

# XI

## BRINKBURN PRIORY

A structural analysis of the manor house

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THE AUGUSTINIAN Priory of SS Peter and Paul stands at the bottom of a steep heugh in a wooded bend of the River Coquet. Founded by William de Bertram I of Mitford, probably between 1130–35, the house enjoyed a quiet existence until its dissolution in 1536. The history of the priory is not well documented, but its fine transitional Church still stands in almost perfect condition. The Church, and its careful restoration in 1858–65 by the owner Cadogan Hodgson Cadogan, and the Newcastle architect Thomas Austen, has been adequately described elsewhere (Clarke 1976), and will not be discussed further here.

The aim of this note is to examine the evidence for the conventual buildings of the Priory, in particular those fragments of the south range incorporated into the

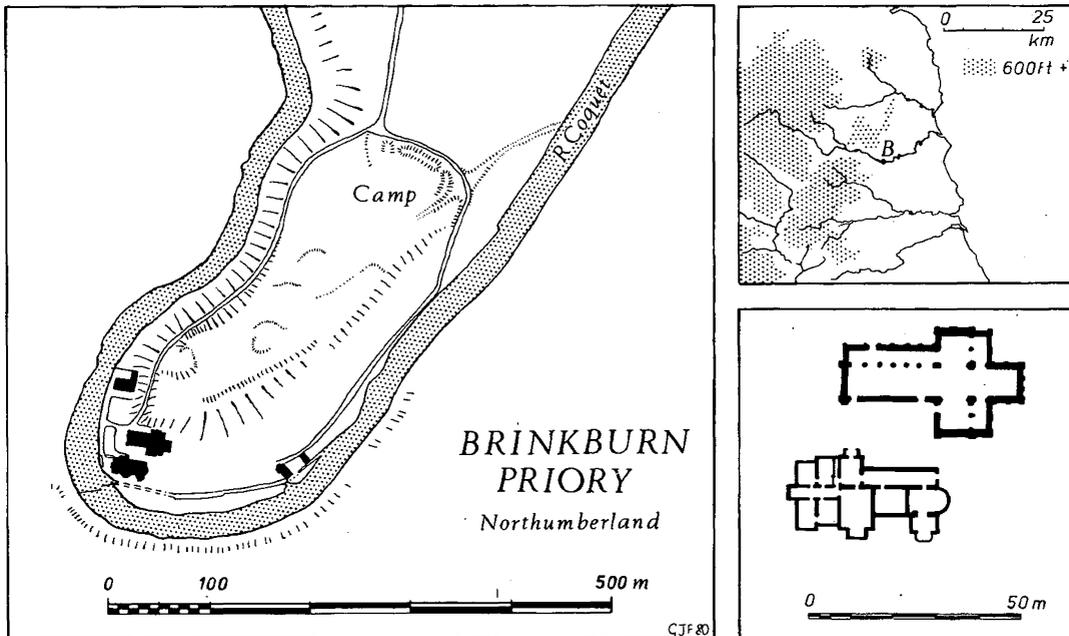


Fig. 1. Brinkburn Priory Location Map, Scale 1:7500. *Insets*: mid Northumberland; Church and Manor House, Scale 1:1800.

nineteenth-century manor house also known as Brinkburn Priory, and to provide a summary account of the development of the house. The remains of the basement of the south (*frater*) range have been known since the middle of the last century, but recent work<sup>1</sup> has revealed more extensive remains, in particular a *lavatorium* recess in the north wall, and evidence for a post-Dissolution domestic conversion of the range. In its existing external appearance, however, the house is entirely of the nineteenth century: a “gothick” east wing of 1810–11 and a castellated gothic west wing by John Dobson, of 1830–7.

