

# V

## THE ANGLO-SAXON CHURCH AT HEXHAM\*

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### INTRODUCTION

THE RECTOR of Hexham wrote a letter to *The Times* which appeared on September 28th 1899. Its main purpose was an appeal for donations to erect a new nave but, as an additional bonus to the scheme, he added: "To the historical student and the archaeologist we can promise the plan, at least, of St. Wilfrith's church". The Reverend Savage eventually got his nave but subsequent controversy shows that his promise to the historian and the archaeologist was not clearly fulfilled.

There is no doubt that the major church of St. Wilfrid's monastic complex occupied the site of the present nave. In the nineteenth century this area was a rubble-strewn waste, a part of the infamous Campy Hill burial ground which "few enter but from dire necessity".<sup>1</sup> During the 1880s and 1890s the Abbey's resident architect, C. C. Hodges, began to record the walls and foundations discovered in clearance-work on this site as well as noting similar traces within the standing church to the east. Later, during the restorations and nave-building of 1899–1908, he was able to explore other features which were then revealed but sadly no systematic excavation was undertaken before the new nave was erected. Hodges described his discoveries in various publications<sup>2</sup> but he never printed a complete report or drawing of his observations. He did, however, supply Professor Baldwin Brown with a measured plan and section summarising his finds and these were used by Brown when preparing the second edition of his book *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*.<sup>3</sup>

It was not until 1961 that Hodges' plan was finally published (though in a formalised version) when it was used by Dr. and Mrs. Taylor as the basis of their important article in *Archaeologia Aeliana*.<sup>4</sup> Four years later Hodges' section was printed as part of the Taylors' monumental *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*.<sup>5</sup> In both this book and the earlier article the Taylors clearly and logically related the features drawn by Hodges to his published statements. They then went on to offer an inter-

\* Bibliographical abbreviations used in the footnotes are listed at the end of the article.

<sup>1</sup> J. Ridley, *The Hexham Chronicle or Materials for a Modern History of Hexham*, 1862, 61. The churchyard was closed for burials in May 1859; in a submission to the Chancellor's Court which preceded the erection of the nave in 1907–8 its condition is described as "a forlorn one".

<sup>2</sup> Notably in: *Hodges 1888; Savage and Hodges 1907; Hodges and Gibson 1919*.

<sup>3</sup> *Brown 1925*, 167.

<sup>4</sup> *Taylor and Taylor 1961*.

<sup>5</sup> *Taylor and Taylor 1965*, I, fig. 133. There are slight discrepancies between the original drawing and the printed version in the rendering of the stones in the apses and the positioning of one of the foundations in relation to a modern pier.

pretation of his records which suggested that St. Wilfrid's church was a transeptless structure, its east end overlying the crypt, with a separate apsed building further east.

Though Hexham was included in subsequent discussions of Anglo-Saxon crypts and towers<sup>6</sup> only one substantial study of the church has appeared since those of the Taylors. This is the chapter by Dr. Gilbert, published in the celebratory volume of 1974, and it offers a very different interpretation of the fragmentary remains planned by Hodges.<sup>7</sup> To Gilbert the apse was an integral part of the large church and he makes a bold attempt to distinguish at least two phases of construction. The strength of his chapter lies in its attention to Hodges' section and in at least one important argument, the half-subterranean nature of the crypt, it carries complete conviction.

The present paper is a further contribution to the continuing study of this impressive building and focuses on two main issues: the problem of floor levels and the eastern entrances to the crypt.<sup>8</sup> Inevitably it takes as a starting point disagreement with sections of Gilbert's recent study. Such disagreements should not, however, mask the value of his chapter which is always provocative and everywhere illuminated by his unrivalled knowledge of Merovingian architecture.

#### THE NORTH ARCADE

Before engaging with the main issue of the level of St. Wilfrid's nave floor it is important to decide upon the nature of the row of three foundations shown on Hodges' plan and labelled as "g" by the Taylors (Hodges' plan and the relevant part of his section are redrawn as figs. 1 and 2: the Taylors' lettering has been retained for ease of identification.).<sup>9</sup> Two of these foundations are also shown by Hodges in his section and are marked as "concrete foundations" on which rest "cores of bases". The natural interpretation of both plan and section is that the "cores" were the remains of the piers of an arcade and that these were supported by rectangular foundations. To the Taylors therefore line "g" was an Anglo-Saxon arcade.<sup>10</sup>

But there are problems in this solution.

The first problem concerns the respond in the west wall of the ruined nave, now incorporated into the new structure, which is in line with these three foundations.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> H. M. Taylor, Belfrey towers in Anglo-Saxon England, *North Staffs. Jour. of Field Studies*, VIII, 1967, 9–18; H. M. Taylor, Corridor crypts on the continent and in England, *ibid.*, IX, 1968, 17–52.

<sup>7</sup> E. Gilbert 1974.

<sup>8</sup> The text represents an expanded version of a part of my public lecture delivered at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in November 1974 during Hexham's 1,300th centenary celebration year. It has been rewritten to take account of Dr. Gilbert's paper.

<sup>9</sup> In the interests of clarity my tracing of the plan has omitted Hodges' centre-lines which are, however, shown

in Gilbert's accurate reproduction. My tracing of the section omits the numerous measurements which Hodges marks between the west wall and the various features which he records.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor and Taylor 1961, 113.

<sup>11</sup> For the relationship of west wall to respond see Hodges 1888, plate 54; for photographs see Savage and Hodges 1907, plates XVIII–XX. The respond was discovered in 1881: see C. C. Hodges and Temple Moore, *Report on the Present State of Hexham Abbey Church . . .*, 1899, 4 (copies in Hexham Abbey records and in Northumberland L.R.O. (No. 467/26)).

