

St Michael the Archangel, Alnham

Archaeological Assessment, including report on 2018 works



The church from the south

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St Michael the Archangel, Alnham

Archaeological Assessment and Report on 2018 Works

The parish church of St Michael the Archangel at Alnham was the subject of a programme of conservation and restoration works in summer 2018, during which archaeological recording made possible a more-detailed recording of the fabric than had previously been made, and advanced our understanding of one of Northumberland's more complex historic church fabrics.



Location Map

From Ordnance Survey 1:25000 sheet OL 16
Ordnance Survey map licence 100045703

The church stands on the summit of a low ridge, the ground sloping down to the west; there are few buildings nearby other than the former vicarage, with its restored medieval tower, a little to the west; on a parallel ridge to the south are the earthwork remains of Alnham Castle. The church is aligned c 25° north of east.

Some Historical Notes¹

The date of the origin of the church is not clear. It has been claimed that it stands on the site of a small Roman camp², but there is no real evidence of this. The eastern quoins of the nave have been identified as evidence of Anglo-Saxon fabric³; this remains uncertain, and is discussed below. The semi-defensive nature of the church site, and in particular the ditch that cuts the churchyard off from the ridge to the east, has led to the suggestion that there may have been a defensive enclosure around the church and an adjacent thegn's hall⁴. The earliest documentary reference to the church is in an 1184 charter in which William de Vesci grants Alnham and its tithes to Alnwick Abbey⁵. The subsequent history of the village has been a troubled one; 'cultivation and settlement probably reached their peak in and around Alnham towards the later stages of the 13th century by the 16th century the picture had changed radically as a result of border conflict, plague and a deteriorating climate⁶.

¹ The following notes are largely taken from the Historic Village Atlas 2: Alnham, (hereafter 'Village Atlas') The Archaeological Practice for the Northumberland National Park Authority, September 2004

² https://wikivisually.com/wiki/Church_of_St_Michael,_Alnham

³ Dodds, M.H.(ed) (1935) Northumberland County History XIV 562-572 (account of church by H.L.Honeyman)

⁴ Village Atlas, 30

⁵ Village Atlas. 34

⁶ Village Atlas 43

There is a very attractive 1619 map of the village⁷ which shows the old village to the east of the church, although the church itself is shown as a stylised building with a western tower which probably bears little resemblance to the actual building. The last remnants of the village are shown on a 1777 plan⁸ (which incidentally shows the outline of the church very much as at present, except for the boiler room on the west of the north transept) before being finally swept away as a result of enclosure effected under the 1776 Act of Parliament⁹.

The church had fallen into a poor state by the mid-19th century; an 1862 article in The Builder¹⁰ eloquently describes this:

‘Open the rickety church-door. The eye is met by a green flash from the damp, mildewed walls, and by streaks of sky seen through the unceiled slates. The western end, with its early transitional single light, has not been much disturbed; but the rest of the window openings have been modernised and filled with common sashes, which are rotten, and let in wind and rain. The east end has a small square sash, such as is ordinarily provided for a scullery, or any inferior office. Three of the worm-eaten mousy pews are square, with a table fixed in the centre of each; a fourth forms three sides of a quadrangle that is occupied by a stone. Fungi abound, and the pavement is sodden with damp. Ruin is imminent, unless precautions are taken to avoid it’.

Precautions came in 1870, in the form of a restoration by Alnwick architect F.R.Wilson¹¹, who published useful before-and-after plans and drawings of the building; all the windows of the present church, except for that in the west end, are his. Further works were carried out in 1953, by Gustav Adolph Renwick, commemorated by a tablet on the west wall of the south porch.

⁷ By Robert Norton, in the Alnwick Castle Archive, ref Aln_M&D 038/039

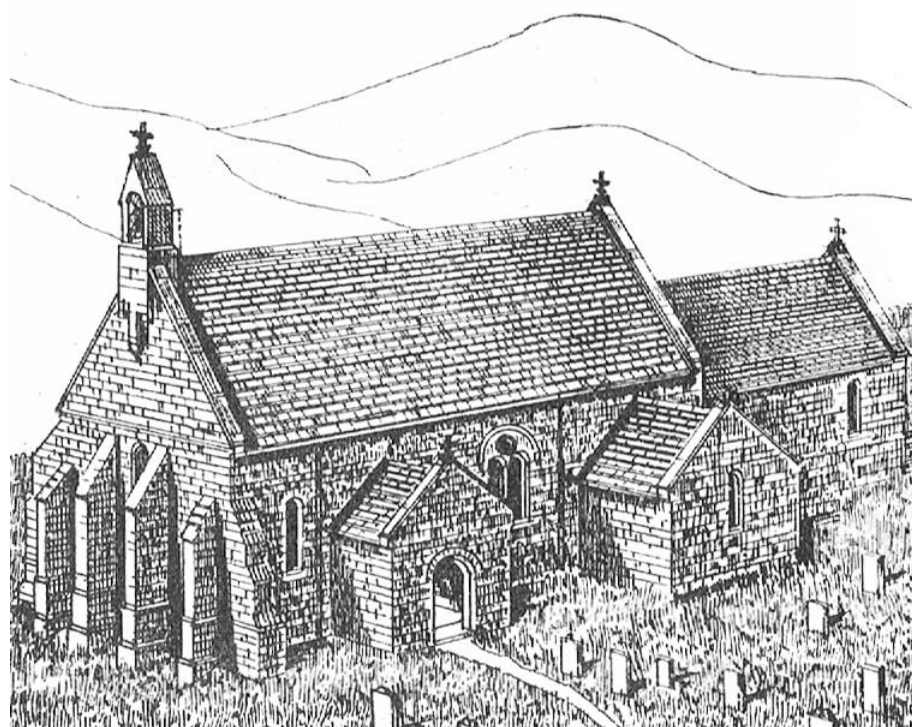
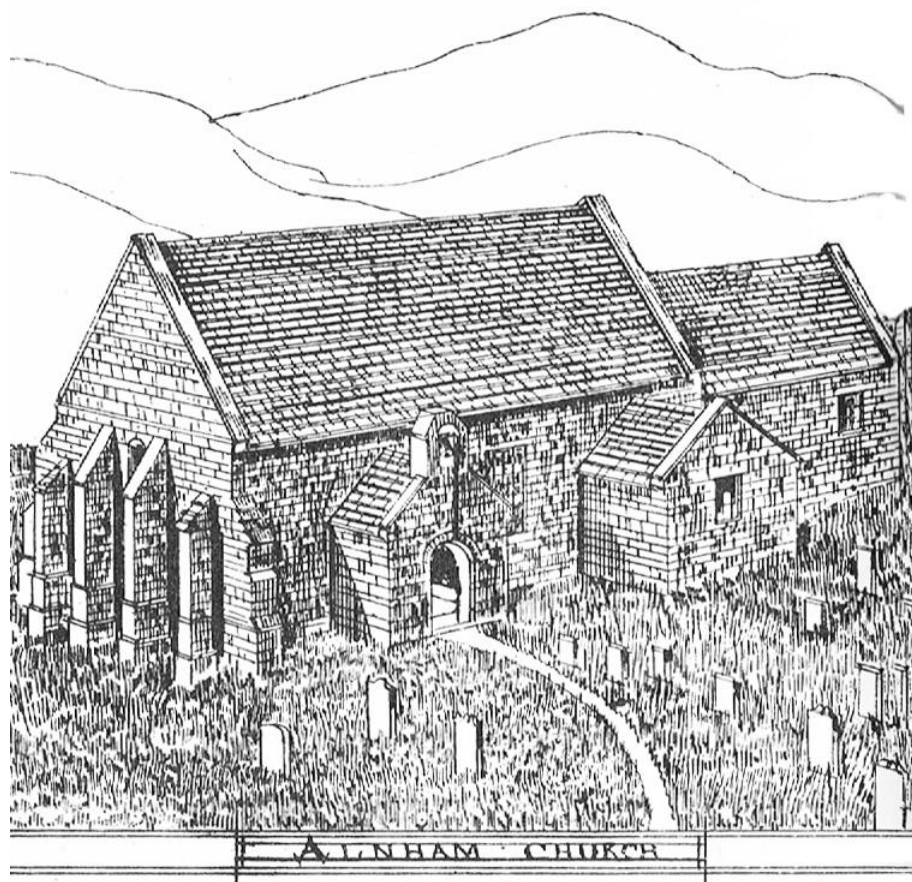
⁸ Village Atlas fig.74

⁹ Village Atlas 44

¹⁰ Quoted in Dixon (1895) Whittingham Vale, 41. (reprint 979, Frank Graham)

¹¹ Documented in his Churches of the Archdeaconry of Lindisfarne (1870) 103-104

Before and after the 1870 Restoration (Wilson 1870)



Description

The church consists of a now-aisleless nave 14.8 by 6.1 m, a south porch, a south transept c 3 m square and a north one c 4 m square (with a 19th century boiler room on its west side) , and a chancel 11 by 3.6 m, all measurements being internal.

