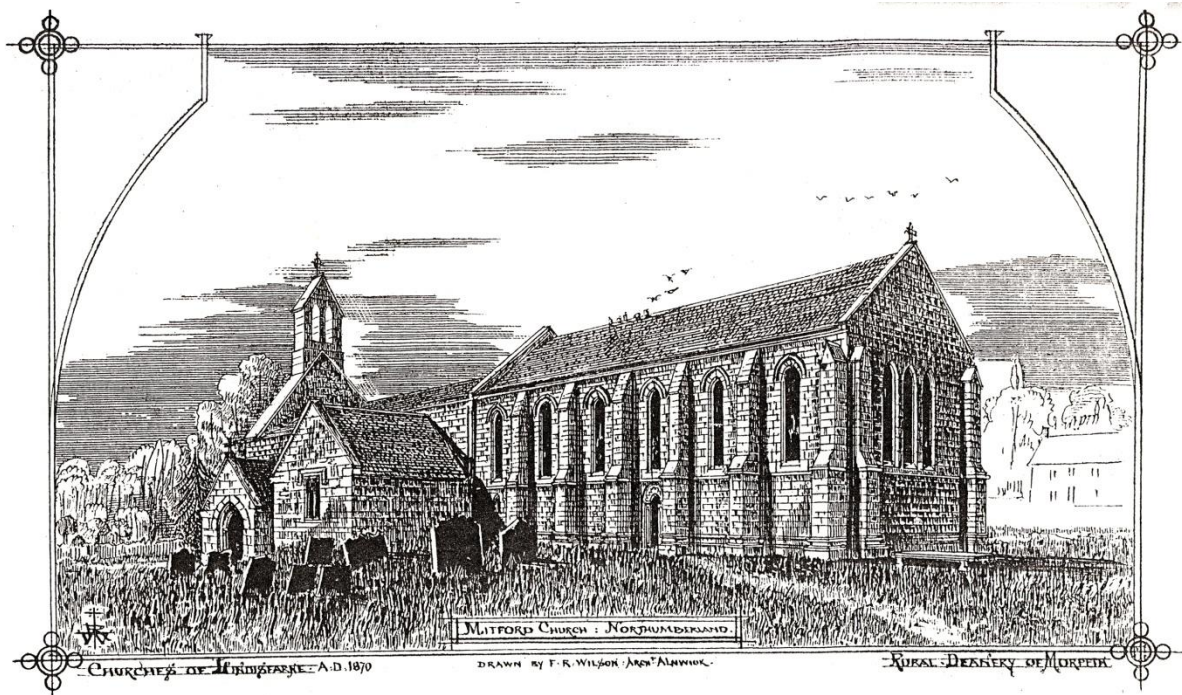


THE CHURCH OF ST MARY MAGDALENE MITFORD

NORTHUMBERLAND

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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St Mary Magdalene, Mitford

The parish church of Mitford, although locally prominent in the landscape through its lofty spire, lies low on the south bank of the Wansbeck, and is overlooked on the south east by the prominent knoll that carries the ruins of Mitford Castle. The church consists of a nave with a four-bay south aisle, small transepts or transeptal chapels, a south porch and a west tower; the aisleless chancel has a small north-west organ chamber. The parts of the church dating from the 1874-5 restoration (tower, south aisle, porch and nave clerestory) are of close-jointed brown/olive sandstone of near-ashlar quality, with ashlar dressings; the medieval parts are of coursed squared or roughly-squared stone, and the roofs of red tiles.



South-east view

Description

The Exterior

The **West Tower** rises in one tall stage (interrupted only by a simple moulded string below the sill of the west window) as far as a bold chamfered set-back at the base of the belfry; at the south-west angle is an octagonal stair turret rising to a pyramidal cap at belfry level, and at the north-west angle are a pair of stepped buttresses that only rise to a little above the string. There is a chamfered plinth; the stair turret has a bold broach stop at the foot of its south-east angle and is lit by a series of small chamfered loops. The west window, set quite high, is of two lights, with simple Y-tracery and a chamfered hood with shaped stops. On the south at mid-height is a square-headed two-light window set east-of-centre, with a hollow-chamfered surround, and just below the top of the stage are pairs of lancets, set centrally, on south, west and north. On the east the steep-pitched nave roof rises to the base of the belfry. The belfry has a tall opening in each face, with a four-centred arch enclosing two lancet lights with a circle in the spandrel, and a transom near the base with blind panels beneath it; the chamfered hood has shaped stops, like those of the west window. Above and to either side are oculi or sound holes, in chamfered surrounds. The parapet has a moulded string at its base (pierced by a spout above each belfry opening) and a moulded parapet, and behind it rises the lofty octagonal ashlar spire, which has lucernes on the principal faces, the lower ones having hollow-chamfered cross windows with blind four-centred arches above and the much smaller upper ones square-headed loops. The spire is topped by a weathervane.

