

ART. XXIII.—*The Abbey of St. Mary, Holme Cultram ; recent investigations and notes on the ancient roof.*
By J. H. MARTINDALE, F.R.I.B.A.

Read at the site, June 27th, 1912.

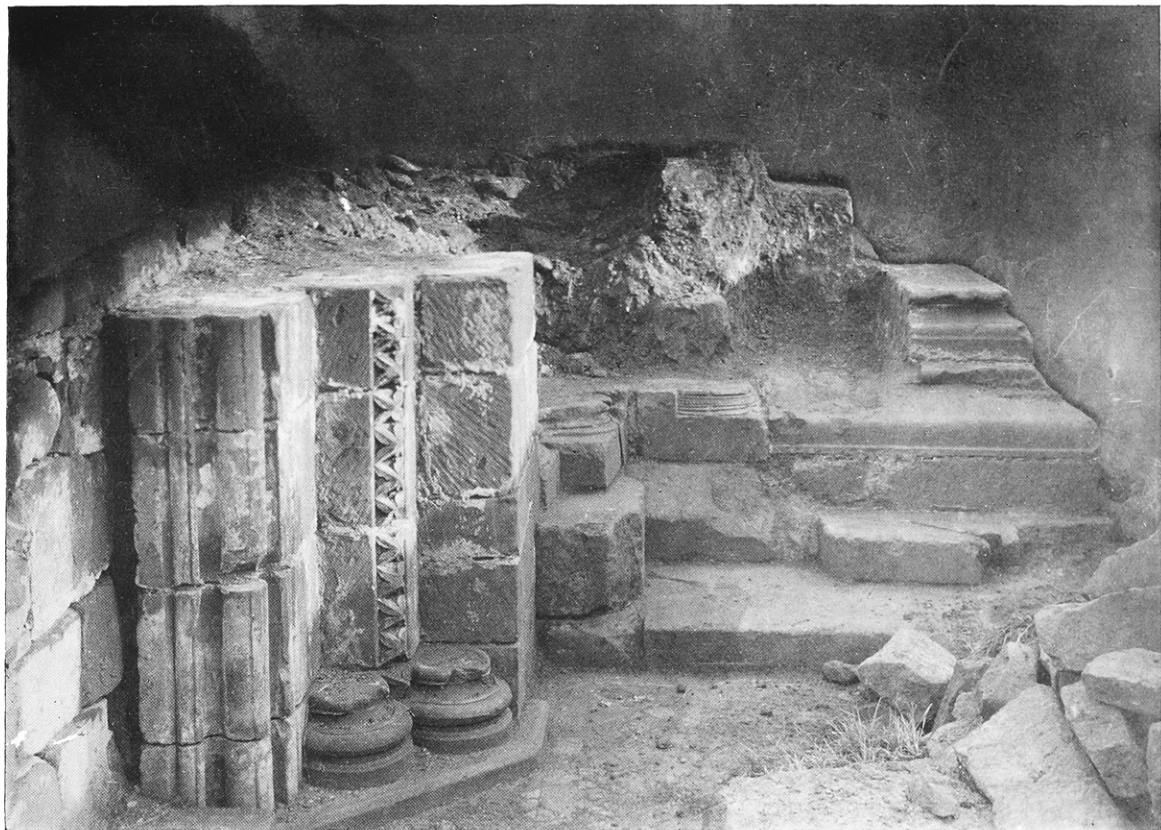
THE great Cistercian house of St. Mary, Holme Cultram, was the largest monastic house in Cumberland. Its revenue at the dissolution amounted to very nearly one-third of the whole revenue of the Order in England. It will, next July, be forty years since this Society first visited the remains, and the paper then read on the site by the late Mr. C. J. Ferguson is in these *Transactions*, o.s., i. Mr. Ferguson endeavoured to trace the plan and extent of the Abbey Church from excavations which had then been made. Later accounts were published by the Rev. Arthur Ashworth and by the Rev. G. E. Gilbanks (*Some Records of a Cistercian Abbey*, 1899).

Since that time, thanks to the efforts of our member, Mr. Grainger, in 1906, further excavations were undertaken ; the crossing, the east end of the church, and also several parts of the monastic buildings and south transept have been discovered and the outline extent definitely settled (see article by Mrs. T. H. Hodgson in these *Transactions*, n.s., vii., and paper read by the Rev. W. Baxter on the visit of the British Archæological Association in July, 1908).

All these recent investigations confirm and verify, as far as they extend, the dimensions (given in yards) in the "old document" frequently referred to in the above papers. The church was undoubtedly a cross church with aisle-less choir, and from the discoveries at the extreme east end it appears that this portion had been rebuilt and extended in the Early English period, as was



SEVENTEENTH CENTURY BASES COVERING EARLIER BASES, NORTH PIER, HOLME CULTRAM.
Phot. by C. J. F. Martindale.



NORTH-EAST PIER OF CROSSING, SIDEWALL OF LEVEL AND STEP, HOLME CULTRAM.

Phot. by C. J. F. Martindale.

