

XV.—WEST LILBURN CHAPEL.

By H. L. HONEYMAN.

[Read on 26th April, 1933.]

On the left bank of the Lilburn, a few hundred yards east of the Wooler road bridge, is a little grassy hollow; open with a gentle slope down to the burn on its south and south-east, sheltered from western gales by a steep bank which is crowned by the ruins of one of the two towers of West Lilburn, sheltered also from the north and north-east by a wooded knoll which is covered with heaps of stones, mounds and escarpments and is perhaps the site of another tower or an earlier settlement. Three hundred yards farther northwards is the Castle Hill of Lilburn with its traces of more ancient earthworks. The bottom and western slope of this hollow is occupied by a five-sided graveyard enclosed with an old earthen dyke; the ruins of West Lilburn church, or chapel as it is generally called, stand about the middle of the enclosure.

West Lilburn was one of five or six chapels¹ in the parish of Eglingham (which probably owed its position as ecclesiastical capital of the district to the fact that it was an early colony of the English at a time when they were still few in the land), and it was in the manor of Bewick but in the barony of Wark.

There may have been a connection between Tynemouth and Lilburn before the Norman conquest, but so far as I know there is no record of it, and very little record of any

¹ Bewick, Brandon, Branton, East Lilburn, West Lilburn and Wooperton. Eglingham had been crown property in the reign of king Ceolwulf, who added it to the patrimony of St. Cuthbert.

of the pre-conquest possessions of that monastery. Late in the eleventh century the manor of Bewick, which included Lilburn, belonged *de facto* if not *de jure* to Archil Morel, the slayer of king Malcolm Canmore at Alnwick.² Morel was a nephew of earl Robert Mowbray who refounded Tynemouth priory as a cell of St. Albans and completed the Norman church which earl Tostig had commenced there. Robert Mowbray rebelled against William II, and Morel, like a dutiful nephew, aided and abetted him. The rebellion was suppressed, Morel's lands were forfeited to the Crown, and so, on the death of William in 1100, passed to Henry I, who had married Matilda of Scotland, the daughter of Malcolm Canmore. With some sense of poetic justice Henry handed over Morel's property to his queen, and Tynemouth's *Liber de Benefactoribus* records that *Matilda regina dedit nobis Bewyke et Lilleburne*.³ The pious daughter of a saintly mother, Matilda had no doubt seen to the provision of churches for the use of her tenants, but in some cases at any rate they were not the first places even of Christian worship on their sites. West Lilburn churchyard is less elevated and less open than the kind of site usually chosen by early Christian missionaries in the north, and as no pre-romanesque stones have so far been found there we may meanwhile assume that its history begins, soon after the conquest of Northumberland, with the erection of an early Norman building. In its principal dimensions this little church almost exactly duplicated the older parts of Doddington church and it was built of similar stone. But it had no western tower and was less regular in its setting out and ruder in its masonry.

In the second half of the twelfth century (the church had been confirmed to the abbot of St. Albans by the bishop of Durham in 1174) it was decided to rebuild the chancel, which may at first have been apsidal, as at Tuggal and Bewick, but the work was interrupted after

² *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd ser., II, 72 *et seq.*

³ It has also been spelt Lylleburne, Lilleburum and Lilbourne.

only the lower part of the south wall had been built and the beautiful little columns, recently uncovered, had been procured. Work was resumed later and completed in a rougher manner and with much old ashlar re-used, from designs by the architect who added the western narthex to Doddington church, as is proved by the trefoil rear-arches of its windows.

About 1220, Lilburn having become the home of a resident landholding family⁴ who could not use the chancel as their private chapel because it belonged to the monks of Tynemouth,⁵ a south chapel was built, and in it was placed the curious monument of the knight Alexander; hereafter referred to.

After the Scottish wars the chancel was altered and refloored and a wooden reredos provided.

