



## X

## Hexham Abbey: the various movements of the fittings since the Dissolution

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### SUMMARY

*Hexham Abbey is known for the rare survival of its pre-Dissolution fittings. Since the Dissolution, all of those fittings, with the exception of the pulpitum, have been moved to numerous positions within the church. Some have suffered alteration or damage as a result of having been re-sited more than once. Research, based on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century written sources and illustrations, has traced the various movements of two chantry chapels, a fifteenth-century lectern, various sets of painted panels, the sedilia and some screen-work. The results offer an insight into how the church was able to preserve so much of its heritage, despite the historical events which caused such significant losses elsewhere.*

### INTRODUCTION

MUCH ATTENTION HAS BEEN GIVEN during the last thirty years, to the history of the fabric of Hexham Abbey church. Several papers have appeared in different issues of *Archaeologia Aeliana*,<sup>1</sup> none of which has addressed the present state of the late-medieval fittings or the complicated history of their survival. Yet the 15th-century fittings at Hexham go some way to providing us with an understanding of the interior arrangements of a pre-Dissolution Augustinian house. They are of considerable significance, not least because eighty-three panel-paintings survive — the largest collection in any English church. In addition to two chantry chapels, wooden sedilia and an unusual lectern/pulpit with side wings, Hexham retains its original pulpitum, the only surviving wooden example in a major English church. Hexham, a house of limited means, and set in a wild and inhospitable area, managed to undertake a magnificent refurbishment of wooden fittings during the fifteenth century. That so many survive, in spite of destructive ‘restorations’ in 1740 and 1858 is, paradoxically, a remarkable witness to the massive losses sustained by the English Church from the Dissolution onwards. For Hexham’s fittings exemplify what was perhaps a relatively typical monastic interior. However, with the exception of the pulpitum, many of the fittings have been moved, often several times, and, as a result, their present positions may not be those originally intended. The main thrust of this paper will be to trace these movements, as supported by documentary evidence.

Hexham was founded in 674 and was served by a succession of twelve bishops, from the time of the founder, St Wilfrid, until the bishopric ended c. 820. The site was re-founded in 1113, by the Archbishop of York, as an Augustinian priory, and remained thus until its dissolution in 1537. It then became a Peculiar of York until 1837, after which it formed part of the Diocese of Durham until the foundation of the Diocese of Newcastle in 1882.

Very little survives of the twelfth-century additions to Wilfrid’s seventh-century basilica, other than the foundations of an apse beneath the floor of the present choir, standing just east



of the foundations of the seventh-century apse, together with a fragment at the west end of the cloister area. That there clearly was a Romanesque eastern limb is indicated by a firm date of 3 March 1155, for the Translation of relics.<sup>2</sup> A rebuilding of this church is what we see today, with a Transitional choir of c. 1180, and the thirteenth-century transepts and crossing. Following a sacking of the church by the Scots in 1296, it seems that the canons did not include the nave in their restoration work, although there is structural evidence that an abortive attempt to rebuild the nave may have taken place in the fifteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Hexham thus remained without a nave until the present one was built in 1907/08, to the designs of Temple Moore.

The disposition of the fittings prior to the Dissolution is unknown; a search in the National Archives has failed to reveal the Dissolution accounts, which might have provided important information on the positions of chapels, altars, etc., and there is no certainty that they were in their intended positions when John Carter (1748–1817) saw them some two hundred and fifty years later.<sup>4</sup> His plan (B.L.Add. Ms.29943 fol. 172), is the earliest to show the positions of many of them; it is reproduced, after Hodges 1888, as fig. 1 in Bidwell's paper, in this volume (p. 54). We may now consider the movements of each of the surviving fittings.

#### THE CHANTRY CHAPEL OF PRIOR ROWLAND LESCHMAN

This now occupies the second bay from the east of the north arcade of the choir. Entered from the choir, a stone substructure supports a wooden cage on the north and south sides. A stone altar, complete with five consecration crosses, forms an integral part of the main substructure, and this in turn supports a painted reredos, the predella of which depicts the Man of Sorrows with the Arma Christi, together with a kneeling Augustinian canon (probably Leschman himself, as the donor). The predella supports the three figures of St Peter, St Andrew (the dedicatory saint of Hexham) and St Paul. The western end of the chapel is formed by an arcade pier, whilst the tomb chest and effigy now form a somewhat cramped arrangement within the chapel.

Carter's plan shows the chapel in the position which it now occupies, although it has suffered several movements in the intervening years. It is possible that Carter saw the chapel in its original pre-Dissolution position; the location, near to the High Altar and on the favoured north side of the church, was an important one that may have been accorded to a prior who had a major impact upon the refurbishment of his church at the close of the fifteenth century. Leschman's initials, in the form of the cross of St Andrew, appear in various places in the church, on image brackets, on his tomb chest, and above the entrance to the Prior's lodgings.

Although Carter gives us the earliest plan, his is not the earliest record of the chapel. For this, we turn to William Stukeley's *Itinerarium Curiosum*, first published in 1724. Unfortunately, Stukeley does not inform us of the actual position of the chapel, but he does refer to: '...two oratories over sepultures unknown, [Leschman and Ogle] a tomb of a woman with a veil over her eyes.'<sup>5</sup> Stukeley, as an antiquary (he was a founder of the Society of Antiquaries in 1719), was far more interested in the seventh-century crypt, discovered in 1725, and misidentified the effigy of Prior Leschman, with his cowl drawn over his face.

Wallis, in 1769, gives us the first written record of the position of the tomb, stating: '... a tomb with the effigies of a Religious, recumbent and veiled ... at the upper end of the north-east isle [sic.] of the quire, near the altar table.'<sup>6</sup> This does not necessarily indicate where the chapel was situated, but since Carter's drawing of only some twenty years later, in addition

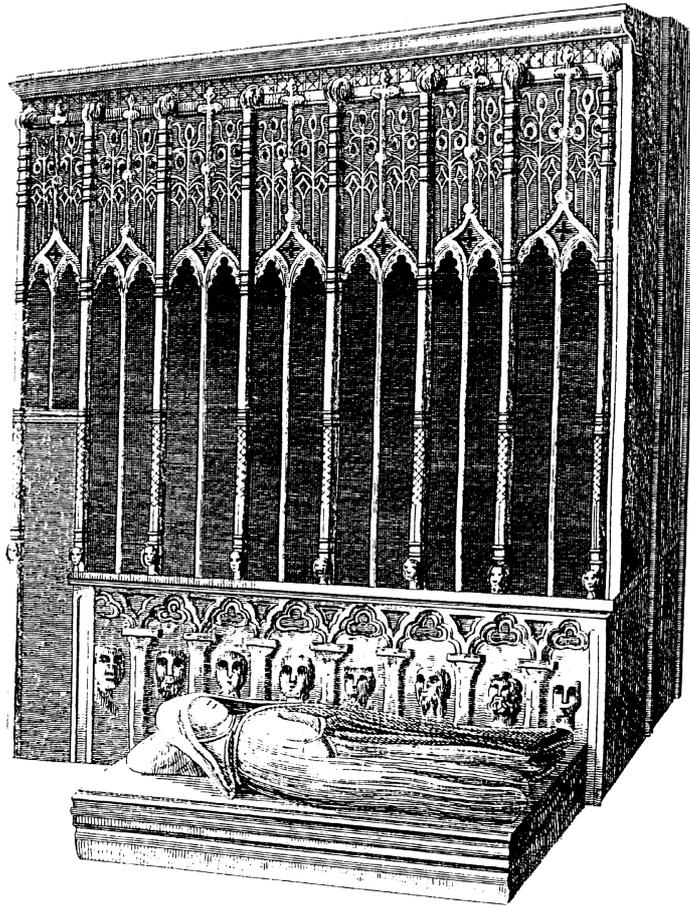


Fig. 1 The south face of the Leschman Chantry Chapel, with effigy.  
From Wright's History of Hexham, 1823.

to his ground plan, clearly shows the south face of the chapel with a tomb and effigy standing *in front of it*, we may assume that both Wallis and Carter observed the chapel in the same position. Carter's drawing of the south face of the chapel, (B.L.Add. Ms. 29933. f. 127) is in accord with that shown by both Pennant and Wright (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup>

Hutchinson, in 1776, makes a more detailed observation of the chapel, which he terms a 'shrine'. He is the first to draw attention to the shield, which he notes in various parts of the church, suggesting that the strange device (which we now recognise as the Leschman monogram) bore '... the resemblance of cross-bones'.<sup>8</sup> The accepted belief at that time was that the tomb was that of Richard, Prior of Hexham from 1142 to 1174, whose written record of the priory survives.<sup>9</sup> Contemporary antiquaries had little ability to date monuments on stylistic grounds. Whilst Hutchinson does not indicate the position of the chapel, it was by his time serving as the pew of the Fenwick family: the transom separating the predella from the upper

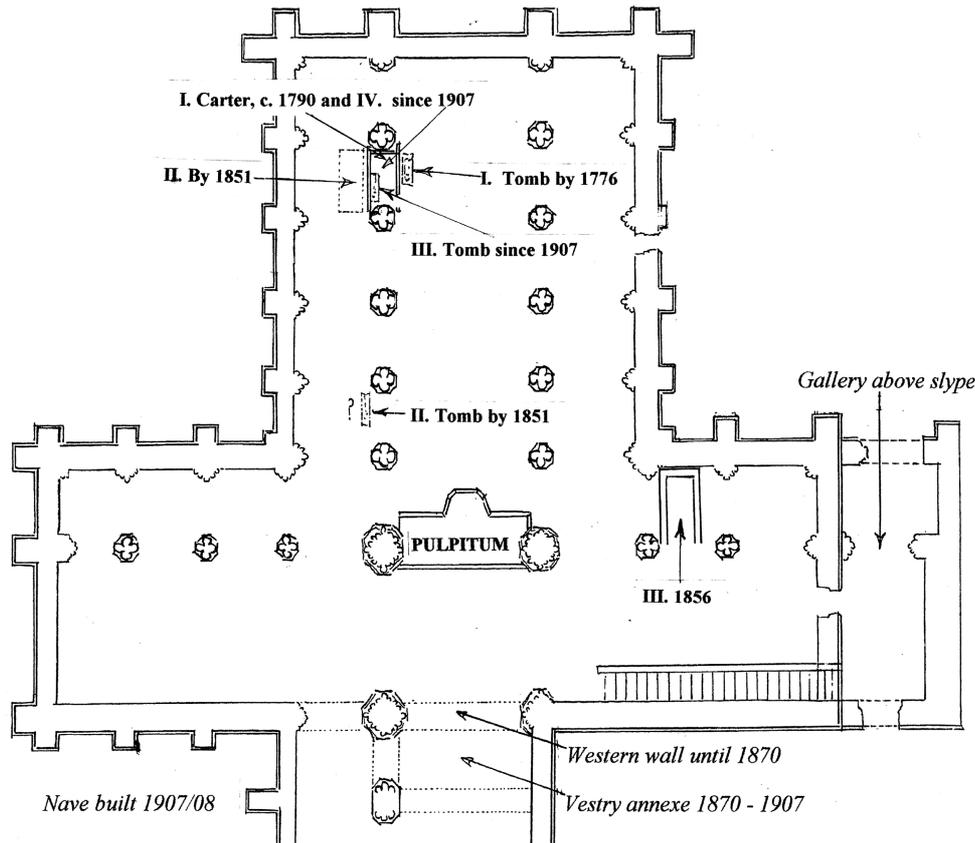


Fig. 2 Plan to show the movements of the Leschman Chantry Chapel.

figures on the reredos still bears the crudely-cut inscription: 'The Lady Kather: Fenwik'. To serve this purpose, the chapel had been moved further back into the north choir aisle. A print of 1851 shows the chapel in this position, and indicates that the north face of the wooden cage was almost as fragmentary as it is today.<sup>10</sup> The eastern end of the cage shows the transomed section that had originally formed the entrance on the south face, and which was visible in the drawings of both Pennant and Carter; this transom has since been lost. The print also shows that the interior of the chapel had been close-boarded, no doubt to protect the occupants from draughts.