TO FACE P. 245.

so commonly done with Norman chancels. The dressed lower courses of the buttresses at the north-east angle show clearly the two buttresses, rising separately on each face, of some 5 feet projection, and not the usual Norman buttress of small projection capping the angle. This east wall was 7 feet thick; the dressed face was found both inside and outside at a depth of 3 feet 9 inches below the level of the present floor of the church.

At the crossing, the floor and steps were found, which gave the present floor of the nave as 1 foot 5 inches above the original floor, and the choir floor as two steps above the nave. The lower part of the main arch of the central tower into the north transept has been closed by a solid masonry screen or wall, and the jambs of an early door exist 2 feet 9 inches high, but as the wall covers the bases of the north-east pier of the crossing, which are a little earlier in character, it is possible the door is not in its original position, but has been removed here, at a later date.

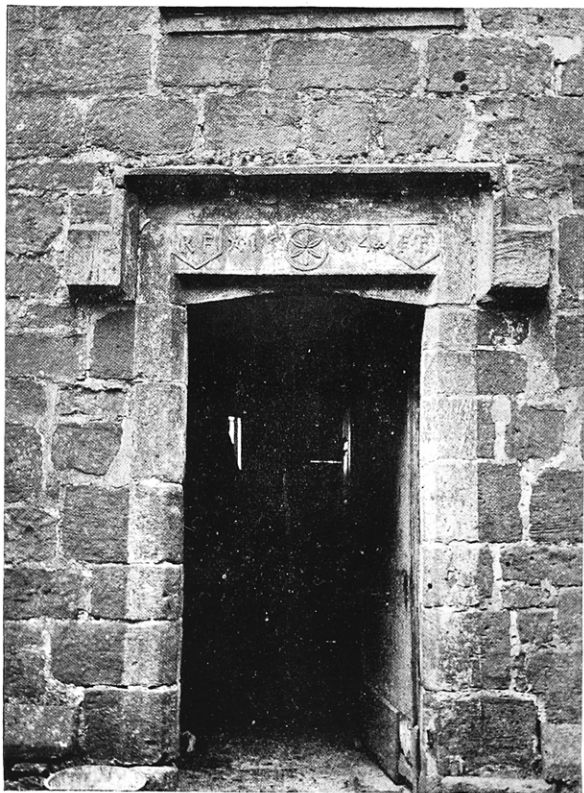
The north pier of the crossing has been very much altered. A singular seventeenth century base now covers the earlier bases, and is formed apparently to receive coupled rectangular pilasters. It is very difficult to suggest at which recorded reconstruction these pilasters were erected, but possibly by Mr. Mandeville, though they seem a little later than 1600. At the south end of the south transept the remains of a door leading to the slype exist some 3 or 4 courses high, and the level indicates three steps down from the original floor-level of the nave. There were two very perfect mason marks on the stones of this door. At a distance of 27 feet from the south wall of the transept, walls were discovered of the chapter house, and these walls are at an angle with the church, very similar to those of the chapter house at Easby. The chapter house was apparently rectangular, which indicates early date, so that probably

it is the building of the original foundation, that is to say, Norman.

There are also the remains of a wheel stair in exactly similar position to the one at Easby in the north wall of the chapter house. No doubt across the west end of this chapter house and over the slype would be a passage or gallery giving access from the dormitory to the night stair in the south transept.

To the south west of the church, about 172 feet distant, is an interesting block of buildings now used as cottages. The external door shown at W on plan has the following on the head :—a rose in the centre with the date 1664, and on a shield on the dexter side R.F. and on the sinister side F.F.—which Mr. Grainger thinks stand for Robert Fayrish and his wife Frances. The date is interesting as giving a slight indication as to the uses the conventual buildings were put to during the period, between Mr. Mandeville's description and Bishop Nicolson's account at his Visitation. The small circular bay window at X on plan has once lighted a room now divided, but formerly a large apartment or hall, with wide fireplace and stone dressings to the internal door-openings. The great chimney-stack is weathered up the whole way from the fireplace on the east side. There is also a very small window to the east, shown at Z on the plan : it seems to have lighted a store or closet. This block of buildings, judging from the remains of early plinths at various parts, must originally have formed portions of the conventional buildings, possibly the infirmary, or the mill as the stream runs just below. Further west again, on the other side of the road, is a fragment of very ancient wall now incorporated in a barn.

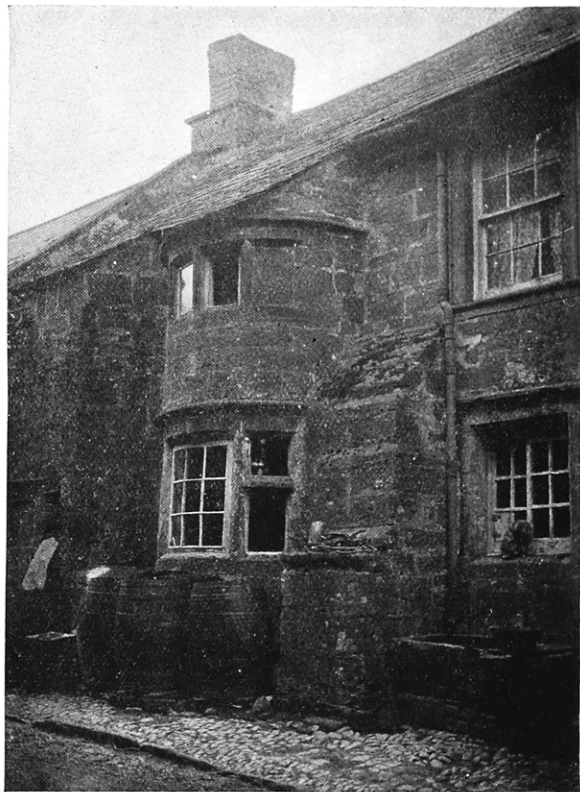
It is very difficult, owing to the interments, to excavate along the lines of the walls inside the churchyard, and outside in an adjoining field the foundations have been robbed of all the facing stones.