# HEXHAM – HODGES' PLAN

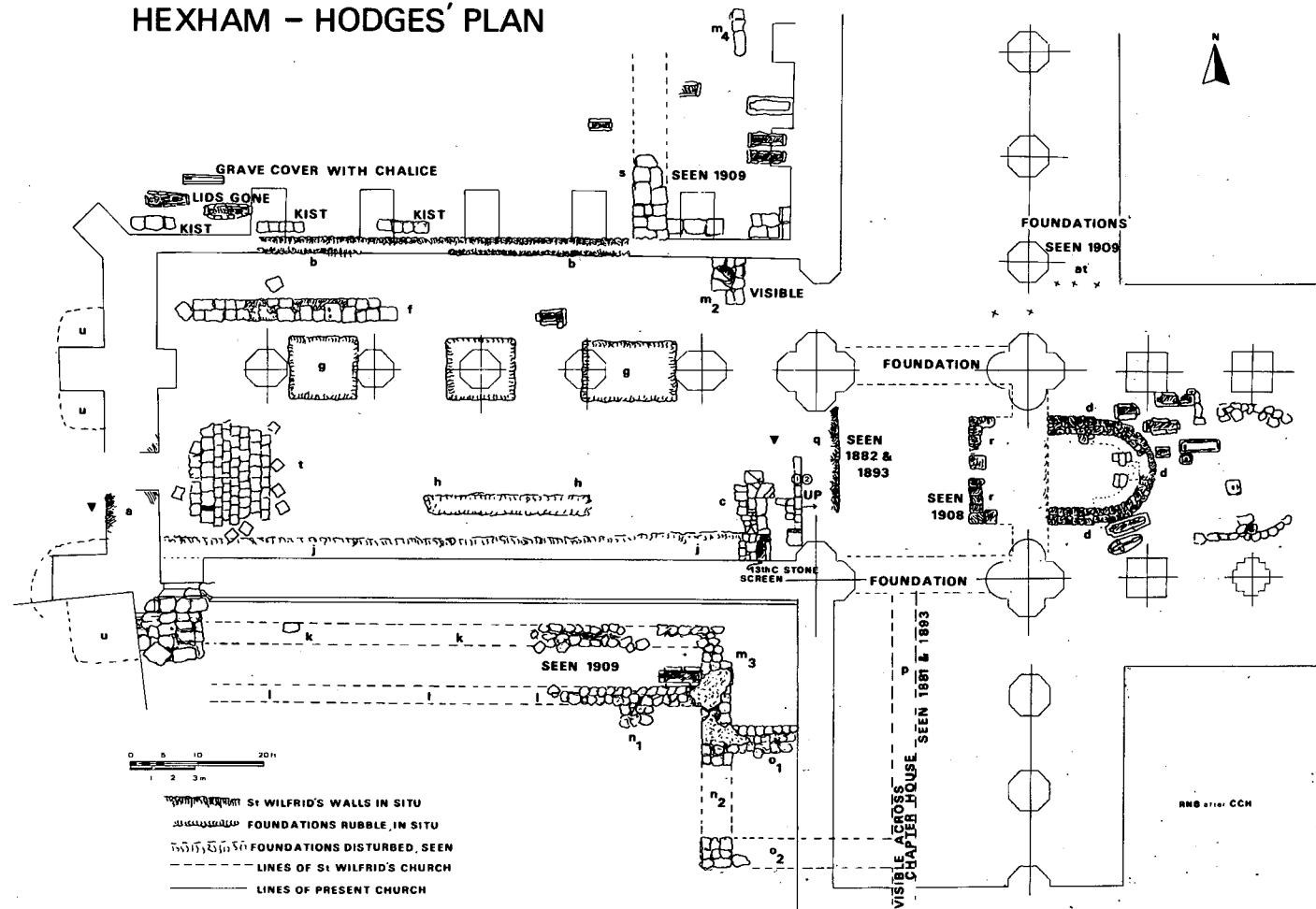


Fig. 1. The letter identifications are those of the Taylors. The key and all other descriptions are those shown in Hodges' plan. The triangle at the west end marks the point where Hodges wrote "Piece of W. face W. wall in situ vide photographs and remarks by C.C.H." The triangle west of line "q" marks a stuck-on label reading "E. wall of crypt about here." See also note 9.

There is now general agreement that it is Norman in date<sup>12</sup> and it has been suggested that the three foundations belong to the same period and are part of the same build.<sup>13</sup> This is unlikely on two counts. Firstly, Hodges' section shows that the base of the Norman respond, which is apparently set on a rubble foundation,<sup>14</sup> is 3 feet (91.5 cm) higher than the top of the three foundations on which the "cores of bases" are placed. Secondly, and more tentatively, if the "cores" were square (as the little evidence suggests<sup>15</sup>) then Hodges' drawings show that the piers with their facing stones would be at least 1 foot (30.5 cm) wider than the Norman respond. It is thus unlikely that respond and foundations are of the same building period, though we are still left with the problem of the extent of Norman or thirteenth-century work on the line of this arcade—a dilemma well summarised by Baldwin Brown.<sup>16</sup>

The second problem concerns a passage in Savage and Hodges' 1907 description which is quoted by both the Taylors and Gilbert. This reads:

"Under the great buttress . . . is a mass of foundation, the bed of which is 11 ft 3 ins. below the Saxon floor level; and is about 11 ft square. It is formed of Roman stones of great size and the Saxon mortar is the conspicuous feature of its construction. The proof of its date is that the 14th century work upon it was cemented with mortar of a different composition . . ."<sup>17</sup>

It is natural to assume that such an important feature would figure on Hodges' plan. Both the Taylors and Gilbert believe it to be a part of line "g" and presumably identify it with the eastern foundations shown in the drawing.<sup>18</sup> This identification ignores a difficulty however. Certainly this eastern foundation was partly beneath the great buttress erected in 1725 but its planned dimensions of 9 feet by 13 feet (2.75 m by 3.96 m) do not readily match with Savage and Hodges' figure of "11 ft square". Nor do any of Hodges' publications suggest the presence of fourteenth-century work in this area.

Fortunately it is possible to show that Savage and Hodges were referring to this foundation because there is an independent reference to its discovery, hitherto unnoticed, in *The Architect and Contract Reporter* for 1907.<sup>19</sup> This describes:

"a great mass of foundation of apparently a great pier near the centre of the church and in close proximity to the crypt. The bottom of this was only reached at a depth of 19 feet from the surface and the mass is about 12 feet by 9 feet."

These dimensions agree more closely with those of Hodges' plan. If we take up the

<sup>12</sup> Hodges and Gibson 1919, 61; N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England; Northumberland*, 1957, 171; Gilbert 1974, 104.

<sup>13</sup> e.g. Anon., The completion of Hexham Abbey church, *Building News*, Aug. 7th 1908, 178.

<sup>14</sup> Savage and Hodges 1907, plate XVIII.

<sup>15</sup> Hodges and Gibson 1919, 41. Hodges 1888, plate 8 which shows them as square may not be reliable. The print of the Gibson negative used for Savage and Hodges

1907, plate XXVII which is preserved in the Northumberland L.R.O. (M. 13. F. 23) seems to suggest that the cores were square. Taylor and Taylor 1961, fig 2 show them as oblong in plan.

<sup>16</sup> Brown 1925, 175.

<sup>17</sup> Savage and Hodges 1907, 39.

<sup>18</sup> This foundation is not shown in Hodges' section.

<sup>19</sup> For April 5th, 1907, 224.

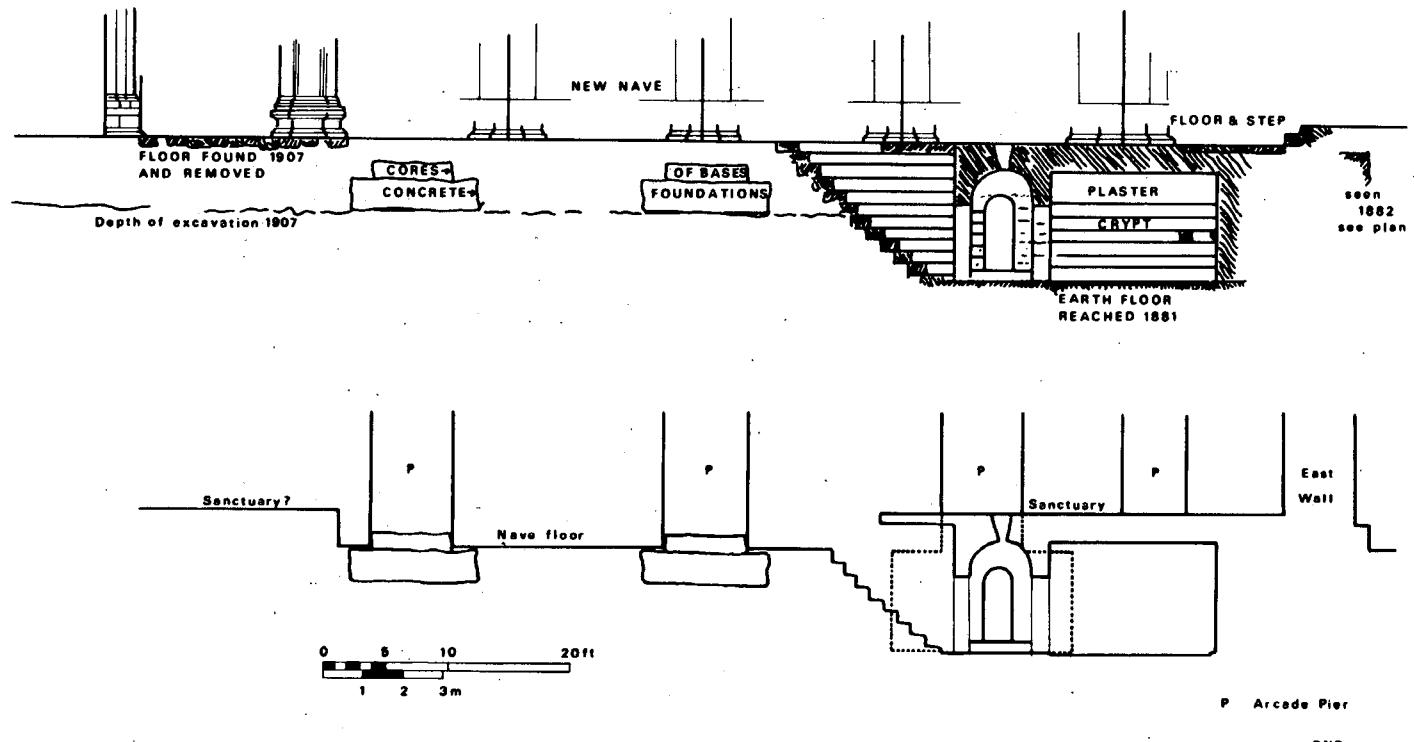


Fig. 2. The western part of Hodges' section and a possible reconstruction.

hint from Baldwin Brown that there was post-Conquest work near the great buttress<sup>20</sup> then it seems probable that Savage and Hodges were describing the easternmost foundation of line "g".