A chantry must have been founded in connection with the south chapel, for in the sixth year of Edward VI an inventory of chantry goods in "the aforesaid church of Lilburne" had to be prepared "by Ralfe Wilcocks, vicar ther."⁶

After the reformation the south chapel was separated from the church by a stone wall, but, as is proved by white-wash on that wall, it continued in use either as a mausoleum or as a "laird's loft" with burial place under. When the Lilburns were succeeded by the Clennels the latter had their burial place at Alwinton, and when they in their turn in 1793 made way for the Collingwoods, these, the monks being no longer there, saw no reason why they should not appropriate the roofless chancel, and the south chapel was

⁴ The Lilburns, whose names first begin to appear in deeds early in the thirteenth century.

⁵ Assuming that the church belonged to Tynemouth, but king John's charter (Bourne, *Hist. of Newcastle upon Tyne*, p. 179) to Tynemouth Priory confirms possession of lands at "Bewick, Egelingham and Lilleburn," but churches only at Bewick and Eglingham. Between 1215 and 1222 the advowson of Eglingham church was transferred to St. Albans, but about 1252 the prior of Tynemouth offered 240 marks to the monastery of St. Albans, whereof Tynemouth was a cell, for leave to retain the churches of Eglingham and Bewick. Lilburn is not mentioned on either occasion. See *N.C.H.*, VIII, 63 and 74, also XIV when published.

⁶ Surtees Soc., XXII 1.

allowed to fall into a ruin which was completed by the overturning of its south gable—the surviving lower part of which inclines sharply outwards.

The crown resumed possession of Tynemouth priory's property at the reformation and let it to various leaseholders until 1625, when the greater part of Bewick manor, including East Lilburn but apparently not West Lilburn, was granted to Messrs. E. & R. Ramsay, "gents," relatives of a favourite of James I.⁷

In the sixteenth century the "vicarage" of West Lilburn is referred to, but after the reformation it was served by a "stipendiary priest," and later by a curate. In 1578 the "curatus of Westlilburne" was excommunicated,⁸ and as no successor had been appointed in 1581, the vicar of Eglington was in trouble for neglecting to appoint one.

A commission in 1650⁹ reported that the church was still in use and recommended that West and East¹⁰ Lilburn and Wooperton should be taken out of Eglington parish and united with Ilderton, in which case their churches would be no longer needed as Ilderton church is comparatively near. The recommendation was not carried out, and the church was in use after 1660 as the mediæval font, carefully mutilated *c.* 1640, was buried under the nave floor (where it was recently found) apparently to have a new font set up above it. In 1663,¹¹ when Brandon and Bewick chapels were "totally ruined and destitute," Lilburn is not so described. However, in 1734¹² all the Eglington chapels are described as ruinous and only used for burial services, and for the next century and a half the building was allowed to fall into complete

⁷ *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd ser., XI, 73; see also *N.C.H.*, XIV, now in preparation.

⁸ *Proc.*, 2nd ser., III, 332.

⁹ *Arch. Ael.*, 1st ser., III, 5.

¹⁰ East Lilburn church, if it ever existed, seems to have been deserted even before 1650, but on Bleau's map both the Lilburns are provided with churches complete with conventional steeples.

¹¹ *Arch. Ael.*, 2nd ser., XVII, 254.

¹² Mark's *Survey*.

ruin. Its roof fell in and its south wall collapsed, but fortunately comparatively few of its stones were removed except from the south chapel, which seems to have been deliberately demolished to a little above ground level.

In 1828 archdeacon Singleton¹³ gave the area of the churchyard as 3 roods 14 perches; like the other chapel yards it was still "in the vicar" and "he cherishes the honourable intention of restoring them to their pristine utility," with which object he tried to preserve the right of public access to them, and reclaimed Wooperton churchyard which had actually been "ploughed out" by a proprietor who must have had a singularly unattractive personality.