The Exterior

The west end of the **Nave** is built of coursed squared stone with some quite large blocks, the courses varying slightly in height. There are four large buttresses; all have chamfered plinths, that of the northernmost set at a lower level as the ground falls away, and the outer two have caps of overlapping ashlar slabs that are clearly Victorian, whereas the inner two have older sloped tops. There is a chamfered offset c 1.2 m above the ground running the whole width of the wall. Between the central pair of buttresses is the west window, a tall light with a chamfered surround, its semicircular head (restored) cut into a single block. One course above the window head is a chamfered offset, above which the gable has clearly been rebuilt, in squared and pecked stone, presumably in 1870 when the present gabled bellcote was built. This is of yellow sandstone ashlar, and has a round-arched opening, and is carried on three corbels, the central set lower than the others.

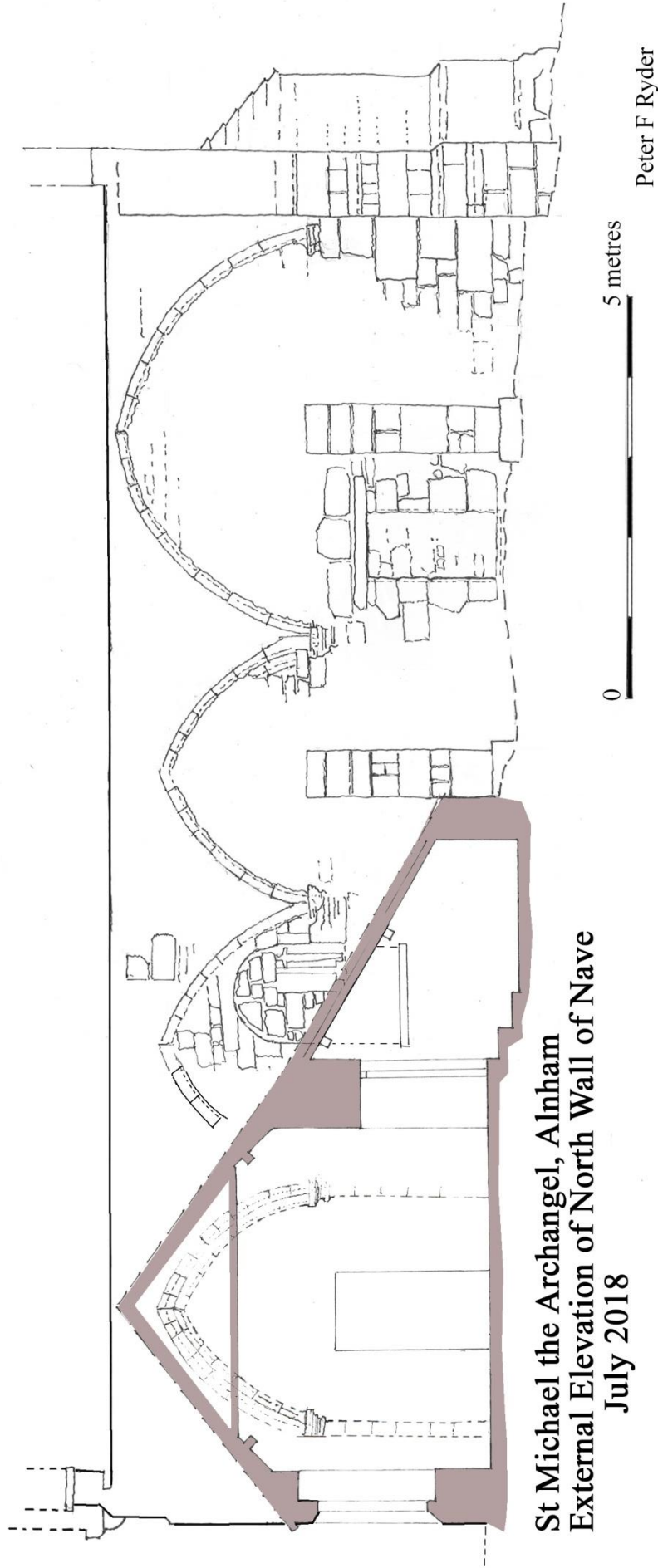
At the south-west corner of the nave, the south-facing buttress has a series of chamfered offsets in addition to the one crossing the west end which is continued round it. The south wall of the nave is clearly of a different build to the west end, being of roughly-coursed stone with some quite elongate blocks. West of the porch is a round-headed light of c1870 with a chamfered surround, its dressings being of parallel-tooled ashlar, and east of it a two-light one of the same date, which has a circular oculus above and between the lights, under a semicircular-arched hoodmould with turned-back ends; on either side of this window is a ragged vertical break. At the base of this section of wall the footings have been disturbed, and there are cavities between the stones, suggesting a vault below.

The eastern corners of the Nave has large irregular quoins laid in side-alternate fashion, which may possibly be Pre-Conquest; those at the north-east corner are partly hidden by render. There is some evidence that those at the south-east angle are in reality a secondary repair; at their base there is irregular stonework that looks to have been re-positioned (apparently overlying the chancel footing)

and higher up there seems to be an irregular break in build between the quoins and the wall immediately to the west. The upper part of the south wall, above the eastern slope of the transept roof, has more irregular fabric but better-squared blocks for a few courses below the eaves. About 2 m short of the south-eastern corner is an odd projecting block just below the gutter.

The east end of the nave has a horizontal chamfered offset a little below the level of the eaves of its side walls; the gable above has the raised tabling for an earlier more steeply-pitched chancel roof. The apex of this is set a little to the north of that of the nave gable; just above the offset close to the north-east corner a square ashlar chimney stack is carried on a quadrant-section corbel, and rises to a chamfered off-set at the level of the adjacent gable coping – an upper section has probably been removed. The gable has a coping chamfered on its underside, and the base of a removed finial cross at its apex.

The most notable feature of the north wall of the nave is its blocked 13th-century arcade, with pointed arches of two chamfered orders (although only the outer order is exposed externally); its easternmost arch now opens into the North Transept but parts of the other three – the westernmost strangely wider and taller than the others – are visible externally. There are a variety of fabric types; the infill of the arcade is of coursed roughly-squared stone; in the spandrel between the second and third arches of the arcade is larger rather better-squared stone, in contrast to the smaller and rougher stone of the spandrel between the first and second. Parts of the moulded capitals of the piers and western respond are visible. In front of the respond are a series of very large blocks, looking for all the world like megalithic angle quoins. In the blocking of the third arch is quite a large round-arched window, probably of 18th century date, its head cut into a series of horizontal slabs. The lower part of the window is concealed by the outbuilding on the west side of the north transept; the western part of the blocking of the exposed section is formed by a medieval cross slab and there is a second slab, set horizontally, set adjacent to it in the western jamb of the window. Hard up against the transept outbuilding is a buttress of squared stone, which looks of 19th century date but a second similar buttress further west seems older, except for its sloping cap. A little to the east of it is a blocked square-headed door, with chamfered jambs and sill; its square-edged lintel is an elongate piece that may well be a re-used grave slab. At the west end of the wall is a big buttress with three chamfered off-sets and a sloped cap, possibly a re-fashioning of the stub of the west wall of the former aisle; on its west side it



appears that its end section is of secondary masonry as if an earlier wall-stub had been patched up.

The **South Porch** is built of roughly-squared stone with some elongate blocks, with some especially large ones low down in the east wall, which have possible traces of carving and might conceivably be reused grave covers or pieces of cross shaft. The round-headed south doorway has a single roll moulding, interrupted by a trapezoidal key stone; the gable above has a square-edged coping and a cross finial of c1870. Excavation of a drainage trench in 2018 showed that, at the south-east corner, the south wall of the porch appears to stand on the footings of an earlier east-west wall, its external face 450 mm in front of the porch wall and its internal 740 mm within it, giving a total width of c 1.20 m. It appears almost certain that this is the south wall of an earlier aisle.