Though they were measuring from different points *The Architect* and Savage/Hodges agree about the depth of this foundation. Its bottom was slightly above the level of the floor of the main chamber of the crypt.<sup>21</sup> And the need for this great depth can easily be seen when a plan of the crypt is juxtaposed with part of Hodges' plan (see fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> The large rectangular foundation is immediately adjacent to the north wall of the vestibule at the western end of the north passage. The bottom of this foundation must have been just below the level of the floor of the vestibule (see the reconstruction of fig. 2). The great depth of the eastern foundation thus has a simple structural explanation: a shallow foundation for a load-bearing pier at this point would have placed an intolerable strain on the adjoining walls of the crypt.

No such structural considerations, however, apply to the two foundations further west on line "g". These are both drawn in Hodges' section and their lower limit is marked at a level, some 6 feet (1.83 m) below the modern floor, which Hodges labels "depth of excavation 1907" (see fig. 2). There are good reasons for suggesting that these two foundations were no deeper than Hodges' excavation. Firstly his drawing shows a solid line under both, with an inward curve on the central mass, and there is no hint of an unexplored extension below them such as he indicates in his drawing of the apse walls to the east.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, when one considers the position of the modern arcade-piers in relation to these foundations, it would surely represent very bad building practice not to establish the downward limits of earlier structures upon which it was proposed to raise such essential supports.<sup>24</sup>

The conclusion must be that the three foundations shown on Hodges' plan were of differing depths and this deduction allows us to confront the central issue of line "g": was this originally an arcade? Hodges clearly interpreted it as such<sup>25</sup> and the Taylors agreed with him, but Gilbert offers a very different view. The burden of his argument is on pp. 92 and 96 where he suggests that "the underlying piers" (*i.e.* Hodges' foundations) "could hardly have been planned for these bases. They create openings varying from 5' to 18' wide, and themselves vary from 10' to 14' long. Such an irregular construction was not made for a regular nave arcade ... but it agrees remarkably well with arches cut in the walls for porticus". He goes on to suggest that the "foundations" were Wilfrid's walls robbed of their dressings.<sup>26</sup>

There are several arguments which can be used against Gilbert's interpretation. The apparent irregularity of foundations can be explained in a different way: the

<sup>20</sup> Brown 1925, fig. 71 seems to imply this. It is clear that Brown had several Hexham correspondents who could have supplied him with information in addition to material he received from Hodges.

<sup>21</sup> These calculations are based upon Hodges' section and *Hodges 1888*, plate 39 where the nineteenth-century surface level is shown. See also *Gilbert 1974*, fig. 4.

<sup>22</sup> The crypt plan used is that of *Hodges and Gibson 1919*. The measurements have been checked on the site.

<sup>23</sup> *Taylor and Taylor 1965*, fig. 133 shows this detail of the apse drawing.

<sup>24</sup> This is particularly the case where modern piers are half off, half on, the earlier foundations.

<sup>25</sup> *Hodges and Gibson 1919*, 41.

<sup>26</sup> *Gilbert 1974*, 96.

### HEXHAM CRYPT AND HODGES' PLAN

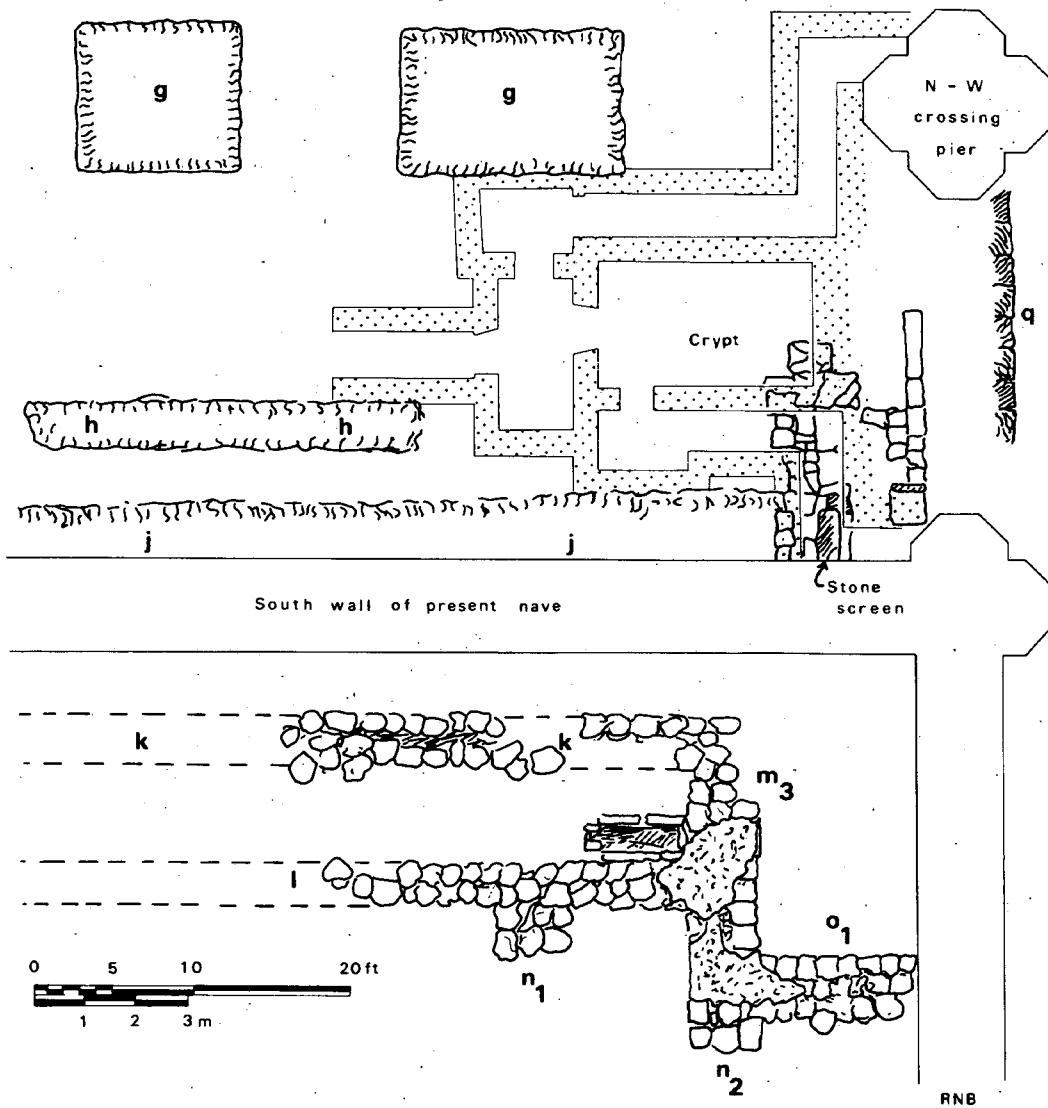


Fig. 3. Part of Hodges' plan with a plan of the crypt superimposed. The flooring shown by Hodges over the east end of the crypt has been partially omitted to show the lines of the passage.

two western examples are, in fact, of the same size and the extra length of the eastern one is probably due to the proximity of the crypt. Furthermore the only opening between arcade cores which we can actually measure from Hodges' section gives a gap of 17 feet (5.18 m) and the same distance of opening can be reconstructed onto the eastern foundation: the Taylors noted that this distance is analogous to arcade openings at both Jarrow and Brixworth. More importantly if, as has just been suggested, the three foundations were of differing depths then it would be unlikely that all three once formed part of a continuous wall. *The Architect's* description seems to suggest that the eastern foundation was a separate unit (and not joined to a continuous foundation) right down to its bottom: Gilbert's hypothesis of arches cut through a wall would necessarily imply that this cutting was carried far below the level he proposes for Wilfrid's floor. Finally, if we were to accept the suggestion that the foundations are Wilfrid's walls robbed of their dressings, then there would only be about 1 foot 6 inches (45.7 cm) between this wall and wall "f" which Gilbert suggests was the outer wall of the church: even by Merovingian standards this would yield a very narrow passage.

Despite the difficulties of the lack of a corresponding arcade foundation on the south side the evidence of the surviving information seems to show that line "g" was an arcade from the first. This has a bearing on the problem of the original level of the nave which is discussed in the next section.