### 1. THE MEDIEVAL CONVENTUAL BUILDINGS (figs. 2–4)

In common with a number of monastic sites, the post-Dissolution occupation of the Priory utilised the south range of the claustral buildings. The whole of the range was initially used in the new house, but with the exception of the north wall only about two-thirds of its length has survived later building work. Sufficient remains however, particularly in the north elevation, to determine the size (24.5 m × 8.2 m) and character of the range. The date of the south range, and of the other conventual buildings, is uncertain, though several details (e.g. the *lavatorium* recess) suggest they were built soon after the completion of the church, perhaps in the 1220s (Clarke 1976, p. 141).

The *frater* range was of two floors towards the cloister and, with a basement to accommodate the fall of the land to the south, three floors towards the river. The position of the *frater* itself is unknown. Its usual position on the uppermost floor (as, for instance, Bolton, Kirkham, Llanthony, Thornton, and Hexham) is perhaps most likely, but *fraters* at ground floor level to the cloister also exist, for example at Inchmahome or Lilleshall.

The north wall survives to its full length and (mainly) its full height. Little of the south wall above basement level remains, however, and the west and east walls were demolished in 1830 and c. 1858 respectively. The scars of the east wall are still visible in the walls of the present drawing room.

The basement is the best preserved part of the building, although its west end was destroyed in 1830. As its barrel vaulted roof is an insertion of the sixteenth century, however, the original vaulting or roofing arrangements are unknown. In the south wall are two niches and two entrances, one “caernarvon”-arched,<sup>2</sup> while a relieving arch at the east end of the wall perhaps supported a stair between ground and first floor.<sup>3</sup>

Above basement level, the building’s plan is known but architectural details are visible only in the north wall (fig. 4). On the ground floor, the remains of an entrance and two narrow slit windows survive at the west end, while to the east is the blocked and mutilated remains of a decorated *lavatorium* recess, in its usual position in the cloister walk. The recess was subsequently, but before its post-dissolution blocking, pierced for a doorway. The uppermost floor retains only a single slit window, and that possibly an insertion, at the west end.

With the exception of a fragment of walling at basement level at the south-east angle of the south range, which is probably part of the *reredorter* undercroft extending