The **South Transept** is built of coursed roughly-squared stone; although Honeyman's analysis sees the south and east walls as work of c1200 and the west wall of the 16th or 17th century there is no clear evidence that it is of other than a single build, at least above plinth level. In the centre of the south wall is a round-arched light of c1870, and the gable above has a coping chamfered on its underside and a c1870 cross finial. The east wall is not very straight, and has an irregular footing with a disturbed area midway along which may relate to an underlying vault; at the north end, hard up against the south-east quoins of the original nave, is what looks like a window opening c 0.60 m wide, extending down for c 0.7 m below the eaves.

The footings of the transept, seen during the 2018 drainage works, are difficult to interpret in detail. On the west there is an upper course – in effect a square-topped plinth - of well-squared blocks resting on a lower footings of two to three courses of rougher stones that seems to be on a different alignment with the wall above, projecting 250 mm at the south and but narrowing to 50 mm at the north. On the south an irregular footing of at least three courses, going down to a depth of at least 430 mm, bows out in the centre of the wall to 350 mm. On the east there has clearly been considerable disturbance, almost certainly associated with underlying vaults, including a recessed section of walling hard up against the south-east nave quoin.

The **North Transept** is built of coursed squared stone, although there does seem to be a break in build midway along the east wall, with better-squared and possibly rebuilt fabric to the north; there are quite substantial quoins at the

north-west corner, and a chamfered off-set on the north, c 1 m above a regular projecting footing. At the south end of the east wall is a typical round-headed window of c1870.

On the north the eastern part of the wall is of rather larger squared stone than the western; in the centre is a small blocked window, 0.53 m wide, the form of its head uncertain. The west side of the transept is covered by the 19th century pent-roofed boiler room which has a square opening, rebated externally for a wooden door, in the centre of its north wall, with an ashlar alternating-block surround.

The south wall of the **Chancel** is largely of squared roughly-pecked stone, apparently rebuilt masonry which slightly overhangs a lower course of large squared blocks which rest on a buried plinth (see below). At the west end of the wall is a round-arched window of c1870; there is a slight disturbance in the walling below, which Honeyman saw as traces of a low-side window. Then comes the priest's door which as a flattened four-centred arch with a continuous chamfer, perhaps of 17th century character, whilst close to the east end of the wall is another round-arched light of c1870.

The base of the wall, exposed in the 2018 works, was of considerable interest. A narrow chamfered plinth of 12th/13th century character ran the full length of the wall, its western portion above a neatly-squared footing that projected another 80 – 100 mm. A threshold slab in front of the priest's door rested directly upon this footing. Midway along the wall the character of the underlying footing changed abruptly to blocks projecting c 340 mm, which may well correspond with an extension of the chancel, perhaps in the 13th century.

There are some substantial quoins at the eastern angles of the chancel, although not as massive as those at the eastern angles of the nave. The east wall is of heavily-mortared coursed roughly-squared stone, with some of the pecked fabric that makes up most of the south wall. The east window is a pair of round-arched lights of c1870. The gable coping is chamfered on its lower edge, and rises to the base of a lost finial cross.

At the base of the wall the chamfered plinth is absent for 1.32 m from the south-east corner, where there are some larger blocks in the underlying footing; might a buttress have been removed at this point? . Towards the north-east corner the plinth is overhung by the wall face above.

The fabric of the north wall of the chancel is of quite different character to that on the south, being of very roughly-coursed quite small stones, except for, as on the south, a bottom course of larger squared blocks, here visibly resting on a chamfered plinth. There seems to be a break in build in the upper walling c 1 m short of the north-east quoin. Near the east end of the wall are remains of a blocked window c 0.33 wide and at least 0.80 m high, although its head and the upper part of its east jamb have gone; the jambs have a small square rebate within a chamfer. Midway along the wall is a buttress of squared stone, probably of c1870, built to counteract an outward bulging of the wall, with a big chamfered offset c1m above the ground; the wall to the west of has no openings, nor any sign of disturbance.

The 2018 drainage trench showed that the chamfered plinth survives over the whole length of the wall and that, as on the south, there is a broader footing to the eastern half of the wall.

The Interior

The internal walls of the church were lined with stoothing and plastered, except for some exposed dressings; this was renewed during the recent works, briefly exposing the internal faces of the walls which were largely plastered – this was not removed.

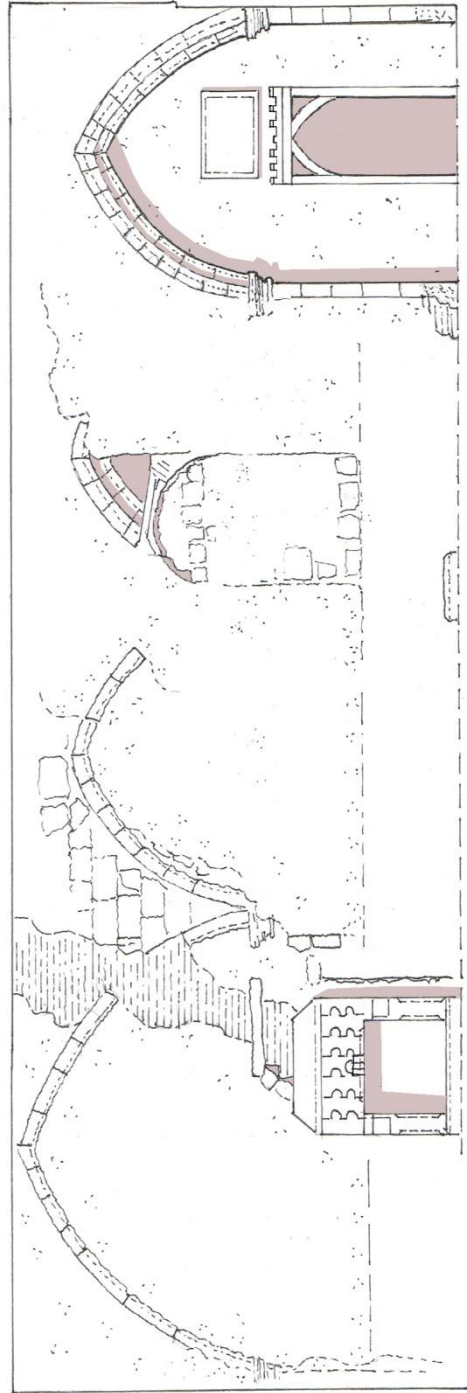
The **South Porch** has a tunnel vault, apparently of brick, and benches on each side with recent wooden tops; set at the south end of the eastern bench is what appears to be a stoup¹², with carving in relief including cable moulding at the angles and a damaged relief carving of what may be a vernacular version of the Sacred Monogram on the front (west) and a vertical pair of opposed fleur-de-lys on the north. The inner doorway of the porch has a rather stilted semicircular arch with a continuous chamfer, of tooled ashlar and probably of 19th century date. On the west wall of the porch is a tablet commemorating a 1953 restoration by Gustav Adolph Renwick.

¹² Although it does bear a close resemblance to a creeing trough, a stone mortar of 17th or 18th century date which were often carved, and are occasionally donated to churches under the mistaken belief that they are 'old fonts'

In the **Nave** there was a dado partly made up of fielded panelling of late 18th century character. The west window is set within a larger arch of distorted segmental form, that has jamb shafts with scallop capitals (the southern apparently authentic) with moulded rings at mid height and old moulded bases; some of the older stonework is reddened, as if by fire – similar reddening is also seen on the lower part of the eastern respond of the arch to the south transept, and on the chancel arch. On the south the doorway has a shallow segmental rear arch and the two 19th-century windows have semicircular ones, which during the 2018 works were shown to be of brick; at the east end of the wall the arch to the transept is of rough two-centred form with a chamfer continued down the west jamb to the floor, but on the east carried uneasily – the arch seems too wide for the respond beneath which rises from a projecting 20th century platform at the same level as the chancel floor, c 0.5 m above that of the nave. The lower part of the respond is semicircular in section and the upper part semi-octagonal, and it has a moulded semi-octagonal capital; any base is concealed by the raised platform. It is clear that there are two phases in the respond itself, and its unhappy relationship with the arch itself suggests a third.

