

Escomb

The parish church of St John the Evangelist¹ at Escomb, on the south bank of the Wear 2 km west of Bishop Auckland, is called by Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 267) ‘one of the most important and moving survivals of the architecture of the time of Bede’ and is arguably the most complete Anglo-Saxon church in England. The building has justifiably attracted considerable antiquarian interest over the last century and a quarter.



Description

The Exterior

The church consists of a nave 14.8 by 5.9 m externally, and c 7 m high to the eaves, and a lower chancel c 3 m square², together with a later south porch. The walls of nave and chancel, the outer faces of which are battered back slightly as they rise, are of coursed squared stone; in both side walls the upper 1.5 m or so is in considerably smaller stone which at first sight looks like a heightening, although the massive side-alternate angle quoins rise to the full height of the building. On the south there are larger blocks in the lower metre or so of wall, and again for two or three courses immediately below the more thinly-coursed upper section; on the north the coursing is generally more regular. A number of the quoins, which are up to 1.2 m long and 0.6 m deep, have cut out sections at the corners; this, and the fact that they do not always

¹ A modern dedication; the original seems to be unknown

² Dimensions after Taylor & Taylor (1965, I, 237)

course in well with the adjacent fabric, suggests that they are re-used Roman blocks. Many of the walling stones show a distinctive Roman diamond broaching.

The west end of the nave has some large blocks in its lowermost courses; some of its angle quoins have corners cut out and the third from the ground at the south-west angle has a vertical pair of incised lines, perhaps a remnant of some Roman carved design. The west window is a large opening with a slightly segmental head; in its jambs and below its sill are a number of blocks with a distinctive chevron tooling, like the window probably of later 18th or early 19th century date. Higher up a very distinct groove indicates the roof-line of the former western annexe or porticus, the outline of which is indicated by modern slabs in the grass in front of the gable. Above the apex of the roof-line is a high-level Saxon window with its segmental-arched head cut into a large block, and jambs each consisting of an upright block with a shorter one below. The gable has a crow-stepped coping, probably post-medieval, set back a little from the line of the wall face below; the bell-cote capping the gable has a simple roughly segmental arch, and seems contemporary with the coping.

The south porch is set towards the west end of the south wall of the nave. To the east of it is a large window with a two-centred arch and a narrow chamfered surround, perhaps of early 19th century date. There are some indications that it may be set within the jambs of an earlier (medieval?) opening, as above its head seems to be part of a cut for a steeper pointed arch, although this must just be a clumsy error made when it was inserted. At a higher level are two Saxon windows, each with a roughly semicircular head cut into a big upright slab, a single upright for each jamb and quite a deep block for the sill. Midway between their heads is a Saxon sundial, thought to be the oldest in-situ example in the country. The dial is almost circular, with a raised surround in the form of a serpent above (head to the left and tail to the right) and plaitwork below; on the dial are three incised lines, one vertical and one at 45° to each side, and a hole for the gnomon. Directly above the sundial is a projecting block carved in the form of a stylised animal's head, but now very worn (for a discussion of the significance of the carving, see Beddow 1991). At the east end of the wall is a tall lancet window with a simple chamfered surround, clearly an insertion in the Saxon walling.

On the north of the nave the doorway is set roughly centrally, unlike that on the south. The doorway is square-headed, the jambs inclining inwards at a slight angle; each is made up of three blocks, two uprights with a horizontal between them³, the upper uprights being cut into the thin lintel. There are two Saxon windows, opposite and at the same level as those on the south, but on this side they are square-headed; each jamb is a single upright, and the lintels are 'long' blocks extending well beyond the jambs. Around 1.5 m from the east end of the wall and c 4 m above the ground is a block with the Roman inscription 'LEG VI' (a centurial stone of the sixth legion), set upside down. A projecting block above it is intended to reduce weathering, but the incised Roman letters are now much fainter than when first recorded. Another Roman stone, two courses above the lintel of the western window and c 1m to the right of it, has a rosette or annulus, and has been thought to be part of an altar. The north-eastern angle quoins of the nave have a series of small cuts and sockets on their north face,

³ This alternation of upright blocks and 'long stones' in a jamb (not to be confused with 'long-and-short' angle quoins) has given rise to the architectural term 'Escomb fashion'.

difficult to make any sense of; on the east face the ninth quoin from the ground has a large square socket in it, and the eleventh (at the level of the chancel eaves) a big horizontal groove; these might possibly relate to the roof of the lost north-eastern porticus.

