chancel has a nine-bay roof with the boarded ceiling resting directly on the cambered tie-beams which in turn are supported by short wall-posts with arch braces, springing from 19th-century corbels; there are carved wall plates.

The interior of the late 19th-century **Vestry** has no particular features of interest except for the tall round-headed rear arch of the 12th-century door opening into it, similar to that of the priest's door in the opposite wall of the chancel; some of its dressings have been re-cut and re-tooled. There are traces of sockets and cuts in the south wall, evidence of some structure pre-dating the present vestry, but not enough to make any coherent reconstruction of its form. There is a 19th-century fireplace set against the south wall.

Inside the outbuilding to the west of the vestry, the lower part of the external face of the north chancel wall is rendered; the only feature of interest visible is the base of the north-east angle of the 12th-century nave, with its moulded plinth, which is not continued along the chancel wall.

The Structural History of the Church

I The Saxon Church

The vill of Norham probably formed part of the earliest land holdings of the Lindisfarne community, although the earliest reference to it is in the 10th century Historia de Sancto Cuthberto which records that during the episcopacy of Egred (830-845) a 7th-century timber church was moved from Holy Island to Norham (Bailey et al 1988, 102); the Lindisfarne community probably fled to Norham after the Viking raids, either in AD 845 or possibly as late as the 870s, bringing with them the bones of Ceolwulf from Holy Island which were traditionally re-buried here beneath the entrance into the church. Gospatric, first Earl of Northumberland, is also said to have been buried at Norham. Excavations in the 18th and 19th centuries, by two vicars, Lambe and Gilly uncovered Saxon carved stones (later built into a pillar, now re-erected inside the present church at the west end of the north aisle); these had apparently been re-used in the walls of a large building in the churchyard to the east of the church where there is an obvious raised platform and some old trees (see 'Archaeological Assessment' section). The monastery church stood until at least 1082, when it is recorded as being given to the Benedictine house of Durham by Bishop Carlilef; it may have remained until 1138, when King David of Scotland is recorded as having destroyed both the town and the castle.

II The 12th century Church



Norham has what is arguably the finest Romanesque parish church in Northumberland, the result of its historical and political links with the Bishops of Durham, and their nearby Castle. The church is thought to have been built c1165-70, at the same time as major works on the castle, and is thought to have been designed by the same architect; the window arches in the chancel are very similar to those of the Norman Gallery in Durham Castle. It was a church of impressive proportions, with a nave of at least seven bays. The chancel survives, shorn only of its presumably-apsidal east end; there is evidence of a contemporary structure on the north that Raine (1852, 259, footnote w) saw as 'a narrow aisle...if it may be so called'³. Burton (1976) suggests that the chancel was built first (implying that there was an earlier nave still standing at the time) followed by the nave.

³A dowsed plan of the church (Briggs et al 1988) indicates the lost apse at the east end, and also apsidal terminations to the nave aisles, as well as large transepts, the post-medieval south porch, and two further bays of the nave to the west, as well as apparent divisions in the nave aisle, not correlating with the arcade piers, which would suggest the porticus of an underlying Saxon building. Apart from these, the features shown can all be deduced from the standing fabric, the 1835 painting and knowledge of other local churches.

III Later Medieval Changes

Norham church was clearly a place of considerable significance in the troubled politics of the medieval Border. In 1290 Edward I twice sat enthroned in the church to give his verdict on rival claimants to the Scottish throne; the ensuing strife is reflected by the vicissitudes suffered by the fabric of the church. In some places, further south, the ‘umbrella’ of a nearby castle might afford a church some protection, but hardly here, right on the Tweed. In 1318 the church was occupied and fortified by Robert the Bruce in 1318, during a siege of the Castle, and it is reasonable to presume it suffered damage. The eastern extension of the chancel dates to after this event; its reconstruction is doubtless dated by the 1338/9 reference in the Proctor’s Roll to new windows being made in the south wall and east end (Raine 1852, 260)⁴. In addition to this, it is possible that the original aisles were destroyed and replaced by transepts at this time. It is possible of course that the church did have both aisles and transepts from the first, but the evidence of other Northumberland churches tends to suggest that the transepts, popular in 13th century churches (eg Corbridge, Ovingham, Rothbury)) might have been a later addition. At Kirkwhelpington and Mitford transepts were built after the destruction of earlier aisles, and this might have been the case here in the 14th century, although nothing now remains of them other than traces of their roof-lines.