DOOR AT W IN PLAN :

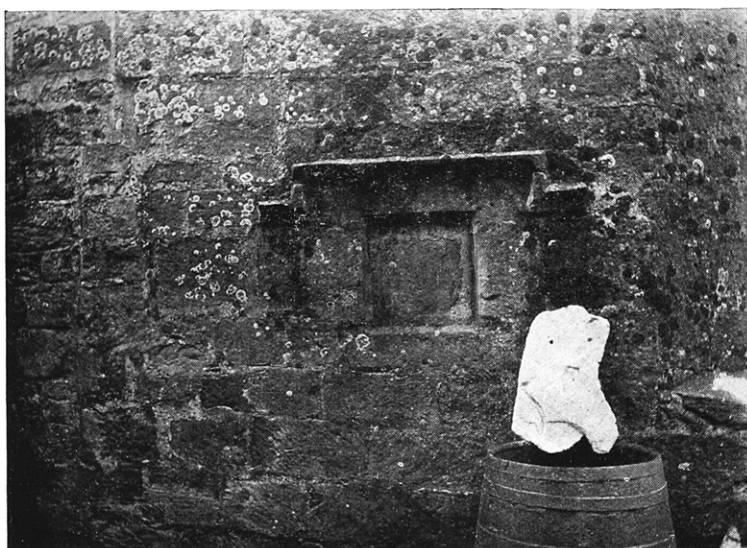
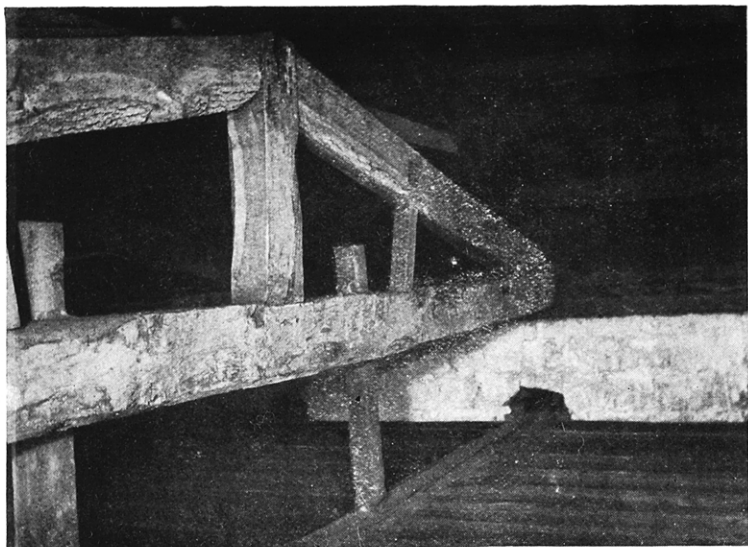
Phot. by C. J. F. Martindale.

Howland_031718_0025



WINDOW AT X IN PLAN :

TO FACE P. 246.



NORTH END OF PRINCIPAL, SHOWING MODERN CEILING,
ROOF AND SUPPORTS :
WINDOW AT Z IN PLAN : HOLME CULTRAM.

Phot. by C. J. F. Martindale.

TO FACE P. 247.

All these investigations, however, were confined to work now buried below the ground, and it seems to have been quite unknown that very extensive parts of the ancient roof remained concealed by the modern slate roof and ceiling. Between these internal and external outlines, absolutely out of sight, very fine parts of a much earlier oak roof exist. These portions can only be seen by removing the external slates and dropping down into the centre of the roof. The photographs were taken by artificial light under the roof.