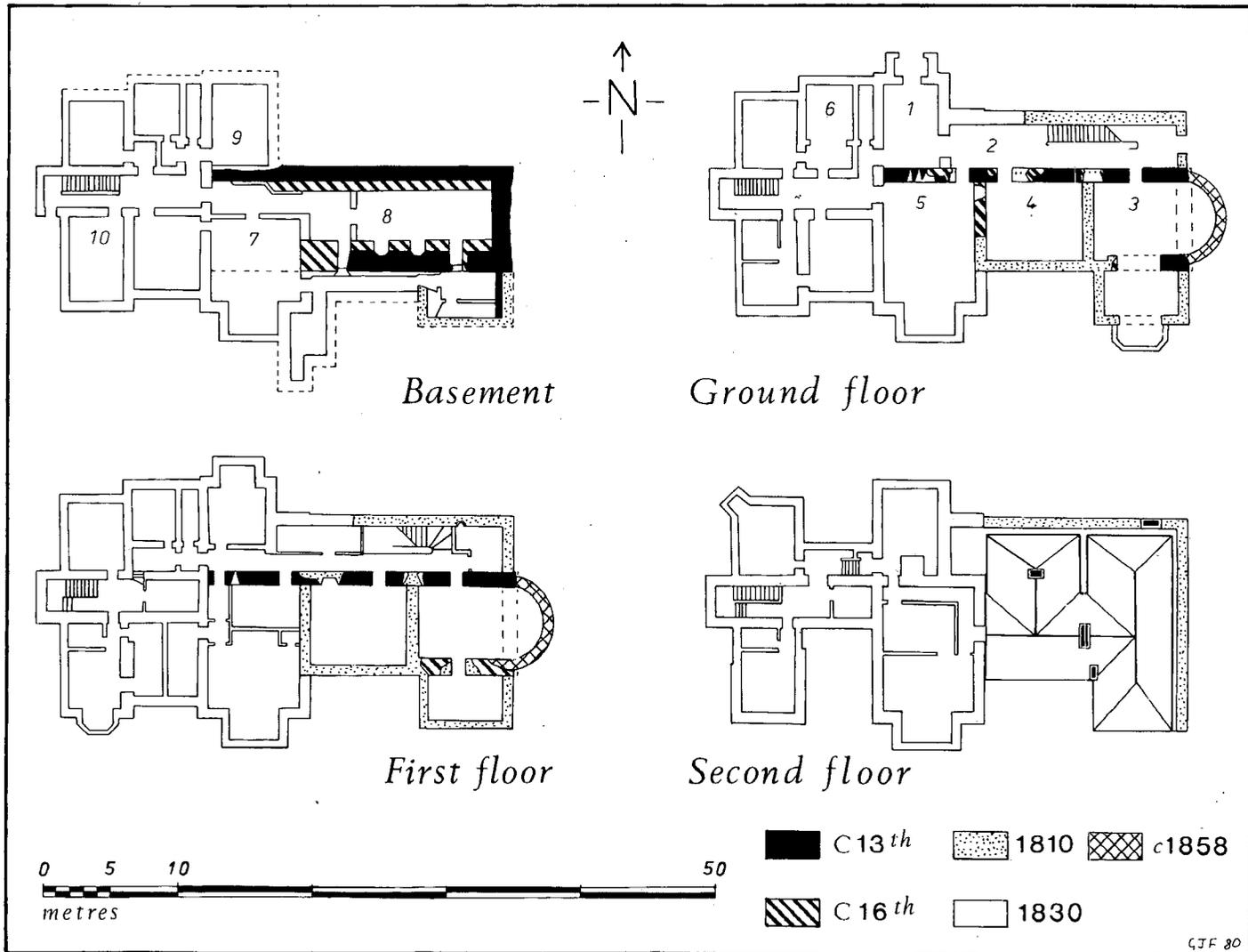


Fig. 2. Brinkburn Priory: Existing floor plans, Scale 1 : 500. Key: 1 Entrance; 2 Gallery; 3 Drawing Room; 4 Library; 5 Dining Room; 6 Small Dining Room; 7 Kitchen; 8 Store; 9 Boiler Room; 10 Laundry.