The lower part of the south wall of the **Nave** is concealed by the south aisle; directly above the aisle roof is a bold string course with incised chevron ornament. This looks wholly 19th century in its present form¹, but below it, at the south east corner, is an old attached shaft that rises from a block c 0.5 m below the eaves of the low transept; below this is a ragged break between the fabric of the nave and the rebuilt walling of the transept. In the lowest two courses is an irregular projection, perhaps the springing of the apse of the 12th-century south aisle. Above the chevron-moulded string the walling of the clerestory is all of 1874-5; the eastern bay has a pair of lancets and the other bays single lancets, all with chamfered hoods, and there are corbels, hollow-chamfered below, to the eaves.

The north wall of the nave is quite complex; the lower part of its eastern bay is concealed by the north transept, and the western half bay is a 19th century addition, although in coursed roughly-pecked stone in contrast to the near-ashlar of the south side, and at the west end is a big ashlar buttress matching the pair at the north-west corner of the tower. A string course, chamfered above, marks the base of the 1874-5 clerestory, which is in the better-quality stone, and is identical to that on the south. Towards the centre of the wall is the blocked north door, a square-headed opening with a lintel (now cracked) cambered on its extrados, and a rough segmental relieving arch above. There are three quite broad lancet windows; the outer ones look ancient (although the eastern has had its sill renewed) but the external dressings of the central one are all restoration. Midway between the central and eastern lancets is a straight joint rising to a height of c1.5 m; above this level roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone courses through but below, to the west of the joint is well-coursed fabric that includes many large square blocks (of 12th century character, although perhaps re-used) whilst to the east is of much less regular stone. Just short of the transept there is a second straight joint that rises a little higher (up to transept eaves) but may be more recent as a small square opening at its base looks of 19th century date, and may relate to the adjacent boiler room beneath the north transept. The wall has no real plinth, although there is a projecting footing in between the two straight joints, ending c 0.30 m from each.

The coping of the east gable of the nave has a foliate finial cross and a large stepped stack rising from its northern slope, rising to with a tapering cap with a series of small vents in each face; all this is clearly of 1874-5.

The **South Aisle** is again of 1874-5, and its fabric is like that of the tower, with which it shares a continuous chamfered plinth; there is a moulded string below the windows and a pair of stepped buttresses at the south-west corner, and shaped corbels to the eaves like those of the clerestory. There is a single lancet in the west wall, with a chamfered hood of the usual type, and a single and double lancet in the south wall to the east of the porch.

¹ Sections of it are shown on an 1832 pencil-and-wash sketch by Swinburne, and mentioned in his accompanying letter. Woodhorn archive ref SANT/BEQ/19/3/1

The **South Porch** is again of the same build, with the same plinth, but here there are two moulded strings, one just above the plinth and the other forming the imposts of the outer arch which is of two-centred form, and of two chamfered orders, under a moulded hood. There are stepped buttresses at the southern angles, and a coping to the gable chamfered on its underside; a horizontal string cross the gable, with a recent sundial occupying the triangular panel above; the gable is topped by a foliate cross finial.

The **South Transept** is largely built of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone. The uppermost four courses of the short west wall are of pecked stone, and probably post-medieval; at the foot of the wall is a projecting footing. At each end of the south wall are what look like the bases of shallow buttresses, which only survive to the height of two courses; the lowest course is of regular cut blocks but the one above has been roughly hacked back. Above, c 0.70 m from the ground, is a slight off-set, above which the wall may have been rebuilt; it contains a square-headed window of two ogee-headed trefoiled lights, with a moulded hood and a raised shield in the spandrel bearing three animals identified as the moles of Mitford of Molesden; on either side of the window head is a worn corbel, that to the west now fairly shapeless, that to the east a pair of human heads. The gable coping is chamfered on its lower edge, and there is an eroded shaped finial. The east wall of the transept is quite complex; the lowermost course, of large squared blocks, has a marked dip in the centre, possibly resulting from subsidence if the wall was, as is supposed, built across the opening into a former apse. At ground level there are some large projecting footings c 2 m from the south end of the wall. Towards the south end of the wall and c 0.80 m above the ground an elaborate chevron-moulded voussoir has been re-used, with just above that the head or sill of a two-light mullioned window. 1.5 m from the south end of the wall is a small rectangular opening with a metal grille. The ragged joint at the north end of the wall has already been described.