IV Post-Medieval Changes

It is recorded that the church was restored in 1617⁵ after having lain roofless for a century, which would suggest another destructive event, probably around the time of Flodden (1513). This time the nave was reconstructed shorn of both aisles and



its south transepts. Several sources provide useful information as to the church at this period - a 1734 outline plan (Northumberland County Record office microfilm M 1596), Raine’s description (1852, 259-60) and illustration, and a painting dated 1835 (above; now hanging at the west end of the nave). The south wall of the nave incorporated six blocked arches of the 12th-century arcade, with the springing of a seventh at the west end; Raine wrote that ‘the original extent of the nave cannot be ascertained’. The painting shows the blocked arches, and a Classical style porch projecting from the second of the six bays, with a two-light mullioned window (perhaps of 1619) to the west and four larger round-headed windows (perhaps late 18th or early 19th century) to the east. The nave has a flat roof; the west end was quite plain (with a central upstanding block of masonry, perhaps the base of a bellcote). Attached to the northern part of the west end of the nave was a ‘diminutive modern tower’ with simple Gothic-arched

⁴MS notes by Canon Waite (Northumberland Count Record Office microfilm M 1596) record that, during the 1883-4 works, ‘immediately underneath the altar rails foundations of a very strong wall running across the chancel’ were seen; he interpreted this as a temporary east end built prior to the construction of the present end bay of the chancel c1340.

⁵Raine reports that the porch bore an inscription ‘This church was repaired by the parishioners of Norham, Maister Patrick Waite being preacher here, 1617’

belfry openings and a small pinnacle at each angle; Raine saw tower and porch as ‘disproportioned erections which prove their date and the wretched taste and parsimony and church-wardenism of the day’ Raine describes the north wall of the nave as having two windows ‘each of three lights with flat heads’ and a doorway, all of which were walled up⁶; there was also ‘an ancient porch, or perhaps chantry’ which had ‘been converted into a family pew and burial place for the owners of Twizell Castle’; this was presumably either the medieval north transept, or possibly a later structure erected on its site. The 1734 plan shows the west tower, and also two structures attached to the north wall of the nave, a small porch-like one a little further from the west end than the south porch, and then a separate longer one extending almost as far as the east end of the nave. Raine also records that the nave was re-covered in lead in 1752 and the chancel in 1762.

V The 19th Century. Several Phases of Restoration

As already stated the structural history of St Cuthbert’s Church has much in common with others in the county; a high-status early medieval fabric suffered badly during the ‘Three Hundred Years War’ and its truncated remains were patched up for continuing use, until the 19th-century brought about extensive restoration, and the reinstatement of the sections of the building destroyed centuries before. At Norham this restoration and reinstatement took place in a series of phases, under different architects:

- 1812 An organ was erected by subscription, and a new organ gallery erected; an older gallery on the south side of the nave, called the Thornton gallery, was removed at the same time (Raine, *ibid*)

- 1837 The present west tower was built; its unusual form and ‘oversized neo-Norman’ bell openings have attracted some architectural criticism.

- 1846 The south aisle and porch were rebuilt by Ignatius Bonomi⁷

- 1852 The north aisle was rebuilt by D.Gray

- 1870: A plan by F.R.Wilson of this date, and an un-dated one by C Hodgson Fowler (Northumberland County Record Office ref NRO 626/10) both provide a valuable record of the church at this date. They show a much smaller vestry on the north of the chancel (Wilson hatching its walls as if they were recent work); Hodgson Fowler shows a dotted outline to the east labelled ‘site of ancient vestry’, and also the tower closed off from the nave by a wall with a small central doorway, with another doorway at the east end of the north wall of the tower. Wilson’s plan shows this second doorway as linking to an external structure (labelled ‘coats’) and also a staircase inside the tower ascending first along the east and then the south walls. There is no window in the west wall of the north aisle. Hodgson Fowler’s drawings include what is clearly a design for the present tower arch, and a rough-out for a stair turret in the present position. They also include sections showing a proposed heating chamber beneath the north aisle

⁶Raine quotes the 1790 will of Thomas Kidd, porter to the Earl of Guildford, who left £100’with this sum the east window was restored, and the windows on the north side of the nave, now blocked up, were re-glazed’.