#### THE RELATIVE DEPTH OF THE CRYPT

The most valuable contribution made by Gilbert's paper is the conclusion that the crypt was not originally below the level of the nave but supported a raised podium.<sup>27</sup> Because of his belief that the eastern apse ("d" of the plan) belonged with the main building he would interpret the podium as part of the choir. Following the Taylors' view of the apse as the eastern end of a separate church I would see the podium as carrying a raised sanctuary like that known from Canterbury.<sup>28</sup> This difference is, for the moment, less important than the problem of establishing the floor level of Wilfrid's nave into which the crypt was half-submerged.

Gilbert takes the view that the relevant level is that of Hodges' "depth of excavations 1907", some 6 feet (1.83 m) below the modern floor.<sup>29</sup> There is support for this suggestion in the change of walling which he notes, presumably on the south side of the western crypt-entrance, some 5 feet 6 inches (1.68 m) below the present floor level. This is probably the same change which was noticed by Micklethwaite in 1882 and thus cannot be ascribed to the 1907/1908 restorations.<sup>30</sup> It would also agree with Hodges' observation in 1913 that the top five steps of the western entrance are all modern.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert 1974, 92 and 96.

<sup>28</sup> H. M. Taylor, The Anglo-Saxon cathedral church at Canterbury, *Arch. Jour.*, CXXVI, 1970 for 1969, fig. 2. This type is well known on the continent.

<sup>29</sup> Gilbert 1974, 92.

<sup>30</sup> J. Micklethwaite, On the crypts at Hexham and Ripon, *Arch. Jour.*, XXXIX, 1882, 350, note.  
<sup>31</sup> Hodges 1913, plan facing p. 8.

There is, I believe, a more likely alternative floor-level which is available if we free ourselves from the hypothesis that line "g" was once part of a continuous wall. The natural point would be at the junction of the "cores of bases" and "concrete foundations" on Hodges' section. This floor would be at a depth of c. 3 feet (91.5 cm) below the modern floor. Such a level would agree with Hodges' revised view that only the top three steps of the western crypt-entrance were modern<sup>32</sup> and it would also match changes in walling on the northern side of the crypt-entrance at a depth of 4 feet (and perhaps even 3 feet) below the modern floor.<sup>33</sup> It would be on a level with the base of the plinth under the present north wall of the nave in which Hodges found the same Anglo-Saxon mortar as was used in the crypt.<sup>34</sup> Lastly a floor at this depth would not only agree with the level of the cist graves outside the north wall but, laid up to the "cores of bases", would allow easy passage between lines "g" and "f". The reconstruction of fig. 2 therefore adopts this height as that of the Wilfridian nave.

#### THE LEVELS OF WALL "b" AND FLOOR "t"

Wall "b" underlies the present north wall of the nave and Gilbert rightly indicates that the remains are, in fact, part of a plinth. He rejects the possibility of this being Wilfridian work on the grounds that its stonework is inferior to that in the crypt, that plinths were unknown before c. 700 and that it is at the wrong level for Wilfrid's work.<sup>35</sup> Yet Hodges claimed an identity of mortar between the crypt and wall "b".<sup>36</sup> Moreover we cannot be certain about the dating of plinths and it seems likely that the church at Repton provides a good, and early, parallel.<sup>37</sup> Most important of all the bottom of the Hexham plinth, in so far as it can be established from early photographs and existing traces visible both in the wall and in the boiler house, is exactly at the level suggested above for Wilfrid's nave. There is no firm reason for rejecting wall "b" as part of the original building.

Floor "t" presents more of a problem. Hodges drew and described it as a neatly-laid area of paving at the west end of the church and showed it at the level of the modern floor.<sup>38</sup> It is this relative height which forms Gilbert's most telling objection to its acceptance as Anglo-Saxon work.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately we have no explicit statement from Hodges about the mortar in which the slabs were laid and we cannot be certain

<sup>32</sup> Hodges and Gibson 1919, plan facing 82. I have doubts about the antiquity of the fourth step.

<sup>33</sup> The difference involves the interpretation of a single course of stone.

<sup>34</sup> Savage and Hodges 1907, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Gilbert 1974, 93–4.

<sup>36</sup> See note 34 above.

<sup>37</sup> The primary nature of the plinth at Repton has been disputed: for the debate contrast H. M. Taylor, Repton reconsidered, *England before the Conquest*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes, 1971, 365–9 and E. Gilbert, St. Wystan's church, Repton, its date and significance, *Cahiers Archéologiques*, XXII, 1972, 238–9; see now *Bulletin of the*

*C.B.A. Churches Committee*, II, 1975, 19. Some problems of plinth-chronology are noted by H. M. Taylor, The Anglo-Saxon chapel at Bradford on Avon, *Arch. Jour.*, CXXX, 1974 for 1973, 158.

<sup>38</sup> Hodges and Gibson 1919, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Gilbert 1974, 95. His other objections, which are based upon the relationship of "t" to foundations "h" and "j" are less important: we know nothing about the relationship of "t" and "h" whilst what abuts (but does not necessarily overlie) foundation "j" is probably part of the tower foundation "u" and not a section of the paving "t".

that everything shown on his plan was selected on the basis of his identification of Saxon mortar.<sup>40</sup> On purely stratigraphic grounds it is certainly possible to associate the paving with the Norman respond and Gilbert has pointed out that we have documentary evidence of Eilaf's flooring of the church in cut stone in the eleventh century.<sup>41</sup>

Yet Eilaf's paving is specifically located *in parte orientali*, as a suitable setting for the altar, and is not directly relevant to conditions at the western end of the building: presumably for this reason Gilbert's suggestion is that Eilaf's successors completed the paving work which he had begun. It is, however, possible to explain this paving as Anglo-Saxon by suggesting that it is part of a raised western sanctuary. We have literary evidence of such a western feature in the cathedral church at Canterbury (though not all writers are agreed on this) where it served as the setting for the archbishop's throne.<sup>42</sup> In Æthelwulf's church the abbot's throne was similarly placed at the western end and the physical remains of one of these throne-settings has recently been drawn to our attention on the west wall at Barnack.<sup>43</sup> I do not make the case with any great conviction but it is conceivable that there was a raised western area at Hexham, like that at Canterbury; and that it was here that the *frithstol* was originally positioned.

#### FOUNDATION "h"—AN AMBO?

The problem of foundation "h" is seemingly intractable. The Taylors could make no suggestion for it<sup>44</sup> and Gilbert observed that it fitted no reconstruction of the church.<sup>45</sup>

Figs. 1 and 3 show that it is not so curiously isolated as it appears in Hodges' plan. It flanks the entrance to the crypt and must have extended westwards into the nave from the raised eastern sanctuary. In this position it would make good architectural sense as the foundations for an ambo or pulpit together with the passage which connected it to the chancel area.<sup>46</sup>

No exact parallel can be quoted for the Hexham reconstruction but all of its elements are present in early Christian architecture, notably in the eastern Mediterranean church and those western areas which betray its impact. It is not unusual to find the ambo positioned far west into the nave, nor to discover it on the south side of the church: examples can be quoted from Greece and North Africa.<sup>47</sup> The

<sup>40</sup> See note 34.

<sup>41</sup> Raine 1864, 191.

<sup>42</sup> The interpretation and dating of the western features at Canterbury, a church which Wilfrid must have known, are disputed: for a recent summary with reference to the debate see H. M. Taylor, Tenth-century church building in England and on the continent, *Tenth Century Studies*, ed. D. Parsons, 1975, 154 ff.

<sup>43</sup> For Æthelwulf's church see H. M. Taylor, The architectural interest of Æthelwulf's "De Abbatibus", *Anglo-Saxon England*, III, 1974, 169. For Barnack see D. Parsons, The pre-Conquest cathedral at Canterbury, *Arch. Cant.*, LXXXIV, 1969, 183.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor and Taylor 1961, 125; Gilbert 1974, 94. Gilbert suggested that it might be part of a pre-Wilfridian church.

<sup>45</sup> For these features see S. G. Xydis, The chancel barrier, solea and ambo of Hagia Sophia, *The Art Bulletin*, XXIX, 1947, 12 ff.

