

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST MARY, MORPETH
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
WINTER 2012/2013



The exterior of the north wall, before works

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The Parish Church of St Mary, Morpeth.

An Archaeological Watching Brief, Winter 2012/2013

1. Summary

1.1 A new north doorway was created at the west end of the north wall of the north aisle of St Mary's parish church, a predominantly 14th century building. This entailed the destruction of the remains of the medieval north doorway, the head of which had already been destroyed when a window was inserted in the mid-20th century. The surviving jambs of the doorway were recorded before removal. A watching brief during the insertion of new services within the aisle revealed only the remains of a 19th-century heating duct. Outside the church a service trench was entirely in ground that had already been disturbed; remains of a 19th and 20th century semi-subterranean boiler house were uncovered, and briefly recorded.

2. Introduction

2.1 The parish church of Morpeth stands on Kirkhill, on the west side of the main Newcastle Road c 0.7 km south of the town centre; in a churchyard that has been expanded westward into an extensive cemetery, the church, a Grade I listed building, is a substantial structure almost entirely of 14th century date, consisting of a five-bay aisled nave with west tower and south porch, and a three-bay chancel with a north vestry.

2.2 A scheme of works were carried out over winter 2012/2013 which entailed the creation of a new north doorway (essential for disabled access to the building; entry by the south door entails a series of steps), the formation of a service duct within the north aisle and the creation of a new drain following the pathway on the north side of the church.

3. The North Wall and North Doorway

3.1 An Archaeological Assessment of the Church (Ryder 2003) saw the western bay of the north wall of the north aisle, in which the new opening was to be constructed, to have been largely re-faced in the 19th century; three of its four buttresses were of 19th-century date as well (a 19th-century plan by C Hodgson Fowler dates them to 1845) and its window was described as looking 'thoroughly 19th century or even 20th century'. The jambs of a blocked doorway were noted below the window, but no further comment made on them. Internally the wall was plastered, and no old features visible.

3.2 In advance of works the internal wall face was stripped, and measured drawings made of both internal and external faces. A faculty for the insertion of the window, which took place in 1953, was traced¹; an accompanying drawing showed the segmental-pointed head of the former doorway, destroyed by the insertion of the window.

3.3 On the external face of the wall the jambs of the doorway formed straight joints, 1.10 m apart, rising from the top of the chamfered plinth to the sill of the 1953 window 1.35 m above. Most but not all of the jamb stones seemed to course in with the wall fabric, of which only a few stones, mostly in the lowest course, look 'old'. As pointed out in the 2003 assessment, the manner in which the walling stones stood 'proud' of the ashlar jambs of the window dressings – which were presumably set vertical – rather suggests they are old work that has been re-tooled rather than a full 19th-century rebuild.

3.4 Stripping the plaster from the internal face of the wall revealed the jambs of a splayed opening 1.32 m wide, coursed in with the adjacent walling and apparently coeval with the wall, ie of 14th century date. The opening was blocked with roughly-squared stone laid in irregular courses, with no clue as to its date.

3.5 When the blocking stonework was revealed, the former doorway was revealed to have jambs with an internal rebate and externally a narrow chamfer, which had been mutilated by a small external rebate being cut into it; within the chamfer the doorway had been exactly 1.00 m wide. There was no evidence of any drawbar tunnel (such as the south door has) but the west jamb had one old pintle for the former door (see appendix 1), leaded into position, and the east jamb a mutilated plate with a circular hole for a bolt, which unfortunately was misplaced by the contractors before it could be recorded in detail.

4 Works within the Aisle

4.1 The north aisle has a 20th-century concrete floor; a new duct was cut in this, 250mm wide, against the west and north walls. Removal of the concrete revealed a layer of loose broken stone, including some quite large slabs, with cavities between; these were removed; at the full required depth of 250 mm there was only loose material along the west wall, but on the north was laid brickwork, with a layer of mortar on top, sooted on its upper surface; this was interpreted as the base of a 19th-century heating duct.