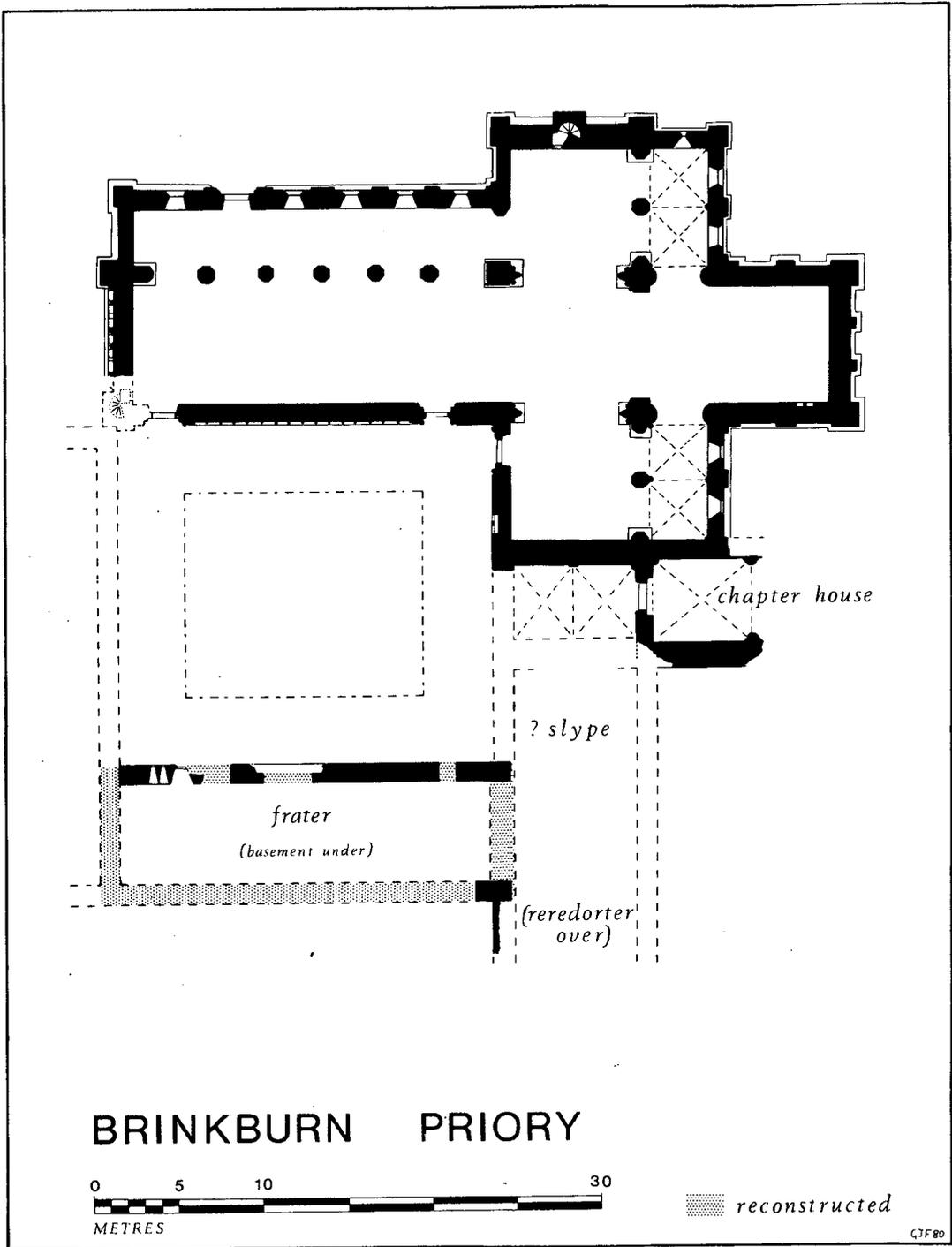


Fig. 3. Brinkburn Priory: The medieval remains (ground floor), Scale 1:400.