<sup>46</sup> R. E. Hoddinott, *Early Byzantine Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia*, 1963, figs. 73, 81, 89, 145, 156. J. B. Ward Perkins and R. G. Goodchild, The Christian antiquities of Tripolitania, *Archaeologia* XCV, 1953, fig. 13 and pp. 65–6.

ambo can be isolated from the sanctuary but is frequently linked to it by a raised passageway or *solea* reaching westwards from the chancel screen: Xydis and Mathews have discussed this arrangement and its associated liturgy in some detail.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately both the narrow Byzantine *solea* and its broader analogue known in Rome extend down the central axis of the church.<sup>48</sup> However we come much closer to the Hexham arrangement among Syrian churches, notably in the fine series of 5th–7th century buildings from Jerash (now in Jordan).<sup>49</sup> Here the ambo juts out from the chancel in precisely the Hexham position, south of the central axis of the nave. None of the surviving Syrian examples have such a lengthy linking element as is suggested by the Hexham remains but a combination of the Syrian positioning with the *solea*-length known elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean would produce precisely the type of *solea/ambo* requiring a foundation like Hexham's "h".

Other interpretations could be offered (a stair foundation to give access to an upper gallery; part of a colonnaded entrance to the crypt) but the idea of an ambo seems the most convincing. If acceptable it would clearly be of great liturgical interest.

#### RECONSTRUCTION

At this point a reconstruction of the church is offered, though the extent of previous disagreements emphasises how inadequate is the evidence for any proposals.

The sectional reconstruction is the more certain (fig. 2) and gives an elevation based upon Hodges' record. It shows the questionable sanctuary at the west end and (in dotted outline) the deduced depth of the large eastern foundation on line "g". A small additional pier has been inserted between this and the east wall for the reasons outlined by the Taylors in 1961 (p. 133).

The plan (fig. 4) is much more difficult though I have tried to indicate the basis of my suggestions by lightly preserving Hodges' record. Basically the result resembles that of the Taylors but an attempt has been made to show how the raised eastern sanctuary and ambo can be fitted into the pattern. At the west end a possible arrangement of towers, entry-porticus and sanctuary is suggested, though the doubtful existence of the western podium should be borne in mind. Five points might be noted:

- (1) Unlike the Taylors' my reconstruction suggests a transept-like wing on the southern side. This seems to me, as to Gilbert, the only possible deduction from Hodges' drawing of the stones and cement of walls "l", "k", "m<sub>3</sub>" and "o<sub>1</sub>" (see fig. 3). There is no justification for the Taylors' eastern extension of wall "l" to provide a rectangular plan and indeed their text seems to recognise this. This is not to claim that there actually was a southern transept—this would involve

<sup>47</sup> For Xydis see note 45 above. T. F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, 1971, figs. 17, 25, 31 and p. 110. Note also the lengthy literary account by Paulus Silentarius in (ed.) C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453*, 1972, 91–6.

<sup>48</sup> T. F. Mathews, An early Roman chancel arrangement and its liturgical uses, *Rivista di archaeologia cristiana*, XXXVIII, 1962, 71–95.

<sup>49</sup> (ed.) C. H. Kraeling, *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis*, 1938, 184 and plans 31, 35–8, 40–1. For a reconstruction see Xydis (note 45) fig. 29.

## HEXHAM RECONSTRUCTION

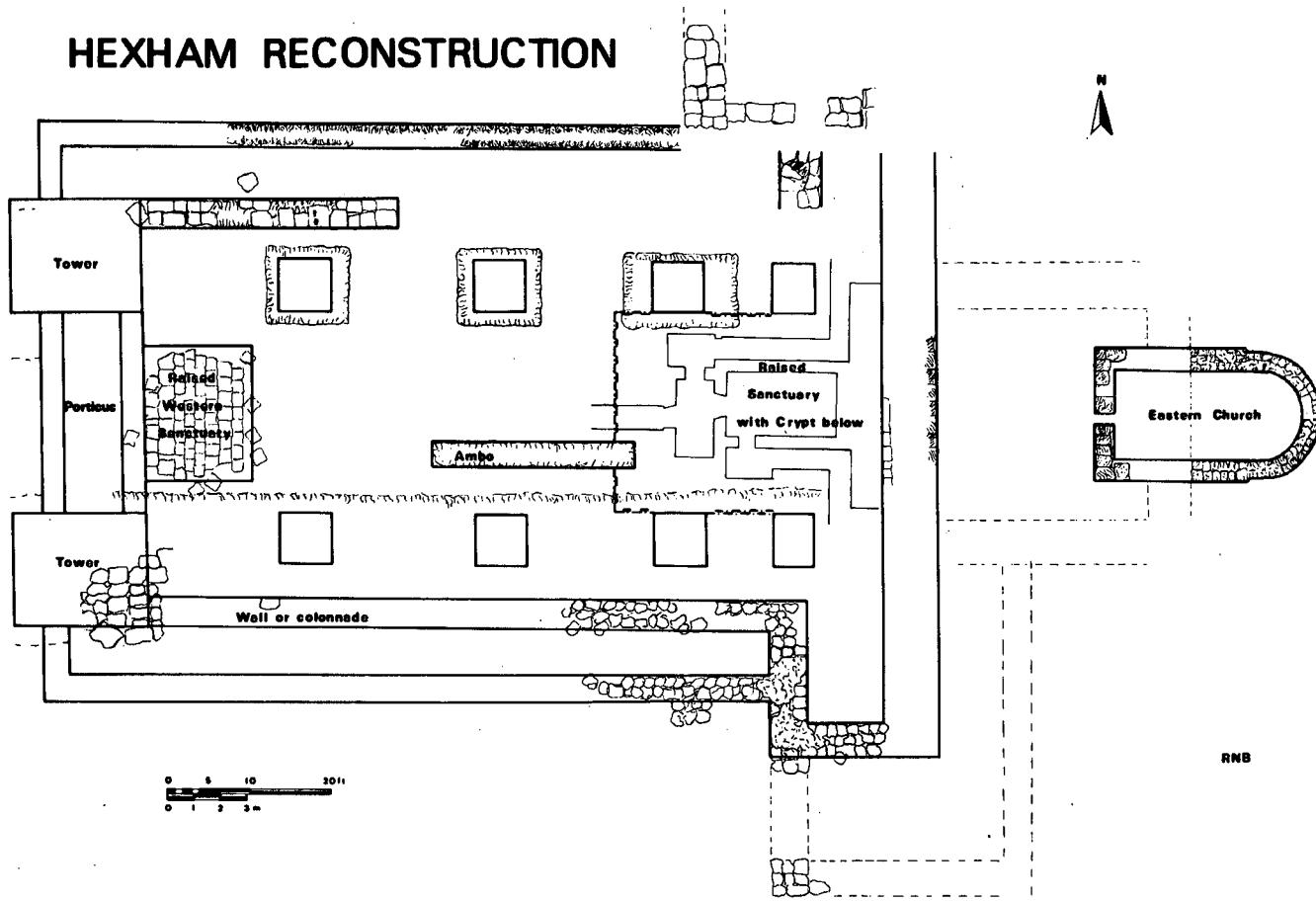


Fig. 4.

entering very treacherous waters<sup>50</sup>—for there may have been a distinct chamber on the southern side of the sanctuary, separated from it by a different floor level and partition.

No restoration of the equivalent area on the north side has been attempted. It seems that wall “b” has been interrupted at its eastern end and that a different type of walling continues its run on a more northerly line. Three of the stones on this northerly line were interpreted by the Taylors as a grave (their no. 12) but, since Hodges does not label them as “kist”, they are more likely to be part of a wall.

- (2) Line “j” has been restored as a series of pier-arcades to correspond with those of line “g”. This would imply a basilican plan. It is only fair to stress that Hodges shows line “j” as a *continuous* line of “disturbed foundation”. If this is accurate then either: (a) a different type of arcade-foundation was used on the south side or: (b) to reverse Gilbert’s argument, the southern arcade may have been blocked at a later date, perhaps when Acca built his porticus (in the words of Bede’s description) *intra muros*.
- (3) We cannot know whether lines “f” and “k” carried solid walls, thus forming flanking corridors or porticus. They may have been the bases for colonnades, perhaps supporting upper galleries, and this interpretation would yield a basilican plan of great ambition. The presence of a cist-grave on the line of “f” certainly suggests that the foundation did not run the complete length of the nave and there could have been individually-founded columns further east on this line.
- (4) The north and south crypt-entrances are extremely difficult to understand both in relation to the sanctuary and the east wall. If a pilgrim followed the northern passage up the steps on its northerly leg and then up the flight to the east he would find very little room for exit between the top step and the east wall suggested by “q”.<sup>51</sup> What is more he would be on the level of the sanctuary. Gilbert removes one of these difficulties by taking line “p” as the east wall. Both problems could be solved, however, by suggesting that the original pilgrim exit was directly northwards at the end of the northerly leg and that the three eastern steps gave limited priestly access to the sanctuary level. The support for this suggestion comes from the fact that the northwards/eastwards turn is exactly at the level proposed above for the Wilfridian nave.<sup>52</sup>
- (5) Hodges’ plan suggests that later extensions joined the main church to the eastern chapel and walls “n<sub>1</sub>”, “n<sub>2</sub>”, and “o<sub>2</sub>” probably belong to a secondary phase. “m<sub>4</sub>”, which is not included by the Taylors, could also be grouped with these later changes. Acca’s known modifications and expansions of the church in the eighth century provide a likely context.