On the north side of the nave, facing the south door is a 19th-century fireplace with a joggled lintel (perhaps modelled on that in the tower at Edlingham Castle) carried on shaped corbels, with its projecting hearth still intact. The wall face above was exposed during the 2018 works, with irregular column of 19th century brickwork indicating the line of the flue. This arch is set within the blocking of the westernmost arch of the former north arcade, much of which was exposed in 2018. The arches were pointed and of two chamfered orders, carried on octagonal piers and semi-octagonal responds, with moulded capitals¹³; virtually all the voussoirs bore an incised figure which could be interpreted as a stylised letter ‘M’; at first thought to be simply mason’s marks, they might actually represent an invocation of the Virgin Mary. The walling above the arches (where exposed – most of it remained covered by plaster) was of large well-squared blocks; similar blocks made up the lower part of the infill of the arcade, which tended to become more thinly-coursed in its upper parts. In the third arch (numbering from the west) was the rear arch of the round-arched post-medieval window visible externally, of semicircular form with its plaster

¹³ In section the abacus was square above with a groove and convex moulding below; then came a triple roll moulding (only double on the capital of the easternmost pier, which looks to have been re-cut) and a concave curve down to a ring at the base.



St Michael the Archangel, Alnham
Internal Elevation of North Wall of Nave
July 2018

0 5 metres

Peter F Ryder



North Arcade: incised 'Mary marks' on voussoirs

carried by a rather ramshackle arrangement of timbers, unfortunately removed before they could be properly recorded.

The fourth arch of the arcade, the dressings of which look to have been re-tooled, now opens into the **North Transept** (now the vestry); both the pier on the west and respond on the east have sockets for a former screen. The arch is now closed by a thinner brick wall containing the vestry door, in a timber surround which has an arched head with open spandrels and a brattished lintel.

The nave roof is of seven bays including a narrower one at each end; there are old slightly-cambered tie-beams with collars, the ceiling being underdrawn at the level of the collars. The second and third tie-beams from the west rather surprisingly have scarf joints towards their north end, of splayed and tabled type with under-squinted abutments, each secured by four vertical metal bolts. The south transept has a very crude central truss that has its principals crossed at the apex to carry a ridge board, and a single purlin just above the side walls.

The **South Transept** has an opening left in the stoothing of the south wall to expose a piscina at the east end of the south wall, which has a rough square head and a circular bowl within the thickness of the wall. The south window has a plain round rear arch. Set upright against the west wall are three grave slabs, the southernmost to ‘Parcival Horsley’ d1694 (and later members of his family), the second to Robin Horsley d.1765 and the third, recessed into the wall and having a swan-necked pediment containing a cherub and crossed bones, to Catherine...., d.1746. The roof of the transept is a very simple one with a single truss, set north of centre, having its principals crossed at the apex and a collar halved onto the south face, and carrying a single level of purlins. When stripped during the 2018 works the remains of an earlier window 1.44 m wide were visible, a sill 0.5 m below and a plastered and splayed west jamb 0.34 m outside those of its successor, which had a brick rear arch. The upper metre or so of the west wall appeared to be of more roughly coursed stone than the lower part.

The **North Transept** (now the vestry) has a recess at the west end of its north wall, on the west side of a former fireplace (shown on Wilson’s 1870 plan), but otherwise now concealed. (as if alongside a chimney breast); the window in the east wall has a plain square lintel internally, and in the west wall opposite is a small square-headed doorway beyond which three steps drop down to the slab floor of the boiler room, in the south wall of which the slightly-projecting sill of the round-arched post-medieval window, the upper party of which is visible externally, is visible. Over the transept the single roof truss has a collar halved on from the south and carries one level of purlins.



Interior looking east during the 2018 works, showing chancel arch, and eastern respond of south arcade.

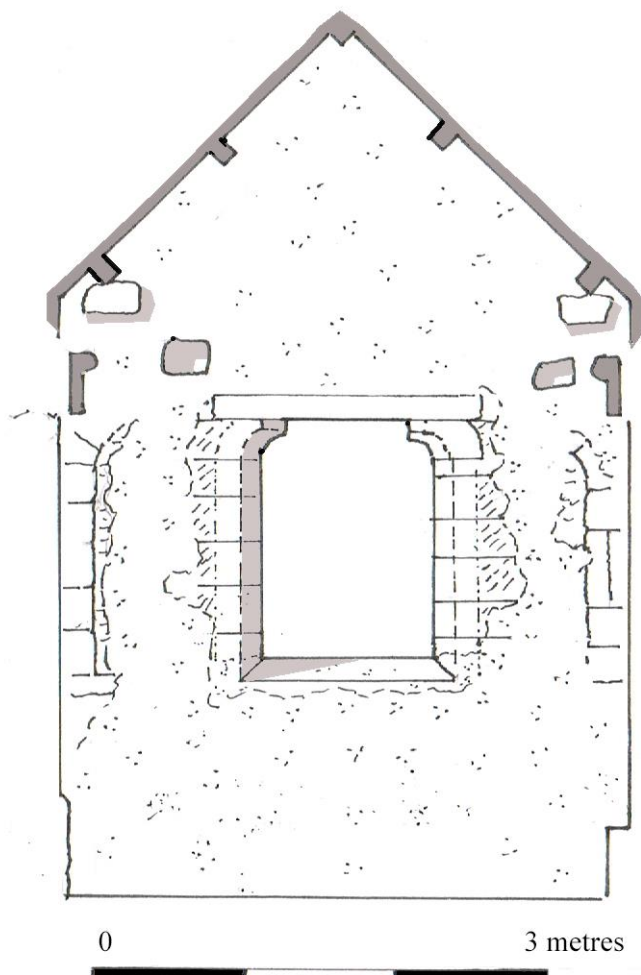
Three steps lead up from the nave into the **Chancel**, which is entered under a chancel arch of distorted semicircular form, and of two chamfered orders; several stones are reddened, as if by fire; a little above the arch is a horizontal set back of c 10cm. When the plaster was removed in 2018 there was no real sign of any hoodmould, although on either side of the arch are rough projecting blocks that may either be former hoodmould stops of parts of a former projecting impost band, the northern perhaps a worn human head and the southern a stepped and chamfered block. The wall above the arch is of coursed squared stone, although much affected by settlement cracks; to the north is an extensive area of 19th century brickwork, relating to the flue (presumably from a stove) that rose to the still-extant chimney stack at the north end of the gable. The responds of the arch, of semicircular plan, have 19th-century 'holdwater' bases at the level of present chancel floor, and older capitals with a roll at the neck and a semi-octagonal abacus that looks to have been re-cut. Towards the narrower chancel the outer order forms a segmental arch, dying into the wall on the north c 0.40 m and on the south c 0.80 m above the capital.

Both windows in the south wall of the chancel have shouldered rear arches, and the priest's door a plain square head; to its east is an old tomb recess that has a rough semicircular arch with a casement moulding and broach stops; what appears as an outer order (but is actually a label) is hollow chamfered, with raised shields as the stops, and on a central block, all now very worn. A sill may have been cut away.

One further step leads up to the sanctuary; below it are four medieval cross slabs, two on each side of the central walkway (Ryder 2003, 92 & 118). Here the sill of the south window is carried down to hold a wooden sedile; a plaque states that the boarded dado, altar rails and windows commemorate Adam Scott, but gives no date, although their character suggests the earlier 20th century. 1.80 m west of the window and 2.25 m above the floor was a block in the wall with a raised curving rib or tendril, apparently a fragment of a relief carving of some quality.

The 1871 east window has a shouldered rear arch; the internal face of its mullion is cut to an attached shaft with a simple sub-Romanesque capital and

base. On either side of it, the removal of stoothing in 2018 exposed the outer jambs of what were presumably originally a triplet of windows, 0.25 m in from the side walls. Only the beginnings of the rear arches of the lights survived,



St Michael and All Angels, Alnham

Internal Elevation of East Wall of Chancel

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insufficient to determine where they had round or pointed heads. Above them, at around eaves level and c 0.50 m in from the side walls were rectangular sockets which presumably related to the roof structure, although it was not clear how. The internal lintel of the c1870 east window is a tapering stone that might have been a medieval grave cover, although it has been chiselled over so that only inconclusive traces of design survive.

The chancel roof is of five bays, and has simple trusses with rough tie beams and collars halved onto their east faces, carrying two levels of purlins and ridge; the joints are pegged, and the trusses have carpenter's numbering; they may be of 17th century date. The vertical boarding to the eaves, with simple cruciform piercings, is clearly Victorian.