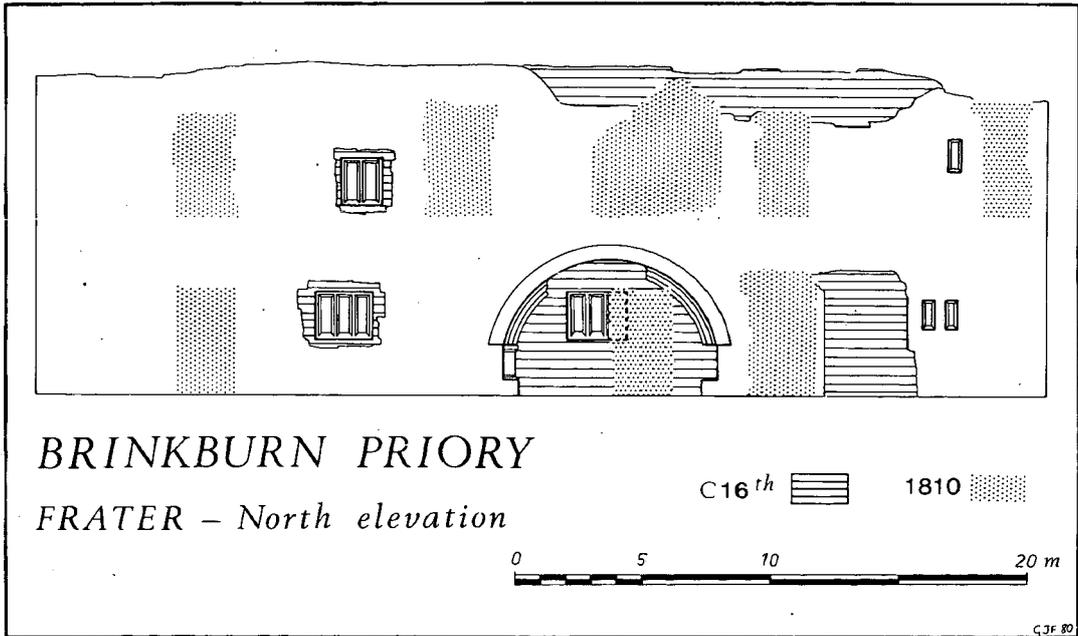


Fig. 4. Brinkburn Priory: South (*frater*) range, North elevation, Scale 1:300.

towards the river, nothing of the east range of the cloister survives within the house. The only extant remnants of the range are adjacent to the south transept of the church: here are visible two blocked first floor doors giving access from the *dorter* to the night stairs and to the transept triforium (Clarke 1976, p. 142), and fragments of the chapter house, notably its door, and the remains of a vaulted vestibule, perhaps the late medieval vaulted building known as Jack's Coach House, which until 1861 (when it collapsed through old age) stood west of the chapter house (Cadogan pp. 7, 18). The layout of vestibule and rectangular or polygonal chapter house is common in Augustinian houses (at Lanercost and Bolton respectively, for instance) but the planning of Augustinian east ranges is far from uniform, particularly in those houses, mainly northern, which like Brinkburn possess small cloisters (i.e. less than 25 m N-S). Thus the planning of the east ranges of, for instance, Bolton, Cambuskenneth, or Inchcolm contains many more eccentricities than the more spaciouly planned formal east ranges of, for instance, Thornton, Norton, or Hexham.

No remains of the west range are known. All evidence of it was destroyed in 1830, during the rebuilding of the house, and 1858, during the rebuilding of the south-west angle of the church. Its position if it was ever built is indicated by the western door into the nave of the church and by the west end of the *frater*. As at Hexham or Leeds, it must have projected beyond the west front of the church.

The cloister arcade has vanished, although some capitals presumed to be from it were found in 1858 re-used in fourteenth-century work in the church (Cadogan, pp. 6,

8–9; Clarke 1976, p. 143). More survives of the details of the rear wall of the cloister walk: the *lavatorium* recess of the south range, a book cupboard in the east walk, and the whole of a fine length of blank arcading along the south wall of the church.

## 2. THE POST-DISSOLUTION HOUSE: THE FENWICKS (figs. 2, 4)

At the dissolution of the Priory in 1536, the church remained in use as a place of worship, but the conventual buildings passed into secular hands. The first lease, to Cuthbert Carnaby, was short-lived (from 1537 to 1546), and in view of Carnaby's extensive interests elsewhere in the county<sup>4</sup> it is unlikely that he carried out any building work at Brinkburn. But from 1546 the Priory was in the hands of the Fenwick family—as lessees until 1626, and as owners until 1792. During this time, with the exception of a period in the middle of the seventeenth century, Brinkburn was the main residence of the family until 1692, and thereafter was occupied by junior branches of the family until 1747. In that year the tenancy was advertised (*NCH* VII, p. 475, n 1), but as it was described in 1769 as “a dwelling house now also in decay” (Wallis 1769, p. 522) the building may have remained empty. The extent to which Richard Hodgson had to reconstruct the dilapidated building in 1810 can be seen from the plans, and from his grandson's mistaken belief that this was the first conversion of the monastic buildings into a house (Cadogan pp. 4–5). For this reason, little of the “very good dwelling house” (*NCH* VII, p. 474) of the Fenwicks survives in the present building.