The **North Transept** is of similar dimensions to its southern counterpart, and is largely constructed of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone; it has old quoins at its north-west angle but 19th-century ones at the north-east; there is a 19th-century boiler room beneath it, reached by an external flight of steps on the north. The west wall is devoid of any features. In the centre of the north gable is a two-light window with trefoiled ogee lights, very like that in the south transept, except that it has no raised shield nor any hoodmould; the gable has a coping chamfered on its underside, and a simple roll moulding as a finial. On the east is a 19th-century doorway very like that in the organ chamber, except that the hoodmould has good carved foliate stops; the southern part of the east wall is concealed by the 19th century Organ Chamber.

The south elevation of the **Chancel** is constructed of coursed squared blocks, and presents an impressive elevation of six rather irregular bays, articulated by stepped buttresses. There is a three-part plinth (a chamfer at ground level, a bold chamfer at mid height and a moulded string at the top) and a moulded string at the level of the sills of the six lancet windows, as well as an oversailing chamfered course to the eaves. Below the string, set left-of-centre in the westernmost bay, is a low-side window, another lancet, and in the fourth bay a priest's door. This is of two

orders; the inner has a narrow two-centred arch with high-relief chevron, now very worn, and the outer a near-semicircular arch (formed from three stones) with chevron in its angle and leaf motifs; there is also a hoodmould, flush with the wall on one side and projecting on the other – one of several features that make this door look like a re-set piece. The outer order is carried on (renewed) shafts with old scalloped capitals; one block in the east jamb has sharpening grooves that clearly pre-date the reinstatement of the shafts. Above the string the lancets windows have chamfered hoods, all now somewhat eroded.



The chancel from the south

The paired buttresses at the eastern angles of the transepts have steeply gabled tops with trefoiled ridges, in contrast to the sloping tops of the buttresses of the south wall. The plinth and string are continued from the south wall; above the string are a triplet of lancets, of equal height, with linked chamfered hoodmoulds, and a vesica window above enclosed by a moulded label; all the dressings of these openings look of 19th-century character. The steep gable has a coping chamfered on its underside, and a foliate cross finial.

The north wall of the chancel divides into three bays, the western now covered by the pent-roofed Organ Chamber. The sill string and plinth are only continued along the short eastern bay, which has a lancet window that seems to be an authentic medieval feature. Then comes a massive stepped buttress, with some odd irregularities – the sloping cap is narrower than the main structure below – which probably incorporates the stub of the east wall of the former sacristy. The broad centre bay was formerly covered by the sacristy; there is a band, just below

the eaves cornice, which must have served as a roof tabling for the vanished structure, and below that a series of five eroded corbels that presumably carried its roof timbers. The wall below shows much reddening, especially in its lower parts (and around the roof corbels) which almost certainly indicates the sacristy was destroyed by fire; it also contains many almost square blocks, perhaps 12th-century material re-used. In the centre of this section is a blocked square-headed doorway (which seems coeval with the walling) that has a chamfered lintel but plain square-section jambs; about 1 m above the eastern end of its lintel is a small stone with what looks like a raised shield upon it. To the west of the doorway is a lancet window with a surround that looks of (early?) 19th-century date; its jambs each have two tall upright stones and three short ones; its internal frame seems ancient². The **Organ Chamber** has 19th-century ashlar quoins but re-uses older masonry in its walling. It has a single lancet on the north, and a two-centred chamfered doorway on the east, with a hoodmould grooved and chamfered on its lower angle.

The Interior

The internal walls of the church are almost all of exposed stonework; the fabric of 1874-5 is mostly finely-tooled ashlar, and the medieval parts roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, in some areas somewhat obscured by heavy pointing.

