

St Andrew's Church, Great Aycliffe

The parish church of St Andrew stands at the south end of the village of 'Old' Aycliffe, set back to the west of what was formerly the Great North Road. Extensive limestone quarries to the south of the churchyard have now been filled in, and a late 20th-century factory building now dominates the southern skyline.

Description

The church consists of a three-bay nave with aisles extended west to engage the west tower, a south porch, and an unaisled chancel with an organ chamber and vestry on the north.

The Exterior

The **West Tower** has two quite different fabric types. The lower part is of coursed blocks of sandstone, varying in colour from grey to pink; many of the blocks are quite large and some quite elongate. The upper part is of much smaller pieces of local Magnesian Limestone, coursed and roughly-squared, with quoins and dressings of grey or purplish sandstone. The west side of the tower is in four stages, divided by chamfered set-backs; at the base is a chamfered plinth, which continues round a pair of substantial stepped buttresses that die into the wall a little below the top of the lower stage. The lower stage has a central lancet window, quite broad, with a simple chamfered surround, its sill and north jamb repaired in recent ashlar; the southern part of the wall below it is concealed by a small modern boiler house.

The chamfered set-back between the lower and second stages is not present on the south; on the north it is set a little lower, and more in the form of a string course¹. The change from sandstone to limestone comes two-thirds of the way up the second stage, which has a narrow shoulder-arched windows with a chamfered surround on the west and north, and a similar opening, now blocked, on the south; their dressings are of large but irregular blocks. About a metre below the sill of the northern window is a block with a semicircular cut-out, perhaps the re-used monolithic head of a small Saxon or Norman window. On the east the apex of the nave roof rises to the top of this stage. The third stage, the earlier belfry, has its original openings now blocked and partly destroyed; each seems have consisted of two shoulder-arched lights; within the jambs of those on north and south smaller square-headed windows, with quite broad chamfered surrounds, have been inserted.

The present belfry, above a large chamfered set-back, has a two-light window of either segmental-pointed or almost semicircular (west) form, with simple Y-tracery; outside the head are outer rows of rough limestone voussoirs. There is a moulded hollow-chamfered oversailing course at the base of the parapet, which has been rebuilt (except for parts of its lowest course) in 19th-century brown ashlar; it has an embattled moulded coping and a crocketed pinnacle at each corner.

The only external stonework of the **Nave** is its east gable, above the chancel roof. This is of coursed squared stone, and looks entirely Victorian. The gable has an oversailing ashlar coping of interlocked slabs, with the base of a finial cross.

The west wall of the **South Aisle** has large roughly-squared sandstone blocks, rather like

1 Is this actually a roof-tabling for the north aisle?

those in the Tower. The west window of the aisle is a chamfered lancet, which appears an unaltered medieval feature. Above it the steeply-sloping roof-line of the original aisle is very clear, below a heightening that is largely in limestone rubble; the buttress below, projecting southwards from the south end of the wall, is of sandstone blocks, but looks of one build with the heightening.

The south wall of the aisle is constructed of roughly-coursed limestone rubble, largely obscured by heavy mortaring. It can be divided into four irregular bays. At either side of the western is a stepped buttress rising to about two-thirds the height of the wall, with between them a two-light window; the four-centred arched heads of its lights, with sunk spandrels, are cut into a single block. The window looks to be of 16th or 17th century date, although some of its dressings have been renewed. It is not clear whether an area of walling above its head has been disturbed, or simply re-pointed.; there is more obvious disturbance to the east, where a rough set-back in the wall face develops at about the level of the window head, and continues past the second buttress to the south porch. There is an apparent vertical discontinuity c 0.30 m west of the porch, which might indicate the position of the west wall of an earlier porch.

The south door, within the porch, has dressings of yellowish sandstone and a two-centred arch of two orders; the continuous inner order bears a simple chamfer, the outer a keeled roll moulding between two hollows, carried on jamb shafts with carved capitals (the western badly eroded, the eastern, with nail-head ornament, a 19th-century replacement) and eroded moulded bases; the hoodmould, chamfered on its lower angle, has old head stops, a lady on the east and a man on the west. The two bays east of the porch have a taller stepped buttress between them; each has a window of three stepped lancet-arched lights, with pierced spandrels, under a four-centred arch, with a casement-moulded hood. Most of their dressings are tooled-and-margined ashlar, of earlier-19th century character. Above the eastern is an area of larger sandstone blocks that appear to infill an earlier arched window, slightly and set a little further to the east. The eastern bay of the wall has a chamfered plinth, that stops abruptly about a metre from the buttress between the bays.

