

## V

# The Church of Holy Trinity, Widdrington

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### INTRODUCTION

Widdrington church is in large part a late medieval building, which has survived despite periods of neglect and restoration. No full description of the fabric has yet been published, although it is one of a small group of churches in Northumberland having major building schemes with detail in the Decorated style.

Northumberland had been so well provided with parish churches of high quality in the 13C lancet styles, that a pause in building activity might have been expected about 1300 even under normal circumstances. After that date, the progressive impoverishment of the region during the wars of Scottish succession must have tended increasingly to confine the limited resources available for church purposes to maintenance and repair rather than extension. The provision of a fortified dwelling such as that of the Widdringtons, which formerly lay immediately east of the church,<sup>1,6</sup> was evidently a more urgent requirement than the erection of chapels with elaborate fittings. Even so, chapels were added or aisles enlarged at several churches such as Bolam, Bywell S. Peter and Embleton. More remarkable, is the group where major building schemes were put in hand, comprising Morpeth, Kirkharle, Widdrington and Alnwick. Widdrington is deserving of study as a lesser known member of the group, derived as we shall see, from alteration of a late 12C building of considerable stature.

### DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCES

There are indications that Widdrington was the site of an early nucleated settlement,<sup>2</sup> but there are few records available which bear upon the architectural history of the church. Widdrington is described as a chapelry within the parish of Woodhorn as early as 1174, when the Register of St. Alban's Abbey, in a settlement with Tynemouth Priory under that year, includes the phrase "... ecclesiam de Wdehorn cum capella de Hortuna et de Wodringtona et de Newebiggynge . . ."<sup>3</sup> The existence of a stone building by that date is thus a reasonable expectation. Chantry bequests were attached in the medieval period, the commissioners reporting in 1548 "Two Chuntries of the Trynyte, founded in the Chappell of Wodrington, apending to the Paryshe Church of Woodhorne."<sup>4</sup> An "altar of S. Edmund" existed in 1307, which Hodgson<sup>5</sup> suspected might be a portable one licenced to John de Widdrington and Margaret his wife by Pope Martin IV before 1284.

From the 16C onwards, we can trace a familiar pattern of neglect, starting with an ominous note, ascribed to about 1578, "... in a ruinous condition, not floored, seated or glazed, roof decayed."<sup>6</sup> Archdeacon Sharpe, at his visitation of 1723 noted "... the roof is tumbling down, and all the chapel in other respects is in a lamentable condition." In 1764, his son "... found things in a still worse condition than when my father visited . . ." Repairs by Sir George Warren in 1766, of an unspecified nature, evidently restored the building to a usable condition.<sup>7</sup> There is no evidence as to when the north arcade was blocked, but it

certainly was so by the time of Hodgson's description, about 1827, when he could speak of "an ancient fabric," which had "undergone frequent alterations and repairs."<sup>5</sup>

In 1870, F. R. Wilson's plan for the "Churches of Lindisfarne" was published,<sup>8</sup> and provides the first detailed evidence of the state of the building. The N. arcade was still built up, and a vestry stands at the E. end of the S. aisle. A door opens through the E. aisle wall, and the remainder is blocked by a fireplace with a chimney projecting through the roof.

When the Newcastle upon Tyne Society of Antiquaries visited Widdrington in 1903,<sup>6</sup> they found a building transformed since 1870. The alterations included removal of the vestry attached to the S. aisle, opening out of the N. arcade, and provision of a new N. aisle which was continued along the N. wall of the chancel so as to provide an organ chamber, vestry and boiler house. Faculties for this work have unfortunately not been traced, so that its date is not readily ascertainable, but it possibly commenced in 1875, the date found upon the signed glass in the new S. aisle E. window. The effect was to recover in large part the medieval aspect of the interior, now one of the most attractive of its period in the district.

## DESCRIPTION

The church (fig. 1, Plate IV) consists of a nave with north and south aisles of different periods, the latter continued along the south side of the chancel so as to form an eastern chapel. The chancel is relatively large, slightly exceeding the nave in both length and area. A modern north aisle to the nave extends along the north side of the chancel as far as its east gable. There is no tower, a bell turret being mounted on the west gable. There are no marked irregularities in the plan. The chancel is deflected about  $14^{\circ}$  north with respect to the nave axis, causing an 8" displacement at the east end, and its south wall is slightly out of line with the arcade. Orientation is approximately  $5^{\circ}$  south of east.

The surviving medieval work belongs to two

main periods, the earlier being represented by the two-bay north arcade, and the later by the south aisle and chancel. The central pillar and responds of the N. arcade are short and of circular form with capitals having a wide concave bell surmounted by a heavy square abacus. The bases are of simple moulded profile featuring a vertical hollow, close to forms found at Bolam,<sup>9</sup> and consistent with a late 12C date (fig. 2a, c). The arches are pointed, of two orders with double chamfer, spanning about 16 ft, but slightly unequal. The arch span exceeds that found in many 13C examples, and we shall have to consider later whether these arches are original.

