

KIRKNEWTON

ST GREGORY THE GREAT

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

JULY 2020



South-east view

PETER F RYDER
B.A., M.Phil, F.S.A
HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSULTANT

The Vicarage
Otterburn
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE19 1NP
01830 520590
E mail: PFRyder@broomlee.org



The **South Porch** has a steep gable on shaped kneelers, with a roll-moulding as a finial; under the gable is a narrow chamfered lancet, and on the east a rather eccentric shoulder-arched doorway.



The **Burrell Vault** has very low side walls (c1.5 m) and a tall gabled roof, its apex just beneath the nave eaves. It is built of rubble, very heavily mortared, with substantial angle quoins; the south-western are more roughly tooled, suggesting that they are of different dates. On the south is a 19th century window of two lancet lights with a pierced circle over, under a simple moulded hood; to the west are traces of the west jamb of an earlier window, of uncertain date. Above the line of an earlier gable is apparent, heightened in the 19th century.

Burrell Vault from the south

The 19th century **North Aisle** has a chamfered plinth, pink ashlar quoins and four pairs of chamfered lancet windows, and is built of roughly-coursed large rubble. At its west end is the **Tower** which is built of darker igneous rubble with pink sandstone ashlar dressings; it has a big sloping plinth, and a moulded string that runs below the sill of the west window, which has three trefoil-headed lights with panel tracery above and a four-centred arch, under a four-centred arch and a moulded hood with turned-back ends. At the north-west corner is a substantial clasping buttress with only rises to about a third of the height of the tower. A little above the string course medieval cross slab grave covers have been re-set in both north and south walls. There is a chamfered set-back at the base of the belfry, with, a little below it, square-headed loops on the north and west, and big square blocks with a central piercing – probably for clock faces – on east and south. The belfry openings, one in each face, are each of two lights, with depressed arches, with trefoil-headed sub-lights over under four-centred arches, and have the usual moulded hoods with turned-back ends. The parapet, of ashlar, is carried on a chamfered oversailing course (from which pairs of stone spouts project on east and west) and has a stepped crenellated coping, with taller sections at each corner topped by small pinnacles.

The **Chancel** has similarly low side walls and a steep roof. It is built of roughly-coursed stone, with large almost square blocks (of 12th century character) being more apparent on the north. On the south the western section of the wall is now covered by ivy; further east is a square-headed priest's door with chamfered jambs and a rebated lintel, with further east a square-headed window with a broad chamfered surround and a more recent sill. One of the south-east quoins has an OS benchmark; the three uppermost are clearly 19th century work, as is the present east window, of three stepped but fairly squat lancets. Around its head is an area of secondary roughly-pecked stone, and below their sills more inserted fabric, this time whitish blocks. At the north end of the wall a few stones project, the stub of the removed eastern section of the north wall; 19th century excavation⁴ showed that the original 12th-century chancel had been truncated at some time. The north chancel wall is quite complex; it has a rough plinth for much of its length, broken near the centre where there is an area c 1.5 m high of projecting rubble; there is also an apparent straight joint in the lower half of the wall c c.020 m from the west end. A window in this wall, set east-of-centre, shown on Wilson's 1870 plan, is no longer apparent externally. A lot of the big blocks near the west end of the wall, are reddened, as if by fire.