¹ Woodhorn Archive, ref DN/E/8/2/2/1840.

5. Works outside the Church

5.1 A service trench was opened from the new north door running westwards along the line of the churchyard path, to (and beyond) the lych gate. As expected, this trench entirely lay within the line of previous service trenches, and only disturbed ground was encountered. Immediately outside the new doorway the 1865 pre-restoration plan shows a buttress, but no evidence of this survived. The only structural remains seen were those of a boiler room set between the third and fourth buttresses (from the west) of the aisle. In its final stage this had been a semi-subterranean structure 3.2 by 2.2 m internally, rather shorter than the 'furnace' showing on Wilson's 1870 plan² (p.2) which extended 4.9 m from buttress to buttress, and was entered by a flight of steps at the north-east corner. This original structure was of stone, but at some time it was remodelled (and shortened at its west end) in brick. In the mid/late 20th century the boiler room had been abandoned and its above-ground structure demolished (it would; appear to have had a pent roof, of which some evidences remained on the aisle wall c 1m above the ground). It was partly infilled with debris (including two fitting pieces of an 18th-century monument, see appendix) and a concrete pad placed over it, supported on girders, with access to the partially-infilled space being by a hatch at the north-east corner; the pad later failed and additional support in the form of several acro props had to be installed.

At the south end of the east wall of the boiler room was a bricked-up opening which had clearly carried a flue which rose inside the adjacent buttress to a vent at the top.

6. Discussion

6.1 At the commencement of works, insufficient could be seen of the north doorway to determine its date; although the external wall face at least looked to be either re-faced or rebuilt, although the very existence of a long-blocked doorway in this position made a medieval origin likely. The head of the doorway had already been destroyed by the insertion of the 1953 window above; stripping of plaster and removal of infill showed that the lower parts of the internal jambs of the doorway survived, and were in fact contemporary with the wall, and that the external opening had originally had a single chamfer, later mutilated by the cutting of an external rebate presumably for an outward-opening door. There was no evidence for the date of the infill; it was quite possibly post-medieval. The opening is not shown on Hodgson Fowler's 1865 drawings, but is shown as blocked on Wilson's 1870 plan.

Peter Ryder February 2013

² It was probably constructed during the 1865 restoration ; the pre-restoration plan shows no sign of it.

7. References

- Ryder, P.F. (2003) St Mary's Church. Morpeth. An Archaeological Assessment December 2003. (MS report, for Diocese of Newcastle)
- Wilson, F.R. (1870) Churches of the Archdeaconry of Lindisfarne. Newcastle 152-155

8. Appendix 1. Pintle from the North Door

8.1 This was presumably the lower of a pair of pintles fixed to the interior of the rebate of the west jamb of the doorway. It consists of a plate originally 170 by 40 mm and c 10 mm thick which has been split and splayed into a Y-form, with the two ends being bent and twisted down to form tangs, and an upright shaft 60 mm high and 28 mm across fitted through it, and hammered to a shallow dome-like form on the lower face. The exposed sections of shaft and plate were coated with an oxidised layer; the tanged ends of the plate, which had been coated in lead, were still clean grey iron.

8.2 From the manner in which the pintle was fixed into the wall it would seem highly likely to be contemporary with the wall fabric, that is, of 14th century date.

9. Appendix 2. Monument

9.1 In the loose infill of the external boiler room, two matching fragments of an 18th century monument were found, together making up a piece c 600 by 400 mm and 40 mm thick of fine-grained greenish sandstone. The lettering is of excellent quality (despite the strange mis-spelling of 'Burial' in the first line).

Biural Place of T...
Taylor of Stan...
 ..on died Jan 2. 1772..
 Wife died Mar^h 16.1722 aged..
 ..June 2 1773 aged 13 Year..
 ..ove *Thomas Taylor* died A..

Nowhere does the original edge of the stone survive; the top and sides are ragged breaks, and the base has been sawn on a slightly oblique line.