The **Tower** opens to the nave by a lofty pointed arch of three chamfered orders, with a chamfered hood, moulded imposts and double-chamfered jambs rising from moulded bases with large leaves copied from the bases of the south arcade. Above the arch is a lancet window, opening westwards into the first floor room of the tower; its rear arch is in the form of a chamfered rib, a form followed by all the windows of this type in the church. Inside the tower is a small modern western gallery, below which the square-headed doorway to the newel stair is set diagonally in the south-west corner; above the gallery the west window has a segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfer to its head only. The newel stair, well lit by broadly-splayed loops, rises to the belfry, passing square-headed doorways into the first and second floors. The former is lit by a two-light window on the south, with a heavy rectangular block forming its internal lintel; the lancet above the tower arch opens into this chamber, and has a groove for leaded glazing, although it is now closed by a casement fixed to its (external) splay; this window is a puzzling piece, as it looks as if it is intended to be an external opening, but never can have been. It looks no older than the earlier (?)19th century; might it have been re-used in 1874-5?. The second-floor room is lit by paired lancets on the north, west and south, all with plain internal lintels. A third similar doorway opens into the belfry, where the bells are now mounted on cast iron frames. The oculi or sound holes each have three-quarter-round rear arches, forming a pair in each corner of the tower, beneath the triple squinches that carry the alternate sides of the spire, the lower part of

² Wilson's 1870 plan does not show any window here, but a lancet at the west end of the wall – was this moved here when the Organ Chamber was added?

which (lit by its four cross windows) is open to the belfry; rickety wooden ladders ascend to its heights.



Inside the **Nave** three bays of the south arcade (left) are of 12th century date, and the fourth, westernmost, a copy of 1874-5. They are semicircular in form, and spring from massive circular piers with scalloped capitals, with moulded bases – each with a large leaf set diagonally at each corner – set on stepped and grooved square plinths. The arches are of two orders; the inner has a soffit roll between two chamfers, the outer is moulded towards the nave but simply chamfered towards the aisle. The eastern respond is semi-octagonal, with a billet moulding to the abacus ring; the western respond is copy. Piers and arches show considerably patching, and the regularly-coursed stonework in the spandrels of the arches seems all of 1874-5³. On the north side of the nave the arch into the north transept is of similar form, but looks all restoration, as does its eastern respond, which puzzlingly takes the form of a three-quarter pier, with a scalloped capital. The western respond however is ancient, and has clearly been a full pier,

with a capital that has both scallops and carved foliage on the vertical faces. Nothing remains of any arch springing westwards, which must have been replaced by the present nave wall with its three lancet windows (the rear arches of all three, of the usual type, appear ancient) and the blocked north door, which has a segmental rear arch. 3.6 m west of the respond is the straight joint in the lower part of the wall (also seen externally); this is in approximately the right place to represent the western respond of a second arch to the former north arcade.

On both walls of the nave a string course, chamfered on its lower angle, marks the top of the medieval fabric and base of the 1879 clerestory. On the south it runs level, but on the north, where it is set at a slightly higher level, it steps down at both ends to the level of its southern

³ It would appear from the account of the restoration which appears in the [Newcastle Daily Journal](#) for 20th May 1875 that the arches and walling above were taken down and rebuilt.

counterpart. The lancets of the clerestory have broad internal splays; above them is a chamfered oversailing course. The four-bay roof is of the crown-post type, with ashlaring to the eaves, struts between the principals and collars, and four-way braces from the posts.

In the **South Aisle** the lower part of the walls – which were presumably originally covered by a dado - are of coursed roughly-pecked stone. The south door has a segmental rear arch with a chamfer to its head, and the windows rear arches of the usual type. At the east end of the aisle is a segmental arch into the transept, of two chamfered orders with a chamfered hood.

Inside the **South Porch** the south door has a two-centred arch; the inner orders has a continuous broad chamfer and the outer, set on jamb shafts with carved and moulded bases (raised to the level of the tops of the side benches) is moulded, as is the hood which has foliate stops. The stone side benches have moulded edges, and the roof is of arch-braced collared rafters.

The **South Transept**, now screened off from both nave and aisle, now serves as a chapel. The short west wall is faced in ashlar, containing a neo-Romanesque monument to Bertram Osbaldeston Mitford, d 1842, who is described as ‘of Mitford Castle’, rather surprisingly as the said fortress had already been a ruin for four centuries. The window in the south wall has a broad internal splay and a renewed shouldered rear arch; to the east of it is a small piscina with a segmental-pointed chamfered arch and the front edge of its bowl cut away. The east wall is plain, except that at its north end, adjacent to the eastern respond of the arcade, is the moulded base and three stones of a 12th-century shaft, either the north end of a wall arcade or possibly the north side of an arch opening into the eastern apse of the early south aisle.