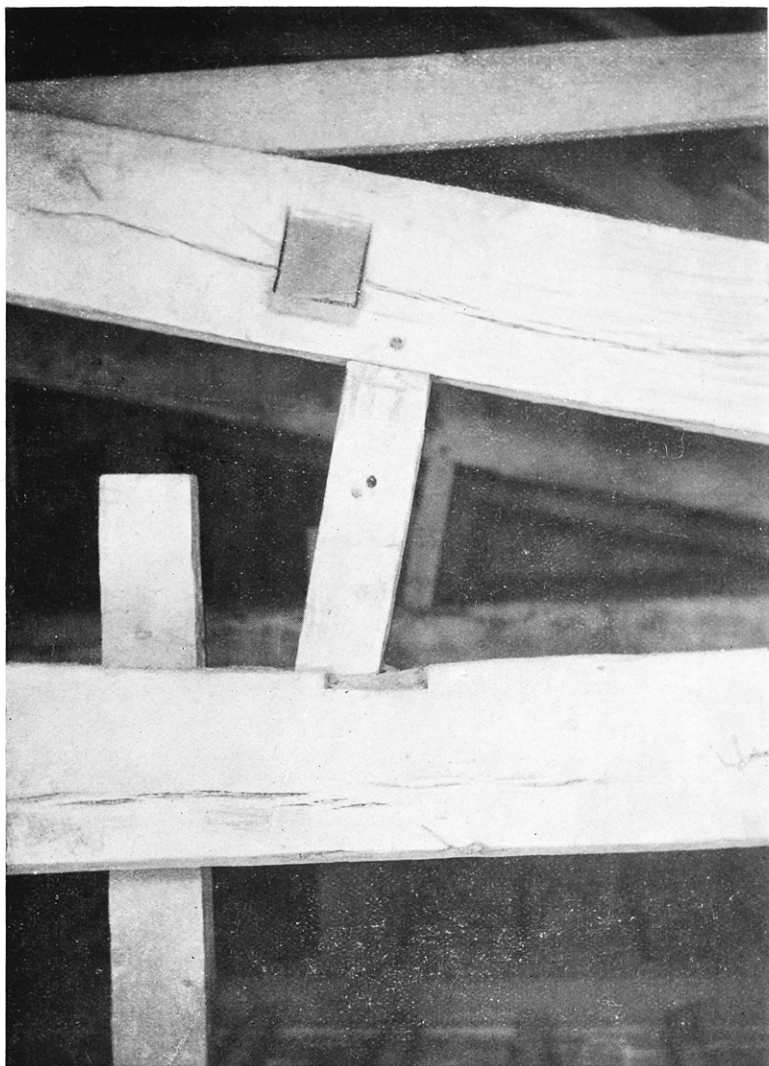
The remains consist of fifteen fine oak principals, 27 feet 6 inches long between the walls, with massive tiebeams 12 inches by 9 inches and cambered in centre 13 inches deep, king post 12 inches by 6 inches, principal rafters 10 inches by 6 inches, and intermediate struts 7 inches by 4 inches. All these are dressed, and the tie beam is chamfered on the lower edge, stopped very close to the wall. The original ridge, 5 inches by 4 inches, exists in four bays, and has the notches for the rafters.

The mortices for the purlins indicate two purlins about 6 inches by 6 inches, on each side of the pitch. In many cases the purlins have been cut off and the tenon remains, and it is quite clear, from the mortices which remain in the tie beams, that the purlins had curved longitudinal struts. This latter feature is a very common one in the magnificent open timber roofs of East Anglia, but is not so common in the North. The principals are at present spaced variously from 6 feet to 8 feet apart, which distance gives about two to each bay of the arcade ; but from the fact of the mortices for struts to the purlins, I think the principals have been spaced at some time wider apart. Some of the old purlins have been used as a continuous wall-plate under the principals on top of the wall, and these shew the mortices for the struts. These have

been very carefully dovetailed together. The pitch of this roof was $12\frac{1}{2}$ degrees.

To understand clearly, and attempt to date these remains, it is necessary to examine chronologically the records of the various destructions by fire and storm. In 1538, on the dissolution of the monastery, the inhabitants of the parish entreated successfully for the preservation of the abbey church for their use, stating that it was not only "little ynoughe to receyve all us, your poore Orators, but also a greate ayde, socor, and defence for us agenst our neighbors the Scots." From this I think it is clear that the parishioners desired to preserve the whole monastic church—nave, aisles, transepts, and choir—not only the nave, or what is occasionally thought to be the parochial portion. This petition was granted, and for 50 years, from about 1540 to 1590, the parishioners enjoyed and used the whole of the noble church, which exceeded Carlisle Cathedral in total length by about twenty feet, and then possessed its stalls, screens and wood-work, no doubt in keeping with the scale and character of the building and masonry. In 1579 the east window had been damaged and the chancel or east end was in a state of decay. Mr. Mandeville seems to have blocked up and repaired the east window, and at this date the roof must have been on the whole of the choir.

In 1590 we have the account of the accident on May 14th, given by Mr. Mandeville. Three stones fell from the vault of the central tower and damaged his *stall* and also the "commōn table." This confirms the existence at this date of the screens and stalls, and proves that there was an altar west of the screens in the nave. The next year the chancel or choir of the conventual church was still in use (or mis-use), probably only for the clergy, because Mr. Mandeville complains about the jangling and talking during divine service in this part of the



STRUTT, UPPER PURLIN AND SUPPORTS FOR BOTH
CEILING AND ROOF : HOLME CULTRAM.

Phot. by C. J. F. Martindale.

TO FACE P 248.



END OF PRINCIPAL RESTING ON NORTH WALL AND SHOWING
NOTCHES FOR PURLIN NEAREST EAVES, HOLME CULTRAM.

Phot. by C. J. F. Martindale.