The east gable end of the nave has a crow-stepped coping like that of the west, again set back slightly from the wall face below.

The low south porch is built of rubble, roughly-coursed in parts, with large irregular block quoins; the top quoin at the south-east corner is a re-used medieval grave slab, with an incised pair of shears, and the second from the ground at the south-west angle has an Ordnance Survey benchmark. The outer arch has old jambs (the uppermost block of the eastern has two chamfered edges and may be another grave cover) and a later segmental arch with cut voussoirs of 18th-century character; perhaps contemporary with the sundial (now rather worn) above. The gable has rough triangular blocks as coping stones, and is capped by a simple cross of uncertain date. The side walls of the porch each have a small rectangular window – that on the west is narrower – with roughly cut dressings.

The walling and quoins of the chancel are very similar to those of the nave, although there are less courses of smaller stone at the wall head. On the south is a lancet window, shorter than that in the nave, with the usual chamfered surround; it appears an authentic 13th-century feature. The east window is a broad round-headed one quite like that in the west end, with cut dressings only to its head, and a slightly-projecting sill. In the wall above a course of masonry at the level of the side-wall eaves has two very elongate blocks in it, interspersed with much shorter ‘upright’ ones; its purpose is unclear⁴. The gable has a projecting coping chamfered on its lower angle, with big triangular foot-stones; this coping may be of 13th century date. The only feature in the north wall of the chancel is a narrow square-headed doorway, set hard up against the west end of the wall, which originally gave access to a porticus clasping the junction of nave and chancel; its foundations have been traced, and are marked out in modern blocks. The jambs of the doorway are single slender uprights, and its lintel a thin slab; this difference in construction with the nave doorways has led to its being regarded as a later Saxon insertion.

The Interior

The internal walls of the whole church are whitewashed, except for occasional features left clear.

The **South Porch** has a simple stone bench on each side and a modern stone slab floor; most of the timbers of its roof – one level of purlins and a diagonally-set ridge – seem recent, but embedded in the south wall is an old truncated-principal truss of 15th-century character⁵, its tie-beam partly cut away to accommodate the timber inner lintel of the entrance.

⁴ The walling above seems very regular, and may be 13th-century work coeval with the coping. Might the course with elongate blocks represent the wall-head of the original chancel, if it had a hipped rather than a gabled roof?

⁵ And surely the smallest example of its genre.

The south doorway of the nave, within the porch, is a square-headed opening; its west jamb is of four uprights, and internally is splayed to around 45°. The lintel is a thin horizontal slab whilst the east jamb survives from an original opening and is cut square with the wall, with a rebate; it resembles the jambs of the north door except that there is a small horizontal stone just below the lintel. On the south face of the jamb are traces of incised lines, possibly just graffiti. On the internal face of the wall the lintel is a heavy elongate block that appears quite recent; the manner in which it cuts into earlier masonry at its east end shows it to be secondary.

One descends three steps from the porch to the carpeted floor of the **Nave**. In the west wall of the nave the large window is obviously an insertion; its jambs are splayed but not its head, and it has a level sill. On the north of the window and c 1 m above its sill is an infilled socket, possible evidence of a western gallery. Above the window the walling seems undisturbed; high up, a roof truss partly obscures the high-level window which has a very rough rear arch, with a vertical V-section groove cut into its apex that presumably took a bell rope.



On the south side of the nave the large early-19th century window has a trefoiled rear arch with roughly-tooled dressings. The two Saxon windows at a higher level are splayed internally and have steeply-sloping sills. Their arched heads are cut into elongate slabs set on their edges, parallel to those on the external face of the wall, whilst the upper parts of their jambs, which incline inwards like the sides of the external opening, are formed by slabs set at right angles to the wall and extending its full thickness. Both have evidence of grooves for shutters just inside the present glass line. The lancet at the east end of the wall has alternating-block jambs of diagonally-tooled ashlar, which appear original 13th-century work, but the trefoiled rear arch is very like that of the 19th-

century window. There are a series of small cuts in the wall c 1.5 m below the eaves, at the base of the more thinly-coursed section, presumably relating to the 18th or early 19th-century ceiling seen on a Pre-Restoration photograph in the porch display..