9.2. It is no clear what the original form of the monument was; it would seem more likely to be part of a table tomb than a headstone. 'Stan' is probably Stannington, the next parish to the south.

10. Appendix 3. Daybook Log of Archaeologist's Visits to Site

26 October

Morning visit with Karen Derham (County Archaeologist); digging trial pit nr NE corner of church (in small area where proposed service trench did not follow path, revealed only disturbed ground.

Tuesday 20 Nov.

Afternoon visit, Internal face blocked N door stripped – PFR drew/photographed, also recorded external face in gathering dusk.

Thurs 22 Nov.

Series of small trial holes opened on line of trench along inside of W and N walls N aisle – only loose rubble, proceed. Upper internal jambs of N door now clear, recorded.

Fri 23 Nov.

Most of blocking now removed from N door, internal jambs photographed, then cleared of plaster, photographed again and drawn. Trench now open, concrete and loose removed, to reveal lots of flat stones, fairly random, 50 to 160 mm below top surface concrete floor. Recorded; trench needs to be 200mm deep so will be removed. Nothing looks structural.

Age of N door not quite clear. The very fact that it is a N door suggests it is medieval, but all external stonework looks like C19 restoration, and internal jambs could be C19 as well – no trace of any drawbar tunnel, which one would expect with a medieval door, although one hinge pin on W and metal plate with hole for bolt on E. Upper W jamb has been cut into for the present C20? Window.

Hodgson Fowlers pre-restoration plan shows no opening here (and in fact a buttress in this position on external wall face), Wilson's 1870 plan shows a blocked opening, not clear whether it is a door or a window. Need to do a trawl at Woodhorn for any more plans/records. Window is so recent that it should be in records.

The openings is to be widened for the new doorway, so it looks as if all old jambs, internal and external will be lost, which is a pity.

Tues 26 Nov.

PFR visits morning and early afternoon. Trench deepened – to reveal brickwork, with sooted mortar adhering, looks like base of an early central heating duct; this is to maximum depth, so nothing pre-C19 will be disturbed. Asked for a little extra clearance of jambs of N door, so all stones that are to be removed can be fully seen. This was done – PFR returned and completed recording. Nothing left to show form of internal head- lintel or rear arch?? PFR to return Thursday 28 am when door will be fully reopened.

Tues 4 December

Doorway now re-opened and jambs already partly removed. PFR photographed and sketched – external opening was exactly 1 m wide, had small chamfer which had later had an external rebate crudely cut into it.

Wed 5 Dec

Snowing! PFR brief visit, retrieved hinge pin from west jamb, bolt plate from east jamb to be saved when that block is removed.

Wed 9 Jan

External trench on N side has encountered remains of C19/early C20 boiler room, outside eastern bay of N aisle. Above ground sections removed at some time (some evidences on aisle wall) and cavity partly infilled with rubble and roofed over with concrete slab, its top a few cm below the tarmac path, leaving hatch in position of earlier coal chute at NE corner. More recently slab has failed, and acros have been put in. Flue from boiler house has been into buttress on E, which is hollow. PFR photographed and measured exposed features (did not enter, unsafe). Slab is to be removed, PFR to visit and record when laid open.

Also concrete to be taken up outside N door (new doorway now complete) where C19 plan shows a buttress- PFR to inspect when this is done.

Bolt plate from original N door mislaid, being sought.