TO FACE P. 249

building,* and therefore moves the whole of the services to the "low church," that is to the nave and aisles west of the crossing, which he repaired for the purpose. This was done in 17th October, 1591.

About eight years later, on 1st January, 1600, the central tower fell and brought down a great part of the chancel, including the timber of the roof. In two years the damage seems to some extent to have been repaired at a cost of £180. This good work was again undone by the carelessness of a plumber † in carrying a candle into the roof and the neglect of the churchwardens in allowing a daw's nest in the same, and in three hours fire destroyed

* "In the Chancell there were māye corneres where in people were alwayes jangling and talking in tyme of devine sēvice which abuse I thought to redrese for the honor of God."

The ritual choir was a very large one and the number of the clergy using it, after the dissolution, very much smaller, so that the congregation might, in many cases, be free from observation.

† As to this workman being a plumber, our member, Mr. Grainger, writes me as follows :—

I do not think that Christopher Harding was a plumber. He was a resident in the neighbourhood, he and his family. They were employed by Mr. Mandeville, more or less, to take part with him in the Tithe Suits against the tenants and the charge against him was, that he purposely set the Church on fire making the excuse that he was looking for a chisel. The following extract from a Petition of two tenants John Clene and John Huddart tells something of himself and family. It is addressed to the Counsel employed by tenants against the University and is dated 24th April 1604. Sir Arthur Atye, Lessee of the University, brought forward certain witnesses which are certainly not flattering.

"Cuthbert Studdham a backward person in all this neighborhead as well as most Slanderos fornycater and for the same facts or offence was ponished ackording to ye lawes by peanance in open church and walketh naked from ye waist. Thomas Harding a most quareling p.son and a great broker and p.curer of this unnecessarie suit and many others and as well are extreme extortioners as is plainly declared by an information exhibited in ye Baron of ye Exchequer—and John Harding his cousin a lyck quarriling fellow and a prinsepell present with his cousin John Harding sonne to ye said Thomas Harding in ye slaughter of Rychard Glaister and for the same faickt fled and was not to be found.

"An unlawful agreement was maid with ye said Glaisters father and friends but as yeat no satisfaction to ye King for want of his subject and also this John Hardings younger brother named Xtopher Harding and being the Sarvent upon Wednesday being the XVIII day of this instant April 1604 hathe burnt and waysted all ye old church and chancel of Holme Cultram and for the same sacke is fled and cannot be found as well for ye said John Harding being sarvent with or' wicked Vicker Mandevell was by pishoners to ever ripe and break opening ye leades of or' church as he did, but he would not be bidden answering that Mr. Vicker Mandevell had so commanded him to dowe his commandment he would obey and p.forme for dyspfit of any p.shoners whatsoever."

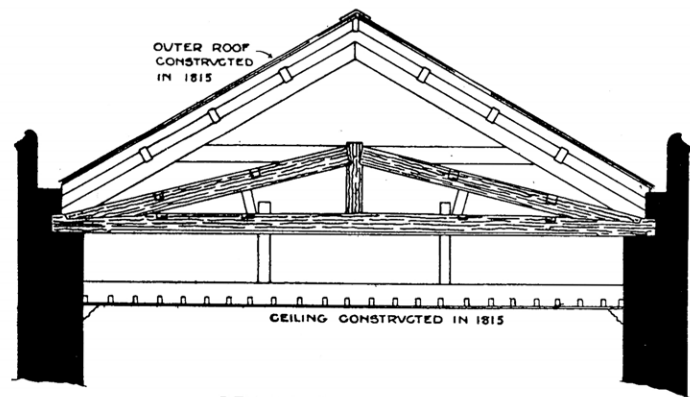
both the body of the chancel and the whole church except the south side of the low church.

I think the damage done to the roof cannot have been so extensive as the descriptions seem to imply, for the total cost of repairing the chancel was only £88, whereas ten years before it had been double. It is possible that all the stall work and screens were destroyed at this time and not renewed.

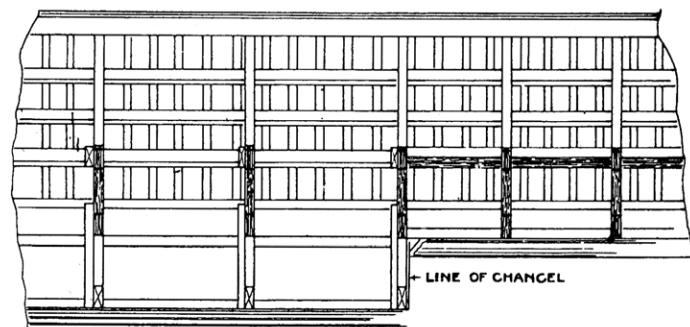
In 1593, apparently, most of the roofs were covered with lead, and therefore were the early low-pitched ones. Now for 100 years we have very little information of the structure, but when Bishop Nicolson visited the church, he says, the parishioners had taken the lead off the south aisle to repair the north. This does not imply that the south aisle was left uncovered or open, but simply that the outer covering was removed and the vaulting, which the Bishop calls "Arching," formed the only roof. The Bishop goes on to say that the body of the church or nave of nine arches only was standing, therefore at some time during this period a division wall had been erected dividing the nave from the east end. He also mentions that parts of the roof had been repaired with slates, not lead.