On the north of the nave, the north doorway is constructed of through stones, although on the internal face the upper stones of the jambs are not recessed into the lintel, and the opening is slightly larger due to the rebate. The internal section of the west jamb

has two horizontal slots or channels cut into it, 0.3 m from the floor and the other 0.4 m below the lintel, running right up to the rebate. The upper is of semicircular section and the lower less regular. The two Saxon windows are similar to their counterparts on the south, except that their lintels are formed by big horizontal slabs that span the full thickness of the wall. The western has a vertical groove for a shutter on the west jamb, just inside the glass, interrupted by a large socket at mid-height; the eastern has no visible shutter grooves. The lower part of the west jamb of the eastern window is formed by a large block which bears, on the face towards the nave, the Roman inscription 'BONO REI PUBLICAE NATO' 'to the man born for the good of the state'; it is said to be of 4th century date.

A section of wall high up in between the two windows has been left bare of whitewash as it retains remnants of medieval wall painting – orange patterns on a pinkish ground – which Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 268) see as 'incoherent remains, apparently of several periods'. One section does show sections of curving tendrils, rather like those on the soffit of the chancel arch.

The arch into the **Chancel** is set in the centre of the east wall of the nave; it is 1.6 m wide and 4.6 m high, and of semicircular form and a single square order; the impost only project on the soffit, and are chamfered on their lower angle. Both jambs and arch are made up of through stones; the jambs are made up of alternating upright and 'long' stones, and the arch of neatly-cut voussoirs. On the south the impost and upper part of the jamb below are cut from a single block. It is often stated that this arch is, like the tower arch at Corbridge (Northumberland) a re-used Roman feature. The



soffit of the arch is left clear of whitewash as it bears relatively well-preserved remains of medieval wall painting⁶, intertwining tendrils of foliage in orange/red on a pinkish ground. On the north of the arch there is a small incised cross on the wall behind the pulpit, c 1.8 m above the floor; this is thought to be contemporary with the fabric.

The chancel has a modern stone slab floor, set one step above the nave, with in its centre a tapering medieval grave slab of Frosterley marble, with no motif now visible other than a faint roll moulding on the edges. At the east end of the south wall is a piscina that has a semicircular arch with a narrow chamfer, and a projecting bowl with a drain and a horizontal line of indented moulding. To the west of it the internal sill of the lancet window is carried down to form a shallow sedile; the lancet has a trefoiled rear arch which appears genuine 13th-century work.

⁶ Identified on an interpretative sheet as of 12th century date, although Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 268) think it 'probably C15'.

On the north of the chancel the blocked doorway to the north-eastern porticus has a similar surround to that on the external wall face; the single upright block forming its east jamb has a simple incised pattern that has been termed a 'tree of life'; some accounts refer to figures of Adam and Eve standing below.

In the east end the large window has roughly-splayed jambs which are clearly insertions.

The **Roofs** are of late medieval date. That of the nave is of five bays with simple principal rafter trusses, including ones set against both end walls; each has a pair of steep broad raking struts, and there are two through purlins on each slope and a diagonally-set ridge. Although pre-restoration photographs (Hodgson 1906, plates facing p.109 and 114) show the roof in poor condition, with large open holes, virtually all the principal timbers seem to have survived. Over the chancel there is a truncated principal truss set against each end wall carrying two heavy square-section purlins, and a ridge carried by the end walls.

The nave roof timbers have been dendro-dated to 1480-1490 (Vernacular Architecture 25 (1994) 25).

Fittings and Furnishings

The **Font**, set centrally at the west end of the nave, stands on a rough stone step of cruciform plan. The bowl is an elongate octagon in plan externally, and a rectangle with slightly bowed sides internally; it has a large central drain and evidence of leading for a clamped cover; it is said to have been retrieved from a local farmyard. The shaft is more modern (perhaps 19th century) and is a rectangle with chamfered angles, the chamfers being stopped at the base.

The majority of the fittings and furnishings of the church date from the 1965 restoration by Sir Albert Richardson.

Sculptured Stones

The following sculptured stones are described and illustrated by Cramp (1984,77-78): Unless otherwise stated they are now displayed in the south porch.