Fri 1 Feb

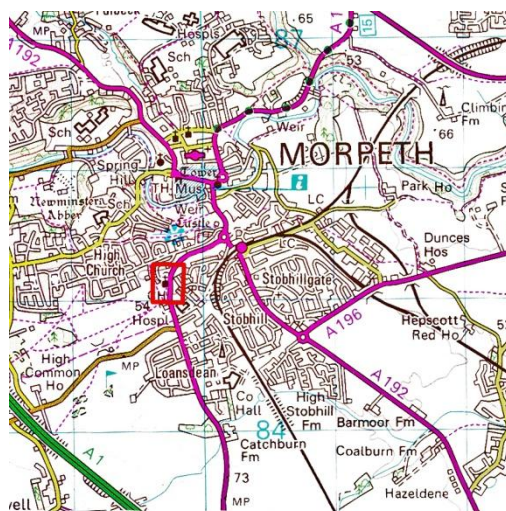
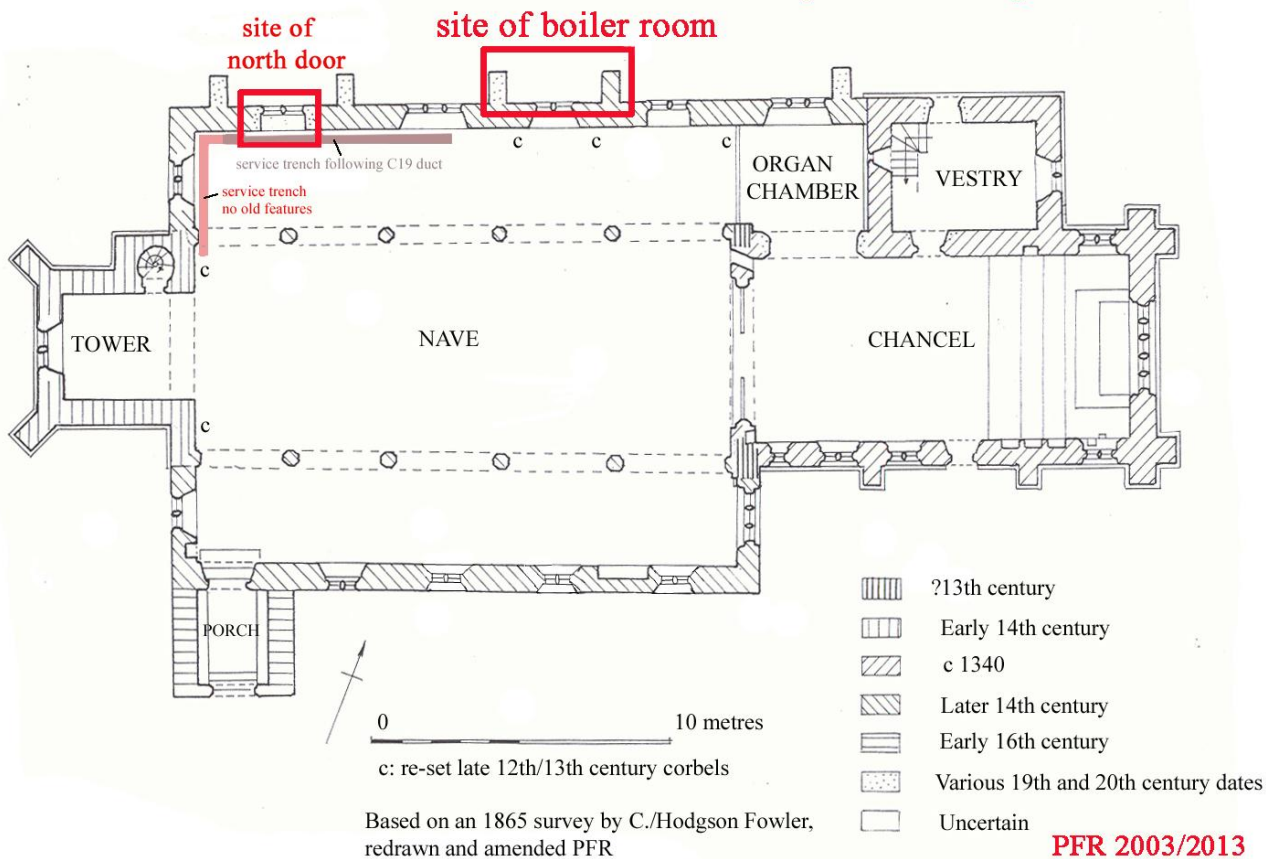
External trench now complete, open right down to road at foot of path in front of lych gate- all in previously-disturbed ground. Works outside new door completed – apparently only disturbed ground with bricks etc seen here, no evidence of former buttress shown on mid C19 plan.