Analysis

The structural history of the church is set out in some detail by Honeyman¹⁴ Since the church has already received such a comprehensive analysis, its structural history is perhaps most methodically dealt with by means of setting out Honeyman's phases, and adding comments (here italicised):

- 1 Anglo Saxon; the eastern quoins of the nave. *These are substantial side-alternate blocks, which look of generally Saxon character (or at least pre-1100), but there are very similar blocks at the west end of the north wall in the blocking of a medieval arcade so perhaps one should not be too sure. If such material was used here, then it might have been used at the eastern angles of the nave, which would have needed repairing if the end walls of integral aisles were demolished. There is indeed an apparent joint immediately to the west of the south-eastern angle quoins, which might imply that the upper ones at any rate may have been patched in; the lower clearly pre-date the east wall of the South Transept, although this could be a post-medieval rebuild.*

- 2 Late 12th century. After William de Vesci gave the church to Alnwick Abbey, it was remodelled with a new west front, south chapel, north aisle, chancel arch and chancel. *Honeyman's evidence of the north aisle being as early as this can be questioned; it seems to be in his interpretation of its broader western arch as having probably 'succeeded a smaller Norman or pre-Conquest arch with a long respond as at Whittingham', and the fact that the size of the buttress at the west end of the north wall of the nave is best explained by it having formed part of the west wall of an early aisle. The corresponding buttress at the south-west corner of the nave – reduced in length in 1840- does not course in as well with the fabric of the west front, but might still represent the west end of a former south aisle rather than a south-eastern chapel. In several Northumberland churches earlier aisles, perhaps destroyed during the troubled late 13th and 14th centuries, were replaced by chapels, rather than the other way round. The evidence of the footings seen in 2018 seems to suggest that there was an earlier shorter chancel which may have been of this late 12th-century phase.*

- 3 Mid 13th century. The north arcade was replaced by pointed arches and the north aisle widened; it was intended to add a south aisle as well but

¹⁴ See footnote 3

works may have got no further than the heightening of the eastern respond of the south transept arch, before the outbreak of war with Scotland. *Honeyman's evidence for the north aisle being widened is in that he believed the east and north walls of the North Transept survived from this phase, and that the west wall was rebuilt c1840, although the evidence here is confused and the north wall plinth does not look this early. The re-used capital found under the floor of the nave suggests that a south arcade had been completed at this time and was similar to the north. The chancel may have been extended during this remodelling; the evidence seen in 2018 of an eastern triplet of lancet windows would tally with this.*

- 4 In the later medieval period the church, which had clearly been at least once been reduced to a state of ruin¹⁵ was restored, the chancel being virtually rebuilt (probably in the 15th century), the present south transept arch built, and the ruined north aisle demolished except for a section at its east end left as a chapel, and part of its west wall utilised as a buttress. *Both transepts may be of late medieval date, although almost totally lacking in datable features. Honeyman sees the South Transept as retaining late 12th/early 13th century fabric in its east and south walls, with its thicker west wall a late medieval rebuild. The south wall does contain a piscina, which would imply a medieval date. The west wall may be later-although there is no great change in the fabric – but could equally well be post-medieval*
- 5 At some time after the Reformation the south porch was built, and a round-headed window inserted in the blocked central arch of the north arcade. A restoration is recorded in 1664, from which the upper parts of the South Transept walls may date. *The south wall of the nave may have been rebuilt at this time as well.*
- 6 In 1759 a bell cote was constructed on the gable of the south porch.
- 7 In 1840 the church was re-roofed and the upper portions of its gables rebuilt. The north chapel was rebuilt and widened, for use as Sunday school and vestry, at around this time. *As already mentioned, there is no visible evidence that the North Transept has been widened. The buttress at the west end of the south wall of the south aisle was rebuilt and*

¹⁵ There is considerable reddening, evidence of burning, on the chancel arch, north arcade and eastern respond of the south transept arch.

shortened; its original form is shown on an 1821 sketch by Hodgson, reproduced in the County History (572) and its approximate extent is shown on Honeyman's plan. This sketch, and a drawing of the church as it appeared in 1869 given by Wilson, also show the old bell cote on the porch.

- 8 In 1870-71 the church was restored, F.R.Wilson of Alnwick being the architect. Several plain square-headed windows with sashes were replaced by new ones in a Transitional style, and a new bell cote built on the west gable of the nave.

Summing up, Honeyman's phasing (as often) seems just a little more definitive than the much-altered fabric will really allow. To simplify the whole story, there is not really enough evidence to claim the survival of Anglo-Saxon fabric. William de Vesci's 1184 charter fits well with the date of the first building of which substantial remains survive, a church with a four-bay nave that had at least a south aisle – the lower portion of its eastern respond survives. – and a short chancel.

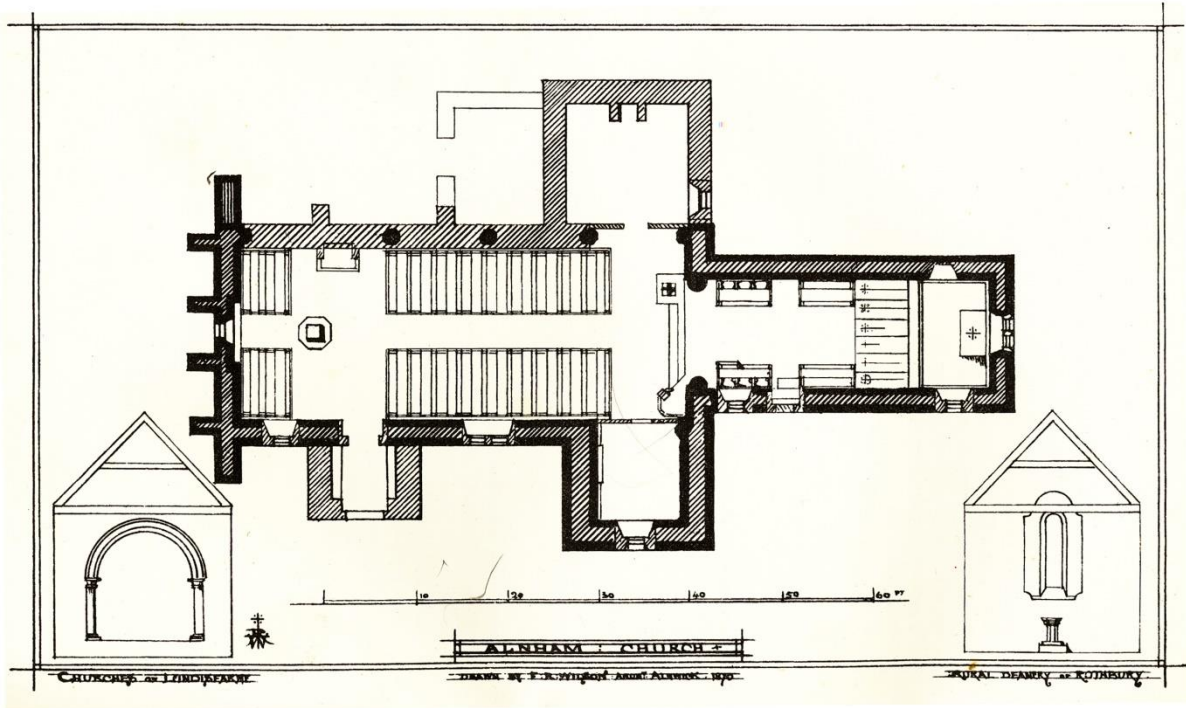
This church was probably wrecked comparatively early in the Border Wars that broke out towards the end of the 13th century, after which it was soon remodelled with new arcades – it is not clear whether there was a north aisle before this time. The chancel was extended as well, to the more elongate proportions typical of the period.

However, some further unrecorded catastrophe struck the building and both aisles were lost. What followed seems to have been more of a piecemeal patching-up than a full reconstruction, and it may have taken place over a considerable period of the late medieval and even post-medieval eras. The chancel was virtually rebuilt above its lowest courses, and the present transepts replaced the former aisles; on the north the arcade survived so that its easternmost arch could be utilised for the new transept, on the south only the respond survived for use in the new transept arch. The south transept at least must be Pre-Reformation as it preserves a piscina¹⁶.

Thus we come to the end of the period at which the structural history of the building must be read from its features and fabric, and into that covered by written documents.