The arcade on the S. side of the nave also has two bays, continued with a third arch in the S. wall of the chancel. All three arches have exactly equal spans, implying a uniform design for the whole S. aisle. The arches are pointed, of two chamfered orders as on the N. side, but the inner order is narrower so as to fit the octagonal capitals. The latter have shallow multiple mouldings, and they are supported by octagonal columns terminating in bases with simple two-stepped hollow mouldings (fig. 2b, d).

By a rather daring piece of construction, the SE corner of the nave above a height of about 7 ft is supported by a single column of the arcade (Plate V), from which spring also the wide chancel arch to the N. and a narrow transverse arch over the aisle, to the S. Not surprisingly, the imperfectly balanced thrust has tilted the column towards the S., to the extent of  $2\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  from the vertical, and in doing so has produced a kink in the S. aisle wall, easily seen externally at eaves level. In the E-W plane, the abutment provided by the remainder of the arcade to the west, and by the S. chancel wall to the east, has maintained a perfectly vertical alignment. In contrast to the pillar, the respond of the narrow transverse arch over the aisle is vertical, and has probably been rebuilt to check the tilting of the arcade. The external buttress, which is several inches out of line with the respond (see fig. 1), has probably also been rebuilt for the same purpose.

The arches of the nave arcades are of similar

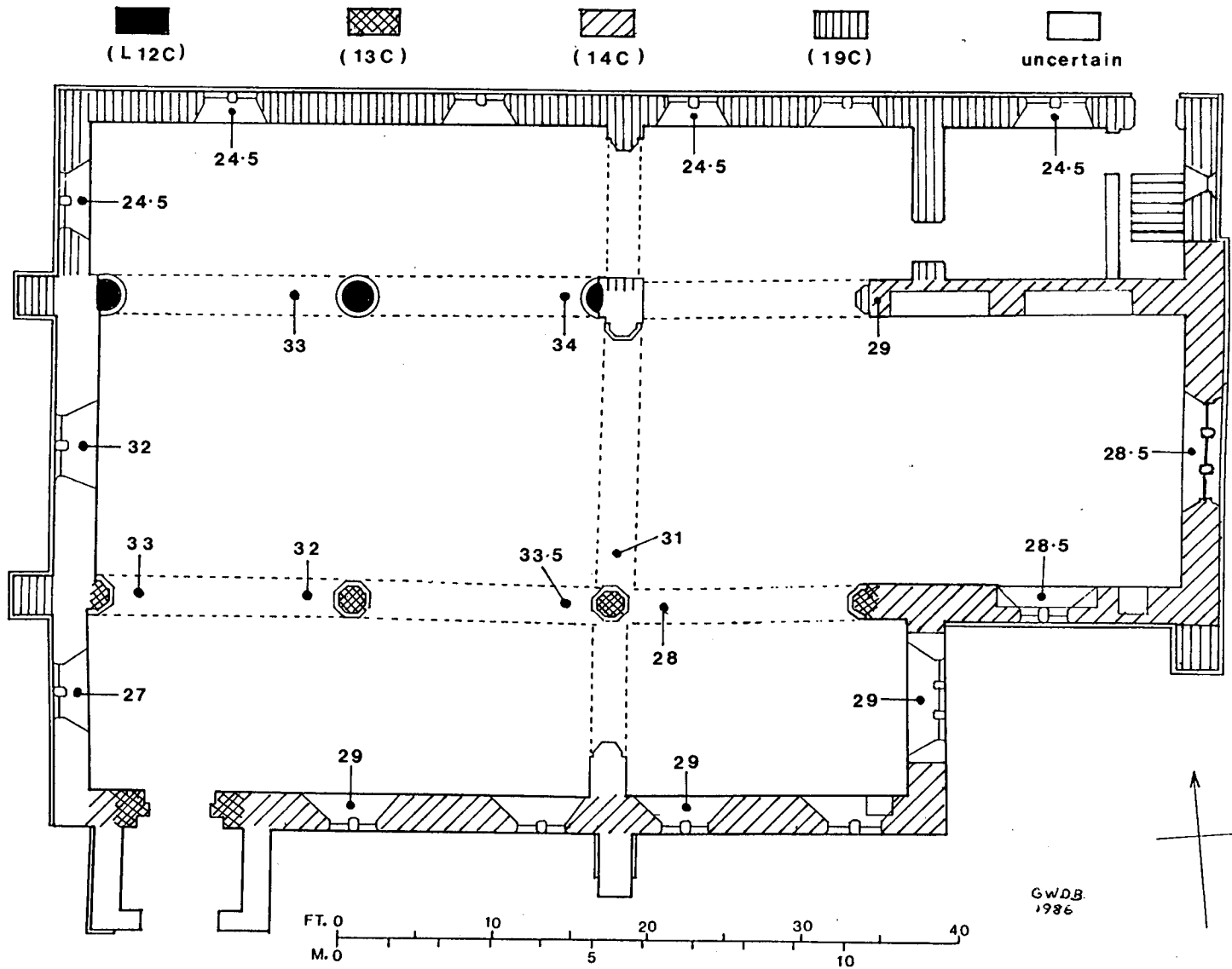


Fig. 1. Plan of church, with wall thickness in inches and tentative dating.