*North wall of chancel
showing stub of
eastward continuation*

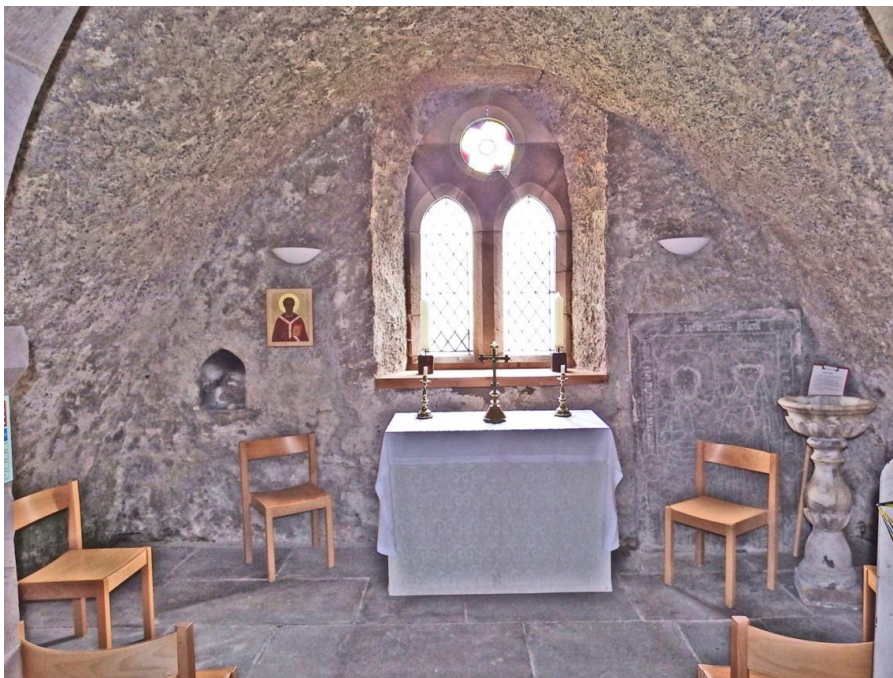
⁴ Carried out by F.R. Wilson at the request of the Archdeacon, prior to the 1860 works. He found a chamfered plinth and the base of a contemporary buttress just beyond the present east end, as well as the original square east end a little over 3 m beyond the present one

The Interior

The **South Porch** has a stone bench set against the west wall, and a common rafter roof with scissor braces and ashlar. A two-centred doorway with a chamfered surround, and a rear arch of flattened segmental-pointed form, gives access to the main body of the church.

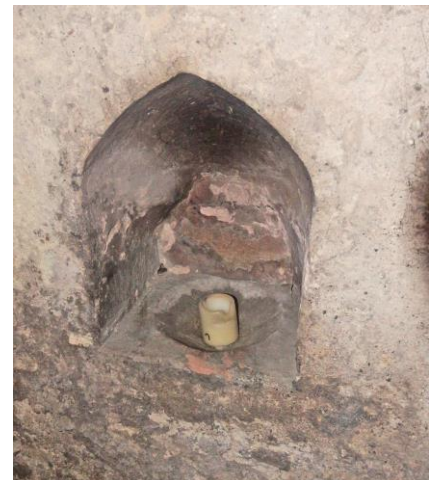
The internal walls of the 19th-century parts of the church are plastered, with exposed pink sandstone ashlar dressings; only the western bay of the north wall of the aisle is free of plaster, and is of coursed rubble. In the **Nave**, the south doorway has a triangular chamfered rear arch, and the lancet windows all have shouldered rear arches with their lintels carried on rounded corbels. The four-bay north arcade has two-centred arches of a single chamfered order, on octagonal piers and semi-octagonal responds, with simple moulded capitals and bases; all its stonework looks Victorian, although it may copy its medieval predecessor, some remains of which survived before the restoration⁵

The arch into the **Burrell Vault** is two centred, and of two chamfered orders, on plain square jambs, with imposts chamfered beneath; all its stonework looks relatively recent. Inside the chapel the vault springs from the floor, so there are in effect no sidewalls; it is now roughcast. At the east end of the south wall is a . piscina that has a four-centred arch and a bowl within the thickness of the wall; the south window has a segmental rear arch. Set against the west end of the south wall is a slab with the incised effigies of Andrew Burrell (d.1458) and his wife; their heads and hands have been inlaid in brass, now removed.