About twenty-five or thirty years later the decayed state of the building was worse, and Dr. Waugh took down the clerestory, removed the side aisles, and three bays at the east end of the nave, and re-roofed with lead the large middle aisle. Although the roofs are now slated the fifteen principals of Dr. Waugh's roof for the middle aisle, which he covered with lead, remain inside the present roof. But are not these principals very much older than 1730? In my opinion they are the original main roof timbers of the monastic church before the dissolution, and Dr. Waugh's builders simply lowered them down to their present position, placing as a continuous wall-plate the purlins and other timbers from the roof of the eastern limb of the church which was now

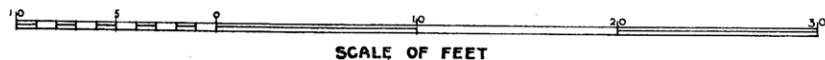
HOLME CULTRAM ABBEY



CROSS SECTION OF NAVE



PART LONGITUDINAL SECTION OF NAVE & CHANCEL

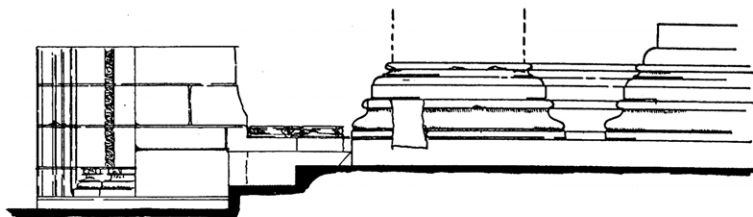


TO FACE P. 250 (a).

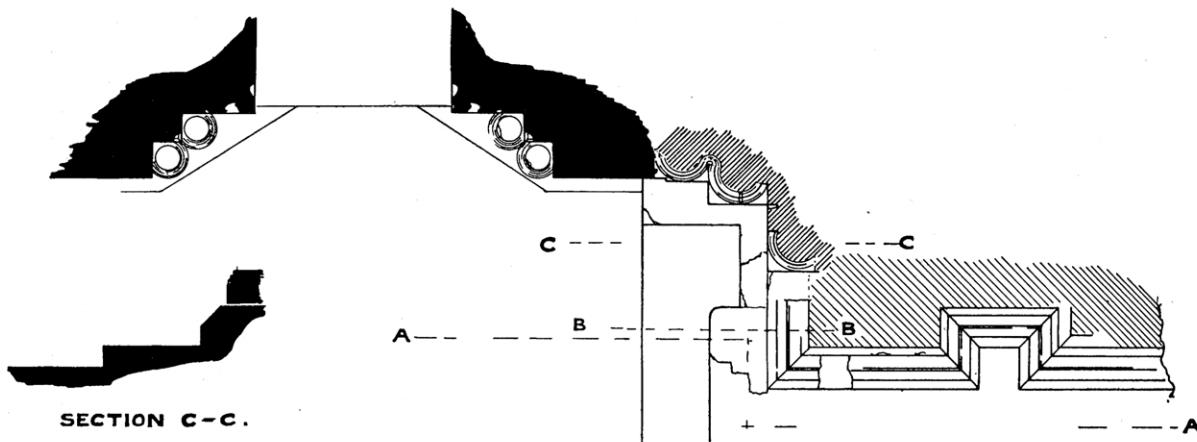
HOLM CULTRAM ABBEY
NORTH EAST PIER OF CROSSING



SECTION B-B.

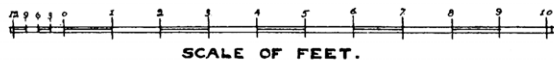


ELEVATION A-A.



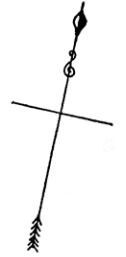
SECTION C-C.

PLAN.