⁷Information from Pevsner et al (1992, 523); as mentioned in the descriptive text, the present porch looks of later date than the aisle, and seems rather different from the one shown on Wilson’s plan (1870). Burton (1976, 189) states that the tower and both aisles are all by Bonomi.

1883-4 The north transept was built; extensive repairs carried out and the floor lowered, uncovering the remains of the 12th-century north arcade⁸. MS notes by Canon Waite (see footnote 4) refer to the floor being lower 20" at this time, to the level of the original pillar bases; east and west windows were inserted in the north aisle, the tower arch constructed, a new chancel roof constructed, and the church re-pewed throughout. The vestry was 'enlarged'. It seems likely that the south porch was rebuilt at this time, as Waite records that the ground around the church was lowered a similar amount to the floor levels inside.

Archaeological Assessment

From the point of view of its archaeological potential, Norham church and its immediate surroundings is clearly one of the most important sites in Northumberland, with the known presence of a Saxon monastery, and then a large and high-status Norman church with a troubled subsequent history.

As regards the above-ground fabric, most of the walls of the church are bare of plaster, and the majority of their fabric and structural features are clearly visible. Below floor level it is a different matter. The floor of the nave is mostly of concrete, with wood block flooring under the pews; that of the chancel is of diagonally-set stone slabs. There is clearly an under-floor heating system, and one of considerable depth - the floor of the boiler room is over 3.5 m below the surface of the churchyard, and the heating ducts within the building look to be of commensurate depth. It is obvious that this heating system will have occasioned some damage to the sub-floor archaeology, as of course will many generations of burial within the building. However, in a building and on a site as important as this, any works that entail the disturbance of the floors will require careful archaeological monitoring. There is clearly a perimeter drain set against the external faces of the walls of the church, which will have caused some damage to underlying archaeological deposits.

The churchyard, not directly the subject of this report, is obviously of great archaeological importance as well. The earthwork platform to the east of the church is of great interest; substantial remains of a building were excavated here in the 1830s by the then vicar the Rev Gilly: his MS account (Northumberland County Record office microfilm M1596) is worth quoting:

'At the East end of the Church, there is a large uneven surface in the Churchyard, where it is said Mr Lambe & former vicar made excavations and found some curiously carved stones. In the winter of 1832, and again in December 1833 workmen were employed to remove the earth on this spot, and at irregular depths of from 3 to 4 feet below the sods were found traces of an ancient building, the original destination (sic) of which antiquarians have not been able to determine. Most probably this was the site of the Saxon church of Egfrid, & previously of a Roman temple. The excavations recorded (?) 74 feet in length, and nearly 40 in breadth. The foundations of side walls, and apparently of cross walls 2'9" wide were discovered, and vestiges of flagged pavement along the whole length, as if it formed the aisle of a church - or a passage leading to cells. In two or three places this aisle or passage was crossed by a flagged pavement laid upon it, and extending the whole breadth of the building. The hewn stones were of various dimensions - some of red sandstone, others of a harder texture - and one of

⁸Notes from church guide pamphlet

wynd-stone. Several of these were very large. In different places carved stones were found, some of them bearing marks of Saxon & others of Roman times....’