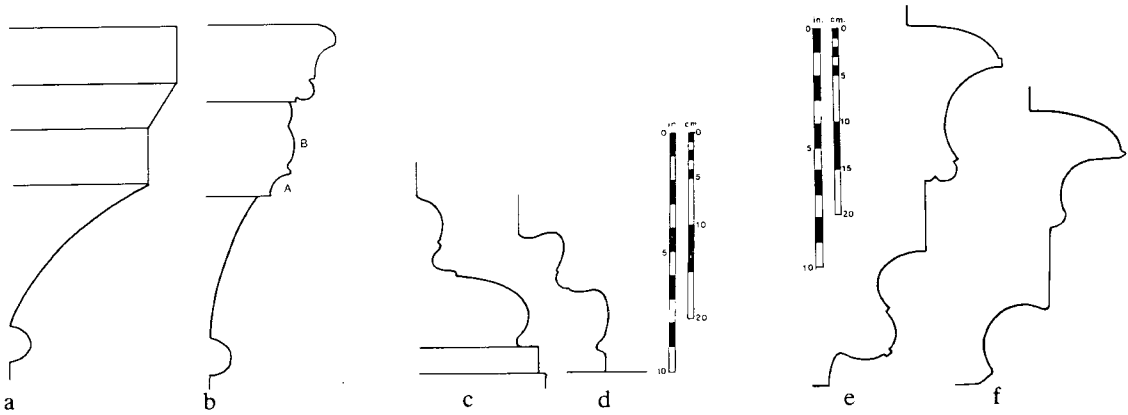


Fig. 2. Moulding profiles.

- (a) N. arcade capital.      (d) S. arcade base.  
 (b) S. arcade capital.    (e) E. tomb recess hood.  
 (c) N. arcade base.      (f) W. tomb recess hood.

shape on both sides, although the piers and responds are quite different. Precise measurements including height, acuteness and curvature, made with suitably designed probes, are given in Table I. These provide a quantitative basis for the comparison, and if extended on a sufficiently widespread basis, might even help in distinguishing between the work of local schools of builders.

On the N. side, the large square abaci permit a wider inner order than the octagonal capitals on the S., the wall thickness being identical.

Although the designs are closely similar, however, the materials are not, the N. arches being built with small stones numbering 38–40 to the arch, the S. side having more irregular large stones with 16–24 to the arch. Two mason marks were found on the S. side, none on the N. The question raised is whether the S. arches were built to match those on the N., or whether the N. arches were rebuilt with original material, to match those on the S. In the absence of documentary evidence it is difficult to determine which solution applies. The problem is

TABLE 1. Dimensions of arcade arches

	Springing to apex h	Width at springing w	Half-arch radius		Acuteness $\frac{h}{w}$
			E.	W.	
Widdrington N(W)	7'7"	13'2"	8'8"	8'8"	0.58
N(E)	7'11"	12'7"	9'7"	9'7"	0.63
S(W)	8'1"	14'3"	8'8"	7'11"	0.57
S. (centre)	8'0"	13'11"	8'4"	7'11"	0.58
S(E)	7'10"	14'2"	9'4"	9'0"	0.56
Lesbury. N(W)	8'1"	14'3"	10'2"	9'7"	0.56
NE)	8'1"	15'0"	10'9"	11'3"	0.54



View of church from south.

not unique to Widdrington; both Chollerton and Alnwick provide parallels to a medieval building procedure which merits further investigation.

The S. aisle has an internal width of 11'5", similar to that of the S. aisle at Bolam,<sup>9</sup> which also has an eastern chapel opening into the chancel. A piscina is located near the E. end, indicating the site of a former side altar. There is no apparent break in the S. wall, either internally or externally, the external facing being laid in a seemingly random sequence of wide and narrow courses, with stones of uneven size, roughly dressed. The windows on the S. side of the aisle are of two lights,

square-headed and with simple curvilinear tracery (Plate IV), two being monolithic, the remainder in two or three pieces as if they had broken during carving, or perhaps during later settlement. These heads fit uneasily on the large upper stones of the jambs, several of which have had the corners cut away to accommodate them, as if the heads had been subsequently lowered. The window reveals have conspicuously large stones internally, in which they resemble the chancel windows at Bolam, and the heads have been rebuilt with lintels of large single stones. The 3-light E. window of the aisle is modern, and the tracery looks as if it had been modelled on a medieval

window in the corresponding position at Bothal, being stiffer in design than any of the original windows at Widdrington.