<sup>50</sup> For the problems of early transepts see R. Krautheimer, *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 1971, 59 ff. and 203 ff.

<sup>51</sup> Hodges 1888, plate 39 shows these steps: they are now inaccessible.

<sup>52</sup> See the section in Hodges 1888, plate 39A.

## THE SOUTH-EAST ENTRANCE TO THE CRYPT

Dr. Gilbert's paper makes several important suggestions about the crypt apart from its half-subterranean setting. Prominent amongst these is the proposal that all three entrances were not contemporary but that the western was later in date. My concern in this section, however, is with the eastern entrances where the visible features do not seem to support Gilbert's interpretations.

His argument, with my explanatory additions in square brackets, is that where the passages from the east:

"met the original transept west wall, they turned north and south respectively, being at this point actually cut into the ancient east wall of the early nave [p. 83]... It is indeed perfectly possible that the [extreme] eastern entrances did not exist in Wilfrid's Early Christian crypt. The reason for suspecting this is that the south passage ends today ... in what seem clearly to be the fragmentary remains of a newel staircase. This feature corresponds so exactly to Eddius' remarks about passages and newels (or spirals) above and below the floor of the church that the writer is inclined to accept this feature as original ... [The spiral staircase] could have been in the east wall of the ancient nave and if so probably at its angle" [p. 85].

Apart from doubts about the interpretation of Eddius<sup>53</sup> the first issue here is the relationship between the crypt passages and the fragmentary remains of the Anglo-Saxon superstructure which were plotted on Hodges' plan (see fig. 3). Gilbert's plan 12 shows walls " $n_2$ " and " $m_3$ " forming the west wall of the transept, and the southerly leg of the south passage as being in line with them. Yet Hodges plotted " $n_2/m_3$ " in a position at least 2 feet 6 inches (76.2 cm) *west* of the western side of the southern passage: the passage in fact lies directly below the thirteenth-century stone screen shown on Hodges' plan—a fact which can easily be checked today *via* a modern ventilation hole.<sup>54</sup> If there was ever a spiral staircase at the end of the southerly leg of the south passage it would *not* emerge in wall " $n_2/m_3$ " nor would the passage cut below this wall. On the northern side of the crypt, wall " $m_2$ " is closer to the corresponding passage but similarly does not overlie it.

More important than this, however, is the very existence of the spiral staircase. Gilbert's plate IV certainly shows what seem to be the fragmentary remains of such a staircase at the top of the modern blocking at the south end of the southern passage. The blocking is known to be a part of the 1907/8 restorations<sup>55</sup> and it rests on the fourth and top step of a flight of stairs which runs the length of this leg of the southern corridor.

Part of the difficulty in accepting the existence of the spiral staircase is that the distance between the top of the fourth step and the bottom of the newel staircase

<sup>53</sup> Eddius' *aliquando sursum, aliquando deorsum* ("sometimes above, sometimes below") seems to refer to above-ground structures, being governed by the phrase *super terram*; for text see (ed.) B. Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, 1927, 46.

<sup>54</sup> The thirteenth-century screen is marked as wall " $m_1$ " in the Taylors' rendering. It is mentioned on p. 65 of *Savage and Hodges 1907* and in Hodges' other works.

<sup>55</sup> Hodges and Gibson 1919, plan facing 82, caption.

fragments is only 4 feet 2 inches (1.27 m). There is no way in which (a) the spiral staircase could have been used in conjunction with the steps or (b) the steps could have been used in conjunction with the spiral remains or (c) the close proximity of both steps and spiral remains could have afforded the easy access for visitors which was apparently available between 1870 and 1907/8 when this corridor was the only entry to the crypt.

Let us begin with the flight of steps. They do not appear on the newly discovered eighteenth-century plan of the crypt which is described in Appendix I<sup>56</sup> nor are they on either Fairless' drawing of 1846 or Wilson's plan of 1862.<sup>57</sup> They are first shown in Micklethwaite's paper of 1882.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately we cannot therefore deduce that they are modern insertions for the early antiquarians were more concerned with general lay-out and were certainly confused by rubble, earth and temporary blockings.<sup>59</sup> In this context it is worth noting that a plan completed in 1935 also omitted these steps at a date when they had certainly existed for several decades.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless there is an archaeological case for interpreting the flight of steps in this leg as insertions, though possibly of ancient date.

In the spring of 1975 it was necessary to remove the lower step and to disturb others in order to install a new lighting system.<sup>61</sup> In the course of this work it emerged that:

- (i) the first, second and third steps in this passage (steps 5, 6, 7 of *Hodges 1888*, plate 39) are all composite and are formed by two blocks laid side by side;
- (ii) none of the steps is in bond with the flanking wall;
- (iii) the flanking wall is not stepped up alongside the flight;
- (iv) the "plaster" surface of the walls seemed to continue down between the wall and the second step. Less certainly there were similar traces between the wall and the first and third steps. Professor Cramp kindly examined a fragment of the material from the second step and reports that it is not true plaster: detailed comparative analysis with other Hexham plaster is obviously required but it should be noted that there is no visible difference between the rendering on the upper surface of the wall and the material between step and wall.

None of these features, taken individually, necessarily indicates that the flight is secondary. Thus recent excavations at Ripon, whose results were generously communicated to me in advance of publication by Mr. A. R. Hall, showed that the crypt steps in another Wilfridian church were also composite. It is not necessary to bond

<sup>56</sup> See below p. 63.

<sup>57</sup> For Fairless' plan see T. H. Turner, Observations on the crypt of Hexham church, Northumberland, *Arch. Jour.*, II, 1846 for 1845, 242. For Wilson see F. R. Wilson, Hexham Abbey Church, *Trans. Archit. Arch. Soc. Dur. and Northumberland*, I, 1870, facing 23 and the revised version in *Raine 1865*, plan facing xlvi.

<sup>58</sup> J. Micklethwaite, *op. cit.* note 30 above, plate facing 349. Micklethwaite used Hodges' plan which was eventually published in *Hodges 1888*.

<sup>59</sup> For the evidence of these difficulties see: *Raine 1864*, xl; J. Collingwood Bruce, *The Wallet Book of the Roman Wall*, 1863, engraving on p. 88; J. Collingwood Bruce, *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, 2nd ed., 1884, engraving on p. 79; *Hodges 1888*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> W. T. Taylor, *Hexham Abbey 674–1957*, 1957, end-plan.

<sup>61</sup> I am grateful to Mr. G. Trayhurn for informing me of this work.

the treads into the flanking walls. Even the plaster (if such it be) between steps and wall need not indicate that the stairs were put in long afterwards (though this is an argument which has been used in other architectural studies<sup>62</sup>) for Professor Cramp reports that walls at Jarrow were plastered down to the original ground surface before the floor was laid. But cumulatively these features do suggest a change of plan: none of the other steps at Hexham are composite, most of them are in bond with the wall on at least one side and, whilst we have no certain information about the stepping of other flanking walls at Hexham, this was certainly the practice adopted at Ripon. On balance, then, it is likely that the steps are insertions and that the original floor of the passage was at the level of the first step; slabs at this level underlie the second and third steps and are perhaps part of the original paving. We cannot know when these changes took place but Hodges' silence on the subject probably rules out an 1870 insertion, and this is the only date in the modern period when they would have been required.<sup>63</sup>

What then of the spiral staircase? It does not follow that this is original just because the flight of steps is secondary, even though a newel stair could be used from a passage whose floor was at the level of the first step. For the problem still remains as to why parts of the spiral staircase, if primary, were left to obstruct the passage when the steps were inserted. In fact, since this was the main entrance to the crypt between 1870 and 1907/8 we are left with but one conclusion: the fragments were never part of a spiral staircase but are the work of restoration in 1907/8.