Raine (1852) writing a few years later, states unequivocally that the remains seen were ‘the

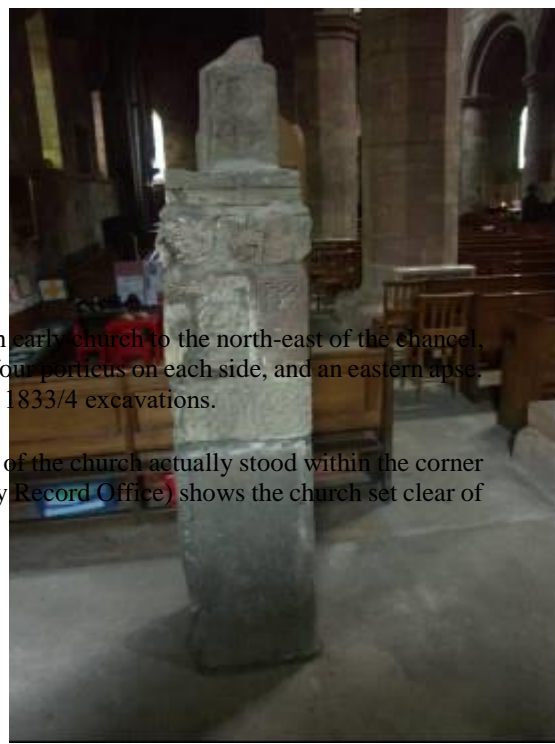


floors and foundations’ of the medieval Proctor’s house. It seems clear that the Saxon carved stones retrieved at this time had been re-used in later medieval fabric. This medieval structure was clearly one of some importance; there are documentary references to an exchequer chamber and an ‘old steeple built in stone’ that was still extant in the early 17th century. It is of course possible that earlier ecclesiastical remains were incorporated in the medieval

buildings⁹. This is a site (above, seen from south-west) crying out for some non-destructive geophysical investigation, although clearly burials and the ancient trees here will have complicated matters. Any such investigation should also include the whole area around the church, to pick up possible remains of the original west end, and transepts. The present churchyard is huge, with relatively recent extensions to the north; it is tempting to wonder whether a detailed study of its boundaries might shed some light on the extent of the early monastic enclosure; is there any evidence of a *vallum monasteri*?

The south wall of the churchyard, in particular the western section fronting onto the drive of the former vicarage, has a number of large L-shaped blocks built into its external face, clearly re-used from some earlier structure. The two walls which abut against the church tower are also of considerable interest. Both seem of considerable antiquity, and their relationship to the church itself is interesting¹⁰. The wall extending west has a distinct break c 2.5 m from the church; the eastern part, of larger blocks, may have either have been built after the shortening of the west end in 1838, or retain or more likely retain fabric from the post-medieval north-west tower. The taller wall running north contains several phases of fabric; c 14 m from the church there is a large block built in near the top of its west face, that has a tapering circular hole pierced through it; could this be a simple Saxon monolithic window?

The Pre-Conquest stones retrieved from the early



⁹The dowser’s survey already referred to (footnote 3) also located an early church to the north-east of the chancel, having an irregular trapezoidal body containing a central nave with four porticus on each side, and an eastern apse. This does tally quite well with Gilly’s rather garbled account of the 1833/4 excavations.

¹⁰The 1734 map already mentioned shows that the north-west tower of the church actually stood within the corner of the vicarage garden; the 1843 Tithe map (Northumberland County Record Office) shows the church set clear of the corner of the garden, which is clearly an error.

building to the east of the church churchyard are now built up into a peculiar pillar (right), which has been moved around but is now at the west end of the north aisle. This is a far from ideal way to display early sculpture; some faces of the stones are certainly concealed; however the mortar is very hard, and it might prove impossible to remove the stones from their present setting without occasioning severe damage. The condition of their exposed faces will require monitoring, although there do not appear to be major immediate concerns. Also less than ideal is condition of the pile of worked stones and architectural fragments, found in 1953 when the sanctuary wall was grouted and repaired¹¹. These have not been closely examined, but appear to be largely of 12th-century date, and probably derive from the 12th-century eastern apse. They should be recorded in detail (as photographs and measured drawings) and some thought given to their storage and display.

Peter F Ryder March 2005



Re-used material in the south wall of the churchyard; note large 'stepped' blocks.. There is a considerable amount of similar material in the other churchyard walls and in the old walls around the Old Vicarage garden.