There is no buttress at the south-east corner of the aisle, where there are quite large quoins in the lower 2 m of the angle, probably indicating the height of the original aisle, and much smaller and irregular ones above. The chamfered plinth continues across the east end of the aisle; its northernmost block is a 19th-century replacement. The wall above is largely of sandstone; again heightened in limestone, although heavy mortaring obscures the junction between the two sections. The two-light east window of the aisle has a segmental-pointed arch (partly old) and renewed Y-tracery. The north end of the wall, where one might have expected to see the south-eastern angle quoins of the original aisleless nave, may have been rebuilt in the 19th-century, although high up, just below the level of the chancel eaves, is one large block with a curious series of parallel slightly-curved lines incised on it.

The parapet of the south wall of the aisle is of sandstone ashlar, and appears to be of 18th-century date; it has a hollow-chamfered course at its base, above which is a tall course of large blocks, and an elaborately-moulded coping. It is divided into three bays by pilasters which have now lost their finials²

The south wall of the 19th-century **South Porch** is of sandstone ashlar, and has a chamfered plinth; the side walls are of squared stone, and have a shallow square-topped plinth; the lower

2 These were in the form of urns at the ends, and spiked balls between (Hodgson 1890, 58)

part of the east wall has more elongate blocks, which may be older material re-used. . The outer arch is of steep two-centred form, moulded with a chamfer within a roll; there is a hoodmould, chamfered below. The gable is coped with interlocking slabs, chamfered on their lower angle.

The external walls of the **North Aisle** were entirely rebuilt in 1882 in a snecked brown sandstone, with a distinctive pecked tooling, with tooled ashlar dressings. The west wall has a chamfered plinth and a chamfered set-back about a metre above the ground, which is continued around the buttress projecting northwards at the north end of the wall. The west window (drawing on r. from Hodgson 1912) is an older feature re-set; it consists of a lancet with a chamfered surround; its head is cut into an elongate tapering block, which to the north has a second (rather shallower) cut-out as if for the head of a second light; a second tapered block, incised to simulate coursed masonry) is set upright as if to form the north jamb of this second light. Both tapering blocks are thought to be Anglo-Saxon cross shafts, although very little indication of their carving remains.

The chamfered plinth, but not the set-back, is continued along the north wall of the aisle, which is divided by stepped buttresses into three irregular bays; the western buttress is broader than the eastern. The western bay has a single trefoil-arched light with a moulded hood; the central bay has a three-light and a two-light window and the eastern a three-light, all with cinquefoil-headed lights and cusped piercings in the spandrels, under casement-moulded hoodmoulds with turned-back ends. There is an oversailing chamfered course at eaves level.

The south wall of the **Chancel** is largely of 1882 and of snecked roughly-squared stone, with limestone and sandstone mixed. There is a little older fabric, roughly-coursed rather than snecked, in the lower courses near the east end of the wall, corresponding with an old weathered section of chamfered plinth. The south-eastern quoins are quite large sandstone blocks laid in an irregular alternate fashion; three elongate blocks (now cut back flush with the face of the wall) extend westward and suggest that the string-course on the east end may have continued along at least part of the south wall. To the west of the priest's door the plinth is clearly Victorian. Close to the west end of the wall is a chamfered lancet window, only its head old; then comes a small round-arched light with a chamfered surround, its external dressings all Victorian. A second round-arched window with worn dressings of dark sandstone seems old³, and then comes the priest's door with a narrow two-centred arch and a thin continuous chamfer; only parts of its jambs look old. East of the door is a square-headed window of three elliptical-arched lights, with sunk spandrels, in a chamfered surround; all of its dressings show a parallel tooling characteristic of the earlier 19th century.

The lower part of the east wall of the chancel is old, and is made up on roughly-coursed pieces of limestone; there is a chamfered plinth, and a sandstone string-course, chamfered above and below (with incised lines bordering the vertical face) below the sills of the stepped triplet of round-arched chamfered windows. These are probably of 1835; they have hoodmoulds chamfered on their lower angles, with above these an outer order of rough voussoirs. Old masonry seems to survive up to eaves level on either side of the windows, but the gable of coursed limestone rubble above is all 19th-century, as is the ashlar gable coping of interlocked blocks, capped by the base of a finial cross.

Only the eastern third of the north wall of the chancel is now exposed externally, and seems

3 Re-used in the wall c 0.50 m below its sill is a chamfered voussoir from a small arch.

to be largely of sandstone (with some large blocks in the lower courses). The chamfered plinth only continues for c 0.80 m from the eastern angle, giving way to a rough set-back set at a slightly higher level. Above is one round-arched window, of similar proportions to those in the south wall, but in this case rebated externally; it appears wholly unrestored.

The **Vestry** and **Organ Chamber** are of one build with, but slightly lower than, the adjacent North Aisle. They are constructed of same snecked sandstone as the aisle, with tooled-and-margined ashlar quoins and dressings, and a chamfered plinth. The north wall has two windows, the western a single light and the eastern of two lights; their lights have trefoiled ogee arches. The east wall has a single ogee-arched trefoiled light under a two-centred arched hoodmould with a casement moulding, and turned-back ends. At the junction of the wall with the chancel it is capped by a square chimney with an octagonal shaft.