The S. door to the aisle is of two orders, the outer jamb with a narrow chamfer and the inner with an edge roll which has formerly had a fillet, now worn away except on the lowest stones. There are neither capitals nor bases, unless the latter are concealed by the flags. By contrast, the arch itself is provided with rich mouldings, and a deep outer hood having worn circular stops with radiating petals similar to those on the chancel arch hood at Heddon. The quality of this work stands rather apart from the remainder of the building, and will be considered more fully in the section on mouldings below.

The chancel is fairly large, measuring 35'5"  $\times$  17'6" internally with an area of about 620 sq. ft. Its walls are built in irregular masonry resembling that of the S. aisle, and there is a similar straight-headed two-light window on the S. side. The E. window is of three lights with a pointed head filled with more elaborate flowing tracery which is multi-jointed and of a conventional pattern with a central quatrefoil supported on each side by horizontal mouchettes (Plate V). The design is not uncommon in the north of England, being found in the N. transept of Durham cathedral, at Jarrow, at Wycliffe in N. Yorkshire and formerly in a

two-light variant at Holy Is. S. Mary,<sup>10</sup> but it appears to be a rare survival in Northumberland, where reticulated tracery was often preferred. The window adds distinction to the chancel, even though it is rather small in relation to the size of gable.

Internally, the chancel gains by comparison with the relatively small nave, and is unusually well equipped with stone fittings. First among these are the two arched recesses in the N. wall, provided with hoods and moulded surrounds and having the appearance of tomb recesses. The easternmost is the higher of the two at 5'7", and carries at its apex an uncoloured shield "Quarterly . . . a bend . . ." which may be assumed to be for Widdrington. The lower recess to the west, 2'3" high, has a less elaborate hood and in its floor is a slab with a crudely incised cross. These recesses are in the normal position for the tomb of a patron, or an incumbent. If, as Pevsner queries,<sup>11</sup> one of them was intended for a permanent Easter sepulchre, it would give the chancel a unique importance, but there is no other evidence for this, and a tomb recess would serve both purposes.

On the S. side of the chancel, a sedile has been formed by lowering the sill of the S. window, a procedure also found at Newbiggin and Heddon on the Wall. There are no divisions, nor any decoration other than a heavy cavetto moulding forming a shoulder at each end level with the external sill. Built in at the east end of the seat is what seems to be a pillar piscina, 20½" high, with a bowl 8½" diameter pierced for a drain and integral with a section of heavy string course. This fitting is evidently not in its original position, and is likely to have come from an earlier chancel contemporary with the N. nave arcade. This is unusual, inasmuch as a second piscina is provided to the east of the sedile, having a projecting bowl and a trefoil recess with a shelf and small cavities in each jamb, which provide extra space for storage or concealment of vessels. There is a string across the E. wall which near its S. end rises 7" as if to accommodate an altar back. However, there is no corresponding fall at the N. end, and the whole feature suggests a misunder-

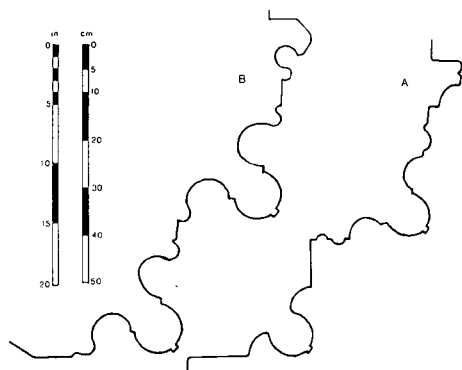


Fig. 3. (a) Widdrington S. door arch.  
(b) Woodhorn N. transept arch.



Interior looking east.

standing on the part of the builder, or an uncorrected mistake.

The medieval church arch is 16'6" wide at the responds and in a style compatible with that of the S. arcade, the S. respond being provided by the E. pillar of the latter. The arch is asymmetric, and has near the crown several voussoirs which are smaller than the remainder. When the column forming its S. respond tilted towards the S. it is likely that a fissure opened over the arch, and these stones may belong to repairs carried out after the tilt had been checked. A modern arch in the N. wall opens to the organ chamber; Wilson's plan shows a blocked door in the position occupied by the arch, and this may have been reused as entry to the present boiler house, where there is a pointed head formed of large stones in the medieval manner.

#### *Mouldings*

A number of mouldings are present in the S. arcade, the S. door, and the chancel recesses, which may embody evidence as to the dates of those parts of the building.

The capitals of the S. arcade vary in height between 13" and 15", and there are small variations in their carving, but all show the main elements of Fig. 2b. A narrow bell is surmounted by shallow mouldings, a distinctive feature being the hollow quadrant (A) immediately above the bell. A shallow bead, or if preferred a double quirk (B), is present on all caps except the N. chancel arch respond, which differs most noticeably from the others. The abaci, though damaged and worn, seem to have been chamfered on the upper edge. The bases are of a simple two-stepped form with water holding hollows (fig. 2d). The arches

over the tomb recesses (fig. 2e, f) have prominent hoods and plain hollow mouldings which are of approximately  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " radius but not quite circular, and the more elaborate eastern recess incorporates a shallow roll.