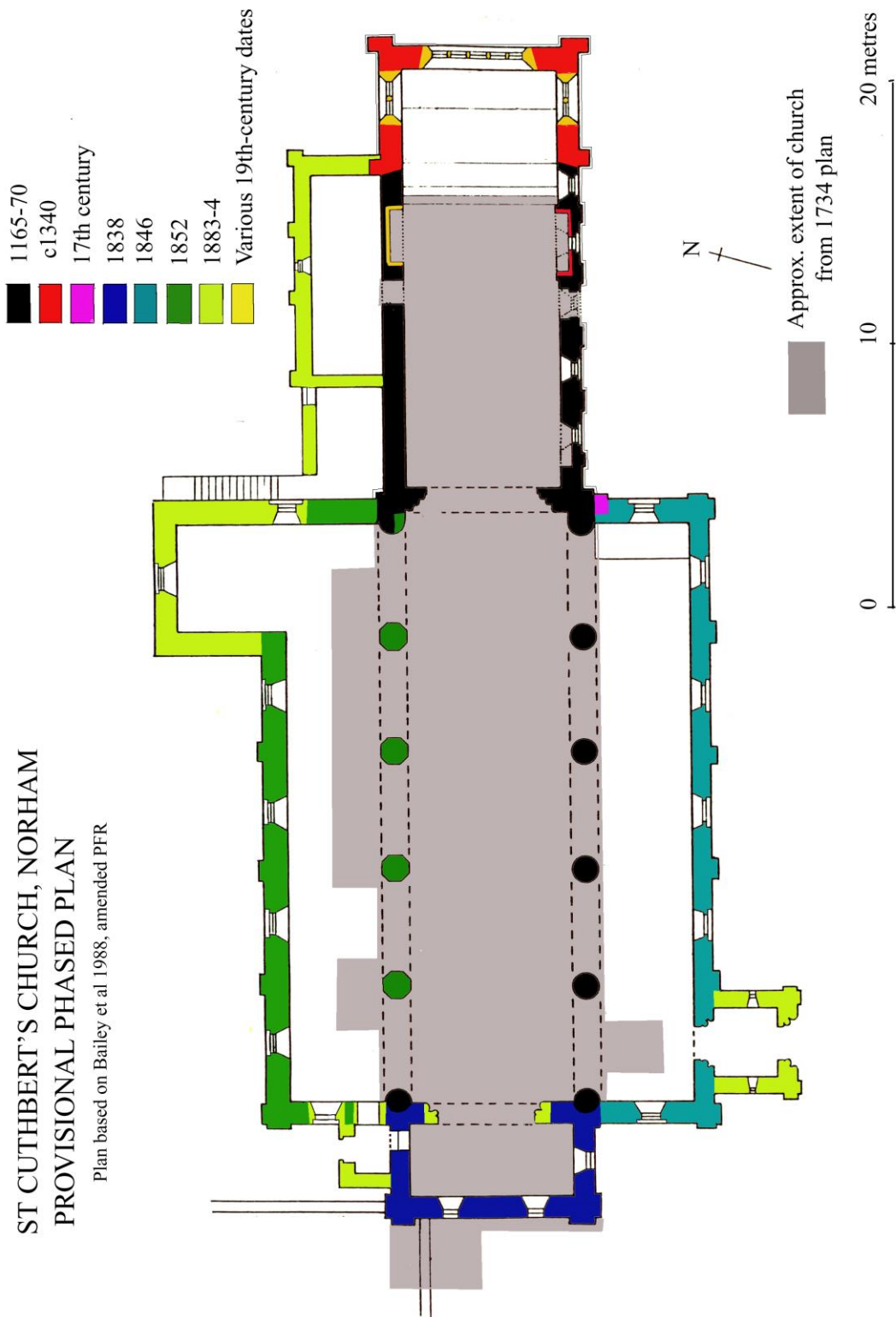
Re-used feature, possibly a small monolithic Saxon window, in the west face of the garden wall of the Old Vicarage, that abuts against the north side of the church tower.



¹¹Information from church guide pamphlet

ST CUTHBERT'S CHURCH, NORHAM PROVISIONAL PHASED PLAN

Plan based on Bailey et al 1988, amended PFR



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