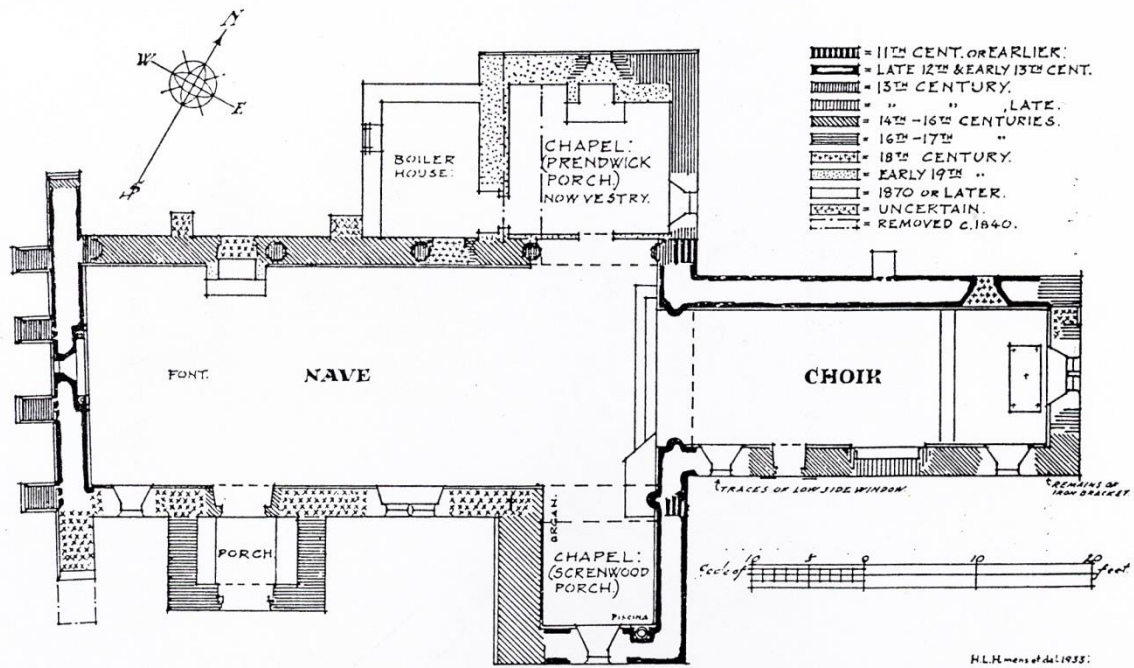
The rebuilding of the south nave wall and perhaps the addition of the porch might have taken place as part of the recorded restoration of 1664 although the

¹⁶ Honeyman thought that it might preserve fabric from the earlier aisle, although evidence seen during the 2018 works suggests that the south wall of the aisle ran within the line of the end wall of the transept.



Wilson's 1870 plan – phasing over simplistic

+ ALNHAM CHURCH.



A PLAN OF ALNHAM CHURCH.

Honeyman's 1935 plan – phasing over complicated

porch may have been built along with the recorded bellcote which it carried in 1759, as its brick vault seems designed to take some weight. Then came the 19th century repair and restoration already chronicled.

The end result is an attractive and picturesque building which despite the recent works and exposure of the north arcade does not readily reveal its complex history.

Archaeological Assessment

Alnham is an intriguing church and one of some archaeological importance. An Archaeological Assessment was prepared in 2008, which hopefully informed the major restoration works carried out in 2018. The complexity of its structural history means that evidence of earlier building phases almost certainly survives beneath the present floors, and in the churchyard adjacent to its walls, although as usual sub-surface deposits and structural remains will have been disturbed by the usual centuries of burial and the construction of an underfloor heating system

The present nave floor is of stone slabs and looks of 19th-century date, with some 17th century ledger stones at the west end, to the west of the font (dated '1664') which stands on an octagonal step. The pews stand on raised and boarded platforms (replaced during the 2018 works), and a heating grill in front of the chancel arch indicates the presence of an underfloor heating system. Both transepts have boarded floors; the floor of the chancel looks relatively recent, and has lightly-tooled slabs in the centre and boarded areas under choir benches; the sanctuary is all paved.

Any further works that entail disturbance of underfloor deposits will require at the least archaeological monitoring; this also goes for works in the churchyard. Parts of the external perimeter of the church were examined during the 2018 works (see report)/ It should be borne in mind that, especially in the immediate vicinity of a church building around which accumulated ground levels may have been reduced (to reduce damp problems), articulated burials may be encountered at relatively shallow depth.

The internal wall faces of the church were largely cleared of stoothing in 2018 but the masonry behind was still partly obscured by pointing and plaster. Any further disturbance of wall faces ought to be accompanied by a detailed inspection to ascertain whether remains of early plaster or pigment survive on the wall faces behind, and to allow proper archaeological recording to take place of either plaster or the complex fabric of the walls themselves.

The churchyard is of considerable interest; along the inside of the south wall, on

either side of the lych gate, lie the eroded megalithic bases of three crosses, said to have been brought to from elsewhere in the parish. A slabbed path leads from the lych gate to the south porch; just in front of the porch, tapered slabs on either side of it may be medieval grave covers, but now show no sign of any carved design.

Peter F Ryder 2008/2018 revised 2020

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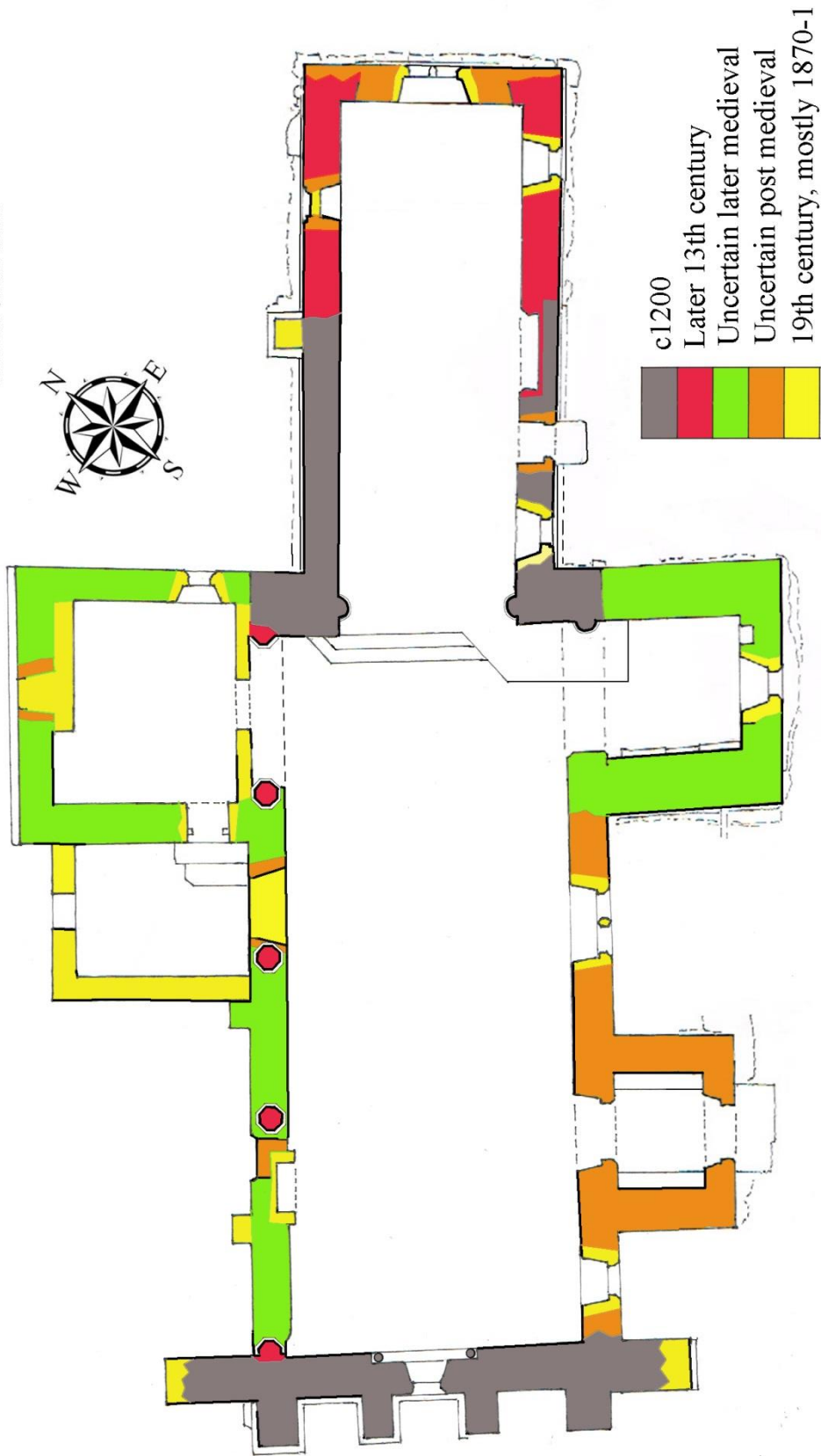


East Respond South Arcade



South end South Transept with footings

ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL ALNHAM



Survey PFR/Archaeology Practise August 2018

Appendix 1: Features seen beneath the Nave floor.