As part of the major re-organisation of the choir in 1856, the chapel was re-erected in the north bay of the south transept.<sup>11</sup> In the process, the north and south walls of both substructure and cage were reversed in position. In 1908, the chapel underwent a third removal, when it was placed back in its present (and probable pre-Dissolution) position, at a cost of £350.<sup>12</sup>

The movements of the Leschman chapel (fig. 2) were associated mainly with various re-organisations (often disastrous) of the arrangements within the choir. The earliest record of

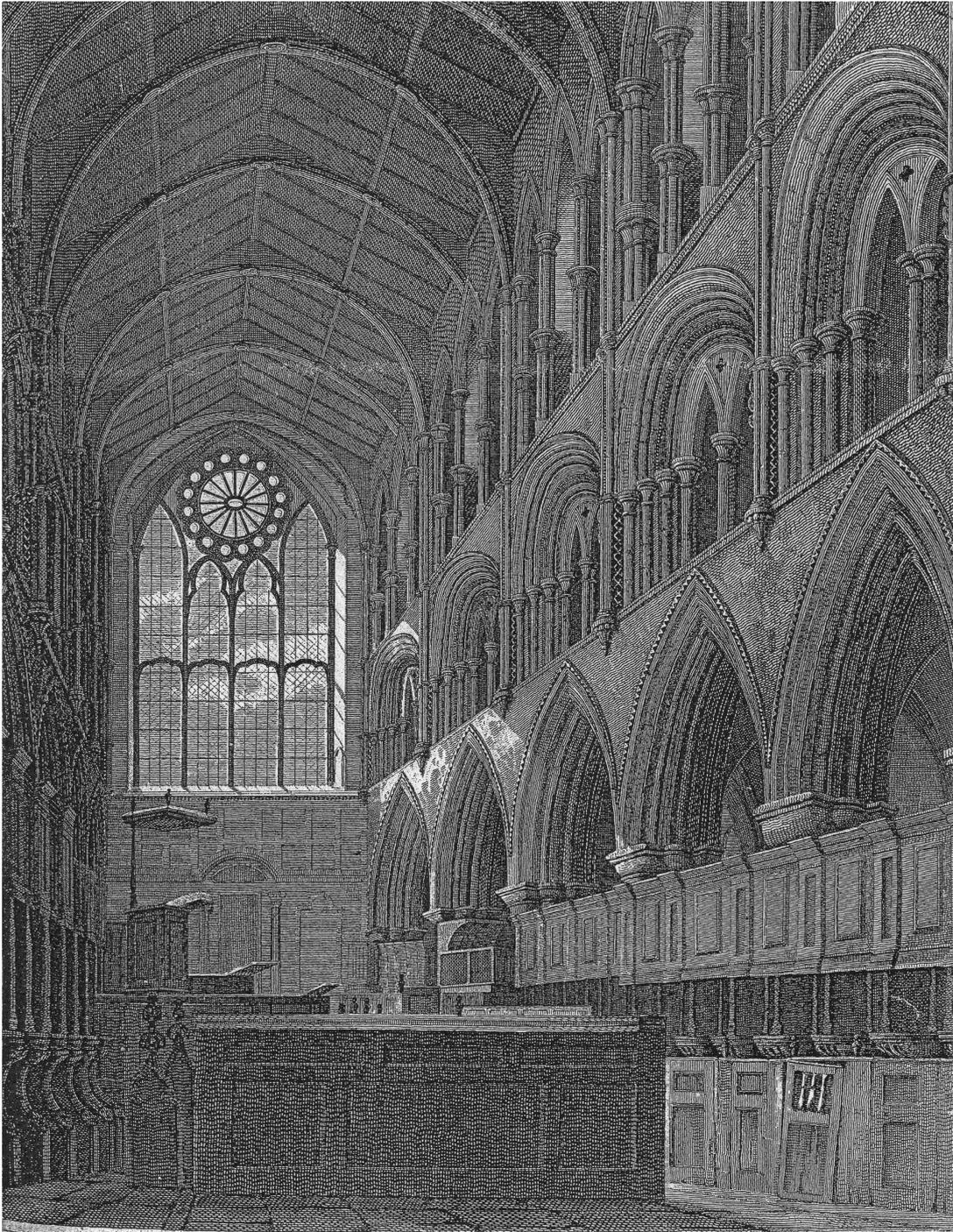


Fig. 3 View of the choir looking east. Print by Nicholson, published 1815.

these was that of 1725, when Sir William Blackett, the impropiator, restored the choir.<sup>13</sup> It may have been at this time, or more likely in 1740 — when the stalls were cut down and the galleries introduced — that the choir was filled with box-pews, as may be seen from Nicholson's print of 1815 (fig. 3).<sup>14</sup> This was possibly the occasion for the conversion of the chapel into the Fenwick pew, and its removal into the north choir aisle. A far worse calamity befell the choir in 1858–60, when the eastern bay was totally rebuilt by John Dobson of Newcastle, resulting in the demolition of the five eastern chapels, whilst the choir was fitted out with new pews and choir-stalls on the pattern of a complete parish church. It was this work that occasioned the removal of the Leschman chapel into the south transept.

We should not leave the chapel without discussing the movements of the tomb chest and effigy. Carter does not record their position, but as has been seen in fig. 1, Pennant's print of 1776 shows them outside the south face of the chapel. When the chapel was moved into the north choir aisle as the Fenwick pew, the tomb and effigy would thus have remained in a somewhat isolated position. Joseph Fairless, writing what was possibly the earliest visitors' guide, in 1853, states that '... a hooded Monk, with his hands clasped in the attitude of prayer ...' lay in the north choir aisle, but does not state precisely where.<sup>15</sup>

As part of the major re-organisation resulting from the rebuilding of the new nave in 1907–8, the final refurbishment of the choir provided the arrangement seen today, including the Leschman chapel and tomb. This was a purposeful attempt on the part of C. C. Hodges, the resident architect, and Temple Moore, the architect of the nave, to restore the choir fittings to what may have been their pre-Dissolution positions.

#### THE CHANTRY CHAPEL OF SIR ROBERT OGLE

Sir Robert Ogle died in 1410, and his chapel now occupies the same position as that shown on Carter's plan, namely within the third bay from the east of the south choir arcade (fig. 4). As will be seen, it has suffered more grievously than any other fitting within the choir. The first written record comes from Wallis, in 1769, in which he mentions the monumental brass as being on the south side of the choir, without specifying precisely where; neither does he mention the chapel.<sup>16</sup> The matrix of a full length brass now lies alongside the outer north face of the chapel, in the same position as that recorded on Carter's plan. Although the figure has gone, the inscription remains: *'Hic jacet Robertus Ogle, filius Elene Bertram filie Roberti Bertram militis, quiobit in vigilia omnium sanctorum Anno Domini mccccx, cujus animae propicietur Deus Amen.'* Three of the four corner shields survive. These were quartered between the arms of Bertram and Ogle, although those of Bertram, consisting of three crescents, have been dug out.

Hutchinson's reference in 1776 is probably taken from Wallis.<sup>17</sup> Mackenzie, in 1811, refers to the chapel as a pew, within which he describes: '... a monument of black marble, inlaid with brass, but which is now partly defaced.'<sup>18</sup> It is apparent from his description, that the brass lay *within* the chapel. However, Longstaffe, in a paper published in 1861, states that the tomb slab had by then been: '... removed into the south aisle, where it was partially covered with pews.'<sup>19</sup> It would have been moved finally, to be set in its present position, when the new choir floor was set down in 1907. During the destructive alterations of 1858–60, the chapel was completely dismantled. Great scandal was caused by the removal of the altar-piece by the contractor. The *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1863 states that: '... the contractor for the repairs at Hexham Abbey claimed as his own, and sold, a painted triptych which was discovered

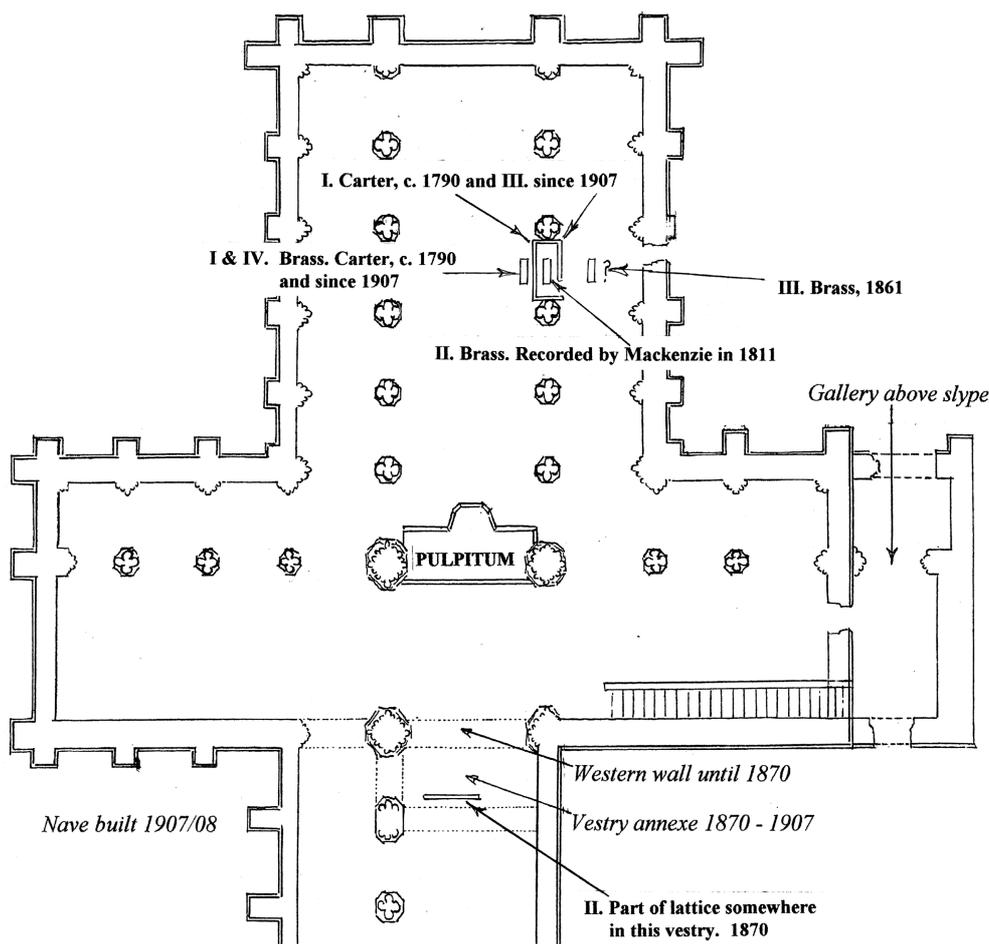


Fig. 4 Plan to show the movements of the Ogle Chantry Chapel.