Concrete slab over boiler house now largely removed; this is partially infilled with debris, quite a lot of pipework still in position – to be filled in completely. Sketched and photographed. Seemed to be two phases of work, large squared stone and (mid C20?) brick. Two pieces of headstone, with well carved later C18 inscription, retrieved from debris, taken by PFR to be cleaned and photographed.

It appears this will be PFR's last site visit.

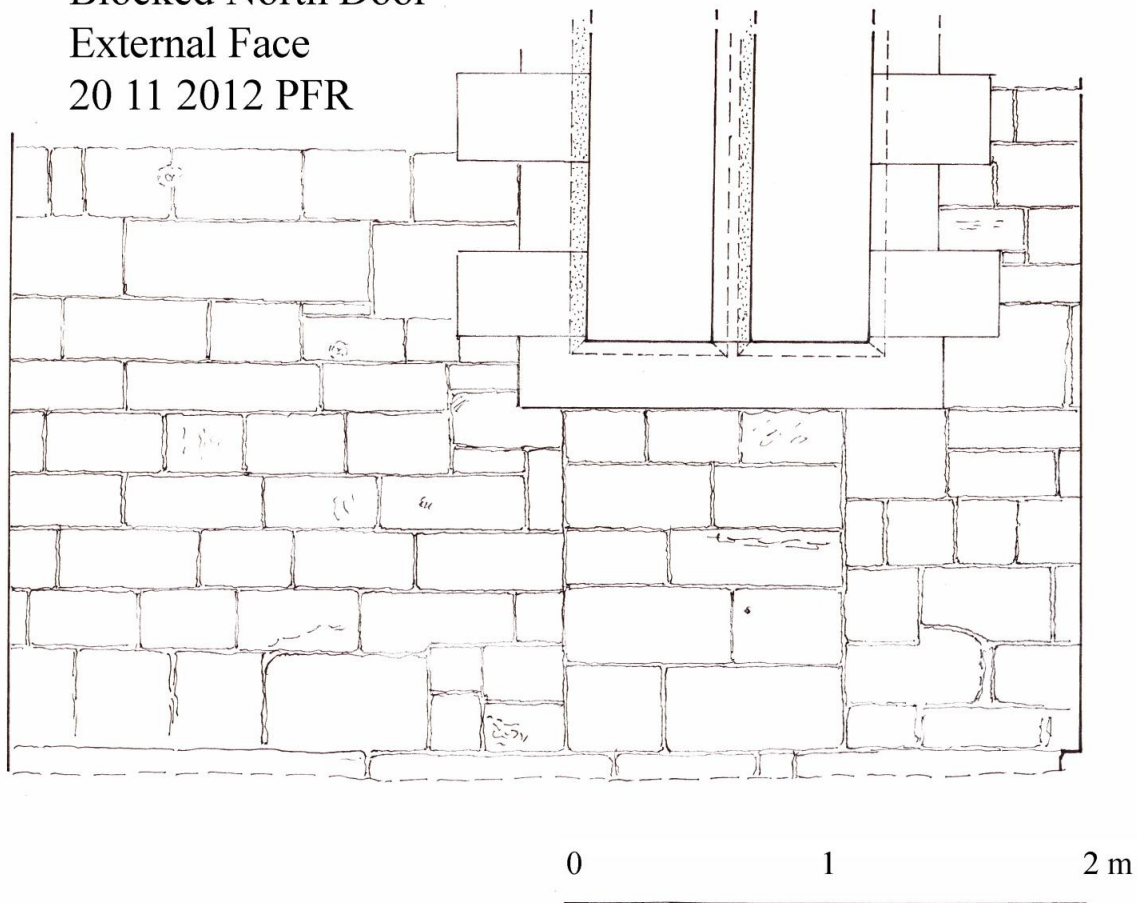
Illus.1. Phased Plan showing locations of archaeological recording