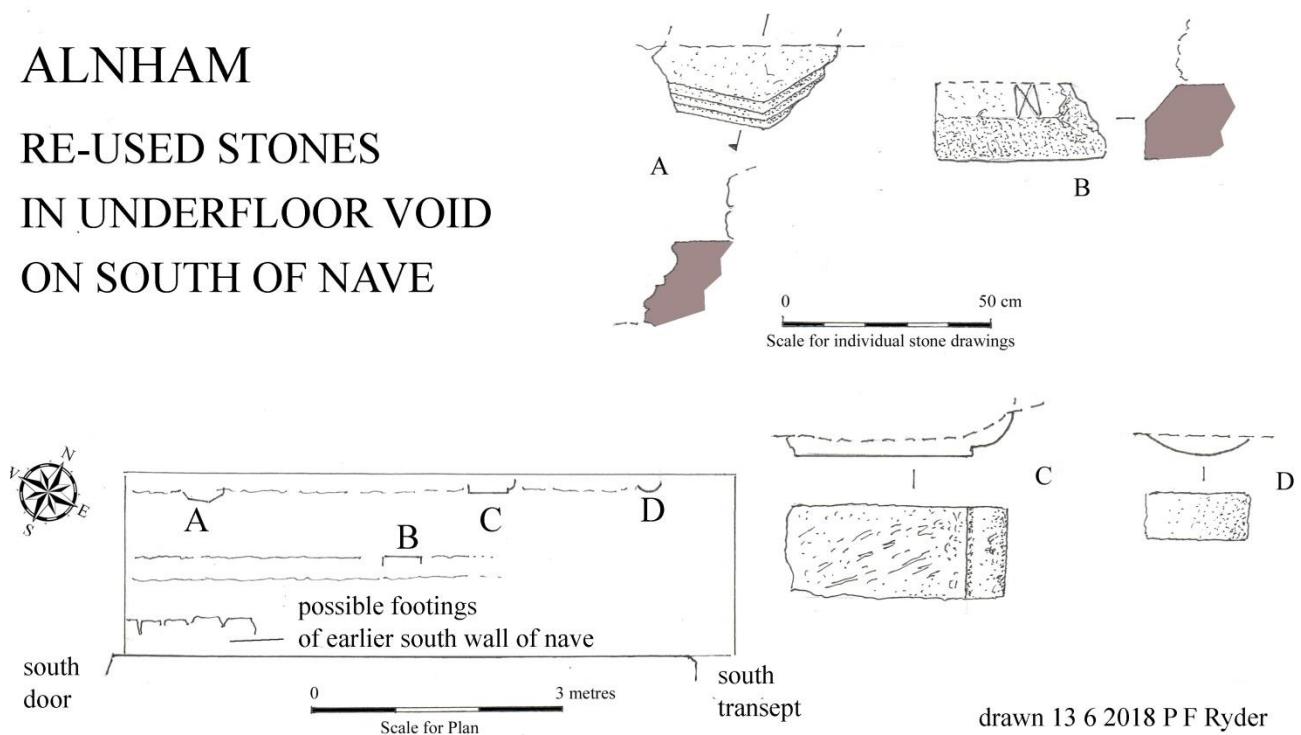
On 13 6 18 the floor timbers of the nave floor, to the south of the central aisle were briefly lifted to allow a cursory examination of the features beneath. Immediately to the east of the south door, a series of large blocks, their inner face c 480 mm inside the face of the present nave wall, may be the footings of an earlier nave south wall. Axial walls 0.90 and 1.90 m north of this were constructed to support the pew platform, and almost certainly of 19th century date. They were of rough rubble construction, but incorporated a number of re-used stones (for positions see drawing):

- (A) A large section of a 13th century pier capital. Almost identical to those of the north arcade. (which remains intact) and thus almost certainly coming from the lost south arcade.
- (B) A block with a chamfered edge and a neatly-incised pair of opposed triangles. This could be simply a mason's mark, but bearing in mind the repeated incised device on the dressings of the north arcade (the so-called 'Mary marks') it may have had some other significance, and may have been a related motif which distinguished the lost south arcade.
- (C) Block with a rebated semicircular end, perhaps part of a 12th-century respond.
- (D) Block of segmental section, part of a pier or respond.

The corresponding section of floor on the north of the central aisle was apparently removed and reinstated as well, but the archaeologist was not given any notice of this; the contractors reported 'nothing of interest'.

ALNHAM

RE-USED STONES IN UNDERFLOOR VOID ON SOUTH OF NAVE



Appendix 2 Graffiti on the rear of panelling.

When the panelled dado was removed from the eastern part of the south wall of the nave, pencil graffiti were found on its reverse. These were faint and difficult to photograph, but included some drawings of figures – one of a Victorian gentleman in a stovepipe hat (below) – notes pertaining to scriptural texts and the date '1865'¹⁷. The drawings were in a number of hands, and some more accomplished than others.

The dado from the north wall of the chancel also bore graffiti, but these were scratched into the varnish rather than drawn in pencil. These included the name 'WILLIAM BROWN' sketches of architectural features – an arcade and a bellcote – and again the date '1865'



¹⁷ Showing that the dado pre-dates Wilson's 1870 restoration

Appendix 3. Lapidary Material from the internal face of the infill of the two re-opened north arcade arches.

In the following descriptions the greatest overall dimensions – length, width, depth/thickness - of the stone are given; all are assumed to be relatively local sandstone.