The S. door has richer moulding in its arch, with filleted edge rolls flanked by pronounced hollows, the whole cut "on the square" in a 13C manner (fig. 3a).

There is at present no agreed typological sequence for mouldings applicable to this district, and it may even be more profitable to attempt to date mouldings from their context rather than the reverse. Nevertheless, some broad distinctions may be made. A review of some sixty examples of capitals from Northumberland reveals that those of the lancet period are usually very plain, with few mouldings and frequently a mere combination of vertical flats and chamfers that appear more like blanks awaiting carving than finished capitals. In later, or wealthier contexts, multiple mouldings do appear, and in those reasonably assigned to late 13C and 14C work, some general trends are found. There is a reduction in height of the lowest member of the bell in comparison to the total height of the capital, so that at Morpeth there is only a deep hollow above the astragal, and even this has disappeared at Felton. Though mouldings multiply, they do not deeply penetrate the surface, and capitals often develop a pronounced overhang, due to their shallowness combined with a reduced thickness of column relative to that of wall. The difference may be clearly seen in the arcades of Newbiggin church, where the wider west bays have the spreading type with multiple mouldings, and the east bays have less spread and fewer mouldings.

The hollow (A) is very rare in the lancet period, although found in the S. capital of the chancel arch at Heddon, where a late 13C date is acceptable; the motif (B) is similar to earlier forms at Hartburn, Ingram and Newbiggin. The Widdrington capitals therefore seem to be of an intermediate type, and the arch chamfers lie in separate planes, a 13C tendency.

If the evidence of the capitals is rather indefinite, that of the bases is clear and almost

conclusive. The Widdrington bases (fig. 2d) have a number of parallels in lancet work, such as Newburn S. arcade, Heddon S., and Hartburn. Bases from the accepted 14C context at Morpeth S. Mary are totally different, comprising a single plain chamfered offset. The bases at Newbiggin are of the greatest value for sequential dating, the E. bays having the two-stepped form with hollows, the W. bays having the single-chamfered offset of Morpeth, but with shallow mouldings on the chamfer. The Widdrington bases manifestly go with the earlier E. bays at Newbiggin.

The arch to the S. door is of exceptional interest on account of its richer mouldings and its close resemblance to the N. transept arch at Woodhorn, Fig. 3a, b. The filleted edge roll forms the main feature in both examples, the principal difference being the much deeper cutting of the hollows at Woodhorn, which has the effect of beginning to emphasise the diagonal plane, in the way which was to dominate late medieval arch decoration. Surprisingly, the sections are almost identical in scale, the profiles being closely superimposable even though the Woodhorn arch is so much wider.

Work as rich as this has rarely survived in the parish churches of Northumberland, and no close parallels to these arches are known to the writer. In such circumstances, that examples should occur in neighbouring churches one of which is a chapelry dependent upon the other, and separated by only four miles, is unlikely to be mere coincidence. Some connection of design, craftsmanship or source is implied, perhaps of the kind discussed by Fawcett,<sup>12</sup> in tracing the work of a 15C mason at churches associated with Wiveton in Norfolk. A search for analogues in Durham would form an interesting extension of these observations.<sup>13</sup>

To attach a date to these details is a hazardous undertaking. Pevsner<sup>11</sup> remarks of the S. door "it looks like re-used 13C material." With this we can agree, and if the above analysis is accepted, not only the door, but certainly the bases and perhaps the whole of the S. arcade are of 13C design, if not of 13C date. Typical 14C forms such as the scroll or ogee are absent or at best faintly implied, and the filleted roll