In 1887, the graveyard was "becomingly kept";¹⁴ and some years ago the late Mr. Collingwood was persuaded by the father of the present owner of Lilburn Tower to repoint the remaining walls so as to prevent further decay. This year Mr. E. F. Collingwood has excavated the site, cleared away rubbish, and revealed the dateable fragments of hewn stone which enabled the following account to be written.¹⁵

DESCRIPTION.

The dedication of West Lilburn church is forgotten, as also is that of its south chapel, but further research may yet reveal them. The presence of a St. Mary's Well and a "Dunnys Well" on the estate suggests that the altars may have been dedicated to our Lady and to St. Denis, St. Dunstan, or St. Donan.

The church walls were built of freestone ashlar in large square blocks roughly cut behind to tail into a core of lime concrete, except in the south chapel, where longer facing stones are used, and in the lower part of the south wall of

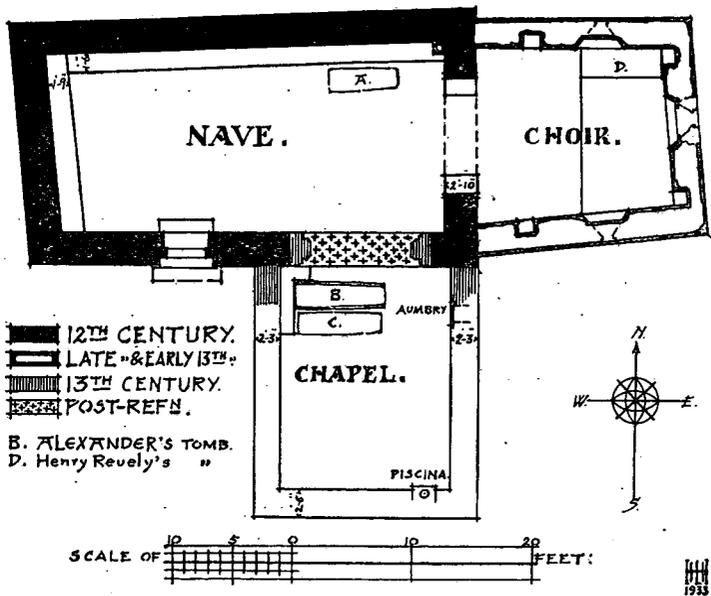
¹³ *Arch. Ael.*, 2nd ser., XVII, 254.

¹⁴ *Arch. Ael.*, 2nd ser., XIII, 65.

¹⁵ I am indebted for much valuable assistance to Miss M. Hope Dodds, Mr. C. H. Hunter Blair, and Mr. E. F. Collingwood, and ought also to pay tribute to the careful way in which the excavation work was done by the latter's estate workmen.

the choir, where the facing is of small oblong blocks much more neatly finished than elsewhere. The roofs were of timber and seem to have been thatched, as no ancient slates have been found on the site. The masonry of the nave closely resembles that of the oldest parts of the nave at Doddington. The photograph on plate xvi, fig. 2, shows the present condition of the fabric.

+ WEST LILBURN CHURCH.



The building consisted of choir, nave, south chapel of nave, and possibly at one time a western tower. The *choir* averages about 19 feet square externally with walls 2 feet 9 inches thick. Its east gable is nearly parallel with the west gable of the nave, its south-east corner is nearly a right angle, but otherwise its setting out is very irregular. It is certainly an addition to the nave, but it is built of the same kind of almost as roughly dressed square blocks,

more than a foot high, except, as already noted, the lower part of the south wall. Its east gable had a plain coursed skew with a deep back rebate for the roof. It was lit by three lancet windows with 4 inch external champfers and rebates for wood frames. These windows all had trefoil rear arches¹⁶ so far as can be ascertained. The inner sills of the windows are flat and set very much lower than the outer sills, so that each window had a recessed "breast" several feet high. In the walls are four rectangular recesses whose tops are level with the inner sills of the window and whose positions are shown on the plan. Although the south wall recess has been used as an ambry, for the crook holes of its door can be traced, and a similar recess at Old Bewick contained a piscina, it would seem to be possible that these recesses were meant to take the ends of heavy wood beams supporting a raised floor reached by a flight of steps from the sill of the chancel arch and covering an undercroft open to the nave. If so this arrangement was done away with later and a stone altar pace, which still remains, laid about 3 feet below the inner sills of the windows. The remainder of the floor is partially unpaved at this level, but there is a depth of fully 6 feet of made ground, beneath which may be the pavement of the undercroft. The positions of the three lancets seem to have been set off in relation to the hypothetical platform and not to the choir as a whole.