Burrell Vault, looking south

Burrell vault piscina



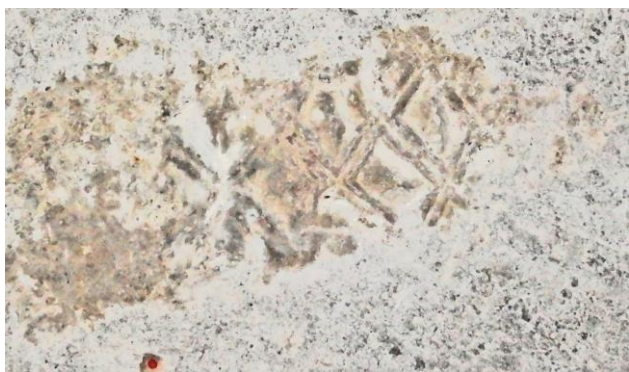
⁵ The lower parts of the piers were apparently still in the north wall, and the arch voussoirs had been reused in the vault over the Burrell Porch. The NCH account states that these still survive, but this does not appear to be the case.

In the **North Aisle** the paired lancets have the usual shouldered rear arches, and at the west end is an arch into the **Tower**, of segmental-pointed form and of two orders, the chamfer of the segmental-pointed outer being carried down the jambs to the ground, whilst that of the two-centred inner dies into the jamb ; it contains a late 20th-century wooden screen with a two-centred doorway and a roundel above containing 18th century? heraldic glass. The interior of the late-19th century tower (the ground floor of which contains the vestry) was not inspected.

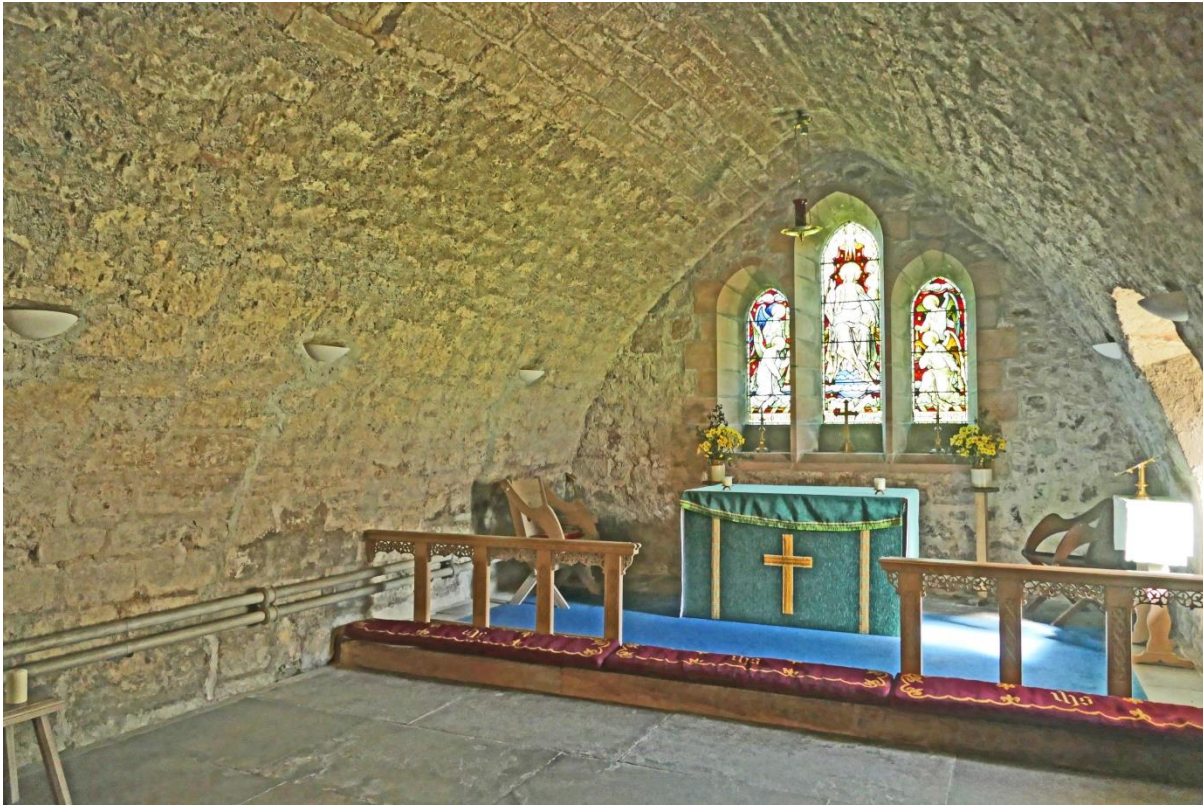
The arch into the **Chancel**, only 1.90 m wide, has plain square jambs (plastered over), and imposts (projecting only on the line of the wall) chamfered beneath; the arch is a very shallow segmental-pointed one, of two chamfered orders, and may well be later than the jambs. The rough segmental rear arches of the priest's door and south window cut into the haunch of the vault; the head of the latter could well be a 19th-century reconstruction, as its sill certainly is.