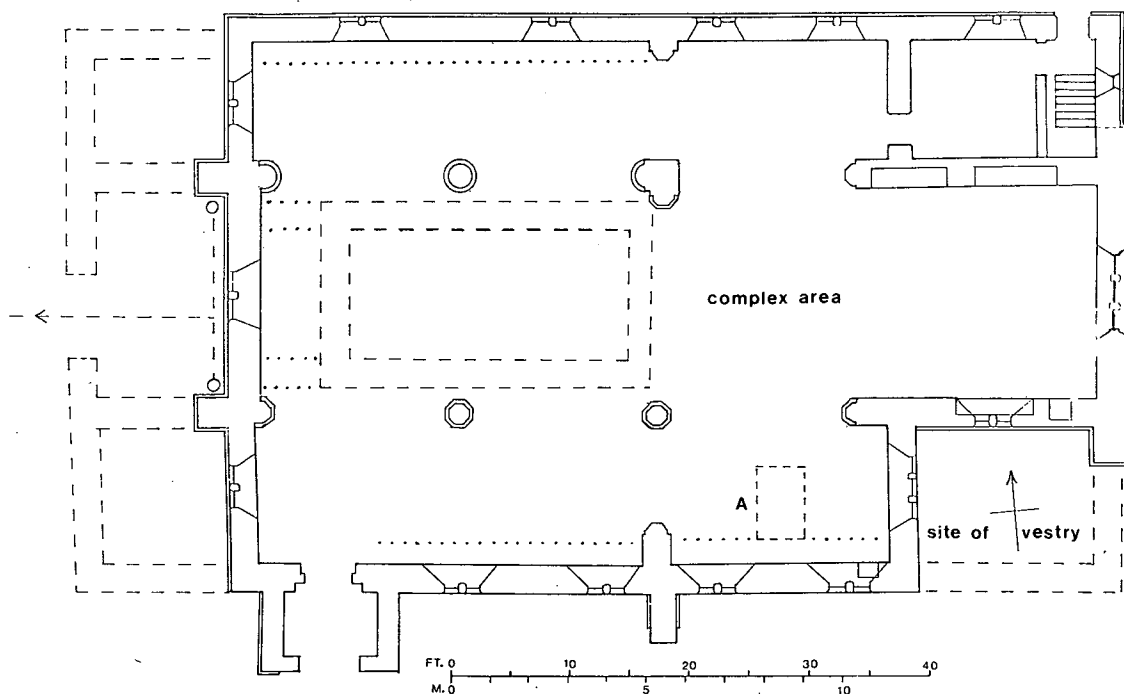


Fig. 4. Plan of possible foundations.

flanked by hollows occurs locally in the responds of a first floor fireplace at Aydon Hall about 1295. The conclusion has to be, that there is an appreciable stylistic difference between the door and arcade on the one hand and the window tracery with its curvilinear forms on the other. The significance of this finding is discussed below.

#### *Foundations*

The proportions of Widdrington church are such that consideration has to be given to the possibility of the nave having been shortened from the west. A search was therefore made using dowsing procedures on the lines recently published by Bailey, Cambridge and H. D. Briggs.<sup>14</sup> Reproducible impulses were obtained by the writer at several places indicated approximately in Fig. 4. Within the chancel responses were so densely crowded, probably including such features as burial chambers, that the evidence was not satisfactory,

and our subsequent discussion makes use only of the simpler patterns found west of the chancel arch. Notable features are the E-W lines which do not lie directly beneath the arcades but are displaced towards the nave axis, and seem to define a rectangle about 24 ft × 12 ft internally. This may mean that the arcades were built outside the line of earlier walls, unless it is caused by distortion in these imperfectly understood images. There are in addition E-W lines about 2 ft inside the aisle walls, which might be read as foundations of early aisles, although on the S. side they terminate near the E. door jamb. The rectangular feature "A" in the centre of the S. chapel coincides closely with a patch of dark coloured stone slabs in the floor. Wilson's plan appears to show steps down in the SE. corner, so there may well be a chamber or vault in this position.

Of most interest is the pattern recorded outside the west gable, where there are E-W responses in line both with the buttresses and



Fig. 5. Masons' marks.

with the aisle walls. They terminate at a N-S line about 11 ft west of the gable, which would not quite allow room for an additional 16 ft bay. There is a curious gap about 7 ft long, and close probing suggested that the drains from two downcomers combine to pass through this gap, whence a continuous line may be traced west across the churchyard. It was noted that the site of the 19C vestry adjoining the S. chancel wall gave rise to impulses of the same kind as found elsewhere.

#### *Fragments and markings*

A fine medieval grave cover is used as the lintel of the outer boiler house door. Showing part of an incised stem and sword, it has a cross head in recessed relief, made up from four broken circles of a fairly common form, but here unusually having small roundels in the centre of each circle. A similar cross has been recorded from Kirk Merrington,<sup>15</sup> and one slab at Newbiggin has florets in this position. A second fragment forms the sill of the small slit at the head of the boiler house stairs, and shows a lightly incised, plainer cross.

A stoup has evidently existed just E. of the S. nave door, where there is a conspicuous stone set vertically, now made flush with the wall face, but still retaining at the top a small section of the bowl.

Mason marks are not numerous, but appear on the soffit of the S. arcade arches, the E. label of the aisle arch and on the face of the E. tomb recess arch (fig. 5). A lightly incised circle 5¼" diameter appears on the W. respond of the S. arcade, and externally there is a very weathered scratch dial on the E. jamb of the W. window of the S. aisle wall.

## EVOLUTION OF THE BUILDING

The architectural details of Widdrington imply work of at least three periods. Two of these are medieval, represented respectively by the early N. arcade and the later S. aisle and chancel, whereas the N. aisle, vestry and organ chamber are modern work later than 1870.