The chancel arch was of considerable interest, and many of its voussoirs were found lying where they had fallen, excellently preserved by the earth in which they were buried. It was of one or two orders partly plain and partly (presumably on the west side) decorated with a very shallow chevron ornament and a series of saltires, one on each voussoir, formed by shallow sunk beads, all cut with the axe, not the chisel, and the saltire pattern very like a lozenge pattern on the Norman doorway of St. Denis church, York (plate xv, fig. 1). The jambs of the arch opening are plain and had at one time pedestals, whose

¹⁶ See *Arch. Ael.*, 4th ser., VIII, 119.

tops were 2 feet below the level of the window inner sills, reducing the opening by about 16 inches on each side. Later these pedestals were roughly hewn off down to the present floor level.

The *nave* averages about 38 feet by 21 feet externally with walls 2 feet 8 inches thick. The north wall had no windows, unless small and high up (compare Birnie church in Moray where the masonry is very similar in character). The west wall has none now, but the upper part of it has been reconstructed with old materials re-used. A carved corbel is built into it outside. It may have been intended to erect a western tower or narthex as at Doddington, but no trace of this can be found. In the south wall is the archway to the south chapel and the lower part of a Norman door. The centre of the door is almost 13 feet from the south-western external corner of the nave, and it is curious to note that this dimension, within a few inches, also applies to the corresponding doorways at Doddington, Chillingham, Old Bewick and Brandon. The door had nook shafts, whose bases remain in situ and are of a not uncommon early Norman section. The threshold had twice been raised to keep pace with the rising level of the churchyard: on the last occasion a thirteenth century grave cover with dog-tooth edging was used as a doorstep, set on top of the nook shaft bases.

A rough bench table or "scarcement," 18 inches wide, runs along the base of the north wall of the nave, and a slightly higher one, 21 inches wide, along the inside of the west gable. There is nothing of the kind on the south side, where the foundations of the wall do not go far below floor level. Resting above the bench table, but not bedded in mortar, in the north-east corner of the nave, is the prettily moulded base of a late twelfth century column, the plinth of the base about 10 inches square and the shaft 6 inches in diameter. Close to this base were found three other bases and one water leaf capital (plate xv, fig. 3). The fine finish of this work contrasts with their surroundings, and the stones may have been brought ready hewn

from a distance. This is the more likely since the shafts are made in pieces only 16 inches long to avoid breakage in transit. In three cases the last section of shaft was cut out of the same stone as its base and plinth, an unusual feature. It is not at present possible to say what was the original position and purpose of these little columns, they may have been the supports of an altar. There was also found in the nave a Norman capital of scalloped pattern, 12 inches square, and fitting a shaft 5 inches in diameter.

The south chapel is 21 feet 3 inches north to south and 18 feet 9 inches east to west externally, with side walls 2 feet 3 inches thick and gable 2 feet 6 inches. It is the only rectangular part of the church and the best built. In its west wall was a lancet window of similar type to those in the choir but with a smaller champfer, and in this side was probably the post reformation or late mediæval door, surrounded by a plain champfer, of which several stones were found but none *in situ*. In the south gable was a window which has entirely disappeared, and a piscina which remains *in situ* but without its fenestella. The windows of the east wall are lost, but here there remains *in situ* the sill of an aumbry, neatly rebated for a door and very different from the roughly formed recesses in the choir. In the north-west corner of the chapel were found two tomb slabs (see *monuments*). The archway to the nave was of 8 feet 3 inches span, with its axis 5 inches west of the axis of the chapel. The wall above it was contemporary with it, and most of the west spandrel has fallen into the nave, where it lies in a solid mass held together by its excellent mortar. Arch and jambs were alike, and on each face had two champfers 4 inches and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide separated by a rebate $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches on the soffit and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep. The arch had a stone sill, in contrast with the unpaved nave and chapel, formed by the lower part of the original nave wall.