ST MARY'S CHURCH, MORPETH
Provisional Phased Plan showing locations of archaeological recording, winter 2012/3

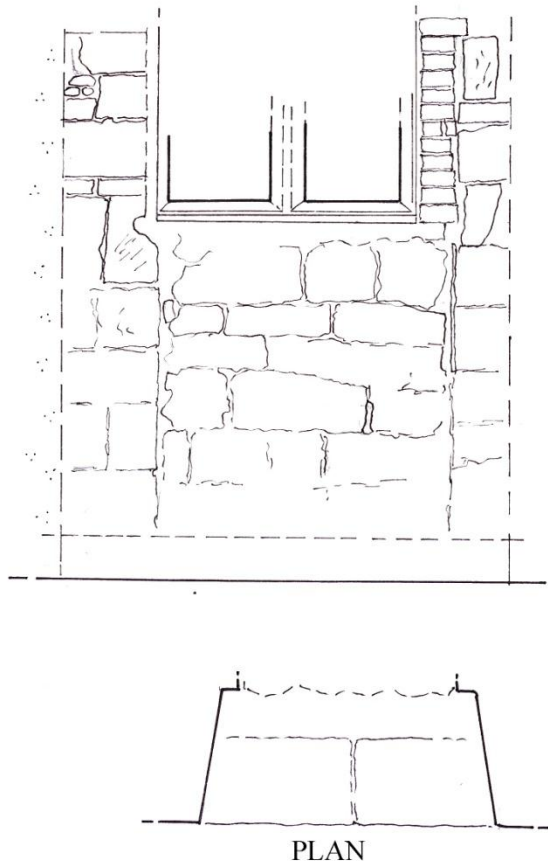


Location Plan
 from Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 sheet 81
 OS map licence 10005703

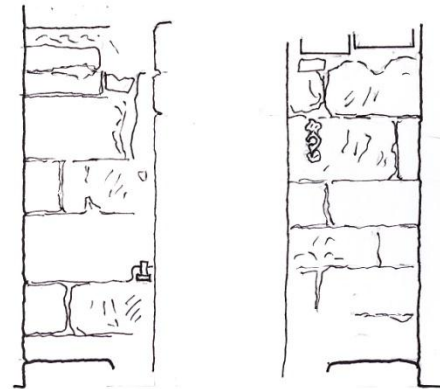
MORPETH, ST MARY'S CHURCH
Blocked North Door
External Face
20 11 2012 PFR



Illus.2 External Elevation of North Doorway before works



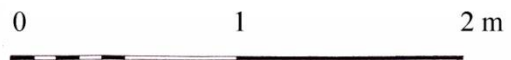
MORPETH, ST MARY'S CHURCH
Blocked North Door
Internal Face 20 11 2012