during the progress of the work.<sup>20</sup> It had evidently been covered over with green baize during the time that this chapel was also used as a private pew, when it was known as the 'Lord of the Manor's pew.'<sup>21</sup>

The triptych followed a remarkable nomadic existence after its removal from the chapel. It was purchased by a Mr F. R. Wilson, who wrote several papers on the Abbey and its varying fortunes. He exhibited it to the British Archaeological Association in 1863.<sup>22</sup> It was then sold by Mr Wilson's widow in 1895 to a Mr Bond of Newcastle, who sold it immediately to Mr W. D. Cruddas of Haughton Castle, in December of that year. In 1960, under the terms of the will of Mr Cruddas, it was returned to the Abbey, where it once again forms the altar-piece of the restored Ogle chapel.<sup>23</sup> The heavily repainted triptych depicts, in the left panel, the Virgin, standing on the sickle of the moon (which is also the Bertram coat of arms), holding the Christ-child on her right arm and bearing a sceptre in her left hand. The figure is framed

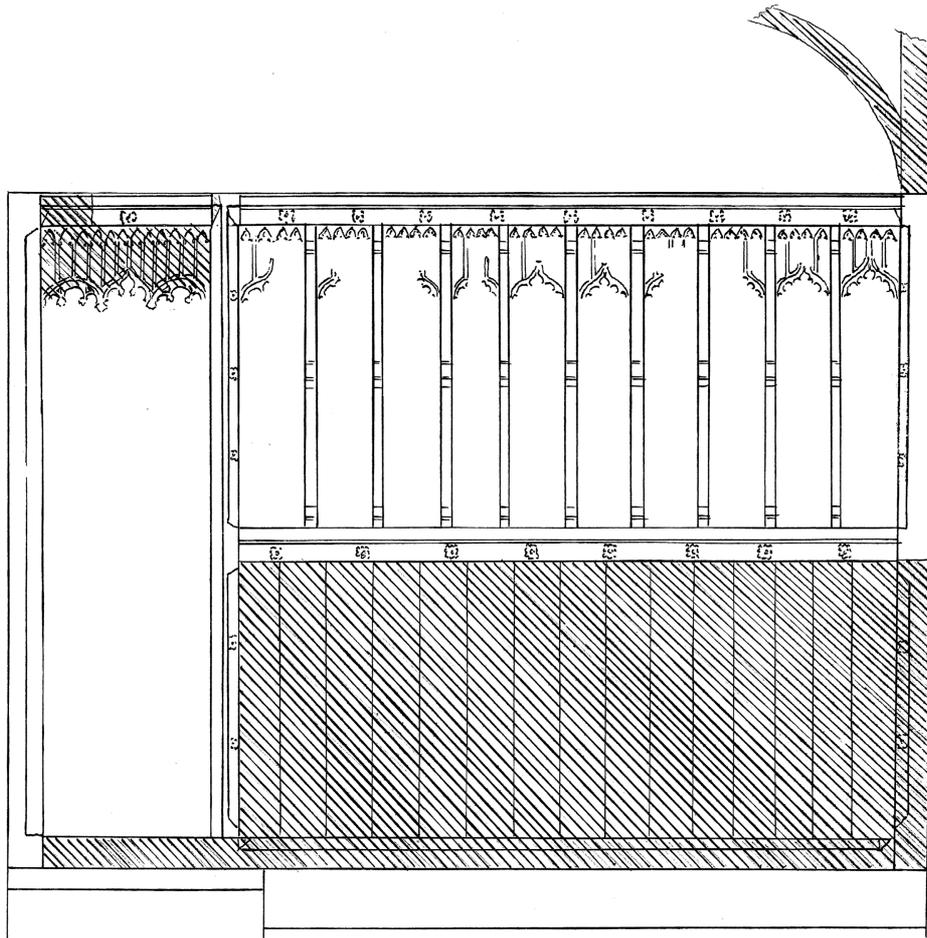


Fig. 5 The south face of the Ogle Chantry Chapel (scale 1:25) showing original work; new work is shown hatched.

in a mandorla of sun rays. The central panel shows the Man of Sorrows, though without the Arma Christi, and here, the tomb has become almost an altar, with candles set on a gradine, and the central figure representing the cross, all within a mandorla in the form of clouds. The right panel represents St John, holding a palm branch and chalice, from which the serpent emerges, all set within a mandorla, which is a combination of those in the adjacent panels.

Following the dismantling of the chapel in 1858, we are told that: 'Most of the lattice of one side was fixed in the vestry in 1870 and other parts were in a lumber room until 1885.'<sup>24</sup> This lattice now forms the south side of the chapel, which was re-constructed on its original site in the restoration of 1907–8, the estimated cost being £250.<sup>25</sup> Of the north face, only the north-west corner post, the middle section of the north-east corner post, and possibly the centre transom, are original. Of the south face, much is original, save for a small section of the top rail above the entrance, the lower half of the south-east corner base, the base rail, the dado planking and small repairs to the lower part of the south-west corner post. Fragments of

original tracery survive in the ten south bays, although that above the entrance is new (fig. 5). At the west end, in addition to the two corner posts, the top rail is original. All else is new, including the coving above the altar, which is itself a modern table. On the inner faces of the south and west top rails may be seen the painted crescents of the Bertram arms.

### THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY LECTERN

This is referred to by earlier writers as an ancient pulpit, or Litany desk, but the title given is now the generally accepted form. It stands in the third bay from the east, on the north side of the choir, against the 1907 panelling which supports the fifteenth-century screen of seven bishops (fig. 6). It is first shown on Carter's plan, set against the blocked western arch of the central tower, there being no nave at that time.

Mackenzie appears to have provided the first written record when, in 1811, he informs us that '... against the west wall of the transept is the Litany-desk, now used for burials.'<sup>26</sup> It was still in this position when Mr. Longstaffe referred to '... a pulpit or litany desk, made up of old painted panels with figures.'<sup>27</sup> By 1888, the Lectern is recorded as being in the south transept, and a photograph of that time shows it standing on the gallery at the head of the night stairs.<sup>28</sup> Following the 1907 restoration of the choir, it was moved to its present position, and in 1909 it was mounted on a stone pedestal (a donation from a Captain Cuthbert) designed by Temple Moore: the work was executed by Messrs Holloway, the contractors for the new nave.<sup>29</sup>

What was the original purpose of this structure, and where was it? The unusual lay-out of a central pulpit with side wings, comprising fourteen painted panels, suggests a purpose other than that of a pulpit or lectern. We may discount any suggestion that it may have been the refectory pulpit, because Hutchinson, writing in 1776, less than twenty years before Carter's plan, states that the refectory was still intact, and that it served '... as a room of entertainment at public times.' It would surely have been surprising if he had made no reference to so distinctive a feature.<sup>30</sup> Hodges, writing on the conventual buildings in 1924, provides more substantial evidence when he states that '... the frater had a stone pulpit ... a section of the rich arcade to this. ... is on a rockery in the town.'<sup>31</sup> Examination of the construction of the Lectern reveals several large mortices in the bottom rail, which would have accommodated substantial tenons, suggesting that it was supported at some height. The presence of these mortices and the fact that the bottom rail is chamfered on its *under-side*, suggests that the whole structure may have been a rood-loft, of which a very similar wooden example survives *in situ* in the little church of Coates-by-Stow in Lincolnshire.

In Hexham, the parish church of St Mary, which stood immediately to the south-east of the priory, still survived in a dilapidated state at the time of the Dissolution. The layout of this church is well established, and parts of the structure still survive, incorporated into domestic buildings on the south side of the present Market Square. If the Lectern had been the rood-loft of the parish church, it seems unlikely that so fine a feature would have been left in a decaying church, when the parishioners were granted permission to use the choir of the priory church as their own. Since the priory church had no nave, and therefore no appropriate position for a rood-loft, west of the existing pulpitum, it would seem likely that a suitable position for the Lectern might be against the blank west wall of the tower. I suggest, therefore, that it may possibly have been the original rood-loft from St Mary's parish church.

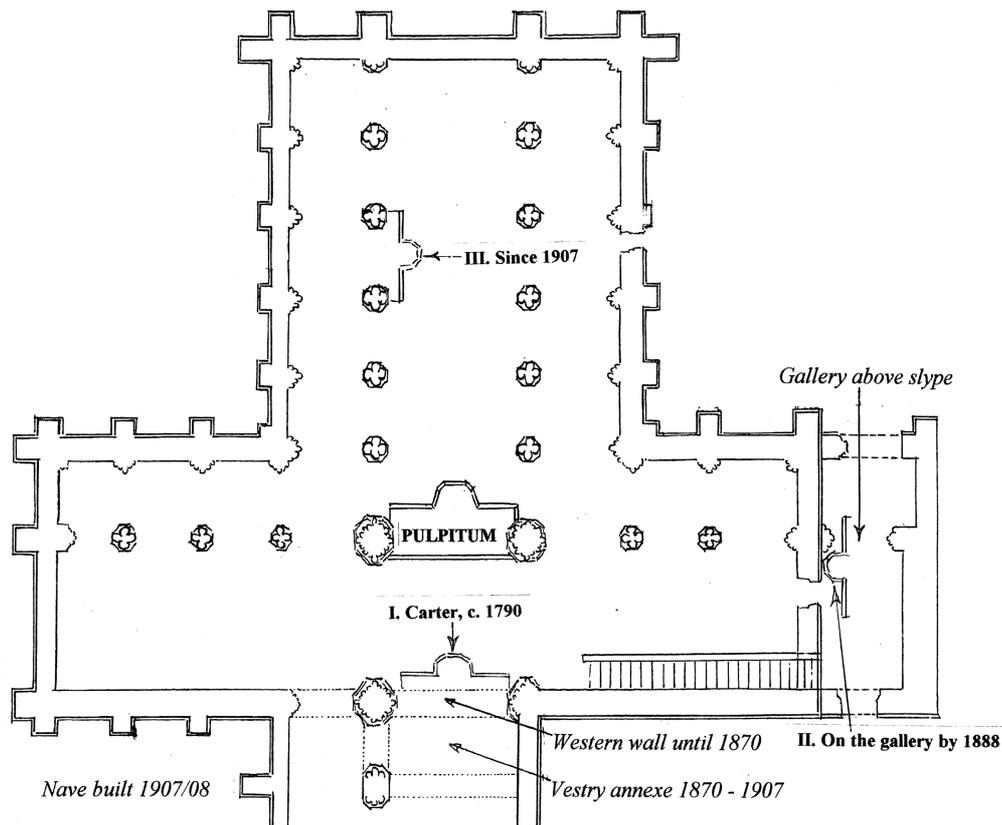


Fig. 6 Plan to show the movements of the fifteenth-century Lectern.