Inscriptions. On the knight's coffin lid in Carolingian uncials the word ALEXANDER.

On a slab in the north-east corner of the chancel, marked D on the plan :

AGVST. 15. 1684/HEIR LYES VNDER/BYRIED THE BODY/
OF HENRY REVELY/OF EAST LILBVRN/AND $\frac{1}{2}$ BODY OF
HIS/SON THOMAS REVELY/OF COLD MARTIN/WHO DE-
PARTTED/THIS LIFE MAY 25/1701

Monuments. During the excavations there were found part of a tomb slab with chamfered and beaded edges, another with dog-tooth ornament at one end, and several slabs whose decoration had been quite worn away. There were also found the three sepulchral monuments described in the appendix. In the choir is a granite tablet in memory of Arthur Burdett Collingwood, 1847-1927. There was found in the nave a piece of straight twice-chamfered coping and a flat stone with two triangular ridges, much worn, either the capstone of a belfry or a twin coffin lid.

Fittings. In the choir are the sockets for the ends of a tester above a reredos, and on the north wall of the nave is a stone corbel and some holes, perhaps connected with a rood loft, or with the canopy of a pulpit. The lower part of the bowl of a plain octagonal early mediæval *font* was found buried under the centre of the nave floor just west of the entrance door (plate xvi, fig. 1). One of the stones of the lancet window in the south chapel had been cut out of the pedestal of a Norman font, similar to those at Doddington and Brandon, for part of its funnel remains on the back of the stone. It is not clear why the Norman font was superseded. Had the church been burnt by the Scots (some pieces of charcoal were found under the choir floor)? Or had a western tower fallen and broken the font? Part of a *quern* made of igneous rock was found: was there a priest's dwelling above the south chapel? Or was the quern used to prepare flour for the making of consecrated wafers? Part of an earthenware pot of a

thirteenth century pattern was dug up, but no coins or metal objects.

Churchyard monuments. There are several interesting tombstones in the churchyard, a mason's gravestone is particularly pleasing and decorative in its treatment of the symbols of his craft. There are also two thirteenth century tomb slabs, one still retaining traces of a carved cross, the other worn quite smooth.

APPENDIX

The principal monuments.

A NOTE BY C. H. HUNTER BLAIR.

There are three monuments of more than ordinary importance within the church. They are marked A, B, C on the plan on page 215. That marked B is the most interesting, and it is reproduced from a photograph on plate xv, fig. 2. It now lies at the north-west side of the south chapel in a place evidently prepared for it when the chapel was built; before then it probably lay on the north side of the early chancel. It may represent the founder of the church, but the only clue to the identity of him who once lay beneath it is the name ALEXANDER cut in a rude type of early Lombardics. The stone is hewn out of the local red sandstone; it measures $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length, 10 inches in thickness to the ledge, 25 inches broad at the head and 19 inches at the feet. The greater part of it is in good preservation, it has not at any time been exposed to the weather and has been covered up since its removal to its present position. Parts of it have, however, been purposely hacked off, probably to make a level bed for the pavement above it, and the lower part on the left of the central ridge has been worn by the action of feet. The upper part of the stone has upon it the head and shoulders of a man carved in low relief; the head in a mail coif rests