Unfortunately the detailed building records of Messrs. Holloway, the builders of the nave, have been destroyed and no firm confirmation of this deduction is available from other surviving documents.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless the case can be made to the point of certainty. When Hodges in 1888 published a section of this leg of the southern passage he drew every stone of its east wall, as well as showing the flight of steps. Yet there is no trace of the spiral feature in either this drawing nor in the re-worked version which appeared in *The Builder* for 1899.<sup>65</sup> By contrast, when he observed something complex in the northern passage it is clearly shown. To this negative evidence from Hodges we can add not only the argument based upon ease of access after 1870 but also two further facts: the newel fragments seem to be composed of the same type of stone as the modern blocking and it is doubtful if they could remain in position if they were not supported by that blocking.

Why did the blocking take this peculiar form? The most likely explanation is that it is a cantilevered support for the thirteenth-century screen and associated paving which is placed directly above.<sup>66</sup> This type of support would avoid sealing off more

<sup>62</sup> e.g., *Medieval Archaeology*, XIV, 1970, 161; A. de B. Hill, Pre-Norman churches and sepulchral monuments of Nottinghamshire, *Arch. Jour.*, LXXIII, 1918, 195.

<sup>63</sup> Hodges would surely have been in a position to record any additions made less than a decade before he began work at Hexham. There is no reason why a staircase should be inserted in this part of the crypt between its discovery in 1725 and the opening of this entrance in 1870.

<sup>64</sup> I am grateful to Messrs. J. Laing and Son Ltd. for this information. Draft specifications for the contract exist amongst documents in the Abbey but are not detailed enough to cover particular issues.

<sup>65</sup> Also reprinted in *Savage and Hodges 1907*, 38.

<sup>66</sup> The architects were particularly anxious to preserve this feature as can be seen both from the draft specifications for the work and their 1899 *Report* (see note 11).

of the passage or dismantling more of the side-walls and roof of the crypt corridor.

In conclusion then, Gilbert's arguments for a change in the eastern entrances, and their relationship to the church above, cannot be accepted on the evidence which he presents. But it is possible that the southerly leg of the southern passage was originally on one level, and this would imply that any steps, which need not have been in stone, were originally in the destroyed extreme eastern section.

#### APPENDIX I

Among the Society's manuscripts which are now in the care of the Northumberland County Record Office is Black Gate M.17.120. In the handlist this is described as "Hexham correspondence 1703–1763" and its most entertaining contents are letters to and from the Archbishop of York concerning the behaviour of the fiery Hexham cleric George Ritschell the younger.

On one of the sheets, however, there is a plan of Hexham crypt (fig. 5) with an endorsement on the reverse which reads:

"This is a Little Chaple under ye west end of Hexham Church now ye Burying place of ye Andrews familly Mr Thoma Andrew being Late Lecturor. The Vaults certainly go under all ye Church but no other yet has been opend."

None of the other material in the bundle explains the presence of this plan but the internal evidence of the endorsement suggests that it belongs to a date within the 1760s. The crypt had been rediscovered in 1725/6 when the great buttress was erected against the north-west pier of the crossing<sup>67</sup> and the Andrews family were given permission to use it as a family vault in 1737.<sup>68</sup> The endorsement shows that the drawing must have been prepared after Thomas Andrews' death in 1757. Fortunately we have an aggrieved letter in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1846<sup>69</sup> which explains that the crypt passed into the hands of the Clarke family as a result of the marriage of Sloughter Clarke to Thomas Andrews' niece in 1768: this helps to pin the date of the plan more firmly since its endorsement makes no mention of the Clarkes. The lack of any trace of a western entrance also points to the 1760s for this was certainly in use by 1776<sup>70</sup> and is shown in Carter's sketches of c. 1780.<sup>71</sup> A dating to this decade would not be out of line with the palaeographic evidence since the hand and abbreviations, I am informed by Miss Arrowsmith of the Northumberland Record Office, are typical of the mid-eighteenth century.

We cannot now know the purpose of the drawing. It is tempting to speculate that it might be connected with the publication in 1769 of John Wallis' *The Natural History*

<sup>67</sup> J. Horsley, *Britannia Romana*, 1732, 248. See also

<sup>69</sup> Part I, 114.

A. Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, 1727, 175–6.

<sup>70</sup> W. Hutchinson, *A View of Northumberland*, I, 1778,

<sup>68</sup> This Faculty was granted on September 24th, 1737, and survives among the York Diocese lists now held in the Borthwick Institute for Historical Research. For a printed text see *A History of Northumberland*, III, pt. i, 1896, 175.

<sup>71</sup> Hodges 1888, plate 8.

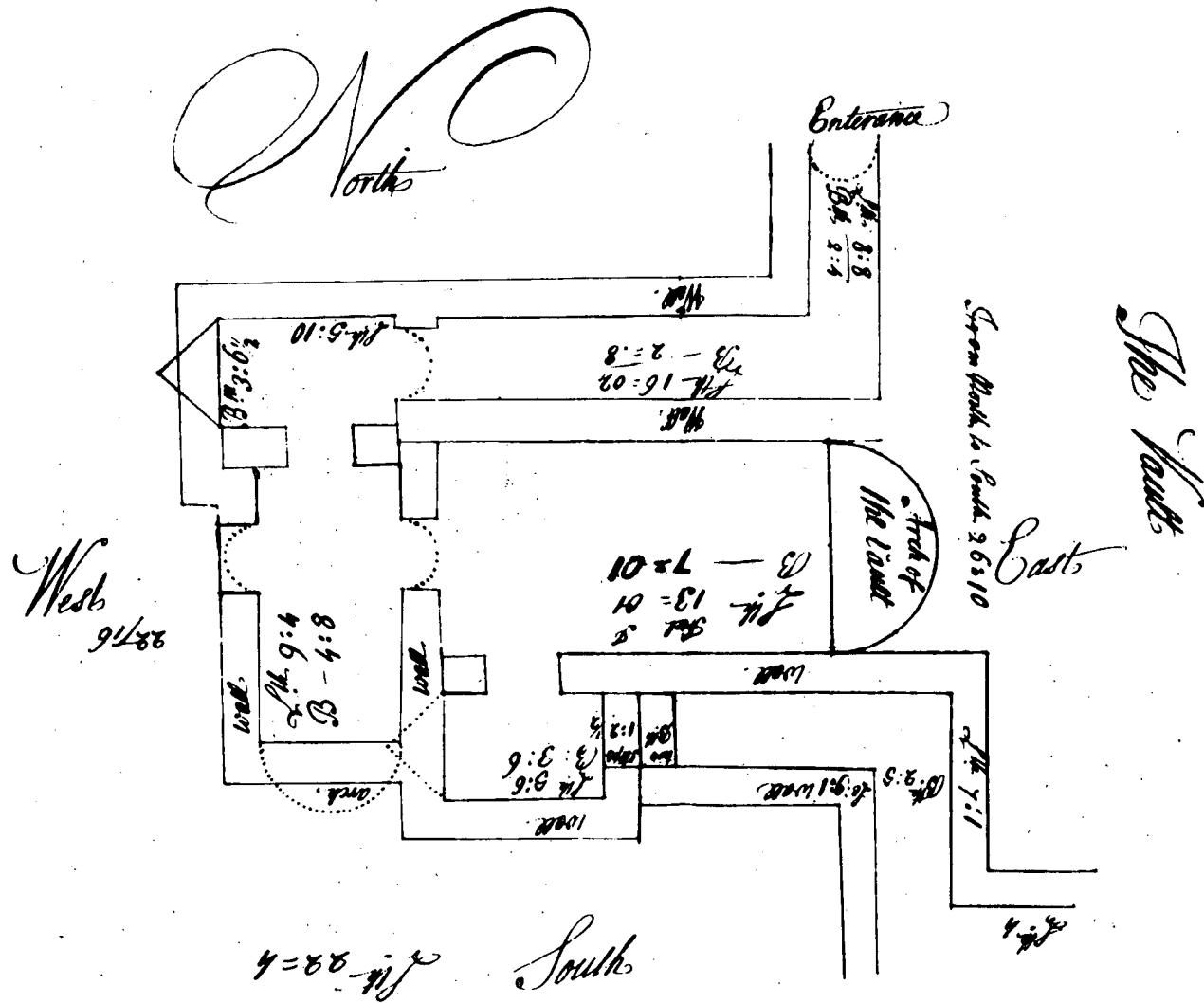


Fig. 5. The eighteenth-century plan of Hexham crypt.