### THE PAINTED SCREEN OF SEVEN BISHOPS

This screen, which is in two separate groups, comprising three and four figures, has suffered more movements than any other feature in the Abbey. Carter states that it was 'Placed against the wall of the transept, removed of late years from the E. end of the aisles of the choir.'<sup>32</sup> On Carter's plan, it is shown against the west tower wall, mounted above the fifteenth-century Lectern. By 1823, according to Wright, the panels had been mounted on top of the pulpitum.<sup>33</sup> Whellan, writing in 1855, confirmed that the panels were still in this position.<sup>34</sup> In 1870, the blocked western arch of the tower was opened out to accommodate a single western bay, added to form a vestry. A photograph of 1890, in Newcastle Central Library, shows that the two sections of screen had been removed from the pulpitum to form a new screen at the entrance to the vestry. By 1907, they had been moved to serve the same purpose, when a vestry was placed at the end of the north transept, to allow for the building of the new nave. The panels were fixed into their present position, against the third bay of the north choir arcade, following the final re-ordering of 1907 (fig. 7).

In considering the most likely position for which the panels were originally intended, consideration must be given to the existing frame that provides support, and to the fact that one

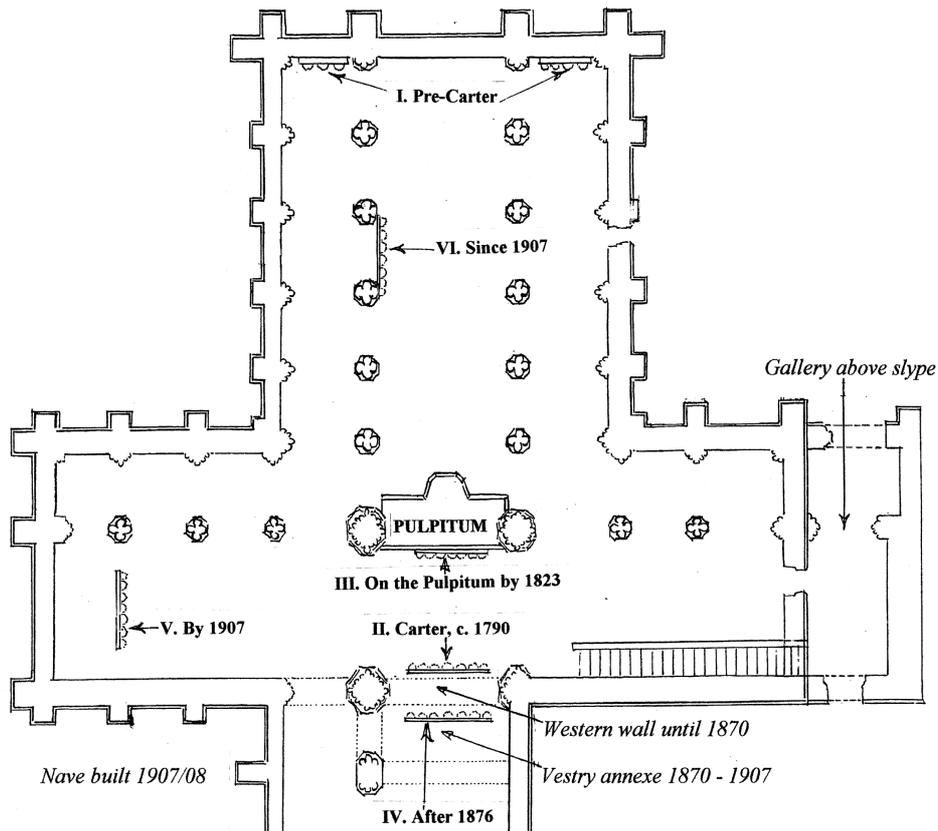


Fig. 7 Plan to show the movements of the screen of the painted bishops.

panel is almost certainly missing from the series. The argument for such a panel is compelling: of the twelve bishops of Hexham, eight were canonised, and it seems reasonable to assume that the screen once depicted all eight. The left-hand vertical frame member is damaged near its base, and the original paint surface may be seen to continue behind it, whilst examination of fig. 8 reveals several further interesting points. The two top rails contain mortices (A) which bear no relevance to the present construction; the left-hand vertical alone contains two tenons (B), which again, bear little relevance; the central shield of St George (C) is cut in two by the central frame members; whilst the final shield of St Andrew (D) is cropped by the right-hand vertical frame member; few of the chamfer stops (E) agree in a logical manner; and the buttresses at (F) do not accord with those remaining, suggesting that these may have been the terminal buttresses to the whole screen. It should also be noted that the carved rosettes are of two quite different types. Finally, examination of the painted backgrounds to the panels reveals an alternating rhythm of foliage and peacock feathers. A panel with a foliage background is clearly needed at the left-hand end to balance that on the extreme right. All of these factors suggest that the frame members are re-used from previous sources, possibly from the parclose screens that would have enclosed the five eastern chapels, demolished

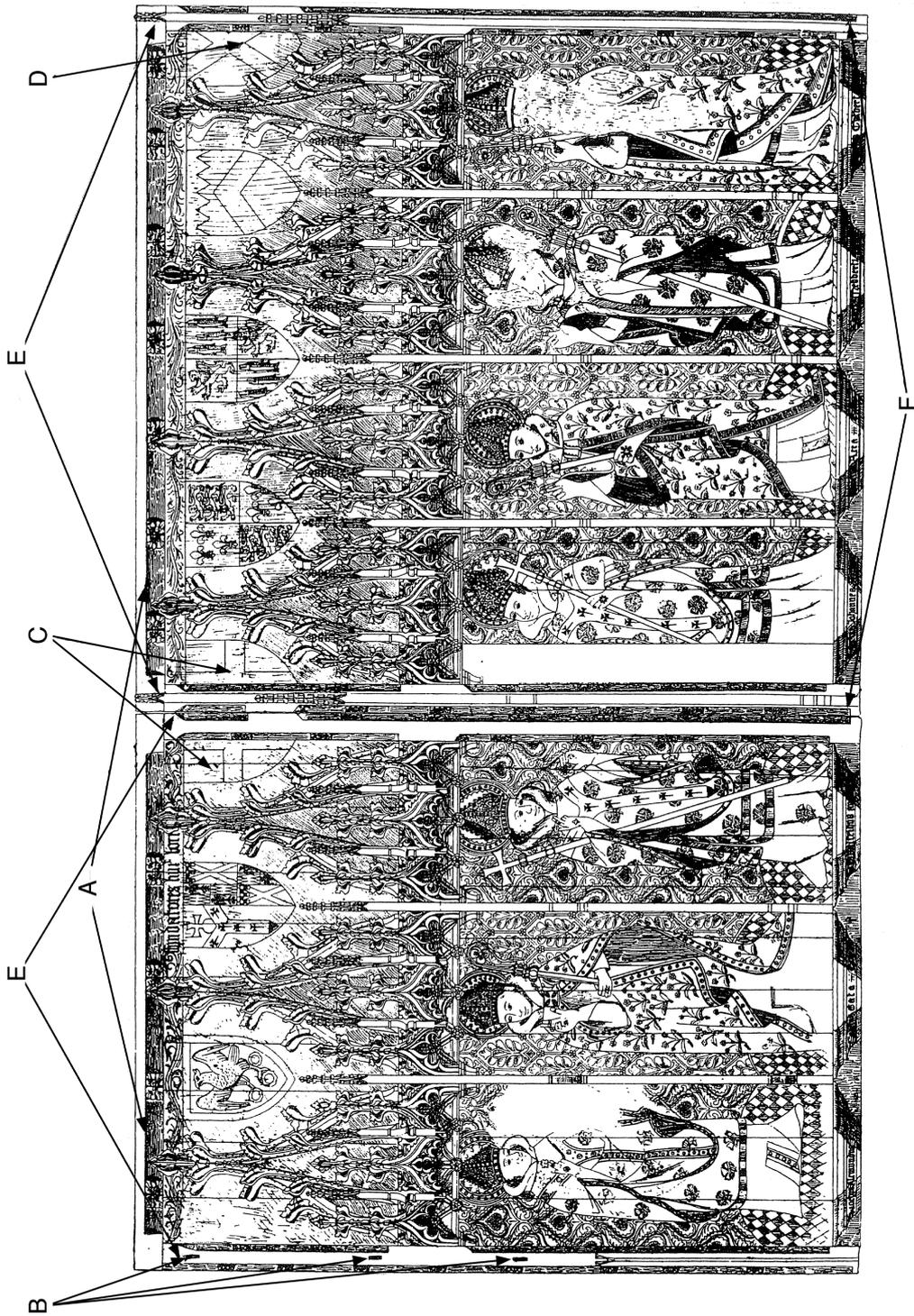


Fig. 8 The anomalies of the screen of painted bishops. From C. C. Hodges *The Abbey of St Andrew, Hexham*, 1888, Plate 51.

in 1858. Carter, on his drawing of various fragments, writes: 'St Mary's chapel behind the altar a place now for rubbish.'<sup>35</sup>

Why did a possible eighth panel disappear? If we examine the top two rails of the frame, the chamfer-stops clearly indicate two un-matched timbers of different length; the left-hand rail, as a re-used fragment, is too short to accommodate four panels. What we see today, therefore, is a substantial fragment of something larger, and set within a later frame. A reconstruction, allowing for the putative eighth panel, indicates that the eight bishops would have fitted across the east end of the choir as a Great Screen. If we consider this as a possible position, allowance must be made for the fact that Carter saw and drew the east end *before* the Gothic reredos was replaced in 1798 by a Classical screen.<sup>36</sup> A Great Screen, mounted above the original reredos and the architectural arrangements giving access to the eastern chapels, would certainly have obscured the lower part of a new Gothick east window, introduced in 1725.<sup>37</sup> A possible alternative setting could have been as a backing to the canons' stalls, before the canopies were cut down in 1740 to allow for the introduction of galleries. In this position they could have performed a duty similar to that still in operation at a neighbouring former Augustinian house, Carlisle Cathedral.