- 1a-b Two pieces of a cross shaft with cabled angles and vine scroll, inhabited by birds. Second quarter of 9th century. Found, along with 4,5 and 7, in the 1875-80 restoration, where they had been re-used as building material 'among the steps of the crow-stepped gables'.
- 2 Fragment of cross shaft or impost with plant scroll very similar in form to an example at Jarrow, 8th century. Found in the wall of a house in the village.
- 3 Small fragment of a socket (?), possibly part of a church furnishing, with a triple leaf; early 8th century. Found in 1968 in the excavation of the western annexe; described by Cramp as 'apparently lost' but now (2005) in display case in porch.

- 4 Upright pillar, apparently part of a church furnishing – possibly the corner post of a shrine or altar. Late 7th or early 8th century.
- 5 Part of a plain cross shaft with moulded angles. 7th to 9th century.
- 6 Fragment of a plain cross shaft, now in Department of Archaeology at Durham University. 7th to 9th century. Found in 1979 excavation on south-western perimeter of churchyard.
- 7 Slab or grave marker, now set upright behind the altar. Late 8th to early 9th century.

(8a-b The sundial and beasts' head above, see exterior description).

Hodges (1905, 229) also mentions 'one or two fragments with interlace on them' as being in the vicarage garden; their present whereabouts is unknown.

Another stone, presumably only discovered within recent years, is re-used in the internal face of the south wall of the chancel just outside the second voussoir above the eastern springing of the rear arch of the lancet window; it is a piece of Magnesian Limestone bearing incised patterns, described on an interpretative sheet as 'probably of Celtic origin' and of 6th century date (?), carved using a V-shaped tool.

In addition to these Saxon stones, Hodgson (1906-11, 117, footnote 4) refers to further fragments of Roman inscriptions on stones in the internal wall faces, 'one reading L, the other LINI; and there is another larger one, so much weathered that all hope of deciphering must be abandoned'; he does not specify their locations.

Re-used in the external face of the west wall of the churchyard (south-west of the church, and a little to the north of the centre of a straightish length) is a small section c 0.2 m long and 0.12 m wide of a possible cross shaft with roll-moulded angles.

Sepulchral Monuments

The church has several medieval grave slabs; nos. 1-3 are described and 1-2 illustrated by Ryder (1985, 84 and pl.27)

- (1) Grey sandstone slab at north-west corner of porch, incised bracelet cross rising from triangular mount; probably later 12th century.
- (2) Sandstone slab at north-east corner of porch, with unusual curved top. Incised bracelet-derivative cross with sword on r and stepped base. 13th century.
- (3) Brown gritstone slab at south-west corner of porch. Tapering slab, very worn; traces of a possible incised chalice, set centrally.
- (4) On the west bench of the porch. Two fragments of a large discoidal headstone with a raised straight-armed cross; not easily dateable.

- (5) Slab re-used as a quoin at the south-east corner of the porch, with its face to the east. Incised pair of shears.
- (6) Tapered slab of Frosterley marble, plain except for roll-moulded edges, set centrally in the chancel floor.

Post-Medieval Monuments.

Set upright at the south-east corner of the porch is a tapering slab, possibly a re-used medieval monument, bearing the incised inscription: 'UNDER THIS STONE LYETH THE BODY OF RAIPH ADDISON BURIED THE VI DAV OF IANVARIE 1628'

Historical Notes

(Much of this information is taken from the current display (PD) in the south porch.)

- c700 The church is built, within the Diocese of Hexham, using masons who have connections with either the Bishop of the Jarrow/Monkwearmouth monastery.
- c830 The church comes into the possession of the Cuthbert Community
- c900 The estate is sold into lay hands
- 12th century The church is in the possession of the Church of Durham
- 1292 Escomb and other local churches become subsidiaries of the College of St Andrew Auckland
- 1494-1501 Bishop Fox annexes Escomb and unites it with the Deanery of Auckland.
- Post Reformation The church becomes a chapel of ease to St Andrew Auckland., with curates living at Bishop Auckland.
- 1857 Fordyce (I, 598) writes 'the church is an ancient building, and consists of nave and small chancel, of comparatively lofty proportions. A narrow circular arch separates the nave and chancel. The east and west windows are modern sashes under circular arches, and the side windows of nave and chancel are of the lancet form. The baptismal font is a low octagonal bason of freestone...'
- 1863 The new church is built, the old being reduced to a chapel, and in effect abandoned.
- 1870 The vicar, the Rev T E Lord, recognises the importance of the old church as a Saxon building, although the credit for its rediscovery was claimed by the Rev Hooppell of Byers Green (Hooppell 1879), who

comments that Lord ‘was not fully aware of the extremely interesting character of the ancient edifice’ .

