

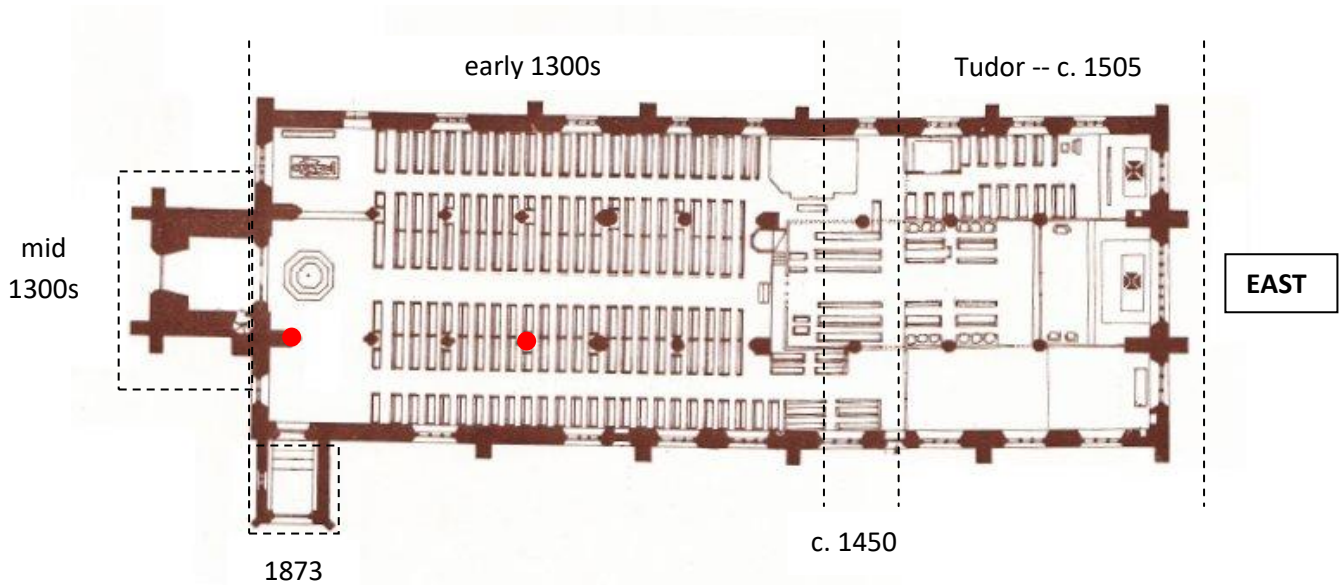
What happened to the early Norman Church in Kildwick ?

Introduction

The history of Kildwick Church is long and rather complicated. Even a cursory examination by someone, such as the author of this piece, who has no real understanding of architectural history leads to the conclusion that the current building has been extensively re-modelled over the years - with various extensions and changes to the roof-line.

Dating the current building

The generally accepted view, taken from a number of histories, is that the earliest part of the current building is at the west-end, and that this dates from the early 1300s; the tower is slightly later, from the mid-1300s; the central section dates to the mid-1400s; and the east-end is from around 1505. The porch is Victorian.



Plan of the current St. Andrew's Church building, showing its development

But what of before the current church ? There is evidence for at least two earlier churches on the site.

Evidence for a Saxon Church

In 1897 it was noticed that the south-eastern part of the building was sinking and several pillars were unsafe. An architect's report recommended "... that no part of the Church east of the pulpit should be used until restored" and also that he was "... strongly of opinion that the Church must be looked to without unnecessary delay. The chancel was in that state that a man could not tell whether it would stand ten years or ten hours." It was subsequently discovered that part of the Tudor building had been erected without any foundations to support it.

Between 1901 and 1903 extensive renovation of the east-end of the church was carried out. This involved considerable demolition and rebuilding work necessary to stabilise the Tudor stonework. During this work a number of stone crosses and blocks with other, probably Christian, designs were discovered. They were subsequently dated to c.950AD. These clearly indicate that the location must have been a centre of Christian worship since Saxon times.

Any Saxon building is likely to have been quite small and may have been a simple wooden construction, although local historian Michael Baumber argued that the existence of so many stone crosses implies a stone building.

A "missing" early Norman Church ?

The Domesday Book, created 20 years after the Norman Conquest, reports the existence of a stone-built church at Kildwick. Whether this church was the old Saxon building, dating from before the conquest, or a new one is not known. However, there is evidence for the existence of an early Norman church in Kildwick that has largely been forgotten and which has all but disappeared.

All that remains are the tops (the capitals) of two columns which have been incorporated into the early-1300s building by turning them upside-down and using them as columns bases. Their locations are indicated in red on the plan of the church shown earlier.



The base of the column at the very west end of the church



The base of the 4th column from the west end (with thanks to Chris Wright)

Note: *The base of the column at the very west end of the church is quite easily seen; the base of the 4th column is more difficult as it is largely below the level of the wooden platform that supports the pews. Both have the same decoration.*

These inverted capitals are of good quality and are sizeable pieces of masonry – one slightly smaller than 30” square, the other slightly larger – and surely indicate that the Norman structure was a substantial building.

This begs the question, what happened to the rest of this church? It is a question that the author is unable to answer, beyond offering the following possibilities:

- The Norman church was destroyed to such a large extent that only the two capitals were in any fit condition to be used as part of the early 1300s building.
- The early 1300s building re-used stone from the Norman church but only these two blocks have, so far, been identified as coming from the earlier building.
- The Norman church was totally demolished and all except these two stones were carted away, possibly to be used elsewhere.
- These two stones, although Norman, are not actually from the old Kildwick church, but were brought in, with other new stone blocks, for use in the early 1300s building.

One or more of these possibilities may offer an explanation.