During the period of research, the Rector and Churchwardens very kindly gave permission for the removal of some of the modern oak boarding behind the screen. This was in the hope that some original fixing positions may have given a clue as to the originally intended position; as it proved, there was nothing to be found other than some pencilled initials: 'W. Civil. 16 Oct. 19[?]' and 'E. Rob[son?] 16/9/[?]

### THE SEDILIA

The five-stall sedilia currently occupy the second bay from the east of the south choir arcade, one which they almost certainly did not occupy before the Dissolution. After the rebuilding of the eastern bay in 1860, by Dobson, the High Altar was placed against the east wall in the customary position, at which time the sedilia were in various fragments. As part of the 1907 re-modelling of the choir, the High Altar was brought forward by one bay, to allow for the construction of the present vestry behind. It was at this time that the sedilia were reconstructed and placed in their present position. Carter again provides the earliest reference to the sedilia, which are clearly shown as having five compartments and standing in the easternmost bay of the south choir arcade (fig. 9). The first written reference comes from Mackenzie, who stated that: 'Near the south side of the altar is a beautiful gallery of carved oak, beneath which are three stalls, highly ornamented with tabernacle work and to which it is said the bishop and his attendants retired during the elevation of the host. Gaudily painted rods are now set up to show that it is the churchwardens' pew.'<sup>38</sup> Whilst the galleries, set up in 1740, may be seen in Nicholson's print of 1815 (fig. 3), there is no sign of 'highly ornamented' tabernacle work, and it is significant that *three* stalls rather than five are quoted.

Raine, writing about the sedilia in 1865, stated that: 'They joined the wall at the east end and left a passage between the opposite end and the pillar, not being wide enough to fill the space. . . . the base under the seat was of stone, but the superstructure of wood. Of the latter, a remnant is now preserved in the north transept, in the shape of a bench with a plain back, like a long settle, divided into four seats by three openwork partitions resembling buttresses, each having a similar termination. Two elbows or finials of the lower portion of these partitions remain; the one resembling a nondescript animal sitting on its haunches, the other, an

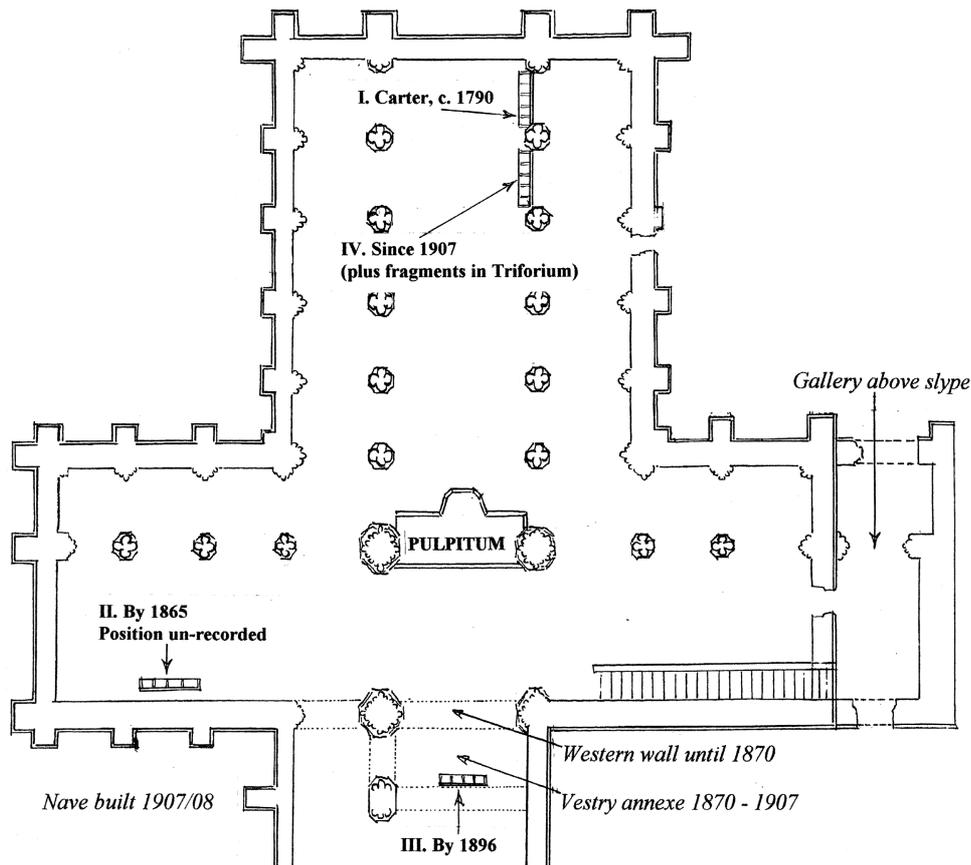


Fig. 9 Plan to show the movements of the sedilia.

angel holding a shield charged with a bugle horn, strung between three Roman letters W; the armorial bearings perhaps of the family Woodhorne.<sup>39</sup> Whilst Raine does not tell us where in the north transept this fragment was placed, he does provide valuable information as to what then survived. The stone substructure was lost, but the bench, buttresses and finials survive today, although he refers to *four* stalls rather than five.

Following the fearful ravaging of the choir in the 'restoration' of 1858–60, the sedilia, which had been moved to the north transept, were by 1896 consigned to the new vestry built on the west side of the tower. Hinds informs us that: 'The sedilia of four stalls is of carved oak, and stood on the south side of the altar before the period of destruction. They are still preserved in the vestry, though in a mutilated condition.'<sup>40</sup> Under the plans of 1907 to restore the choir, we find: 'The original sedilia, now standing in the Vestry, should also be restored and refixed in their proper place in the Choir. The missing canopies, (fragments of which are amongst other fragments in the triforium) were of a very rich character, and its complete restoration might cost as much as £250.'<sup>41</sup> From the same source, we read: 'The canopies of four remaining seats are intact, but have lost their carved gablets and tabernacles. The fifth stall can be supplied and the tabernacles as well. A liberal sum has been allowed for this work.'<sup>42</sup>

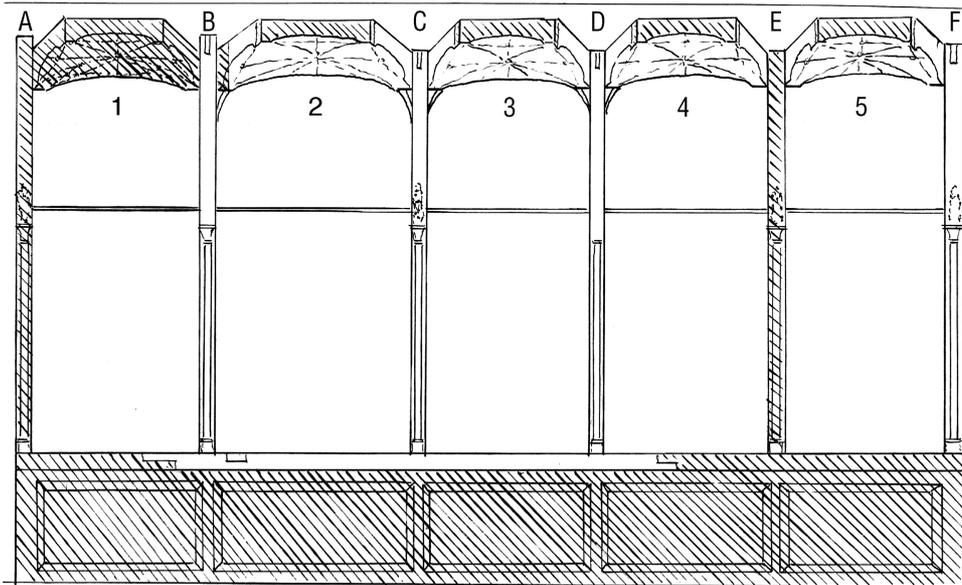


Fig. 10 The sedilia (scale 1:25) showing original work; new work is shown hatched.

Fig. 9 indicates the various movements of the sedilia, and with reference to fig. 10, it is possible to clarify the often contradictory and confusing accounts of their constituents. The oak base is new, as are the two end sections of bench. Verticals A and E, together with canopy 1 are also new. Canopies 2 to 5 are original but have new front fillets 17 mm in thickness. It should be noticed that a small portion of the left-hand side of canopy 2 is also new.

It seems evident that the sedilia were never of five stalls, but of four, with a credence at the eastern end. The evidence to support this view is as follows. In fig. 11, which shows the left face of vertical B, we notice a horizontal slot running into a vertical slot, which in turn, rises the full height of the division, and which engages with a short slot in the original bench section. The alignment of these slots immediately suggests housing for a rear panel and shelf. Figs. 12 and 13 show fragments discovered in the triforium, and it will be seen that the upright section contains vertical and horizontal slots, whilst there is also a slot at the rear of the canopy, which also contains a small section of an adjoining canopy. When these were placed against the existing portions of the sedilia, the slots lined up exactly, and the extra fragment of canopy matched the replacement work in canopy 2. This important discovery, and the fact that the credence was less deep than the sedilia stalls, means that the whole construction could have been moved further east. The credence then backed onto a shaft of the main pier, and this arrangement would have left a gap at the western end, to which Raine has referred, sufficient to allow a person to pass through, enabling access to be gained to the sacristy that formerly stood against the south side of the choir aisle.

### THE STALLS

The stalls with their misericords, are in the traditional place on the north and south sides of the choir, with return stalls against the east face of the pulpitum. They are shown on Carter's



Fig. 11 The vertical and horizontal slots in the first compartment of the sedilia.

plan and the earliest written record appears in 1811, when Mackenzie stated that: '... under the organ is a circle of ancient seats, formed of curiously carved oak. Each seat is a chair, with elbows or arms quaintly carved, and the bottom made to be occasionally turned up, when the under face displays a grotesque mask, bouquet of flowers, or other ornament. They have been divided by beautiful mimic pinnacles of superior execution, like those in the front of the shrine [the Leschman chantry chapel] but these have been lopped away to support galleries.'<sup>43</sup> This gives us some idea of the stalls when they were less emasculated than at present, although Mackenzie, writing some seventy years after they had been cut down, possibly never knew them in their entirety. However, the remains of the destruction wrought in 1740 by the introduction of the galleries, were still available. Hodges wrote that: '... the remainder along with most of the stanchions of the canopies, were treated as lumber, but have fortunately been preserved.'<sup>44</sup> Hinds informs us that: 'A great quantity of carved woodwork was taken out of the church in 1858. Seventy-two of the carved standards of the stall canopies lay in a joiners' yard until a few years ago.'<sup>45</sup> The wanton destruction continued with the granting of a Faculty on 3 July 1858, for the removal of pews, stalls and benches, and the pulpit and reading desk. Hodges commented that: 'In 1858, a wholesale 'restoration' was begun, which resulted in the destruction or removal of nearly all the ancient fittings of the choir, ... the whole affair is a permanent disgrace to Hexham.'<sup>46</sup> By 1907, we learn that: 'A single front



Fig. 12 Fragment from the triforium showing vertical and horizontal slots.

Fig. 13 Canopy fragment from the triforium showing rear slot and mortice.