upon a flat square cushion, the face with shoulders and arms have been hacked off. On his left side is a long shaped shield with a straight top and a border and charged with a cross within a circle upon a stem issuing from the base point of the shield; on the right side, opposite to the shield, are some undecipherable incised lines. From about where his breast ought to be, a ridge in the form of a bar is prolonged to the lower end of the stone, and continued over the foot as a narrower reeded band. Heads of animals have been carved upon it, but one only now remains, which seems to be that of a dog. Below the shield is an early javelin-like spear and a heavy two-edged and pointed sword with short straight quillons and a large round pommel, both carved in low relief. Below the sword a fish is carved in incised lines and, crossways, beside it is a bird (? raven) also depicted in outline. On the right side of the central ridge is the name before mentioned, carved in rough letters of very irregular size, cut square in section. Incised lines have also been cut on this side, but they are much worn away and the figures they represented cannot now be determined. The long very heavy stone, the elongated shield, the spear shown as a knightly weapon, the style of the letters of the name all point to a date not later than the first quarter of the twelfth century, possibly even earlier. The incised lines are reminiscent of similar carving seen on the wooden lids of Saxon coffins, whilst the form of the letters used in the name is very like to that on an early stone at Hexham¹ and on twelfth century stones at Durham.² The identity of "ALEXANDER" is unknown, nor has much searching revealed a likely person; he remains a name and nothing more, but he must have been a person of importance in his day and generation.

The second stone, marked C on the plan, is also of the local reddish sandstone. It lies to the west of B, in a place prepared for it, and like its companion was probably

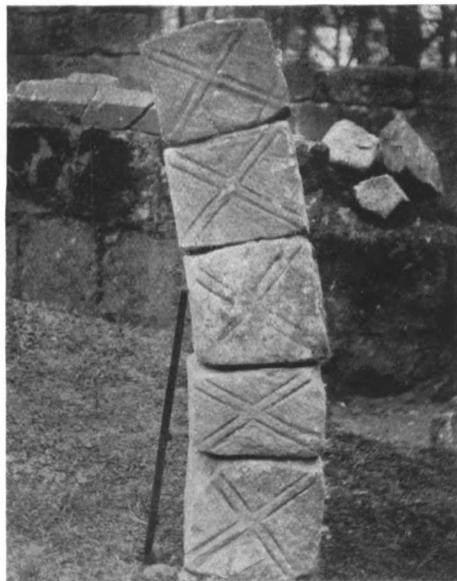
¹ *The Abbey of St. Andrew, Hexham.* By C. C. Hodges; plate xxxv, fig. H.

² *Durham Sepulchral Slabs,* Hodges, plates 34, 35.

moved to its present site when the south-chapel was built. It also has been covered up from the time of its removal and is not weathered at all. There is no inscription upon it nor any carved or incised devices. It bears only a broad heavy Latin cross in low relief, the upper limbs joined together by a wide circle, like a wheel-cross of late date; the base broadens out in a semicircle to the edges of the stone. It is rather smaller than B both in length and breadth, but of the same heavy type, and is apparently of approximately the same early twelfth century date.



The third monument, marked A on the plan, lies probably in its original position, on the north side of the nave towards its eastern end. It is much broader and thinner than either B or C, and is also considerably weathered and also broken across diagonally. In the centre is a wheel-cross of irregular shape with a long lower limb and a stepped base of rude design, all carved in low



VOUSSOIRS OF CHANCEL ARCH.



STONE OF ALEXANDER.



FRAGMENTS.

WEST LILBURN CHAPEL.



BROKEN FONT.



WEST GABLE.



PISCINA IN SOUTH CHAPEL.

WEST LILBURN CHAPEL.

relief; on its dexter side is a cross-hilted sword, double-edged and pointed. At each side of the cross-shaft are small figures, one on the dexter side and two on the sinister. They are roughly carved and now much weathered, but they seem to be clad in dresses tightly drawn in at the waist and to wear long pointed boots. They probably represent the family of the deceased, and are an early example of the later fashion of representing, on brasses and stone monuments, the family of the dead praying for his soul.

There is no inscription upon the stone, nor any guide as to whom it may commemorate, but it dates later than B or C, probably about the early part of the thirteenth century.