The **North Transept** now serves as a vestry; the 19th-century doorway at the north end of its east wall has a segmental rear arch with a chamfer only to its head. The two-light window in the north wall has broadly-splayed jambs and a shouldered rear arch, the lintel of which has neat parallel tooling on its edge, marking it out as a 19th century replacement. The west wall is concealed by a range of fitted cupboards

The **Chancel** is entered under a broad segmental-pointed arch of two orders, the inner with rolls on its lower angles and the other with a broad chamfer. It springs from short wall shafts, resting in short lengths of moulded string course c 2.5 m above the floor. The southern wall shaft – in section a big half roll between two fillets – is the only old part, and has its central block cut back, perhaps to house the end of a rood beam; it carries a scalloped capital with its impost grooved and chamfered beneath; the northern respond is a copy.

On the south side of the chancel, the internal opening of the low-side window, with broadly-splayed jambs and a plain lintel, is partly concealed by the choir stalls. Further east the priest's door has a plain pointed arch within a square frame. In the sanctuary are three sedilia (all on the same level) with rather distorted moulded pointed arches and a casement-moulded hood, springing from shafts with moulded caps and bases; all their stonework looks old, and retains some traces of red ochre colouring. To the east is a piscina with a cusped bowl set in a large

square recess containing a (renewed) shelf and framed by a bold roll moulding. The head and the ends of the sill look of much fresher stone but the jambs look old, raising the possibility that the recess has been widened at some time. Above all these features is a moulded string course, below the range of six lancets, with all have rear arches of the usual rib type.

On the north of the chancel the western third of the wall and the loft chamfered arch into the Organ Chamber is concealed by the elaborate woodwork of the organ, and the lower part of the eastern section by a boarded dado; there is a mid-height string, as on the south, interrupted by an unusual monument – a rustic effigy on a tomb chest - to Bertram Revely d.1622 which is set in front of the blocked north door. The two lancet windows each have rear arches of the usual form.

The east wall has a central recess, backed by the carved stonework of the 19th century reredos, below the triplet of lancets. These have richly-moulded rear arches, and intermediate shafts with shaft rings, all of which (together with the moulded surround of the vesica above) are clearly of 19th century date, but the plain outer shafts with their scalloped capitals, and the short lengths of chevron-moulded frieze which continue from these to the side walls, are apparently 12th-century work, although possibly ex situ.

The chancel has a boarded wagon roof with a carved plate. The west wall, above the chancel arch, is rendered.

The interior of the **Organ Chamber** is boarded around, and of no architectural interest, although the boarding is covered by pencil graffiti, largely from the early years of the 20th century, which have some claim to be a valuable social/historical document in their own right.

Discussion

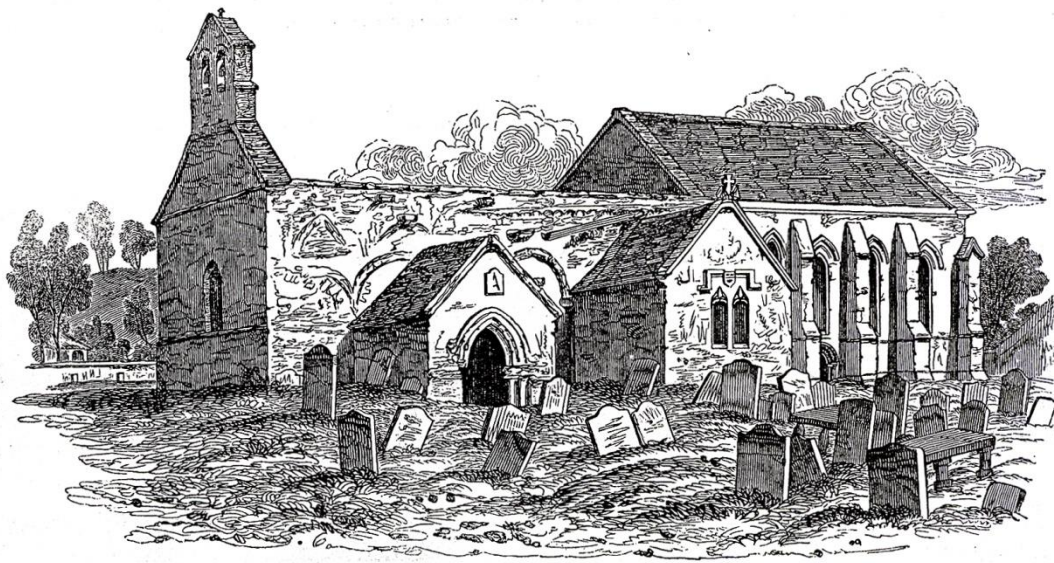
This is a complex and interesting building, which despite its rather grandiose Victorian refurbishment retains evidence in its fabric of the vicissitudes of the medieval history of the area, although, as often, correlations between features in the building and specific historical events need to be treated with caution!

