

## V

### AN EXCAVATION IN THE NAVE OF WOODHORN CHURCH, NORTHUMBERLAND, 1974

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IN 1973 the redundant church of Woodhorn (NZ 301888) was bought by the old Ashington Urban District Council (now part of the Wansbeck District) for conversion into a cultural centre. In February 1974 there was an opportunity to dig two small trenches in the nave before new floors were laid, and to make certain other observations. I am most grateful to the Council for permission to do this, and to several members of their staff, in particular Mr. George Stephenson, for their help and kindness during the operation. I am also indebted to all those who took part, some of whom assisted with the preparation of this report, namely Mrs. J. Carlyle, Mr. and Mrs. M. Lain, Mr. and Mrs. J. Slade, Messrs. P. A. G. Clack, S. Hill, T. G. Newman, E. Slade, H. Welfare, G. and G. Yates, and to Mr. J. E. Parsons and Mr. G. D. Robson for their comments on some of the finds.

The conversion disturbed the floor or ground surfaces in two places—in a trench round the outside of the church, and in the nave, where the rotten wooden floor beneath the one-time pews was removed. The trench had been dug before our arrival, so all that can be said is that earlier foundations appeared to exist beneath the nineteenth-century external walls. The removal of the wooden floor exposed much of the bases of the piers in the arcades and made available for excavation small areas in the south aisle, and on either side of the centre aisle. It was agreed that excavation could take place on two consecutive weekends in the east bay of the nave.

In an assessment of what might be found under the floor the surviving Saxon stones had to be considered first. It is believed that these must imply the existence of a cemetery in the late ninth or early tenth century, but not necessarily the existence of a church at that date.<sup>1</sup> It is possible indeed that the church with the aisleless nave, of which parts of round-headed windows

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Professor R. J. Cramp for commenting on the significance of these stones.

survive above the later arcades, was the first on the site. Dr. and Mrs. Taylor prefer a date in the early eleventh century for this period, while Professor Sir Nikolaus Pevsner interprets it as early Norman. In the twelfth century the building of a north arcade was quickly followed by a south arcade, and two piers and two round-headed arches survive in each. Pevsner and F. R. Wilson agree that the chancel arch is thirteenth-century, but disagree on the date and hence the sequence of the wide eastern bays of the nave. Wilson believes that the southern arch is contemporary with the chancel arch, which it resembles, and that the northern is later; Pevsner attributes both northern and southern to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century in spite of their dissimilarity. Although Wilson argues that the Norman nave was four bays long and was reduced in length by the rebuilding of the thirteenth century the other possibility of three bays followed by an extension seemed equally reasonable, particularly as the southern and chancel arches could well be the same date. Only a lengthening of the north aisle would then

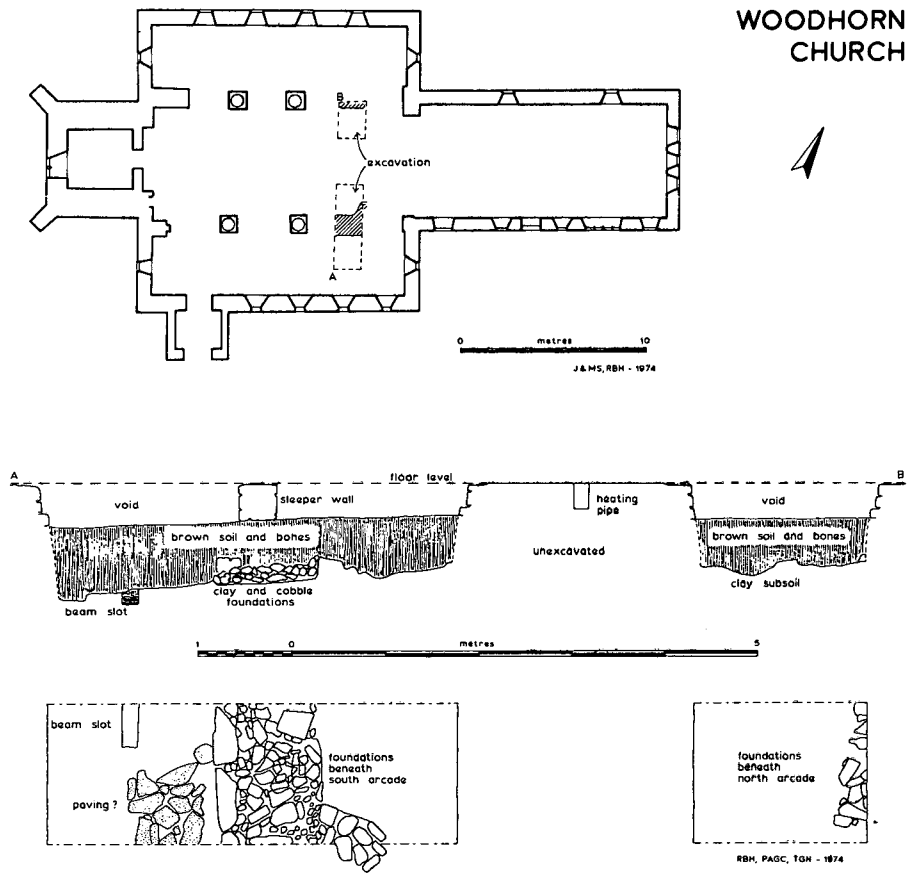


Fig. 1

be needed to complete the existing plan. It was in the hope of solving at least one of these problems that excavation was begun.<sup>2</sup>