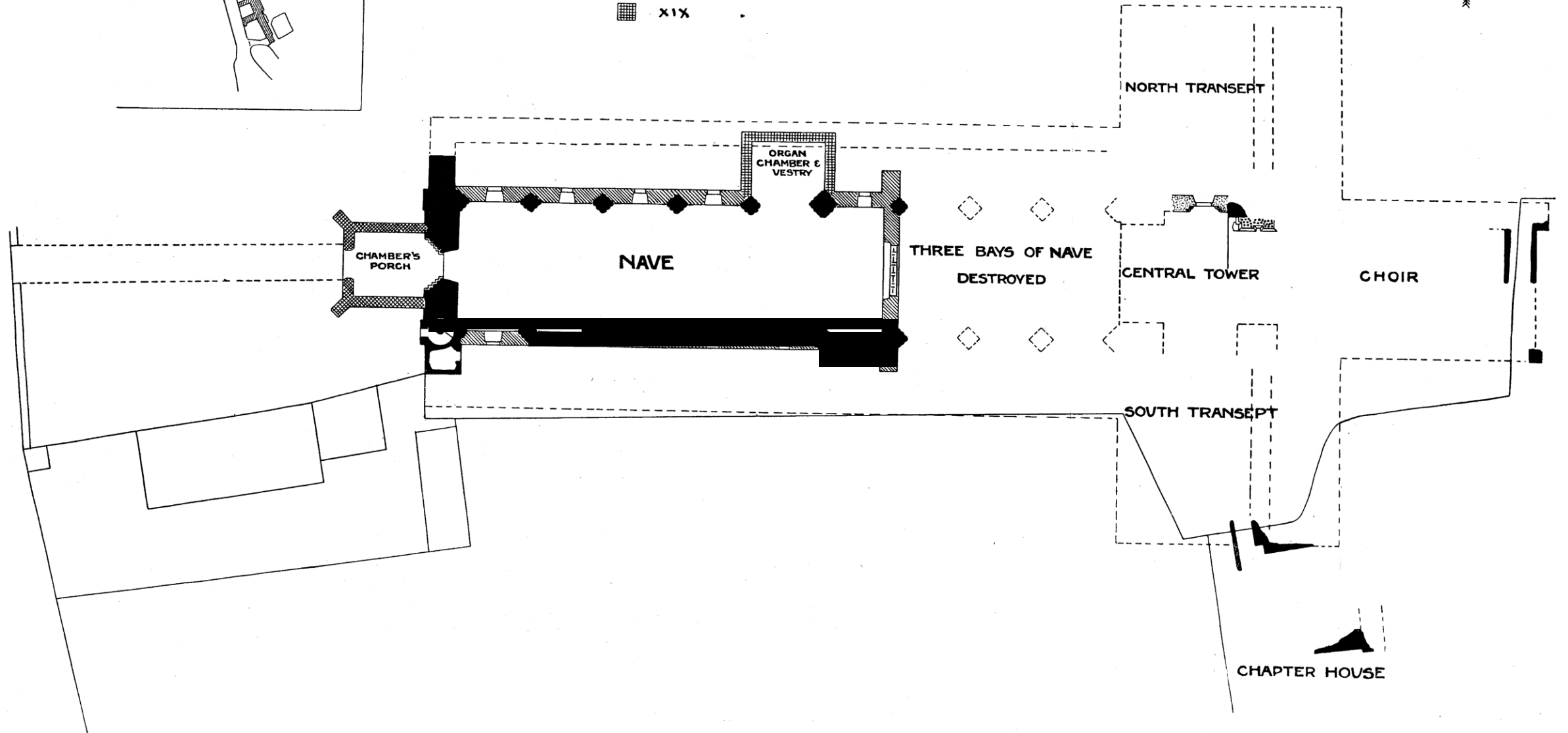
TO FACE P. 250 (b).