The history of the church is obviously wound together with that of the adjacent castle, which is first recorded in 1138; excavations immediately prior to World War II uncovered the remains of a 12th century chapel which apparently overlay a still-earlier graveyard, with several monuments remaining in situ (Honeyman 1955). This would appear to suggest that the earliest church here – probably with Pre-Conquest origins – stood on the knoll, and was enclosed within the late 11th/early 12th century castle of the Bertram family, a new church then being built for the parish on the present site. This appears to be a relatively common scenario ; at Newcastle remains of an early church (and graveyard) have been recently found adjacent to the 12th century castle keep, which it would appear was superseded by the church that is now St Nicholas' Cathedral, a little outside the castle to the north.

Thus what was probably the first church on the present site was constructed in the mid-12th century, and would appear to have been a sizeable and high-status building; Hodges (1928) sees it as having a five-bay fully-aisled nave and a chancel of the present length, but his reconstruction can be queried on several grounds. What survives of this Romanesque building is three-and-a-half bays of the south arcade and one of the north, and some features in the chancel – the priest’s door and the shafts and the decorative string at the east end – which really have the look of being re-used. The north arcade is a real puzzle; the surviving arch has what seems like a pier as its eastern respond, although a pier in this position (with another arch springing to the east) is impossible to accommodate with the present chancel arch, the southern respond of which looks to be mid-12th century work as well. This respond seems entirely 19th-century restoration in its present form; as it is shown in this form on Wilson’s plan of 1870 it seems unlikely to be the product of the 1874 works, but could be earlier Victorian. It would be unusual for an arcade of this period to continue unbroken alongside the chancel; however, the chancel arch, despite having scalloped capitals to its imposts, seems unusually tall and wide for one of this period, so this could be later – but the eastern respond of the south arcade, which is clearly in-situ mid-12th century work, shows that the position of the nave/chancel division has not changed. A mystery remains.

Hodges shows the north arcade as continuing the full length of the nave, but here structural evidence is against him; the lower part of the north wall of the nave looks as if it might be undisturbed mid-12th century masonry, and has a straight joint in a position which would correlate with the western respond of an arcade that had only two bays. The Newcastle Daily Journal account of the restoration refers to the base of a pillar being found on the north of the nave ‘corresponding to those on the south’ and infers there was an aisle here. This is puzzling, unless what was found was the base of the respond postulated above. The same article records that other foundations uncovered showed that the original nave was 73 feet (22.25m) long (and of five bays) and that the south aisle was 9 feet (2.74m), a little wider than its successor – unusually broad for an aisle of this period.

Another possibility that needs to be mentioned is that the south arcade at least was an insertion in an even older wall. This is raised by Swinburne’s 1832 pencil and wash sketch (see footnote 1); this shows the church from the south-west, with various features in the south wall of the nave above the remains of the then-blocked arcade. One at least looks to be the top of an earlier window, above the remains of the westernmost arch; an accompanying letter from the artist to the engraver (who produced the cut published in Hodgson’s History of Northumberland) asks that these features be carefully reproduced, so it is probably more than artistic licence. It is however possible – and perhaps more likely - that the feature represents the remains of a later medieval opening, made after the loss of the aisle and the blocking of the arcade. Whatever evidence there was here was lost in 1874-5, when it would appear that the arches were taken down and rebuilt, so that all the regularly-coursed fabric above is now of that date.