All that remains of the Fenwick house, indeed, is that part of the inserted barrel vault in the basement that was not removed in 1830, some small areas of masonry added to the medieval north and south walls, and a ground floor internal wall, perhaps the east wall of a service end, containing a door. The alterations to the north wall include the blocking of the *lavatorium* recess and three sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century mullioned windows (fig. 4). A fourth window may have been destroyed by the insertion of a first floor fireplace and chimney in 1810. The medieval entrance at the west end was moved slightly to the east, but still gave entry to the western part of the house, perhaps a service end linked to the storage basement as in later periods. The entries to the basement from the south, though modified, were retained. There is no surviving evidence of the entrance to the eastern part of the house, of stairs to the upper floor, or of the first floor arrangements.

## 3. RICHARD HODGSON: THE 1810 HOUSE (figs. 2, 5)

Brinkburn, and the remains of the Fenwick house, came by marriage in 1809 to Major Richard Hodgson, of Burgh-by-Sands, Cumberland. Hodgson immediately set about the task of rebuilding: the *Journal* of his grandson records “. . . the year 1810, when the ruinous part of the conventual buildings [he was unaware of the Fenwick house apparently] was arranged as a residence by my grandfather Major Hodgson” (Cadogan, pp. 4–5).

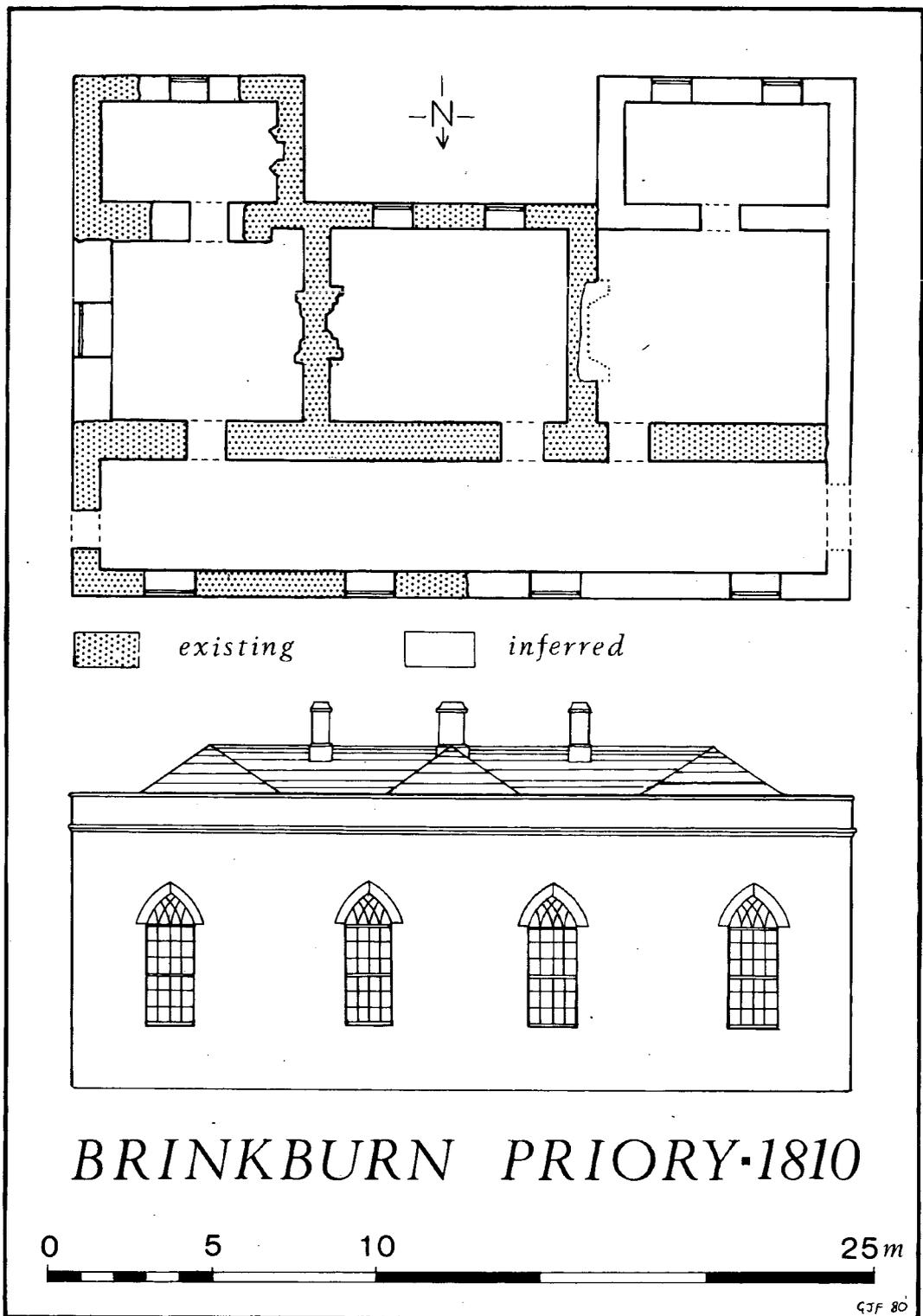


Fig. 5. Brinkburn Priory: Reconstruction of Richard Hodgson's house, 1810. Plan and north elevation, Scale 1:200.

The architect of the building is unknown. Perhaps Hodgson himself designed it. It is a simple, almost austere, house, classical in symmetry, proportions, and detailing, but late Georgian gothic in fenestration, particularly the tall pointed lancets (now two, originally perhaps four) in the north elevation towards the church. The west end was destroyed in 1830 by Hodgson's son, so the original plan is uncertain. The existing remains, however, suggest a building symmetrical about its north-south axis, presumably with a western front entrance to match the small eastern "garden" entrance, containing the principal rooms, linked by a long gallery lit by the tall lancets opening towards the church, on the ground floor, and with bedrooms above. The present staircase, obliterating one of the lancets, is an insertion of 1830 but probably occupies the site of the original stair, lit by the first floor lancet in the east wall. The vaulted basement below the main house was probably still complete at this period, as Hodgson apparently retained the existing gables of the building.