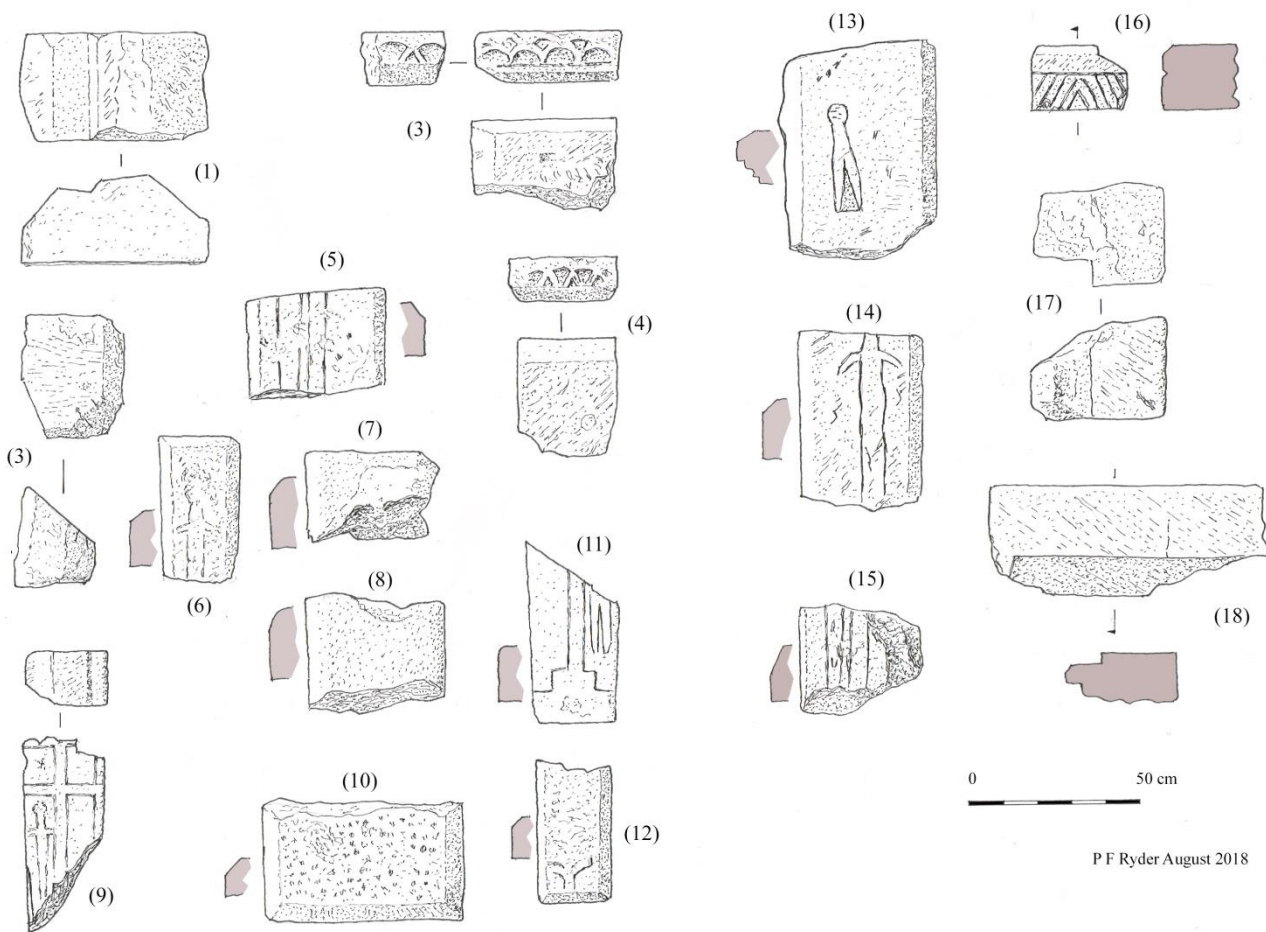
Lapidary Material

Stones found when internal face of blocking of the two central arches of the north arcade was removed.

- (1) Block 560 x 320 x 250 mm. Irregular semi-octagonal section, perhaps part of jamb or re-cut pier, original form hard to reconstruct.
- (2) Block 330 x 300 x 270 mm. Block with tooled upper surface and chamfered edges, one set at 45°, possibly part of a base or capital.
- (3) Block 420 260 x 140 mm. Impost, chamfered on lower angle, two adjacent faces with arcades of intersecting semicircular arches, different in style. 12th century.
- (4) Smaller block, 340 x 285 x 125 mm, part of same or similar impost as (3) but with intersecting arches on one face only.
- (5) Section of grave slab 390 x 280 x 1'40 mm with incised cross shaft and slightly-tapering sword blade on l.
- (6) Small grave slab 415 x 230 x 155 m, tapering to 2145 mm at lower end which has been truncated. Incised sword or dagger, very rough and weathered.
- (7) Fragment of probably grave slab 390 x 270 x 210 mm, badly damaged, rounded rather than chamfered edges.
- (8) Section of probable grave slab, almost certainly same stone as (7), 410 x 310 x 210, tapering to 398 mm, of same distinctive section.
- (9) Small cross slab lacking its base, 550 x 225 x 145, tapering to c 200 m, incised straight-arm cross within a border, with small sword or dagger on l. The stone has been re-cut as part of a jamb, with a moulding at the upper l. corner and a rebate at the upper r.
- (10) Slab 580 x 345 x 110 mm, with chamfered edges that have neat parallel tooling and roughly-pecked face, perhaps an impost or base.
- (11) Lower part of cross slab 535 x 265 x 160, tapering to 200 mm at base. Incised cross shaft rising from two-stepped base, with lower part of a pair of shears on r.
- (12) Lower part of grave slab 400 x 215 x 120 mm, tapering to 210 mm at base. Chamfered edges, surface badly decayed but at the base there appears to be a Y-shaped motif.
- (13) Grave slab 650 x 440 x 150 mm, tapering to 430 mm, both ends look broken, chamfered edges. The only motif is an incised pair of shears set l. of centre.
- (14) Section of grave slab 510 x 360 x 170 mm, tapering to 350 mm, with incised sword, pommel and lower part of blade missing.
- (15) Section of cross slab 350 x 30 x 160 mm, incised cross slab with sword blade on l., damaged. One chamfered edge survives.

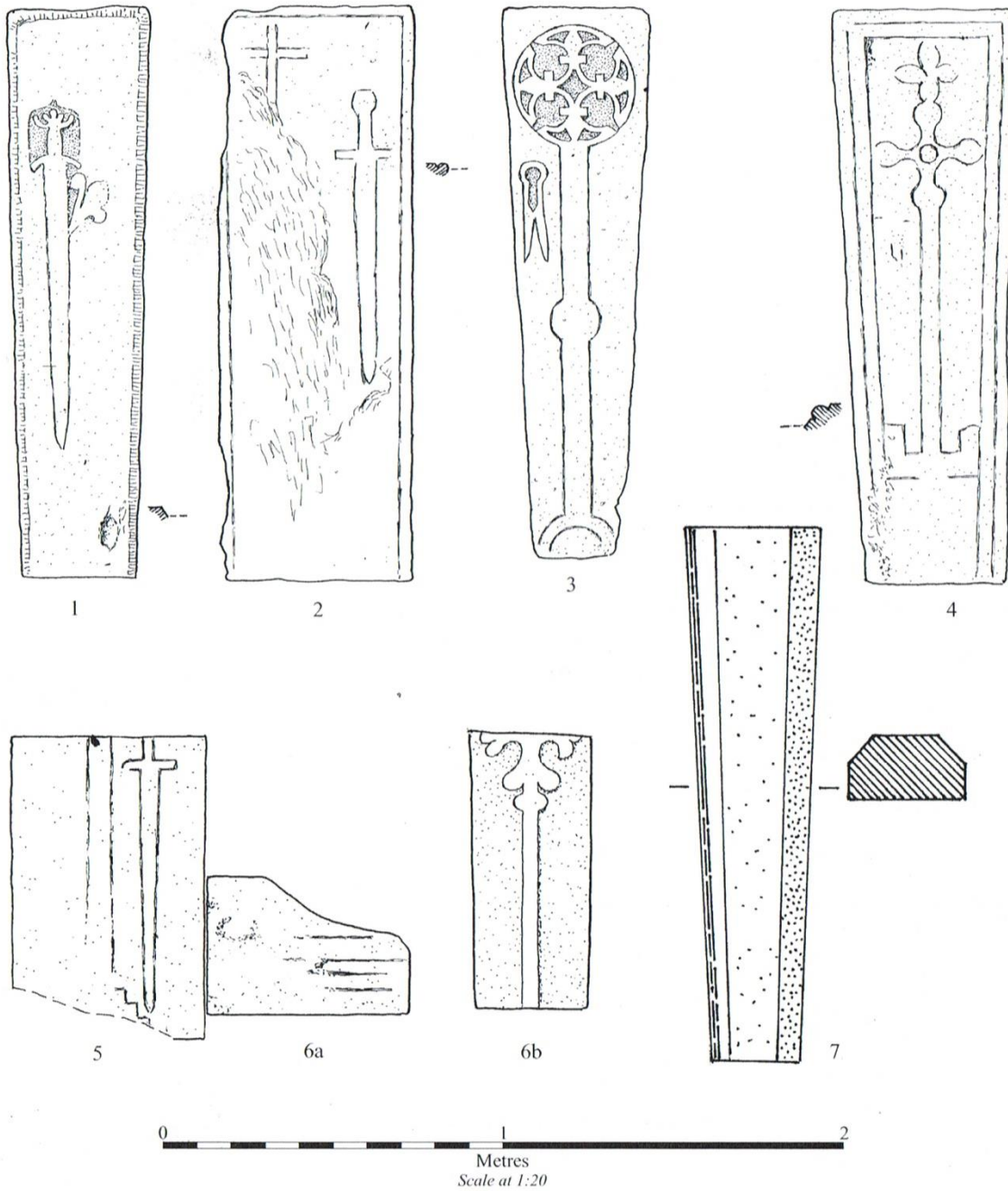
- (16) Block 250 x 200 x 182 mm, with chamfered edge and neatly-cut chevron ornament below an incised line, light diagonal tooling. It is not clear whether this is an architectural fragment or possibly part of a grave slab, but the ornament indicates a 12th-century date.
- (17) Block 300 x 290 x 280 mm, part of door jamb with square rebate and a very narrow external chamfer.
- (18) Block 820 x 330 x 180 mm. Square rebate stopped at one end, part of a door lintel?

ALNHAM. LAPIDARY MATERIAL AUGUST 2018



Appendix 4. Cross Slabs previously recorded

Alnham (St Michael) Slab 7 is of uncertain size and scale.



(from Ryder 2003, 118)

(1) – (4) are in the chancel floor

(5)-(6) in the external face of the blocking of the third arch (from the west) of the north arcade

(6b) is an 1899 sketch probably of the same stone (Proc Soc Antiq Newcastle 2nd ser 9, 83) which also illustrates (7), now lost.