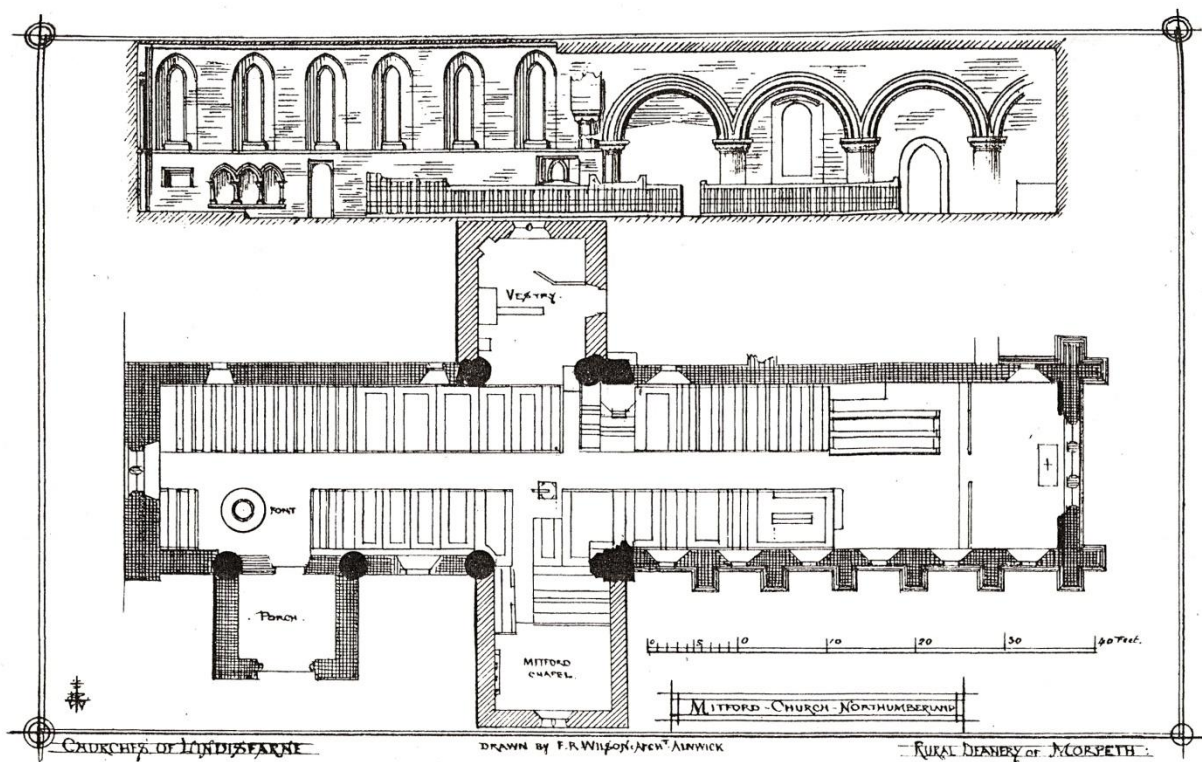
THE CHURCH OF MITFORD

Print from Hodgson, after drawing by Swinburne

It is recorded that Mitford village was burned by King John in 1216, and the castle besieged by Alexander, King of Scotland, in the following year. It is thought that the church was partly destroyed during one of these vicissitudes, and that the nave lost its aisles; the upper section of the north wall of the nave, with its lancet windows, could well relate to repairs after this destruction. Whether the south aisle was lost at this time is questionable. The chancel was rebuilt, more or less in its present form, later in the 13th century; it would seem a little odd for a church to be provided with such a grandiose chancel whilst the nave was left truncated and shorn of its aisles. It is possible that the broad south aisle, the foundations of which were seen in 1874-5, was a later 13th century rebuilding of the 12th century original.

This brings us to a second surmised destruction of the church. The Castle had been seized from the Valence family by Sir Gilbert de Middleton, who used it to hold people he had kidnapped, until he himself was seized for treason by Ralph de Greystock. The Castle may have been wrecked then, or shortly afterwards in May 1318 by the Scots; certainly it is described as 'entirely destroyed and burnt' in an inquest of 1323. The church was burned as well, at least in part; there are clear signs of burning on the north wall of the chancel, where a large sacristy once stood. The nave was certainly left aisleless by this time, as the present transepts, little more than chapels, are of later 14th century date. The northern was later known as the 'Pigdon Porch' and the southern as the 'Mitford Porch'.