Servants areas probably stood to the west of the main house, on lower ground towards the river. A pencil sketch entitled "The part of Brenkburn Priory pulled down in 1831" (NRO ZFE/21), depicting a straggling collection of miscellaneous buildings which do not otherwise relate to the known house, may illustrate the servants' wing, although there is no indication of any attached buildings on the estate plan of 1823-4 (NRO ZAN M17/70).

#### 4. WILLIAM HODGSON CADOGAN AND JOHN DOBSON: 1830-37 (fig. 2)

Between 1830-37 John Dobson worked at Brinkburn, rebuilding the western part of Richard Hodgson's house. In 1826 Hodgson had sold the estate to Ward Cadogan, of St. Lucy's, Barbados and had married his son William to Cadogan's only child, Sarah. It was William, three years before his father-in-law's death, who began the task of rebuilding.

Dobson demolished the western part of the monastic south range, with the exception of the north wall but including the vaulted basement, and built in its place a large building of three floors, above a basement open towards the river, dwarfing Hodgson's earlier house. The new building is in an archaeologically correct late medieval castellated gothic, asymmetric in plan and elevation and strongly three-dimensional. Dobson built frequently in late gothic in this period (at, for instance, Beaufront 1837-41, Benwell 1831, and Lilburn 1828-43) so his choice of the style at Brinkburn probably owes nothing to the problem of assimilating his new work to the "gothics" of the earlier house and the church. Little attempt, in fact was made to build in a style sympathetic to those of church or house, yet the aesthetic success of Dobson's solution is self-evident.

William Hodgson Cadogan's house was considerably larger than that he had inherited. The principal ground floor rooms remained basically the same, although the dining room was enlarged and a subsidiary dining room added, but the provision of bedrooms, mainly on the first floor, was greatly improved, and an impressive stairway<sup>5</sup> inserted in the existing gallery to lead up to them. The major changes were in the service

wing however, now carefully integrated into the main house. Servants were dismissed to spacious basement rooms for their working hours, and to less spacious bedrooms on the upper floors (the second floor of Dobson's wing and the roof-spaces of the earlier house) for their hours of rest, though the most senior servants probably occupied ground floor rooms at the west end.