On the north wall the outline of a window shown on Wilson's 1870 plan can just be traced. The chancel has a barrel vault of pointed section, springing from only c 0.85 m above the floor and rising to 3.8 m. There is a change into better-coursed stone at the apex of the vault, which presumably indicates repair at some time.

Built into the east wall of the nave to the north of the chancel arch is a sculptured panel showing the Adoration of the Magi, an attractive but markedly rustic piece of work that is probably Romanesque, ie 12th century (p.9). In the opposite face of the same wall (ie facing towards the chancel), partly concealed by mortar, is a stone with a diaper pattern (which seems to be one of the 12th century stones illustrated along with Wilson's 1870 plan) (below)



Chancel arch, looking south-east (drawing from NCH)



*Chancel
looking
east*

Structural Development

The earliest reference to a church at 'Newton in Glendale' is in 1223, although the building may have been in existence before that as Wilson illustrates decorative stones of 12th century character, and thought the original chancel of this date. The jambs and imposts of the chancel arch might well be this early. The NCH suggests that in its original form this was an aisleless cruciform building, with the north aisle of the nave being added in the late 12th or early 13th century, absorbing the earlier transept. The church almost certainly suffered during the Border Wars; in 1436 the vicar was licensed to say Mass in any place in the parish that was safe and suitable, as long as hostilities continued. In 1669 the nave was in need of rebuilding, and it looks as if the north aisle was lost, although its eastern bay was retained as the Copeland Chapel which was still standing in 1796, but demolished soon afterwards. We know that the Burrell Vault was repaired in 1727, but that there had probably; been previous works here because in 1870 its vault was found to re-use voussoirs from the lost nave arcade.

There is no clear evidence of the date of the chancel and Burrell Vault in their present forms; they are usually cited as being defensible structures of later medieval date, but this can perhaps be queried. Wilson saw them as being constructed at a period when the church lay 'in utter ruin', as store houses or refuges. The Burrell Vault looks like the adaptation of the east bay of a former south aisle, the evidence for this being in the disparity between the quoining at its south-east and south-west corners, and also in the positioning of a piscina at the east end of its south wall, indicating an adjacent altar, which could hardly have been in

the usual place against the east wall as the vault virtually springs from ground level. It seems possible that the end bay of the former aisle was adapted as a burial vault (as its name suggests) at some post-medieval date, and that the re-use of the nave arcade voussoirs came at the construction rather than repair of its vault. Were the church north of the Border a post-medieval vaulted burial aisle like this would come as no surprise.

This leaves open the question as to whether the chancel was reconstructed when in use as part of the church, as a defensible structure, or formed another post-medieval burial aisle. Its walls at 0.75-0.80 m thick (at the base) are not as massive as one might expect in a building constructed with defence in mind. However, it does seem to have been provided with a reasonable-sized east window for quite some time; a mid-19th century painting by John Wykeham Archer (in the Duke of Northumberland's collection) shows a Gothick sash window set within an earlier blocked square-headed opening, which, together with the existing south window, could well be of 17th century date.



image © Northumberland Estates | Licence: All Rights Reserved

St. Gregory's Church, Kirk Newton, and the Graveyard
c.1847-c.1863

JOHN WYKEHAM ARCHER

Mid-19th century painting

Interior looking east



We are on firmer ground when it comes to the 19th century changes. Thanks to Wilson we know that a complete rebuilding was being envisaged, but thankfully the importance of the chancel and Burrell Vault were recognised and they were preserved when John Dobson, the Newcastle architect, was employed in 1860. He rebuilt the nave and reinstated the long-lost north aisle.