Evidence for the principal phases, derived from differences in style, is supported by measurements of wall thickness in various parts of the church, shown in Fig. 1, which fall into three main groups coinciding with the principal building periods. First, averaging 33", are the walls over the N. and S. nave arcades and the west gable. Secondly, very close to 29" throughout, are the S. aisle and chancel walls. Finally, the N. aisle and vestries have a consistent thickness near 24½", a dimension which readily distinguishes the modern work from the remainder.

The design of the pillars and capitals of the N. arcade show that the church had at least a N. aisle by the end of the 12C. The only other surviving nave arcade of two bays is at Lesbury, about ten miles to the north. There, the arches are actually of shorter span, due to the presence of wing walls at the E. and W. ends, and careful measurement reveals differences in shape such as to exclude the possibility of identical centreing having been used at both churches. These dimensions have been added to Table I for comparison, and taken with differences in carving of the capitals, and the absence of half-column responds at Lesbury, they tend to discount the possibility of the same building team having worked at both sites.

The chancel and S. aisle at Widdrington are clearly of later design, and the facts that they have identical wall thickness and masonry characteristics, and that the arcade spans are equal, suggests that they comprise a single building scheme. Pevsner,<sup>11</sup> and Morris<sup>16</sup> both take that view, assigning them to the 14C, but as we have indicated above, the matter requires re-examination because there is a large stylistic gap between the windows on the one

hand and the carved detail of the door and arcade on the other.

Although it is not easy to say exactly how this part of the church evolved, there are possibly two main paths by which it may have reached its present form. The first supposes that chancel and S. aisle are entirely 13C building, with inserted 14C windows. This simple scheme would accommodate the date of the door, arcade and mouldings as well as the uniformity of build of aisle and chancel, and on those grounds has much to recommend it. Closer examination, however, shows that there are problems in maintaining this view. Thus it requires a S. chancel wall in line with the arcade, implying a large structure for the period, yet the ratio of length to breadth is much less than the average of about 2.50 for the 13C, and is in fact much closer to the 14C chancels of Morpeth (2.11) and Elsdon (2.14). The masonry is not typical 13C and though Haltwhistle, and to some extent Newburn, have irregular masonry, they do not show the frequent large stones found at Widdrington. Lastly, conclusive proof is required that the windows are in fact insertions, and this is not so easily established as it is at Ponteland and Heddon-on-the-Wall. It is true that a blocked pointed aperture is visible just above the S. chancel window and a doubtful sill below, but if these details are not accidental they may represent an abandoned intention for a window of the type used in the E. gable. There are no indications of early lancets in the aisle wall as there are at Whalton.

An alternative view is that the chancel and S. aisle were built in the 14C with contemporary windows, the arcade using materials from an earlier 13C aisle. There is a hint of such a predecessor in the steep roof line faintly visible above the present aisle arch and partly intersected by it. The whole arcade must have been rebuilt because if the leaning pillar had been inserted behind an existing respond, the arches would have had unequal spans. This scheme also fits the available structural and decorative evidence, the main objection to it being the need to postulate re-used material.

This is a view which needs to be adopted with caution, even when it seems to be justified on grounds of economy.

One of the above basic schemes should represent fairly closely what actually happened, yet there may not be sufficient evidence to decide between them. It is in any event a rare procedure to spring four arches from a single column; Morris cites the example of Gisburne in West Yorkshire, where four arches rest similarly on large circular pillars. At Raunds in Northamptonshire<sup>17</sup> the S. aisle development has some similarity to Widdrington, and it is interesting to see that the builders carefully avoided this device, providing a respond for their chancel arch which actually divides a bay into two half-arches. The insertion of a crucial load-bearing column into an existing structure looks so hazardous that one questions whether the whole south wall was taken down and rebuilt from ground level. This was done at Longbenton when a new aisle was added in 1874, as we know from the faculty documents,<sup>18</sup> and it may have seemed equally good practice in the 14C!

It remains to assess the probability that the church has been larger than it is at present. Wilson<sup>8</sup> states that a window in the blocking of the N. arcade was made up from medieval fragments, and he goes on to remark that the nave has been shortened, although without quoting either the source of his information or the observations which led him to this conclusion. There are nevertheless points about the building which tend to support his contention, for example, the nave with its length to breadth ratio of 1.84 is abnormally short for Northumberland. The patterns described above from dowsing responses can be interpreted as foundations extending west from the present W. gable, and an extended late 12C aisle is feasible, surviving examples at Chollerton and Newburn being nearly ten feet longer than Widdrington, although having four narrower bays. Shortened naves are encountered at Norham and, almost certainly, at the largely 14C church of Kirkharle.

On the other hand, the proportions of the

nave are closely paralleled by at least six churches in the former small county of Rutland, at Barrowden, Great Casterton, Little Casterton, Morcott, Stretton and Tixover,<sup>19</sup> these buildings also have two-bay arcades. The dimensions are therefore not in themselves conclusive; nor is it wise to rely too heavily upon dowsing evidence, unless it is corroborated in other ways.