1875-80 Restoration by R.J.Johnson; the faculty records do not appear to survive.

Faculties and Other Records of Structural Work

All faculties coded DDR/EJ/FAC/3/..

2928	20.9.1946	Installation of electric light in old church.
4521	9.11.1962	Restoration and refurnishing of saxon church
5464	22.8.1973	Removal of certain headstones, monuments and tidying churchyard.
5496	21.3.1974	Limewashing interior of church
6375	21.5.1986	Redecoration of interior
6747	21.6.1988	Repairs to porch roof
9058	21.12.2000	Re-laying of porch floor.

Structural History

It is usually accepted⁷ that nave and chancel are a structure of one build, but their actual date has occasioned some discussion. At one stage it was argued that the fact that Escomb was not mentioned in the writings of the Venerable Bede implied that it was built post c ., but its architectural features are very similar to those of the late 7th century work at Jarrow and Monkwearmouth, on which it is known Gaulish masons worked. The discovery in 1968 of coloured window glass, as well as carved pieces of Magnesian Limestone from East Durham all point to links with other and probably monastic sites. However, some authorities (eg Hodgson 1906) have paralleled some features of Escomb with early Irish architecture, such as the way in which the both the external faces of the walls themselves, and the jambs of various doorways and windows, all incline slightly inwards as they rise (this is not seen at the other early churches in the North East).The sub-circular plan of the churchyard has also been cited as a links to the Celtic west rather than the Roman church. Preston-Jones (1977, 26) parallels the way in which the external jambs of the north door are ‘morticed’ into the lintel with an early doorway at Labba Molaga in County Cork.

The Saxon church at Escomb had two further chambers which are now demolished, the northern porticus (sometimes termed a vestry) overlapping the junction of nave and chancel and a western porticus; their foundations were excavated in 1968. The

⁷ Preston-Jones (1977,34) suggests that the nave was constructed first, to be followed by the western annexe and chancel, which are almost identical in size.

former had been badly robbed, although remains of both northern angles survived; there was evidence to suggest a doorway at the south end of the west wall. The western chamber was better preserved, although the east part of its north wall (in which it was presumed a doorway was located- a socketed stone lay nearby) had been removed by the insertion of a Victorian heating chamber. The chamber does not seem to have had any access to the main body of the church, at least at ground level⁸. Neither chamber was bonded into the church; the western was seen as virtually contemporary with the main building, and the northern a slightly later addition, on the strength of its doorway into the chancel appearing to be an insertion in older fabric. Opinions vary on the date of the removal of the western chamber or annexe; the excavators, Pocock and Wheeler (1971, 17) saw no evidence of post-Norman use, but the porch display suggests that it was not demolished until c1700. The relatively fresh appearance of its roof-line might point towards a relatively recent period.

There has been some debate as to the origin of the Roman stonework re-used in the church. Older authorities saw it as having been brought from the fort at Binchester, about 3 km down-river, but it is of course possible that there had been some substantial Roman building in the more immediate vicinity; a considerable amount of Roman pottery etc has been found in and around the churchyard. There is also debate as to whether the chancel arch is a re-set Roman arch (cf the tower arch at Corbridge) or a Saxon arch re-using Roman stone; some features, eg the varying lengths of the voussoirs, are said not to fit a standard 'Roman' pattern, although Rosemary Cramp has pointed out that it is doubtful whether we actually know enough of what a Roman arch in this area would look like.

The website of the Northern Archaeology Group (NAG)⁹ in their bulletin for June 2000 discusses this and states that 'there was a much closer Roman fort than Binchester (Newton Cap?), but even so, it is obvious from the air that Escomb Church sits on a Roman-looking earthwork. There is an earthwork with a rounded corner to the north of the council houses and a very Roman-looking causeway lined-up on the church, runs towards the River Wear. Also, the farmer tells us that in these same fields to the north of the church and houses, his potato-pickers find dozens of Roman coins. Also, gravediggers in Escomb churchyard find Roman pottery and coins at a depth of six feet'. Pocock and Wheeler's 1968 excavations yielded four fragments of Roman pottery.

