

## AN ACCOUNT OF RECENT INVESTIGATIONS AT THE RUINED CHAPEL OF NORTH GOSFORTH.

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READ BY MR. SHERITON HOLMES, ON 29TH NOVEMBER, 1882.

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By a resolution of this Society, Mr. Hodges, of Hexham, and the writer were empowered to make excavations in and about the ruins of the ancient chapel at North Gosforth. Owing, however, to inconvenience of distance from the residence of the former, the work of exploration devolved chiefly upon the latter, who in February last (1882) opened up trenches round the buildings and the adjoining graveyard.

Of the history of this chapel but little seems to be known. In all probability it was, like its neighbour at South Gosforth, a chapel of ease to St. Nicholas, for in the year 1578 the same curate, Umfrid Sicomer, did duty at both places.

The respective limits of the four parishes of Newcastle were settled in 1220, though it is supposed that in Saxon times the whole town was included in the Parish of Gosforth. Bourne says, "St. Nicholas is not the mother church" to Gosforth, "but rather the contrary."

From Barnes' visitation it would seem that John Graunger was curate in 1577, Umfrid Sicomer in 1578, Thomas Maslet in 1579, and Mich. Frisell in 1580 and 1586.

Brand, in his "History of Newcastle," written in 1789, says, "A clergyman now alive in Newcastle remembers to have read the burial service in it," which would allow of the building having been in use so late as about 1730 or 1740. On the other hand, in Mackenzie's "History of Northumberland," published in 1811, it is stated, "There was formerly a chapel in the village of North Gosforth, but it has long since been pulled down, and not used for a place of worship for upwards of two centuries past." The lettered tombstones remaining

bring down the date of burials so late as 1691, so that the yard must have been used for interments long after the time when the chapel had ceased to be a place of worship.

Brand also (quoting from the Warburton MSS.) describes North Gosforth as "a small village in a low ground with a ruinous chapel." It is probable that the village occupied the site of the present Three Mile Bridge. The farm buildings at that place have evidently been built in part out of stone previously used, which might have been obtained from the chapel building.

The architectural remains of the chapel are very meagre, but from the dado with its splay course running all round the walls, and the character of the doorway, it may probably be dated from the time of the transition from the Norman to the Early English style of architecture, or the early part of the twelfth century. It may, however, be later than that, as in all probability the changes in the mode of building would not be quickly adopted in such outlying agricultural districts as this.

The building is simple in plan, consisting of the chapel proper, equivalent to the nave in larger structures, 38 feet 5 inches by 17 feet within the walls, and a chancel 18 feet 5 inches by 14 feet 4 inches, having an opening in the wall separating them 6 feet wide, which would be arched over in the usual way. There are, however, no remains of the arch stones to be found. The doorway of the chapel is on the south side 3 feet 8 inches wide, and 10 feet from the west wall. There is also a priest's entrance door in the wall of the chancel on the north side. At a later date than the erection of the building two buttresses had been placed against the west wall to support it. These are not bonded to the original wall. And also, at a later date, probably on account of the west wall having become ruinous, a new wall had been built for the west gable at a distance of 10 feet within the original one, thus decreasing the internal length to 28 feet 5 inches.

The chapel doorway has had a shaft on each side to carry a member of what would probably be a semi-circular arch. The bases of the shafts remain *in situ*, and there is also a portion of one of the shafts which was found amongst the loose stones thrown upon the broken walls. This piece of shaft is peculiar in form, and when in

position gives the impression of being an attached column, it being circular on the face, but tailed off behind to a point, to fit into the reveal or angle between the return of the wall and doorway rebate.

The whole of the walling was trenched round to the foundations inside and outside of the building, and carefully examined, but no trace of Roman inscribed stones were found other than the one in the east wall, noted by Mr. John Bell in 1826,<sup>1</sup> This stone has been re-dressed



on its lower angle, so as to adapt it to the dado splay course, and is built into the east wall of the chancel in a reversed position. It has upon it the letters COH, which are yet distinct, and what appears to be the numeral V, but the accompanying numerals are illegible. The inscription has been surrounded by an ansated border, some of which remains.

The drawings accompanying this paper show the plan of the building with the later alterations, also the various sculptured stones, which consist of a number of medieval tomb-stones, and a portion of a third, two coffer tombs with lettered slabs, a portion of the slab of another, a stone in the shape of a trough, a Roman altar, and a stone like a pedestal. These were generally described by Mr. John Bell in 1826, but as he makes no mention of the Roman altar it must have been found since he wrote. This stone has a moulded base and head, but is much weathered and the inscription eaten out; on the sides, however, with the aid of a side light, may be made out the usual sacrificial implements.

It is somewhat difficult to account for the presence of these Roman stones in this place, unless a road led direct north from the bridge over the Tyne past Morpeth to join the road from Watling Street, and this Dr. Bruce thinks highly probable, the name Morpeth, or Moor Peth, favouring the hypothesis.