Wilson gives plans and sketches showing the church before and after Dobson's 1860 campaign of works, and including the results of his 1860 excavation which traced the original extent of the chancel. The old nave had three windows on the north, interspersed between the surviving lower sections of the medieval arcade piers, and a doorway between two windows on the south. There was a round-headed window in the west end, which was surmounted by a small bellcote; the plan shows single-light windows in the end gables of south transept and side walls of the chancel. His post-1860 drawings show a corbelled-out bellcote on the west gable of the nave, and a lancet window in the west end of the north aisle.

Wilson's plan and drawings show us the church as it existed in 1870, and there have been some more changes since then. The east window of the chancel and south window of the Burrell Vault have been renewed, in a simple Gothic style, the north chancel window blocked and the tower has been built at the west end of the aisle, an essay in the Perpendicular Gothic that became popular in the last decades of the 19th century; the 1896 OS 25":1 mile map shows it as in existence by then.

Archaeological Assessment

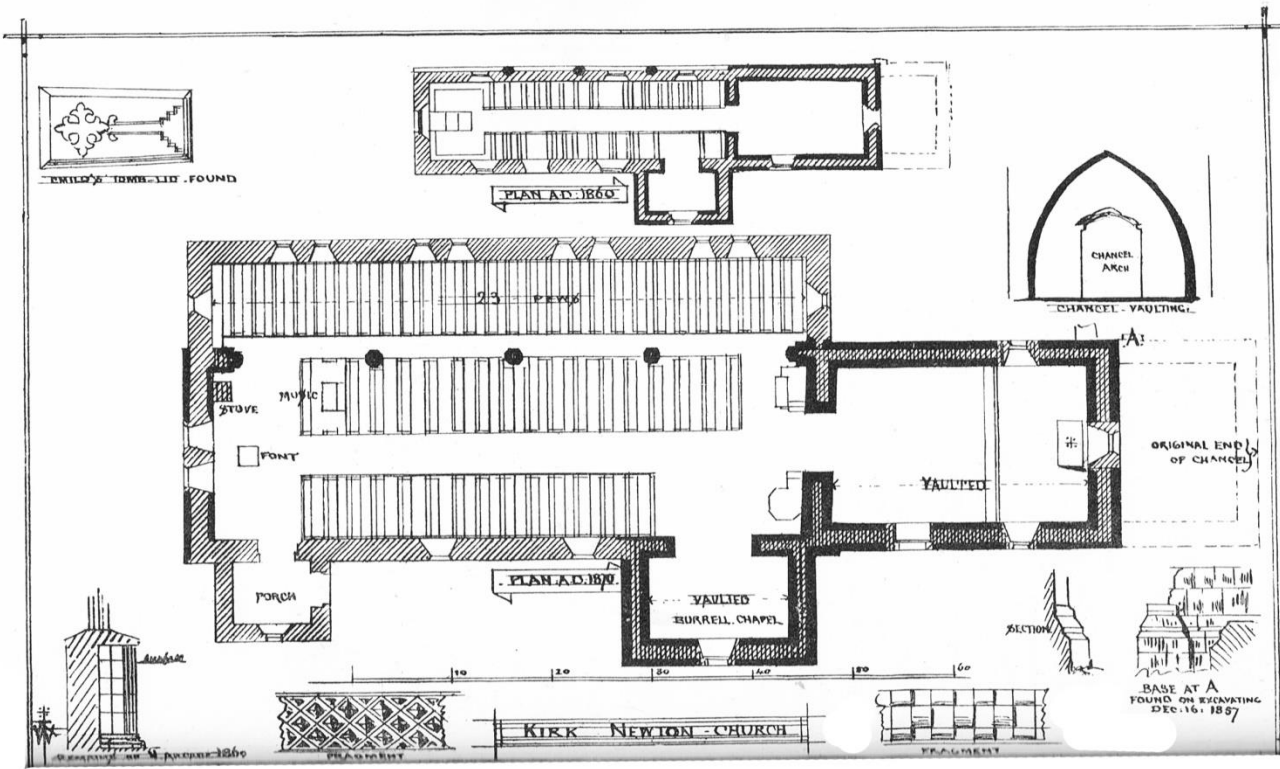
This is an interesting church with a history that goes back at least to the 12th century, and possibly further; the Saxon town of Ad-Gefrin (Yeavinger) where Paulinus is recorded as having carried out mass baptisms in the early 7th century, is only 2.5 km to the east. The surviving fabric, albeit much-altered, retains evidence of a complex medieval and post-medieval history. Further evidence must survive beneath its floors (which look to have been relaid relatively recently), although structural remains will no doubt have been impacted by generations of burial and possibly by an underfloor heating system (perhaps indicated by the former chimney on the south-west corner of the nave): the present oil-fired system (there is a boiler room on the south of the tower) has above-floor radiators. There are also areas of archaeological importance outside the church; it is known that footings of the probably 12th-century chancel survive outside the present east end, and remains of a former south aisle may remain on the south of the nave. Any grave digging in these areas should be accompanied by an archaeological watching brief.