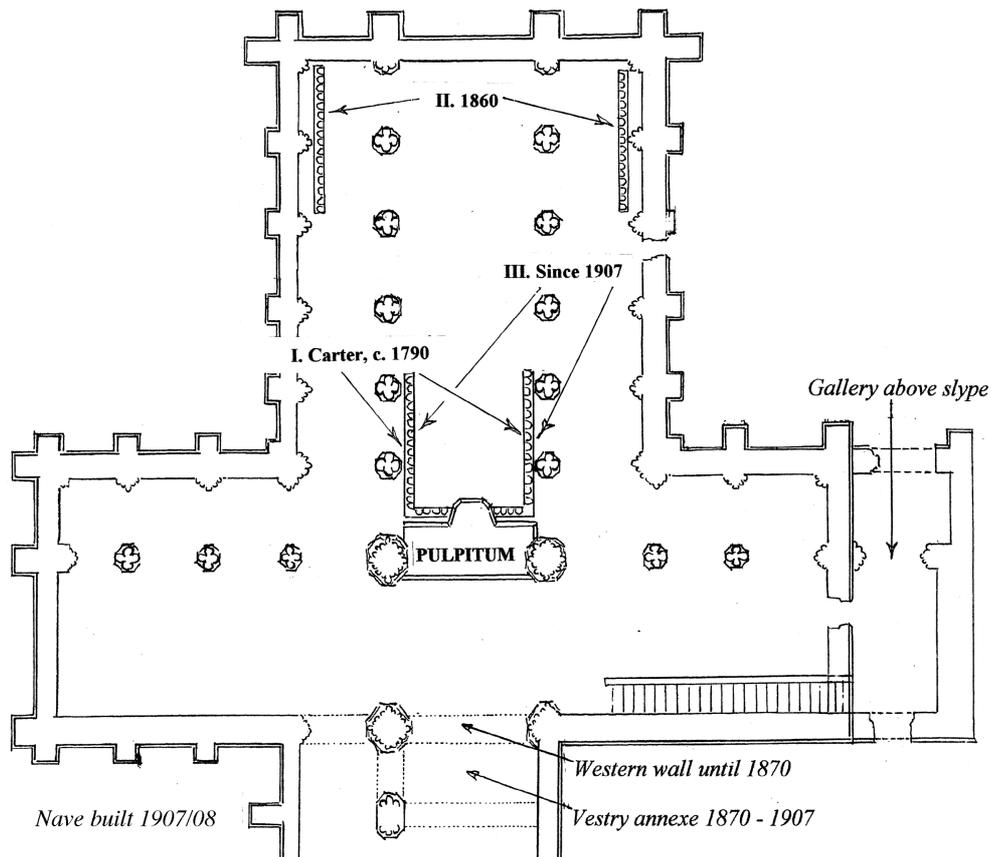


Fig. 14 Plan to show the movements of the stalls.

upright, moulded and carrying a crocketed pinnacle survives complete with its tenons: likewise a single mutilated specimen of the heads of the canopies, of which there was one to each stall.<sup>47</sup> Such a fragment still survives in the triforium, though without the pinnacle. The broken tenon matches precisely the modern inserts into the mortices in the stalls. Not only were the stall canopies removed in order to accommodate the galleries, but so also were the reading desks, to allow for the introduction of box-pews.

Fortunately, four of the poppy-heads were retained and incorporated in the present arrangement of the stalls, whilst three of the desks survive. Of these, two have an original 45-degree angle at one end, indicating that they were part of the return stalls, whilst the third has an original angle at one end, with a new angle at the other. This is because the three desks were grouped around the font to form a baptistery in front of the vestry annexe on the west side of the tower. These three desks are now stored within the north-west porch of the nave. In the alterations to the choir of 1858–60, the stalls were moved to the eastern ends of the north and south choir aisles (fig. 14). In 1907, they were returned to their original position. Fig. 15 indicates exactly what remains of the original stalls; new work is shown hatched.

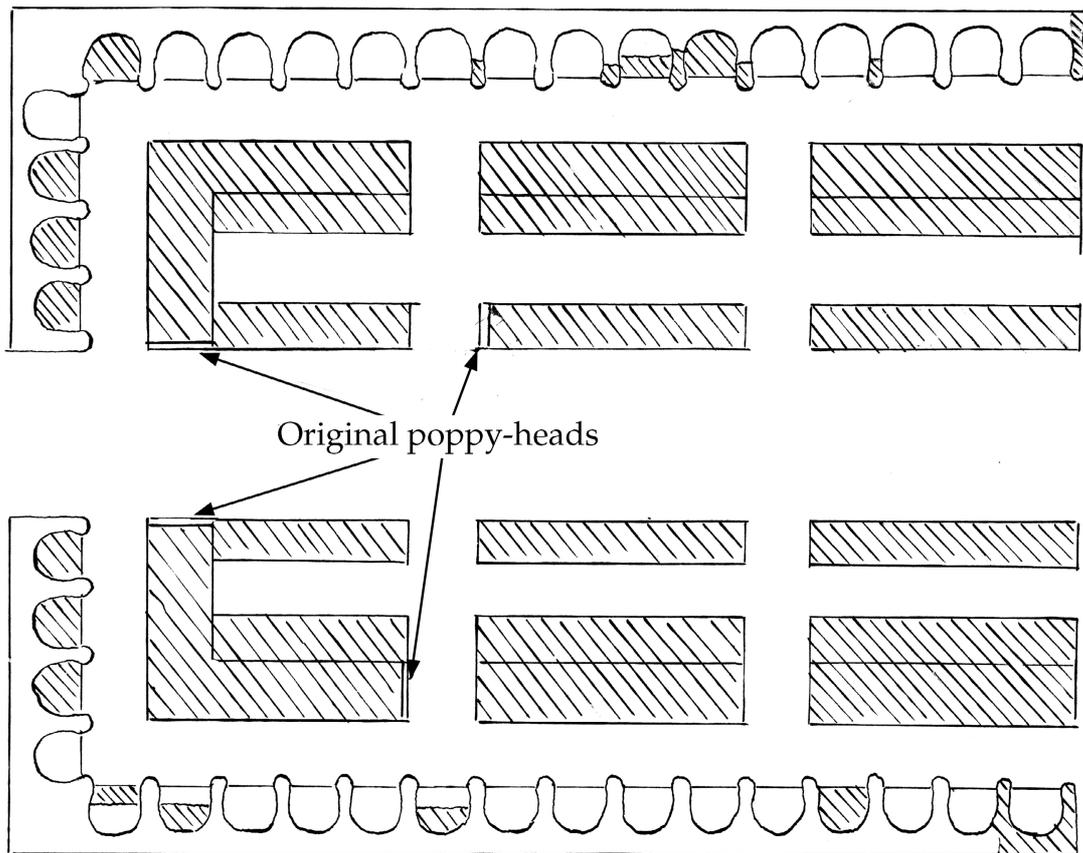


Fig. 15 The present arrangement of the stalls, showing original work; new work is shown hatched.

### THREE SETS OF PAINTED PANELS

These will be considered as a group, because at one time, they were all set along the top of the west face of the pulpitum. First, the four panels of the Dance of Death, which are now within the 1907 panelling that supports the painted screen of seven bishops (fig. 16). These paintings are extremely rare, and are the only group on wood panels to be seen in an English church. A complete set in the Guild Chapel at Stratford-on-Avon is now covered over because of serious deterioration; two painted stone panels survive in the Markham Chantry in Newark parish church; one stained glass panel may be seen in St Andrew's church, Norwich, and a few examples survive in the ribbed vault of the Lady Chapel at Rosslyn in Scotland.

The first record of the Hexham examples comes from Carter, who viewed them when they were mounted on top of the pulpitum. His carefully annotated drawings survive in the British Library, (B.L. Add. Ms. 29933) and comprise: *Death and a Cardinal*, f. 116; *Death and a King*, f. 117; *Death and an Emperor*, f. 118; and *Death and a Pope*, f. 119. Carter also drew a fifth panel, f. 115, but this has unfortunately disappeared within recent years. Two records of this serious loss survive in the form of Carter's drawing, on the bottom of which he wrote: 'This figure

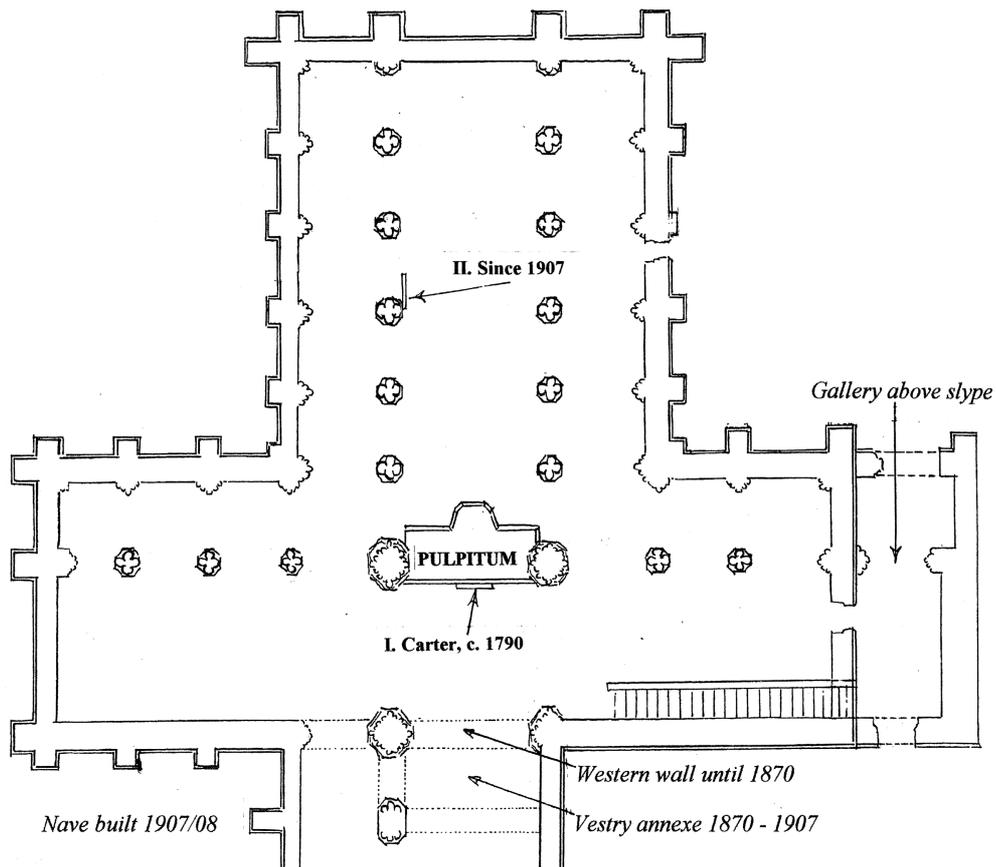


Fig. 16 Plan to show the movements of the Dance of Death panels.

may serve for the introducer or chorus to the following Death's dance painting in the upper panel of the foregoing screen. [the pulpitum] That I might copy the originals of this and the following one, I had a scaffold rais'd for the purpose of bestowing every attention that such pretious and only remains of the like in the kingdom deserv'd.<sup>48</sup> In addition, there is a written record from Pauline Plummer's 1960 report on the condition of the Abbey's painted panels, in which she noted that there was a tenth panel included with the nine Passion panels, depicting a figure in civilian dress of c. 1500.<sup>49</sup> This is without doubt the panel that Carter saw and drew, and its disappearance has therefore happened since 1960.