<sup>1</sup> *Archæologia Eliana*, Vol. II. (O.S.), page 3.

The stone in the form of a trough is 2 feet 6 inches long by 1 foot 9 inches broad and 1 foot 10 inches deep, and is hollowed out to a depth of 12 inches. There is a small circular hole in the base, 5 inches deep, where it widens out to a much larger square form for the remaining 5 inches of the thickness of the base. This, in all probability, is the font, as it is similar in appearance to that of the old church at Escomb and has the four upright angles arrised in a similar manner. The pedestal stone has a splayed base on three of its sides, capped by a torus moulding. The pillar is roughly sculptured to represent four attached shafts, and finished by another torus moulding, above which spring what appear like the ribs of a vaulted arching, but which may have been only ornamentation. The fourth side of the stone is plain and flat, indicating that, whatever its use, it had been designed to be placed against a wall. The writer is of opinion that it had formed the support of a font or holy water basin, though it is worthy of note that the stone bears a strong resemblance to the columned arch-pillars at Monkwearmouth Church.

The two later tombs bear the following inscriptions. The one to the south of the chapel door:—

“Buriell Place of WILLIAM  
ROBINSON, Senior. LUCY his  
Wife Defted y<sup>e</sup> 2<sup>d</sup> of November,  
1664.  
Also WILLIAM ROBINSON their  
Son. Margaret his Wife Defted  
y<sup>e</sup> 12 of November, 1666.  
Also ELIZABETH his Wife, who  
Departed y<sup>e</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> of October,  
1691.”

A circle at the foot of the stone bears the coat-of-arms and crest.

The other, to the east of the chancel, has:—

“The Buriall Place of WILLIAM  
HEDLEY, yeoman, MARY his  
Wife, and 12 Children. He defted  
Octob<sup>r</sup> y<sup>e</sup> 29, 1664. JOHN their  
Son defted June the 13, 1665.”

Then follow ten lines of epitaph poetry and the armorial bearings in a circle.<sup>1</sup>

The broken slab of the third is in memory of Ralph Rutter, who died 4th of September, 1665.

Near the east end of the chancel some small pieces of the window glass were found, but so decayed as to be quite opaque, and so brittle that it could be pulverised between the fingers. A portion of this has been preserved, having upon it a figured design in the form of circles with connecting straight bars. The glass has been made in two layers and is a brilliant green in fracture. The ground-work of the design has been red, with the lines and circles of the pattern left clear.

In excavating the interior of the chapel a number of bones were turned up, which had evidently been previously disturbed, but a cut across the chancel revealed four skeletons in line, which could not have been buried more than a few inches beneath the floor. The second from the south wall appeared to have been buried on its side and with the jaws wide apart. No trace of coffins was found round these skeletons.

The altar slab remains near the chancel archway, and has upon it what might be a mason's mark, thus  $\frac{\text{T}}{\text{I}}$ . It is 5 feet 8 inches long, 2 feet 11 inches broad, and 6 inches thick, with a chamfer on the angle at one end.

At a distance of 20 feet from the south wall of the chapel there is the base of a monument or cross built with large stones. In excavating down to the foundations of this a coffin was found, composed of thin stone slabs set on edge to form the sides and ends, and with a similar slab forming the cover, but without bottom other than the earth. The interior was filled with fine brown mould, but without any remaining trace of bone.

Generally throughout the graveyard portions of earthenware vessels and red tiles were found, but in a very fragmentary condition, and a considerable quantity of these together near the chancel doorway, seeming as though they had been collected at times of later interment and deposited there. These consist of portions of red tiles resembling Roman, and of various vessels, some red unglazed, cream and white

<sup>1</sup> See these lines at page 244 of "*Archæologia Æliana*" (O.S.), Vol. II.

unglazed, and other fragments with portions of glaze upon them. The presence of such a variety of pottery and of the Roman altar seem to indicate a use of the place as a place of sepulture from very ancient times.

North Gosforth Church

# Platz

1882

Sherlock Holmes

Coffin made of thin stone slabs but without bottom. Filled with fine mould without trace of bone

masonry base for superstructure

Jomb Slab of Ralph Rutter 1665

Scale  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch per foot.

The stones marked A are in situ. Those marked B are doubtful. All the other stones are out of their original positions. The walls of the buildings remain about three feet above ground.

Burial place of  
William Robinson  
1664 1691.

Burial place of  
William Hedley  
1664 . 1665

x Pieces of figured window glass found here

Roman centurial stone  
built into dado splay  
course

Red tiles and pottery  
found, chiefly, here

The buttresses not bonded to wall

Section of Buttress  
and wall  
Scale  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch per foot





Sheet No 2  
North Gosforth Church  
Details

1882 Sheridon Holmes