If the nave has been shortened, the present W. gable clearly cannot be the original one. There is a long vertical straight joint just clear of the N. buttress, and this coincides with the NW angle shown on Wilson's plan, which was made after the aisle had been removed. From the shading on the plan, Wilson evidently considered both the W. and N. walls to be recent, or at least post-medieval. The central part of the W. gable nevertheless retains a weathered plinth and lower courses of large stones which look 14C, and not at all 12C. Other small indications of rebuilding are the outward tilt of the W. respond of the S. arcade and the fact that the respond capitals have integral wings for insertion in masonry courses but which are not now flush with the surface. Indeed the one in the S. aisle has a gap of about 4" between the wing and the wall. The evidence is not entirely satisfactory, but on the whole tends to favour the possibility that a western bay has been lost, perhaps even as early as the 14C, and with this goes an increased likelihood that the arches on the N. side have been partially rebuilt. It may be that the site itself had a subtle influence on building development, for the ground commences to slope westwards within a few feet of the west gable, and at the E. end the churchyard wall runs only four feet from the E. gable. If the latter is a medieval boundary, then the church was constrained in an E-W direction, and expansion would favour wider aisles extended along the chancel.

Widdrington emerges as a church which displays an ambitious late medieval rebuilding at a time when few projects of comparable scale were carried out in Northumberland. The equally ambitious building at the chapelry of Newbiggin may be attributed to the pocket of

wealth near a thriving small port; for an area of scattered agricultural settlement such as Widdrington, it would seem inevitably to be linked with the important local family, whose impressive tower and mansion immediately adjoined the church. The suggestion is supported by the presence of their coat of arms over the tomb recess in the chancel. Here is a connection with a family of note such as we find with the Raymes at Bolam or the Ogles at Bothal, less impressive than the chapels of East Anglia or the Midlands, but forming a distinct local pattern in which Widdrington is an important element. Some of the building work, such as the S. aisle wall with its windows, is crudely done as if by provincial masons, but some shows higher skills. For example, the open plan of the S. aisle extension implies a master of unusual imagination and initiative, while the S. door, so close in detail to the transept arch at Woodhorn, is richer than usually found in the churches of Northumberland.

In the account given above, the history of Widdrington church has been, in part, traced in its fabric. The view presented differs from previous writers mainly in that we prefer to divide the chancel and S. aisle development into two phases, and have given more consideration to changes at the west end. The church has architectural links with Woodhorn and Newbiggin, and it preserves a variety of moulded detail which should ensure it a place in future surveys of this art in Northumberland. Fairly certainly, part of the architectural history is lost, or it would be more correct to say, is not accessible to simple observational methods. It may be revealed by selective excavation, especially outside the west gable, and perhaps supplemented by geological study of the stonework. Fortunately, the post-1870 restoration has preserved much of a church deserving a high place in the county from the amount and quality of original work remaining, as well as for the outstanding visual appeal of its splendidly cared-for interior.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>J. R. Bibby. *PSAN*<sup>5</sup> I 336.  
<sup>2</sup>R. Newton. *The Northumberland Landscape*. Hodder and Stoughton 1972 p. 43 fig. 3.  
<sup>3</sup>*NCH* VIII 63n.

- <sup>4</sup>Surtees Society Vol. 22 lxxxv.  
<sup>5</sup>J. Hodgson. *Hist. Northd.* Pt. II Vol. 2 p. 221 ff.  
<sup>6</sup>*PSAN*<sup>3</sup> I 81 (1903).  
<sup>7</sup>J. Hodgson, *Op. cit.* p. 249.  
<sup>8</sup>F. R. Wilson. *Churches of Lindisfarne*. Newcastle 1870 p. 165.  
<sup>9</sup>G. W. D. Briggs. *AA*<sup>5</sup> X 125.  
<sup>10</sup>*PSAN*<sup>2</sup> V 133 (1892).  
<sup>11</sup>N. Pevsner. *Buildings of England: Northumberland*. Penguin Books Ltd., 1st Ed. 1957 p. 323.  
<sup>12</sup>R. Fawcett. *Antiquaries J.* Vol. 62 35 (1982).  
<sup>13</sup>J. F. Hodgson *AA*<sup>2</sup> XX Pl. 10 fp 97. The writer is indebted to Mr. G. Graham for this example.  
<sup>14</sup>R. N. Bailey, E. Cambridge and H. D. Briggs. *Dowsing and Church Archaeology*. Intercept, 1988.  
<sup>15</sup>*PSAN*<sup>2</sup> V 103.  
<sup>16</sup>J. E. Morris. *Northumberland*. London, Methuen, 3rd Ed. 1933 p. 358.  
<sup>17</sup>VCH. *Northamptonshire* Vol. 4 p. 34.  
<sup>18</sup>Northumberland Record Office, Newcastle Diocesan Records, No. 204 (1874).  
<sup>19</sup>VCH. *Rutland*. Vol. 2 p. 236, etc.