Turning to the nine panels of the Passion, these are now towards the east end of the north choir aisle (fig. 17). They obviously did not attract Carter's attention when they were mounted on the pulpitum, but it is interesting that together with the two paintings of the Visitation and Annunciation, mounted above the internal doors of the pulpitum, they are the only narrative subject in the Abbey, all others depicting either the early bishops or disciples.

The third set of panels now forms the dado to the parclose screen in St Etheldreda's Chapel in the aisle of the south transept (fig. 18). The ten panels are of the bishops of Hexham. A

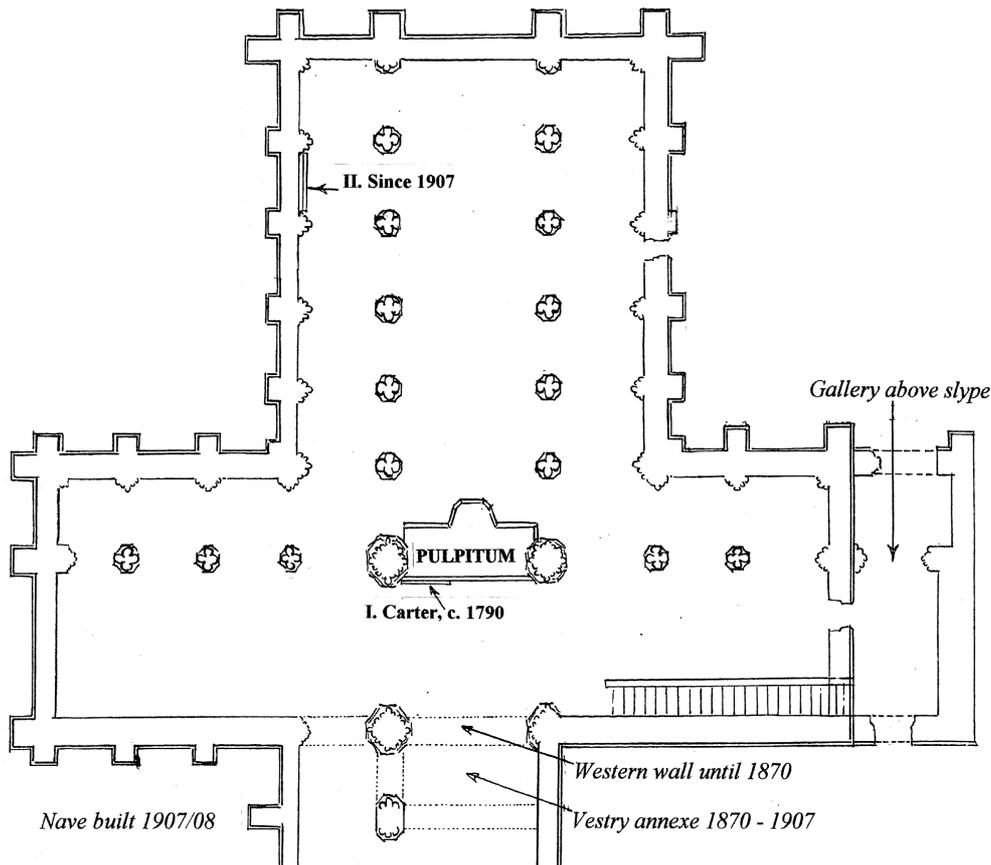


Fig. 17 Plan to show the movements of the Passion panels.

photograph shows the west face of the pulpitum in its pre-1907 state, with the three groups of panels mounted along the top; the nine Passion panels, followed by the five Dance of Death panels, and finally, the ten panels just referred to. By 1890, the screen of seven bishops had been removed, whilst the remaining twenty-four panels were removed during the destructive mishandling of the pulpitum in 1907, when it was dismantled so that the stone plinth could be reduced in height; the internal stone staircases were demolished, and the large traceried panels above the dado cut and hinged, to afford a view of the choir from the new nave.

It remains to consider where all these panels may originally have been sited. It is known that there were five chapels in the fourteenth-century transverse section beyond the choir. The panels are all small, and could have formed part of the parclose screens that would have separated the chapels, or they may have fulfilled a similar function in the arrangements of the chapels that once filled the eastern aisles of the transepts. There is clear evidence that the chapels in the north transept were once separated by stone perpyn walls. The Passion panels suggest a 'themed' chapel; we do not know if there was a complete Dance of Death series, which may have furnished a chapel on the lines of the German *Totentanzkapellen*.

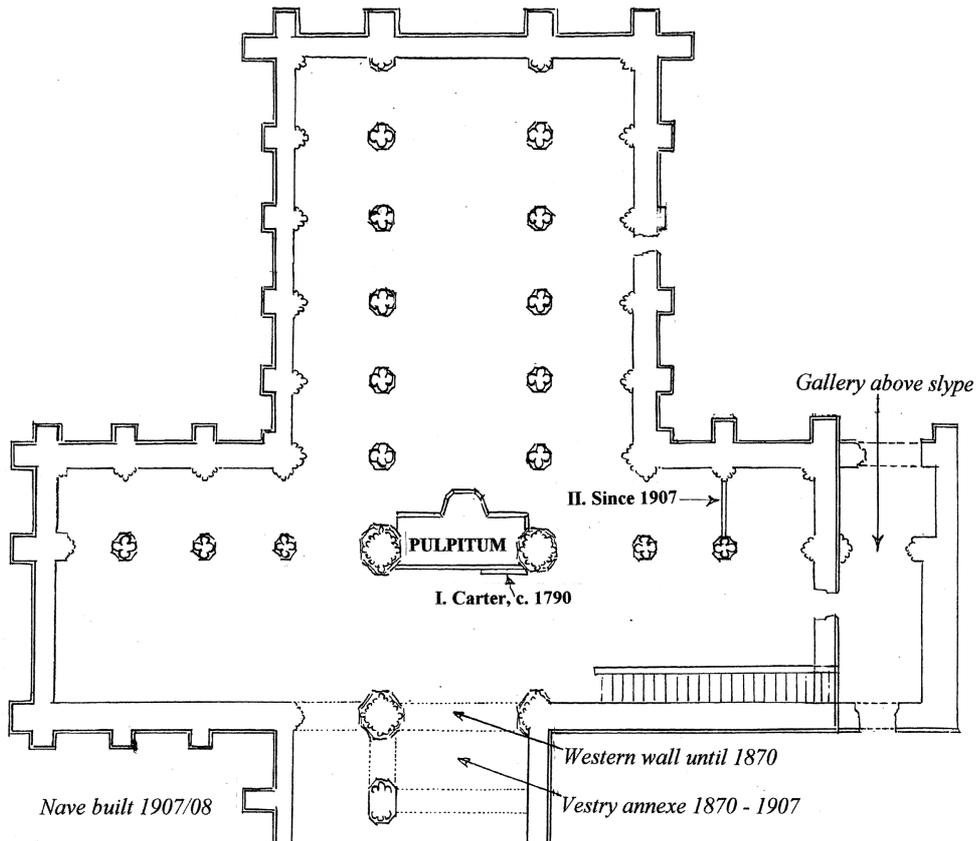


Fig. 18 Plan to show the movements of the dado panels in St Etheldreda's Chapel.

### THE PARCLOSE SCREEN IN ST ETHELDREDA'S CHAPEL

This final fitting encloses the north side of the chapel in the south transept (fig. 19). Carter's plan of c. 1790 indicates screens enclosing both north and west sides of this chapel, though whether one of these formed the surviving screen cannot now be certain. Hodges informs us that, 'As late as 1869, a screen remained in the aisle of the south transept dividing the chapels. It was removed to form part of the vestry partition.'<sup>50</sup> When that vestry was built on the west side of the tower, part of the screen was set up alongside the two groups of bishops. When the building of the nave commenced in 1907, and the vestry was moved into the north transept, once again parts of the screen, and the panels of the seven bishops, were used.

Together with so much of the carved woodwork at Hexham, a good deal of the screen appears to have been discarded during the 1858–60 'improvements'. We are told: 'How many parclose screens, or fragments, or remains of them were thrown out in 1858, we shall never know, but there are residents in Hexham who bought carved oak work at that time for five shillings a cart load.'<sup>51</sup> Permission to investigate many of the older properties in the town, might prove a rewarding experience! What we see today in St Etheldreda's Chapel is a recon-

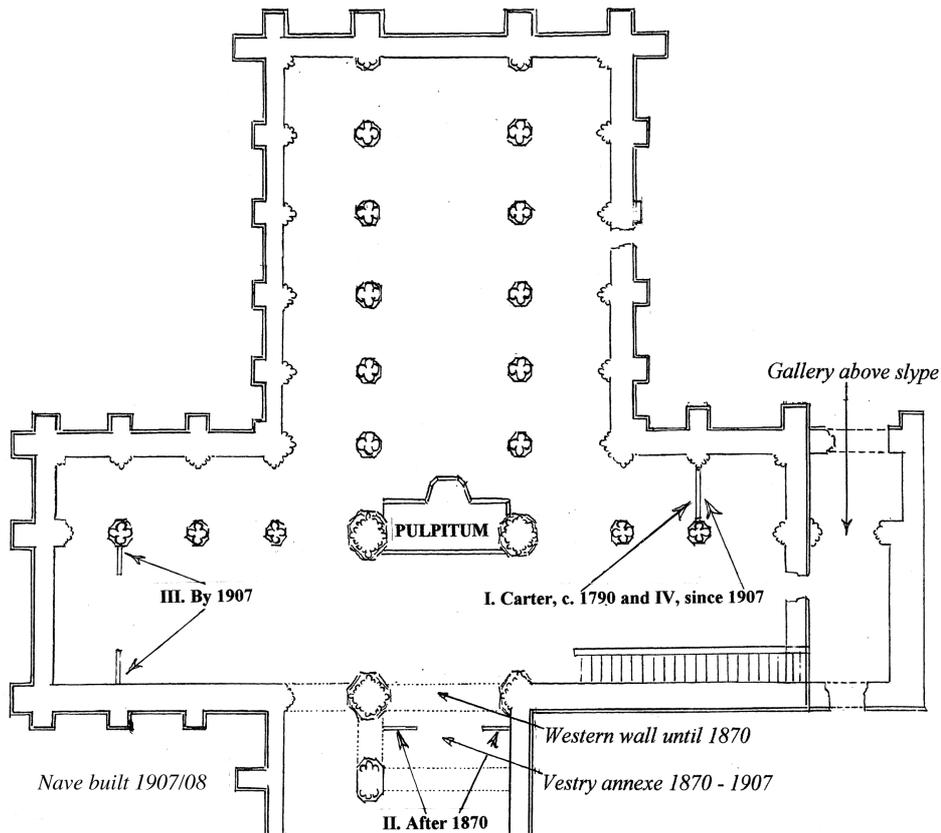


Fig. 19 Plan to show the movements of the screen in St Etheldreda's Chapel.

struction of 1907–8 (fig. 20), using parts of an original screen, but patched with pieces from other sources within the Abbey.