West Jamb

East Jamb

Elevations of Jambs after partial removal of blocking and remains of plaster



Illus.3 Internal Elevations of North Doorway



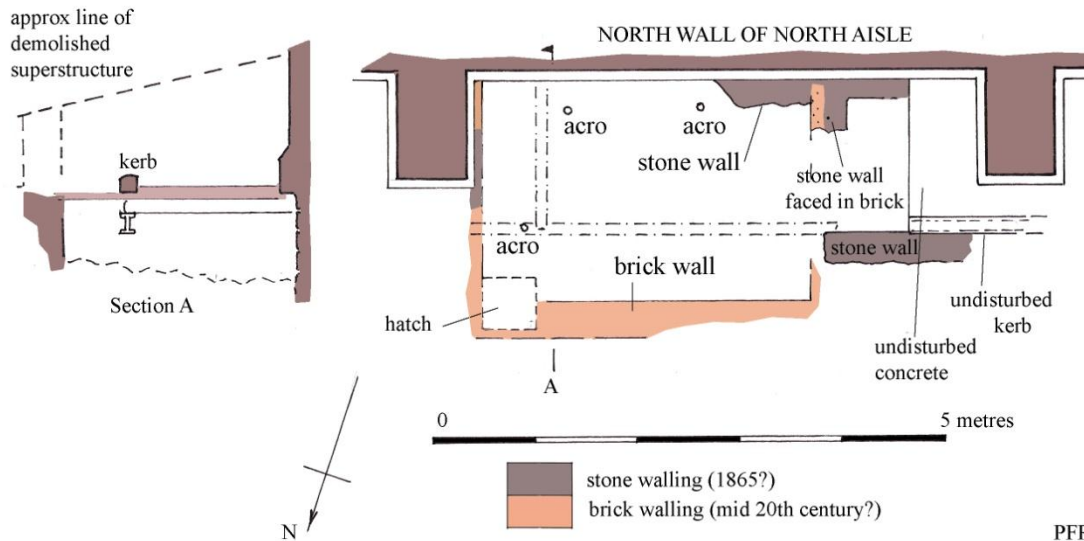
Illus.4 Internal West Jamb of North Doorway (note pintle)

Illus 5. Internal face of North Doorway before removal of blocking.