Scant regard was paid to Richard Hodgson's earlier work, particularly his north elevation, where two of the four lancets were demolished, and a third was blocked by the new stair. An upper storey was introduced at the west end of the remains of Richard Hodgson's gallery, the two floors articulated by two of Dobson's windows, uncomfortably juxtaposed for once with the surviving lancet. It is interesting that Richard Hodgson's work fared better at the hands of his antiquarian-minded grandson, for when the drawing room bay window was added in c. 1858,<sup>6</sup> its details, of parapet and window, faithfully copied the building to which it was attached. The south drawing room window, added earlier by Dobson, makes no such concession.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The work was carried out by the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works and its successor the Department of the Environment. I am greatly indebted in this connection to the earlier research of Mr. R. Gilyard-Beer, Mr. O. E. Craster, and Mr. A. B. E. Clark, and to Mr. I. W. Stuart for much help and encouragement. Figures 2 and 4 are drawn from original surveys by members of the Ancient Monuments Drawing Office (Messrs. C. F. Bamber, W. Ball, M. F. Kilburn, and R. C. Punchard).

<sup>2</sup>Whether such a door is diagnostic of the later thirteenth or earlier fourteenth century must however be left open to discussion.

<sup>3</sup>Or it possibly supported the *frater* pulpit.

<sup>4</sup>He was constable of Warkworth Castle, heir (succd. 1546) to Halton Castle and, from 1543, owner of Aydon Castle *NCH* X Chart opp. p. 408.

<sup>5</sup>This is perhaps the staircase purchased specifically for Brinkburn by Dobson from Grainger, after the demolition of Anderson Place House, Newcastle. (NRO 2FE 158 and 159).

<sup>6</sup>The window was in existence by 1858 (*NCH* VII photograph on p. 479), but the treatment of the masonry, different from the work of both 1810 and 1830 but identical with that on the S.W. angle of the church, suggests that it was built by the same masons responsible for the church restoration in 1858-60.

### References and Abbreviations

Cadogan: *Journal* . . . , 1858-82 NRO 234.

Clarke 1976: Brinkburn Priory, *Archaeological Journal* 133 1976: pp. 140-45.

*NCH*: *Northumberland County History*.

NRO: Northumberland Record Office.

Wallis 1769: *History of Northumberland*, vol. II.

## BRINKBURN PRIORY: descent of the manor house

CUTHBERT CARNABY  
lessee 1537-46

GEORGE FENWICK  
lessee 1546-

TRISTRAM FENWICK = MARGARET  
lessee 1569

GEORGE FENWICK = DOROTHY  
lessee by 1615  
d 1617

GEORGE FENWICK Claudius Fenwick  
purchased B 1626  
d 1657

GEORGE FENWICK = MARGARET = 2) WILLIAM RAMSAY  
d 1678 d 1723

Richard Fenwick = ELIZABETH FENWICK  
of Stanton married 1692

John Fenwick = Margaret

ANNE FENWICK = ED. ORD = 2) MARY  
d 1724 d 1745 d 1747

William Fenwick = Margaret  
d 1780

William Fenwick

Thomas Hetherington of Brampton

Joseph Hetherington  
purchased B 1792  
d 1792

John Hetherington = Thamer  
of Brampton  
d 1808

MARY HETHERINGTON = RICHARD HODGSON  
married 1809  
d 1830

WARD CADOGAN  
of Pickerings, Barbados  
purchased B 1826  
d 1833

WILLIAM HODGSON (CADOGAN) = SARAH CADOGAN  
d 1855 married 1826  
d 1874

CADOGAN HODGSON CADOGAN  
d 1888

owners underlined,  
occupiers in capitals  
pre-1626 absentee owners omitted  
see NCH VII, pp. 468-71