HOLME CULTRAM ABBEY

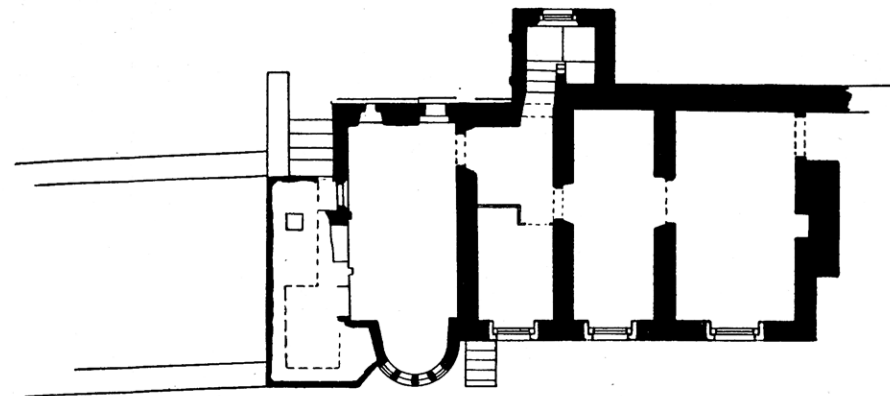


KEY PLAN

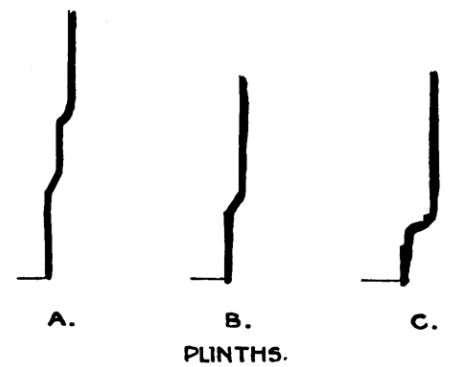
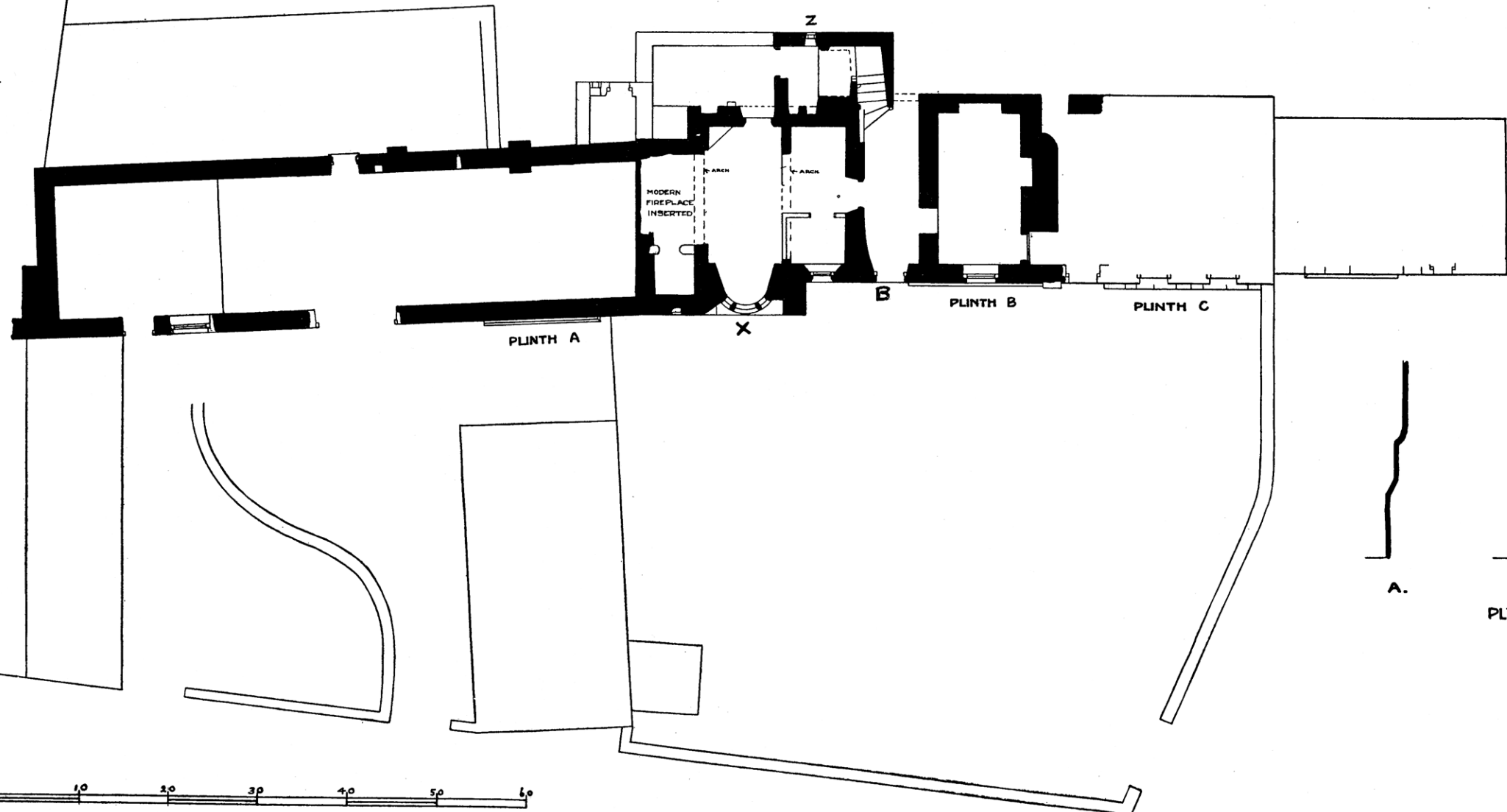
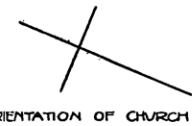
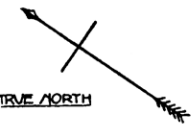
- XII CENTURY
- ▨ XIII
- ▩ XVI
- ▧ XVII
- ▦ XVIII
- ▤ XIX



HOLM CULTRAM - CUMBERLAND
BUILDINGS TO THE SOUTH OF THE ABBEY



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



PLINTHS.



SCALE OF FEET

removed. Dr. Waugh retained the old external outline of the roof and covered it with lead, and the grooves for the flashings remain on the inside of the west wall to-day.

Mr. F. Grainger, of Southerfield, has kindly given me the extracts from the parish records, which he knows so well, of a grant of timber from Wedholme at this time, and one principal has a tie beam of very inferior material which seems to indicate renewal.

We are thankful to find that when the plaster ceiling was erected and the roof slated they did not fix, as was often done, the ceiling joists to the oak tie beams, but inserted large main transverse beams supported from the principals, to carry the new ceiling quite clear of the old roof principals, so that they were left intact, and able to give their history plainly 180 years later; and also built up supports on the top of the old principals, to give the necessary steeper pitch for a slated roof, except in the case of the easternmost one, which has been mutilated to get the hipped outline for the east end.

As mentioned before, the purlins had longitudinal struts, and this seems to indicate that the principals were rather wider apart than at present; and if so, no doubt Dr. Waugh selected the best of all the old principals from both nave and choir to use in the contracted portion he was repairing. In any case he had those from the three destroyed bays of the nave.

Mr. Gilbanks in "Some Records of a Cistercian Abbey" claims for Holme Cultram that it is one of only three Cistercian monastic churches used at the present day for Anglican service, the other two being Beaulieu and Abbey Dore. I doubt whether any other in England possesses the original roof timbers of the monastic church before the Dissolution.