The church seems to have undergone very little alteration in the medieval period. The lancet window and piscine in the south wall of the chancel, and the lancet in the south wall of the nave, are all probably of the earlier 13th century. Then comes the nave roof, dendro-dated to 1480-90. What Rev Hodgson (1906, 112) termed the 'wretched

⁸ It is possible that some sort of opening at a higher level, perhaps onto a gallery, was enlarged to produce the present west window. Pocock and Wheeler (1971,17) suggest that a door to the church 'must surely have existed' and that the central section of the west wall may have been rebuilt when the large window was inserted, whilst admitting they could not see any actual evidence of this. Pevsner & Williamson suggest that two large stones on either side of the west window represent impostes for a western arch, but this seems highly unlikely.

⁹ [://www.n-a-g.freereserve.co.uk](http://www.n-a-g.freereserve.co.uk). It has to be admitted that NAG are something of an 'alternative' group, and viewed with suspicion in some quarters.

modern porch' may in fact be a late medieval structure, on the strength of its truncated-principal roof truss, unless this is a re-used piece¹⁰.

The three large windows, in the end gables and south wall of the nave, are all of late 18th or early 19th century character; the vaguely Gothic-arched head and trefoiled rear arch of that in the south wall may point to a slightly later date than the other two. The reconstruction of both gables of the nave, with their present crow-stepped coping, and the rather attractive little vernacular bellcote may also date to this period¹¹ Pre-restoration photographs also show what appears to be a small chimney capping the chancel gable. The segmental arch of the porch is of the same period, although its jambs are probably older.

In 1863 the old church was abandoned when a new parish church by W.Tuke of Bradford was built further up the hill; it fell into a state of decay until its architectural importance was realised; it was restored in 1875-1880 by R.J.Johnson.. There was a further restoration and re-furnishing in 1965 by Sir Albert Richardson; in 1970 it became the parish church once more, the Victorian building which had replaced it being abandoned and soon after demolished.

Archaeological Assessment

Escomb is a church that has clearly attracted considerable archaeological interest and one that has, after the monastic sites of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, seen more direct physical investigation than any other in the county. This has all been however in the form of excavations in the churchyard; there is no record of any investigation or recording being carried out beneath the floors of the church itself, except that an area of what is said to be the original cobble floor was found in the 19th-century restoration and preserved, at the north-west corner of the nave. The state of preservation of sub-floor deposits is not clear – the semi-subterranean boiler room outside the west end was probably associated with an underfloor heating system, although reflooring in the 1960s, when an important opportunity for archaeological recording seems to have been missed, has erased any visible evidence of this inside the building.

The principal campaign of archaeological investigation in the churchyard was carried out in 1968 (Pocock & Wheeler 1971, 11-29) when six areas were excavated:

- (A) The area outside the west end of the nave. The foundations of the western chamber (some of which had been seen in 1895) were cleared; a brick-walled semi-subterranean heating chamber (probably built after 1879) had destroyed part of these and the position of the entrance was not clear; it was assumed to have been at the east end of the north wall.
- (B) The area outside the north wall of the chancel. The remains of a porticus overlapping the junction of nave and chancel were uncovered, much disturbed by burials. Finds included eight fragments of Saxon glass.

¹⁰ The rather sophisticated truss form seems at odds with the generally shoddy construction; perhaps it was re-used in some 17th or 18th century reconstruction. The 20012 archaeological investigation found a piece of 16th-century pottery sealed beneath a former stone flag floor of the porch.

¹¹ Another feature that the acid-tongued Rev Hodgson (1906,112) did not find it quite so appealing, in fact he thought it: 'utterly despicable and hideous'.

- (C) The area a short distance north of the north door, where it had been suggested there might have been a further porticus; all disturbed by 19th century burials.
- (D) Trench north of (C) and overlapping north side of (B). Once more all disturbed by 19th century burials.
- (E) An area in the angle between the south porch and south wall of the nave. Two 13th/14th century graves which clearly pre-dated at least the east wall of the present porch.
- (F) Area to the north-east of the church, immediately inside the churchyard wall. Walls of a building, dated from finds to the 17th century.
- (G) Area to the east of the church, immediately inside the churchyard wall. Probable remains of an earlier churchyard wall (no dating evidence) just inside the present line.

An unpublished excavation in 1979, on the site of a new store in the south-western part of the churchyard 'showed an earlier, wider wall (possibly repaired at this point c1700) over a low earth bank with evidence to suggest that late C7 builders may have sited their church on a low 'peninsula' surrounded by a marsh or damp area, possibly only approachable from the S, as today. No early dating evidence as found; however, incorporated in the earlier wall were dressed blocks of stone similar to that used for a fragment of late C7 or early C8 ornament (possibly architectural) from here. (Pevsner & Williamson 1984, 268).