MORPETH, ST MARY'S CHURCH

Remains of Boiler Room: Sketch Plan and Section, January 2013 P F Ryder



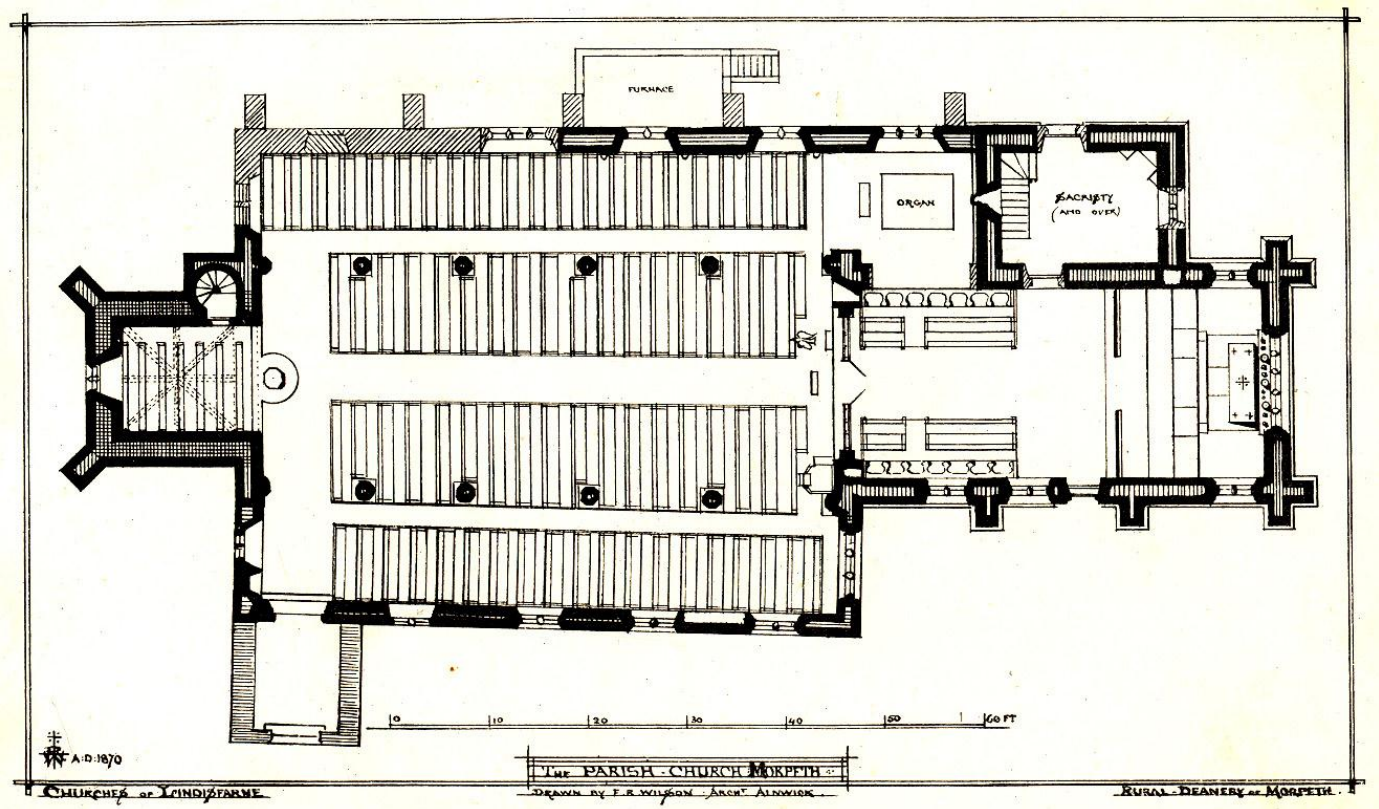
PFR 2013

Illus vi. Plan of Boiler Room

Illus vii. Remains of Boiler Room looking east

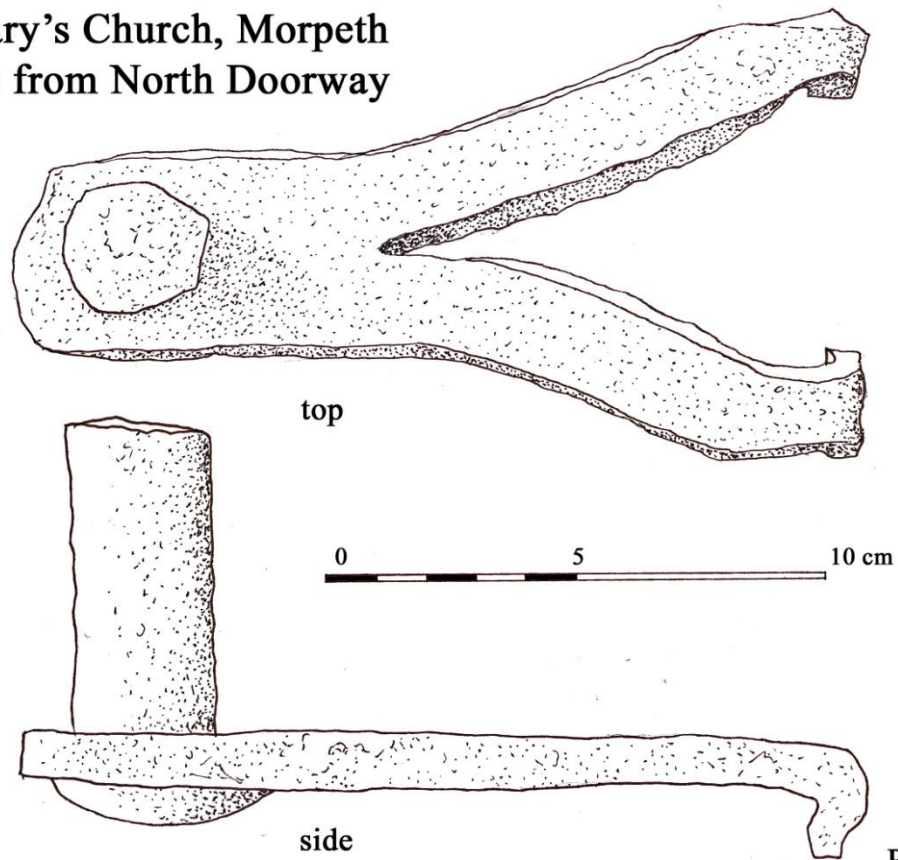


Illus viii. F.R. Wilson's plan (1870) showing 'Furnace'



Illus ix. Drawing of Pintle from North Doorway

St Mary's Church, Morpeth
Pintle from North Doorway



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Illus x. Monument from fill of Boiler Room