### CONCLUSION

With so large a collection of carved woodwork still surviving, one might seek stylistic links. Prior Leschman of Hexham (1480–1491) and Prior Gondibour of Carlisle (1484–1507) were contemporaries, as were Gondibour, Prior Smithson of Hexham (1491–1507) and Prior Castell of Durham (1494–1519). There is a close similarity of detail between the tracery and buttress elements on the Leschman chantry and the Gondibour screen at Carlisle (a former Augustinian house). There is an even closer similarity of detail between Smithson's pulpitum and the choir pew-ends at Jarrow, presented by Castell. Whether all of these works emanated from the same source, and where such a workshop might have been located, is not known, but much fine work was produced in the North during this period, ranging from Ripon, Lancaster and Cockersand to Fowlis Easter and Lincluden; Jarrow, Hexham and Carlisle form a convenient central range between these two groups.

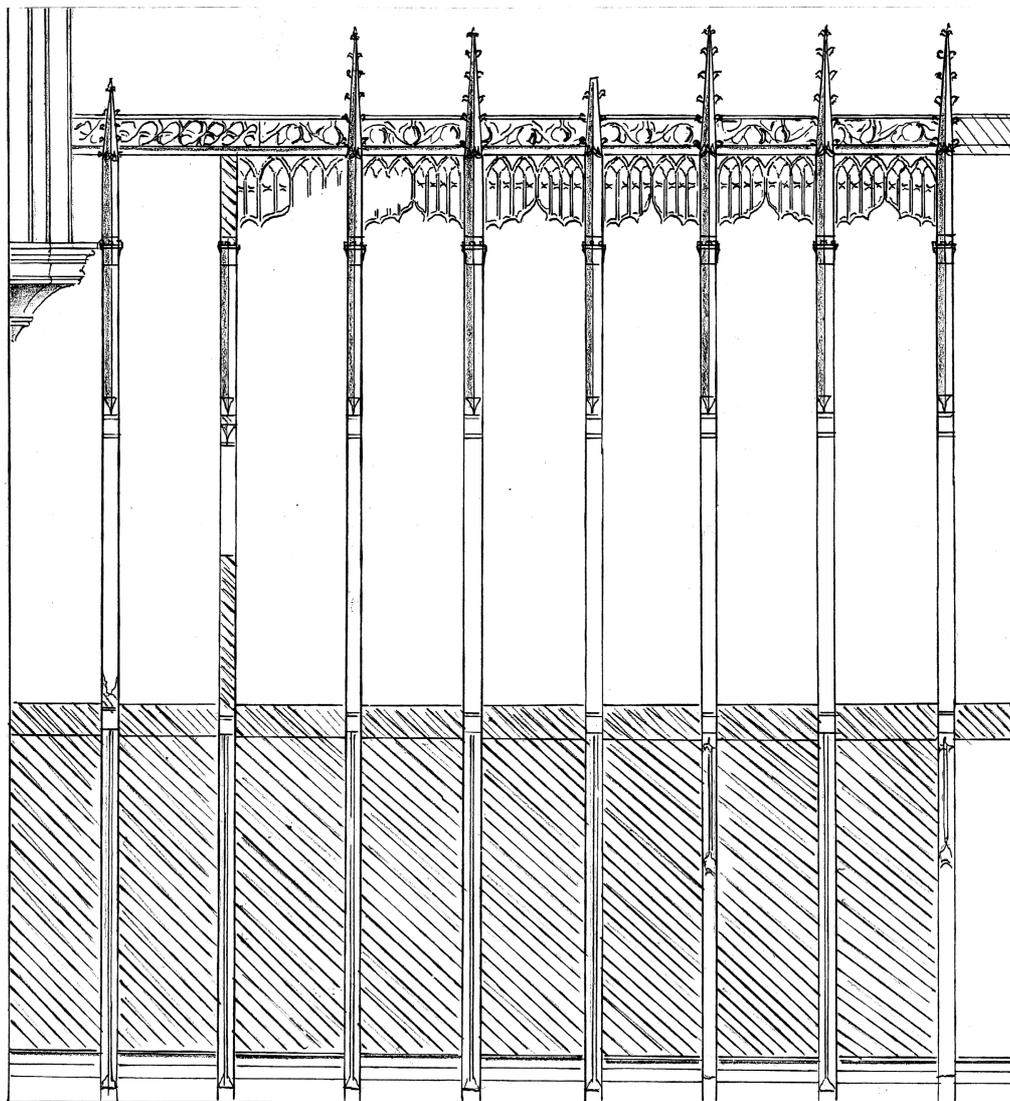


Fig. 20 The north face of the screen in St Etheldreda's Chapel (scale 1:25) showing original work; new work is shown hatched.

Hexham, of course, was not alone in suffering the movement and destruction of fittings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One has only to think of Ely, where there were interventions in the choir by James Essex in 1770 and by Gilbert Scott in 1852. Such interventions were usually the result of changing liturgical patterns. At Hexham there was the conversion of the canons' choir into a parish church; the destruction of the eastern chapels, which no longer served a liturgical purpose; the necessary rebuilding of the eastern bay which was threatening collapse. All of these posed a threat to the existence of so many fine fifteenth-century fittings, which, by their sheer number, could have proved an embarrassment when finding new ways of incorporating them into a new liturgy. With the concept of Purgatory dismissed, chantry chapels could become family pews, or be swept away; with the eighteenth-century requirement for maximum seating, galleries were introduced which could not be obscured by fine canopied stalls; with the theatre of the Mass replaced by the occasional low-Anglican Lord's Supper, sedilia were no longer required for Celebrants and their assistants; and with the completion of the parish church by the building of a new nave in 1907, the pulpitum, which had enclosed the privacy of the *Opus Dei*, could now be cut about and opened up to afford a view of the High Altar, as well as having its fine proportions distorted by placing an organ thereon. However, a working religious building is not a museum, and we may at least be thankful that so much has survived.

It is pleasing to record that since the preparation of this paper, Mr Colin Dallison, the Honorary Archivist of the Abbey, has discovered a wooden chest full of carved fragments. Of these, I have been able to identify thirteen, which have now been re-instated.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTES

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<sup>3</sup> H. Maxwell, trans., *The Chronicle of Lanercost, 1272–1346*, Glasgow, (1913), 136.

<sup>4</sup> W. Dugdale, in his *Monasticon Anglicanum*, published in three volumes between 1655 and 1673; whilst giving a view of the eastern chapels and the replacement late 14th-century east window of the choir, he provided no information on the interior arrangements at Hexham.

<sup>5</sup> W. Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum*, London (1724), 62.

<sup>6</sup> J. Wallis, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Northumberland*, London, (1769), 97.

<sup>7</sup> T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland*, Vol. 2, London, (1778), 290–4. A. B. Wright, *History of Hexham*, Alnwick, (1823), 78.

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- <sup>9</sup> J. Raine, *The Priory of Hexham: Its Chroniclers, Endowments and Annals*, 1, SS, 44, (1863).
- <sup>10</sup> W. B. Scott, *Antiquarian Gleanings in the North of England*, London, (1851), Plate 35.
- <sup>11</sup> C. C. Hodges and J. Gibson, *A Guide to the Priory Church of St. Andrew, Hexham*, Hexham, (1913), 66.
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- <sup>13</sup> Wallis (1769), 96.
- <sup>14</sup> E. Mackenzie, *A History of Northumberland*, 1, Newcastle, (1811), 278.
- <sup>15</sup> J. Fairless, *A Guide to the Abbey Church at Hexham*, Hexham, (1853), 12.
- <sup>16</sup> Wallis (1769), 97.
- <sup>17</sup> Hutchinson (1776), 98.
- <sup>18</sup> Mackenzie (1811), 280.
- <sup>19</sup> W. H. Longstaffe, 'Hexham church,' AA<sup>2</sup>, 5 (1861), 150–8, at 156.
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- <sup>21</sup> J. Raine, *The Priory of Hexham: Its Chroniclers, Endowments and Annals*, 2, SS, 46 (1863), lxxvii.
- <sup>22</sup> *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 19 (1863), 58.
- <sup>23</sup> *Abbey Chronicle* (June 1960), 1.
- <sup>24</sup> C. C. Hodges and J. Gibson, *Hexham and its Abbey* (1919), 50.
- <sup>25</sup> Savage and Hodges (1907), 23.
- <sup>26</sup> Mackenzie (1811), 276.
- <sup>27</sup> Longstaffe (1861), 157.
- <sup>28</sup> C. C. Hodges, *Ecclesia Hagustaldensis: The Abbey of St. Andrew, Hexham. A Monograph*. Privately Printed. (1888), 47.
- <sup>29</sup> *Hexham Parish Magazine* (1909), 39.
- <sup>30</sup> Hutchinson (1776), 105.
- <sup>31</sup> C. C. Hodges, 'The conventual buildings of the priory at Hexham', AA<sup>3</sup>, 21 (1924), 214–23, at 223.
- <sup>32</sup> J. Carter, B. L. Add. Ms. 29943, fol. 172.
- <sup>33</sup> A. B. Wright (1823), 71.
- <sup>34</sup> W. Whellan, *History, Topography and Directory of Northumberland*, London and Manchester, (1855), 834.
- <sup>35</sup> J. Carter, B. L. Add. Ms. 29933, fol. 137.
- <sup>36</sup> Mackenzie (1811), 277.
- <sup>37</sup> Hodges, *Monograph*, 49.
- <sup>38</sup> Mackenzie (1811), 277.
- <sup>39</sup> Raine, 2 (1863), lvi.
- <sup>40</sup> A. B. Hinds, *A History of Northumberland*, 3, Newcastle, (1896), 194.
- <sup>41</sup> Savage and Hodges, *Record* (1907), 23.
- <sup>42</sup> *ibid*, 52.
- <sup>43</sup> Mackenzie (1811), 278.
- <sup>44</sup> Hodges, *Monograph* (1888), 49.
- <sup>45</sup> Hinds (1896), 194.
- <sup>46</sup> Hodges, *Monograph* (1888), 49.
- <sup>47</sup> Savage and Hodges, *Record* (1907), 51.
- <sup>48</sup> J. Carter, B. L. Add. Ms. 29933, f. 115.
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- <sup>50</sup> Hodges, *Monograph* (1888), 46.
- <sup>51</sup> Hodges and Gibson (1913), 63.