In 2001 the porch floor was relaid and an archaeological investigation carried out (NAA 2001); three burials were located, and evidence of an earlier stone flag floor, probably of 16th century date.

The Churchyard

The sub-circular churchyard has already been mentioned, entered by a single gate with 19th-century piers, to the south of the church. The ground falls gently southwards, and there seems to be a bank against the internal face of the wall on the south. The wall is generally c 2 m high, with a rough rubble coping; it contains a variety of types of stone, with clearly re-used material in places. Inside the monuments (which all lie to the south of the church; those to the north have been cleared away at some stage) are largely of earlier 19th century date, although there are several attractive vernacular headstones of the early and mid-18th century.

Recommendations

Whilst the church has obviously attracted great interest, and there has been a considerable amount of direct physical archaeological investigation around the exterior of the building, there is still scope for considerable further work:

- (1) Given the importance of the building, one would expect scale stone-by-stone drawings of the internal and external elevations of the walls of

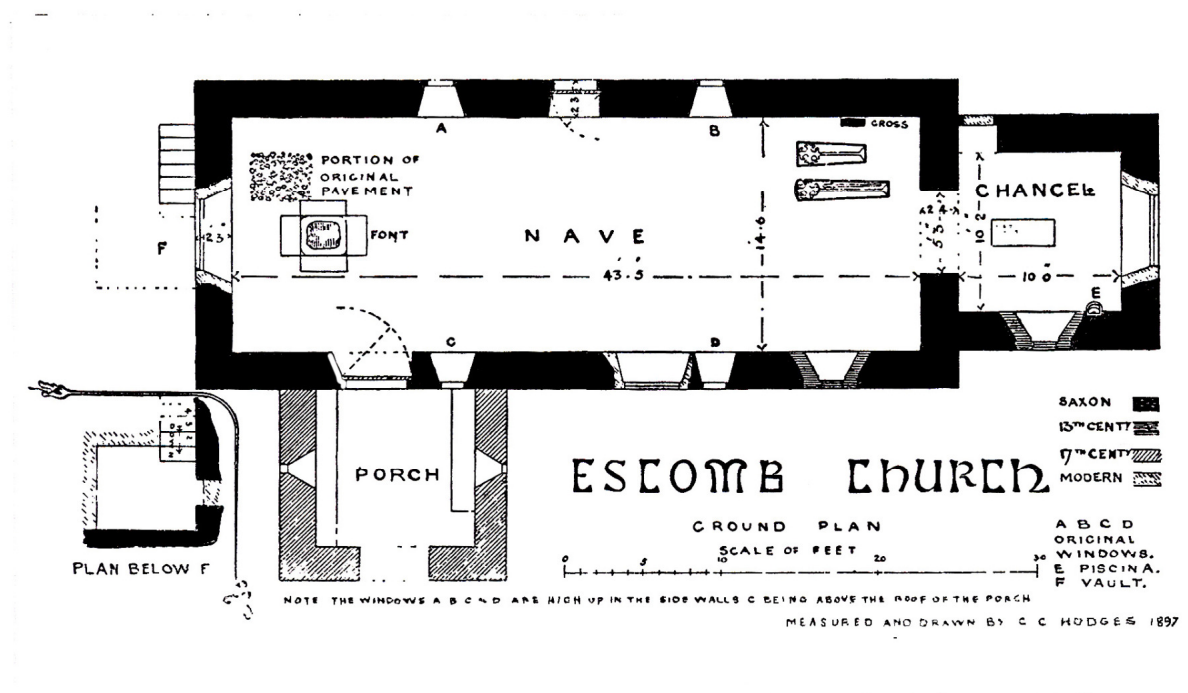
nave and chancel to have been made, but none seem readily available. Such a survey should also include scaled drawings of the roof trusses.

- (2) There does not seem to have been any archaeological investigation inside the building, except for the 2001 investigation when the south porch was re-floored. It goes without saying that any works inside the building that entail disturbance of either the floors or the above-ground fabric will require strict archaeological monitoring.
- (3) A study of the churchyard wall, and of its various stone types and evident re-used material, might prove of value.

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Plan of the Church after Hodges