*and Antiquities of Northumberland* which also identifies the crypt as Thomas Andrews' resting place.<sup>72</sup> It is perhaps more likely, however, that it was prepared for Arch-deacon Thomas Sharp whose correspondence with the Archbishop of York in the 1760s forms much of the manuscript bundle. What is important is that it shows the exact position of the original entrance, that it is the earliest known plan of the crypt and is decidedly more comprehensive and accurate than any drawing which appeared for the next century.

## APPENDIX II

### THE 1870 RESTORATIONS AT HEXHAM AND A NEW ENTRY TO THE CRYPT

Between the time when Hutchinson visited Hexham in 1776<sup>73</sup> and the restoration of 1869/70 the only entrance to the crypt was through a shaft, some 19 feet (5.79 m) deep, over the western entrance steps. This shaft cut down through the accumulated rubble and soil of the graveyard and ruined nave.<sup>74</sup> According to Hodges and Gibson, writing in 1919,<sup>75</sup> it was during the restoration of 1870 that the southern entrance replaced the western as the main access, a role which it fulfilled until the nave re-building of 1907/8.<sup>76</sup>

Hodges and Gibson are, not unexpectedly, correct in their summary but this conceals a rather curious story. In Walbran's description of the crypt which was contributed to the 1865 Surtees Society collection of Hexham documents we are informed that the end of the northern passage was so close to the surface that "it is very desirable that this outlet should be restored, for many persons might thereby be enabled to visit the crypt".<sup>77</sup> When he wrote his local history in 1879 Hewitt repeated most of Walbran's description but replaced the first part of the passage quoted above by "This very desirable outlet has been restored".<sup>78</sup> This suggests that the *northern* passage was opened in the 1870 restorations.

Apparently this was the original intention. The Faculty lists for the Durham Diocese in 1869, now in the Department of Palaeography at Durham, include permission dated 27 April 1869 to "reopen the entrance from the transept to the crypt". Fortunately the detailed plans which accompanied this Faculty application survive in the Newcastle Diocesan Registry, and these show that the intention was to run a staircase westwards from the north transept midway beneath the arch, which is now at the east end of the nave aisle.

One can only hope that the error was realised in time because such a passage would miss the eastern leg of the north passage by some 2 feet (61 cm). As Hodges showed in his plans, the eastern end of this passage is directly below the north-west crossing

<sup>72</sup> Vol. II, 71.

<sup>73</sup> See note 70 above.

<sup>74</sup> See section in *Hodges 1888*, plate 39A.

<sup>75</sup> *Hodges and Gibson 1919*, 81–2.

<sup>76</sup> For a sectional drawing of this entrance see *Hodges 1888*, plate 39A.

<sup>77</sup> *Raine 1865*, xli.

<sup>78</sup> J. Hewitt, *A Handbook of Hexham and its Antiquities*, 1879, 66.

pier. Perhaps it was the result of a frustrated attempt to reach the transept at this time which the architect Temple Moore reported in November 1902 when he lamented an excavation from the crypt-passage "apparently extending into the rubble core of the pier, actually some 12 inches above the Norman floor level".<sup>79</sup>

The source of the planning error in the Faculty proposal is easy to trace. The proposed staircase is exactly at the point where Wilson plotted the exit from the northern passage in 1862.<sup>80</sup> Once Wilson's error had been realised the alternative entrance *via* the south passage was presumably opened out and it is this entrance, often located in guides as being "near the font", which is described by local historians in the later years of the nineteenth century.<sup>81</sup> One must assume that Hewitt made his changes somewhat unthinkingly.

### APPENDIX III

#### ST. PETER'S CHURCH AT HEXHAM

Wilfrid's biographer, Eddius, describes three churches at Hexham which were built by the saint.<sup>82</sup> One of these was the church dedicated to St. Peter of which we have no other record apart from a sentence in Prior Richard's *History of the Church at Hexham*, written in the middle of the twelfth century, which describes it as being *remotior* from the main church than the church of St. Mary.<sup>83</sup> As Raine observed: "the very site of this church or chapel is unknown. It was not in existence in 1310, when we have a list of sacred buildings belonging to the Priory in Hexham and its vicinity".<sup>84</sup>

If a St. Peter's church actually existed in the twelfth century—and its apparent disappearance, Richard's vagueness and well-known anxiety to list any possible antiquity, might cast some doubts on this—then it is possible that it was not Wilfrid's original foundation.

There is a perfectly good candidate for the church dedicated to St. Peter. This is the small apsed building to the east of the main church which was first recognised from Hodges' plan by the Taylors. Hodges' drawing suggests that this separate building was eventually incorporated into the main church and the most likely context for this is the eighth century.<sup>85</sup> The reason for suggesting that this may be the lost church of St. Peter is found in a twelfth century compilation traditionally attributed to Symeon of Durham. In a passage emanating from a writer colourfully known as "the Hexham interpolator" we are told that the relics of St. Alchmund, early in the eleventh century, found an overnight resting place *in porticu Sancti Petri ad*

<sup>79</sup> Copy amongst vestry papers in Hexham Abbey.

<sup>83</sup> Raine 1864, 15.

<sup>80</sup> See note 57 above.

<sup>84</sup> Raine 1864, 15 note y.

<sup>81</sup> The location of the font can be seen in Hodges 1888, plate 8. There is no trace of a Faculty for the opening of the southern corridor.

<sup>85</sup> See p. 59 above. The find-spot of the Hexham bucket hints that this extension had certainly taken place by the middle years of the ninth century: see R. N. Bailey, The Anglo-Saxon metalwork from Hexham, *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham*, ed. D. P. Kirby, 1974, 142 and note 8.

<sup>82</sup> (ed.) B. Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, 1927, 122.

*orientalem plagam ipsius ecclesiae Hagustaldensis<sup>86</sup>* (in the porticus of St. Peter in the eastern part of the church itself at Hexham). A similar, though not independent, description is given by Ailred.<sup>87</sup>

Clearly in the eleventh century there was a chapel dedicated to St. Peter at the east end of the church.<sup>88</sup> An eastward extension of the original Wilfridian church, incorporating the apsed building, would naturally form an eastern porticus or chapel and what more likely than it should preserve the original dedication?

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The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes:

- Brown 1925. G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*: II, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, 2nd ed. 1925.
- Gilbert 1974. E. Gilbert, Saint Wilfrid's Church at Hexham, *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham*, ed. D. P. Kirby, 1974, 81–113.
- Hodges 1888. C. C. Hodges, *Ecclesia Hagustaldensis: the Abbey of St. Andrew, Hexham*, 1888.
- Hodges 1913. C. C. Hodges, *Guide to the Priory Church of St. Andrew, Hexham*, 1913.
- Hodges and Gibson 1919. C. C. Hodges and J. Gibson, *Hexham and its Abbey*, 1919.
- Raine 1864, 1865. ed. J. Raine, *The Priory of Hexham*, 2 vols., 1864–5 (Surtees Society, XLIV, XLVI).
- Savage and Hodges 1907. E. S. Savage and C. C. Hodges, *A Record of all Works connected with Hexham Abbey*, 1907.
- Taylor and Taylor 1961. H. M. and J. Taylor, The seventh century church at Hexham: a new appreciation, *AA*<sup>4</sup>, XXXIX, 1961, 103–34.
- Taylor and Taylor 1965. H. M. and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, 1965.

<sup>86</sup> For the text see Raine 1864, 209. For studies of the interpolation see P. Hunter Blair, Observations on the "Historia Regum", *Celt and Saxon*, ed. N. K. Chadwick, 1964, 87–90 and H. S. Offler, Hexham and the "Historia Regum", *Trans. Archit. Arch. Soc. Dur. and Northumberland*, II, 1970, 51–62.

<sup>87</sup> Raine 1864, 197. Offler, *op. cit. supra*, 53 suggests that the passage in Simeon is derived from Ailred.

<sup>88</sup> And another on the south side is dedicated to St. Michael where Acca's bones were laid *super altare Sancti Michaelis in australi portico ecclesiae*: see Raine 1864, 205.