Any proposed works which entail disturbance of floors will require archaeological monitoring, as will any that entail removal of mortar or render from the historic vaults; the remainder of the building is mid-19th century, and whilst remains of mural decoration may survive, they are likely to be of limited interest, although worthy of some sort of record.

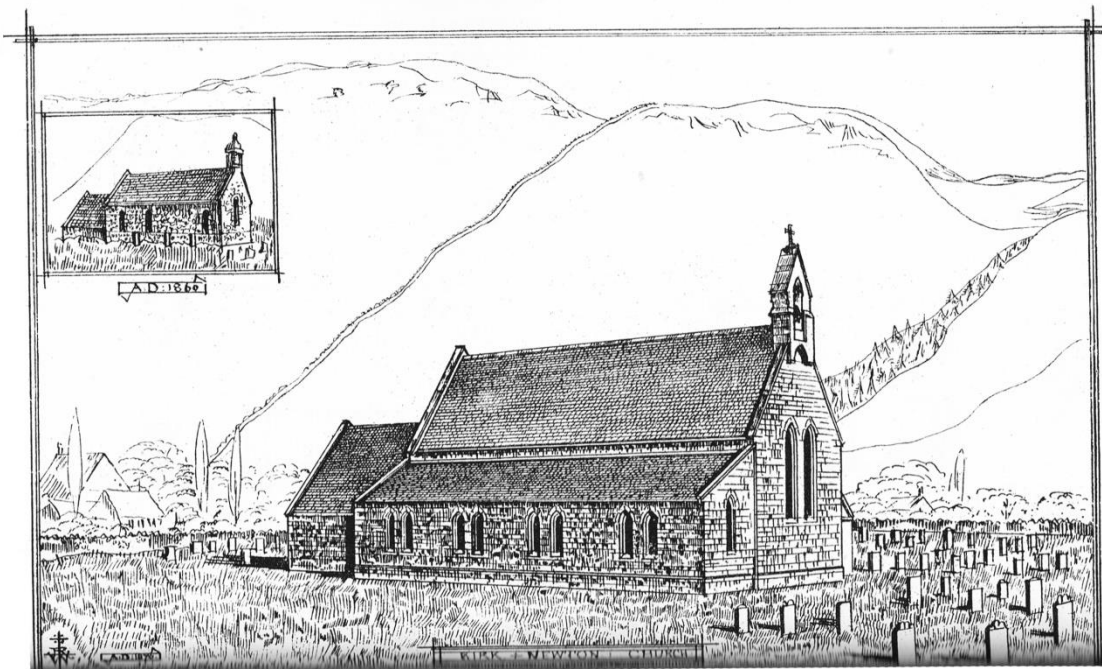
Peter F Ryder July 2020

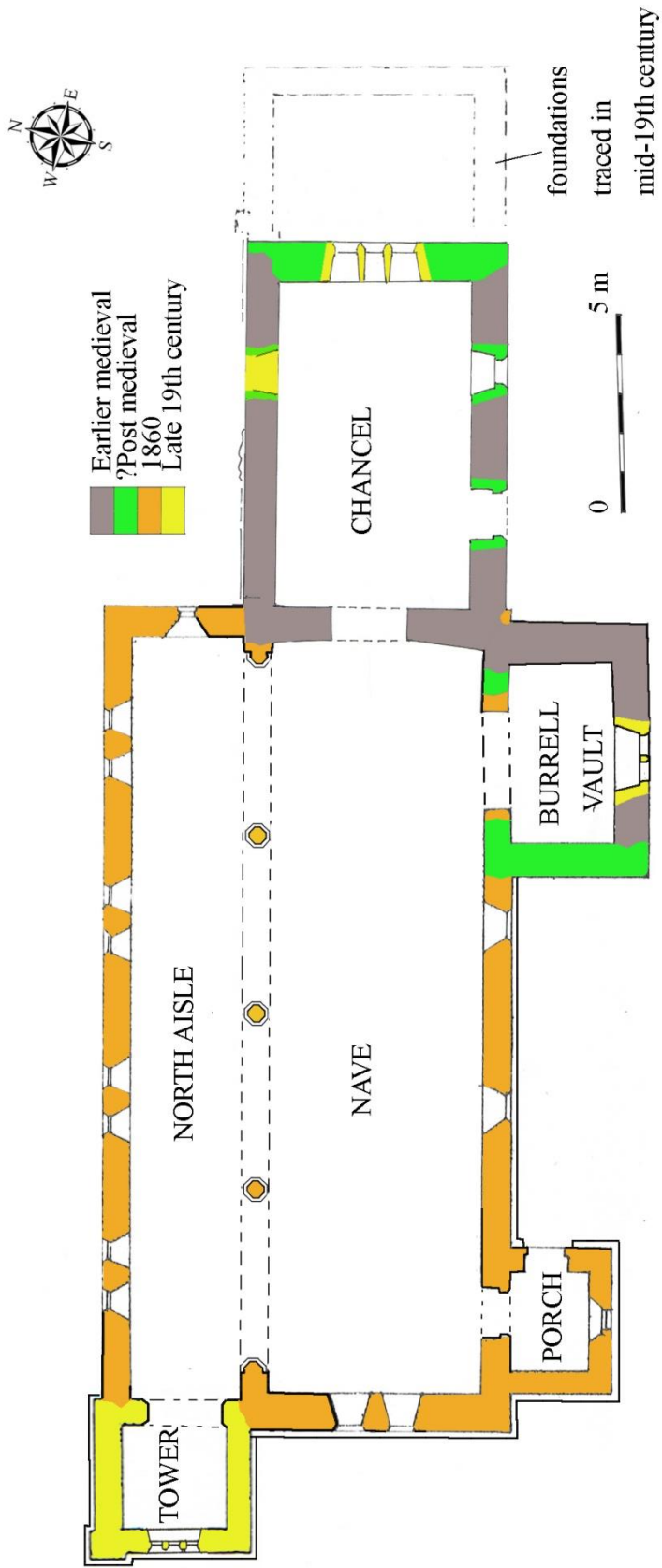
Carving of the Adoration of the Magi





Plan and drawings after Wilson (1870)





ST GREGORY THE GREAT, KIRKNEWTON

PFR 2020