In the event little fresh information was obtained. Continual disturbance of the ground while burying the dead had resulted in an almost total absence of stratified layers and in serious damage to the stone structures. While the flagging was probably earlier than the wall footings, it was impossible to fit the various features into a satisfactory sequence and impossible to date them. Only the ubiquitous dirty brown soil yielded any artifacts and these ranged in date from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century.

The stone foundations beneath the arcades are, however, worthy of comment even though the northern line was so fragmentary. These footings were the remnants of either the walls of the nave before the addition of aisles or—if the first nave did not extend so far east—sleeper walls beneath the Norman piers. Whatever their origin, enough remained of the southern line to show that it turned to the north just within the limits of the excavation, or approximately one bay to the east of the neighbouring pier. Although later burials had removed any possibility of corroborative evidence on the north side it seems likely that this return marked the east end of the nave before its extension in the thirteenth century. In the late twelfth century, therefore, Woodhorn church had an aisled nave of three bays.

### THE FINDS

I am grateful to Mr. J. E. Parsons for commenting on nos. 1–7 and 9, and to Mr. G. D. Robson for identifying no. 14.

### POTTERY

From the upcast of the trench dug along the outside of the south wall of the nave.

1. \*Rim of cooking pot in orange/buff fabric with grey core which contains some grit. The external surface has a dark stain below the rim. Internal diameter 165 mm. 13th-century.

Nos. 2–14 were recovered from the dirty brown soil in the trenches in the nave.

2. Fragment of jug wall in hard, slightly gritty, dark grey fabric with brown/orange outer surface spotted with light green glaze. 14th-century?

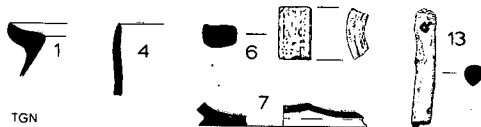


Fig. 2 ( $\frac{1}{4}$ )

<sup>2</sup> The information in this paragraph is derived from F. R. Wilson, *Churches in the Archdeaconry of Lindisfarne* (1870), pp. 179–182, N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North-umberland* (1957), p. 325, H. M. and Joan Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, Vol. II (1965), pp. 682–3.

3. Fragment of jug wall in pale brown fabric with blackened inner surface, and dirty brown outer surface except where it is covered by mid green glaze. 14th-century.
4. \*Upright rim of a stoneware jug with glossy brown external glaze and matt brown internally. Raeren. 16th-century.
5. Fragment of stoneware, with brown glaze outside and grey glaze internally. Raeren. 16th-century.
6. \*Part of the handle of a stoneware "Bellarmine" bottle covered with brown-mottled grey glaze. Frechen. 17th-century.
7. \*Base of a vessel in hard red fabric. The interior is covered with chestnut brown glaze, and the exterior is heavily soot-blackened. Diameter of base 101 mm. 17th-century.

#### FLOOR-TILES

8. Twenty-nine fragments of plain medieval floor-tiles, almost all retaining traces of yellow or dark green glaze. Those which can be measured are from 122 to 125 mm square, and 24 to 30 mm thick. Tiles of this type are very common in the north-east of England, and have been found on every medieval site excavated in Newcastle, military, religious and domestic.

#### CLAY TOBACCO-PIPES

9. Part of the stem of a clay tobacco-pipe with large off-centre hole. 17th-century.

#### WINDOW GLASS

10. Ten fragments of window glass, all very friable and ranging from translucent to opaque. Three are c. 3 mm thick, show traces of grozed and flame-rounded edges and are probably medieval. The remainder are no more than 2 mm thick, and are perhaps 16th- or 17th-century.

#### IRON

11. Assortment of nails with wood attached, and corroded handles, presumably all from coffins.

#### NON-FERROUS METALS

12. Two pieces of lead, one certainly and the other possibly being portions of calme.
13. \*A lead rod, 62 mm long, and sub-circular in section with a diameter of c. 12 mm. There is a small hole through one end; the other has been broken.
14. Two Scottish bronze turners or bodles of Charles II, 1672-77.

From the stone rubble which had originally filled the void under the wooden floor in the nave, and which was removed by the builders before the excavation began.

#### WORKED STONE

15. A voussoir, 200 mm high, 180 mm deep, and with a face 200 mm wide at the top and 140 mm at the bottom. The face bears a saltire cross outlined by a pair of incised lines.