As often, the church retains virtually no evidence of the later medieval or immediate post-medieval centuries⁴. In 1707 came yet another fire, this time accidental, when the nave was gutted. It is recorded that at this time ‘a very small archway led from the nave to the chancel’⁵ and that the villagers hung this with ‘sodden tapestries’ to prevent the fire spreading. The nave remained roofless for over a century, and was probably still in this state when Davison made a print in 1824⁶ and when Swinburne sketched it in 1832. These illustrations show a substantial; bell-cote capping the west gable, which has a small square-headed window; on the south of the nave the south porch remains roofed and intact, with behind it the outlines of two-and-a-half arches of the 12th-century arcade visible in the wall; to the east of the porch is a small square-headed window.



Plan and Section after Wilson (1870)

It is not quite clear when the nave was restored, but when it was it received a new west window in a neo-Romanesque style, in a style popular around 1840; this was removed in 1874-5 and now

⁴ A c1783 drawing by Samuel Hieronymous Grimm in the British Library, ref AD000015543U00057000(SCV2) shows a pair of six-light Perpendicular-style windows with an elaborate archway between, and is labelled ‘Mitford Q Northumberland’. The ‘Q’ may stand for query; it seems highly unlikely they can ever have been part of Mitford Church.

⁵ Richardson 1977, 11-12

⁶ Woodhorn archive SANT/BEQ/18/7/4/683

stands to the east of the church, forming an incongruous but picturesque entry into the vicarage garden. The faculty papers for the 1874-5 works⁷ include ‘at present’ plan and elevations of the church; the plan shows this window, but for some reason it is omitted from the western elevation, although the south elevation shows that another large round-arched window, of a single light, had replaced the small square-headed window on the south side of the nave east of the porch. Wilson’s 1870 survey⁸ provides similar information. Other parts of the church seem show evidence of Victorian work that pre-dates the 1874-5 works, notably the eastern triplet of lancets – which almost certainly replicate the 13th century arrangement but look newer stone – and, as already mentioned, the odd columnar eastern respond of the arch into the north transept.

The Newcastle architect R.J.Johnson was responsible for the 1874-5 works. In 1870 he had rebuilt Stannington Church, a few miles to the south, producing a fine building but destroying its medieval predecessor (except for a much-retooled arcade). This time he was more conservation minded; the Newcastle Daily Journal account in fact comments ‘it may be questioned whether the desire to preserve as much as possible of the old building has been carried too far’. A series of medieval stone coffins were found beneath the floor, and placed outside the west end of the church, where they remained until the late 1990s when apparently broken up by contractors requiring hardcore....

Rather surprisingly, the church suffered earthquake damage in 1920, with cracks requiring patching. Around 1980 a major refurbishment was carried out, with the nave being refloored with stone flags; it is understood that features of archaeological interest – including ‘post holes’ were seen at this time, but it has not proved possible to trace any record of them, which is unfortunate.

Archaeological Assessment

As already discussed, the standing fabric of the church, for the most part readily accessible, itself provides a valuable archaeological record. What is more difficult to assess is the preservation of fabric and stratigraphy in areas currently concealed. There is no doubt that the underfloor deposits will have been disturbed to some extent, primarily by the usual generations of burials that one finds in any old church, and then by 19th century restoration and the creation of underfloor heating systems etc. Heating grilles shows that such a system runs beneath most of the church, and there is a boiler room beneath the north transept. In addition there would appear to be a Bertram family vault under the south transept. Despite all this it must be stressed that any works which entail disturbance of sub-surface, whether under the floors within the building, or outside the building but within the footprint of the 12th-century church, will require archaeological monitoring. There have been unfortunate recent losses here – both in terms of major floor works around thirty years ago which were apparently not attended by archaeological recording, and more recently in the contractor’s vandalism which saw the wanton destruction of

⁷ Woodhorn archive ref DN/E/2/1/87

⁸ Wilson 1870, 174-175

medieval stone coffins. On the positive side, of two stones which lay outside the church, one, an interesting post-medieval headstone, has been re-set in the churchyard and the other, a medieval inscribed slab, has now been mounted inside the chancel. An early gravestone brought from the Castle, which lay in the churchyard in the mid 1980s, 'went missing' some years later but a second similar early slab has now appeared in the churchyard, and has been taken inside the building for its protection.

Peter F Ryder March 2011

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