The steep-pitched roofs of nave and chancel are of graduated green Lakeland slates, with a serrated ridge; there are also Lakeland slates on the south porch. The lower-pitched roofs of the aisles and organ chamber/vestry are of Welsh slate.

The Interior

The internal walls of the nave and tower are bare of plaster, but those of the aisle and chancel plastered, except for exposed dressings and the internal splays of some windows.

The internal walls of the **Tower** are of quite large roughly-squared stones, largely sandstone, with some elongate blocks. In the lower courses of the west wall are some very large almost square blocks, that look very like re-used material. The tower opens from the nave by a large two-centred arch of two chamfered orders; the jambs have large semicircular attached shafts with moulded capitals (partially restored) and simple chamfered bases; the arches that open into the aisles are very similar, although slightly smaller. The masonry above and to either side of each arch 'dips' to some extent towards the arch, possibly due to the arches being insertions in earlier fabric.

Above the tower arch, at the level of the tops of the side walls of the nave is a slight set-back, and a change in fabric to rather smaller coursed stones. In this section of wall, slightly to the south of the apex of the arch, is a blocked square-headed doorway with chamfered jambs and a rough square lintel; this seems to have traces of carving but is difficult to inspect closely.

The west window has a broad internal splay and a shouldered rear arch; the lintel itself appears to be recent concrete. In the south-west angle of the tower is a flue for the boiler; in the lower stage it is boxed in, but in the upper parts of the tower it is of 20th-century brick.

The lower stage of the tower has a ceiling carried on five transverse (north-south) beams, which in turn rest on large roughly-squared corbels (one on the south has been broken off). An iron ladder leads up to a trapdoor giving access to the Ringing Chamber; the walls are of exposed stonework, although heavily mortared. The windows on the north and west each have their internal jambs cut square with the wall, with some large blocks in the jambs; the window on the south seems to have been similar, but its external opening is walled up; its internal opening, like that of the blocked doorway on the east, now forms a recess. This doorway has rather crudely-cut jambs, and a roughly shouldered rear arch. On the east side of the brick flue at the south-west corner, c 1 m above the floor, is an odd projecting block. The boarded ceiling of the chamber is carried on two iron girders, close to the east and west walls.

A wooden ladder leads up to the second floor of the tower, a low chamber below the belfry. The walls here are of coursed limestone. Here there are rough set-backs on both north and south walls, c 0.30 m above the present floor. Above this the lower parts of the original belfry openings, now blocked, are exposed in all four walls, their internal jambs, apparently set square with the wall, of sandstone blocks with a light diagonal tooling. On the west there is a rough set back around a metre above the floor, cuttings the jambs of the blocked opening on that side.

Another short leads up to the belfry, where the internal walls are largely of coursed limestone rubble. At the foot of the walls are the upper parts of the jambs of the earlier belfry openings; there is no indication of their rear arches, or of the smaller blocked light set within the jambs of the southern. The present belfry openings have pointed rear arches cut from large blocks of sandstone; the internal dressings of the southern are very heavily eroded. On the east there is a rough set-back (more of a slope) at the level of the springing of the arch of the opening. At the west end of the north all of the belfry, c 1 m above the floor is what appears to be an infilled opening c 0.60 m high by c 0.80 m wide. The tower has a low-pitched east-west roof with a single central truss, probably of 1882. A modern ladder gives access to the roof via a trapdoor.

The side walls of the **Nave**, the earliest part of the church, show various irregularities, but are generally of roughly-coursed stone including some very large blocks.

Each of the nave arcades is of three bays. The south arcade has two-centred arches, the eastern appreciably slightly wider and taller than the others. The arches are each of two chamfered orders towards the nave, with the outer order left square towards the aisle; where the outer order of the eastern arch, which is clearly simply cut into pre-existing fabric, is very narrow. There is a hoodmould, chamfered on its lower angle, towards the nave. The piers are circular and the responds have broad semicircular attached shafts; the capitals are moulded, with a ring at the abacus, and the bases of holdwater type, those of the piers set on square plinths. On the west side of the western arch a large socket, presumably relating to a former gallery, has been cut into the first and second voussoirs above the respond capital. The base and plinth of the western pier look all restoration; it is less easy to determine the age of those of the second as they are badly affected by saltation. The eastern respond is of unusual form; the capital is of the usual type (with an infilled socket, probably for a screen) but the lower 1.5 m is a square block of 19th-century ashlar; the lower part of the short semicircular shaft is of greater diameter to the upper, with a roll-moulding around the set-back between the two parts.

The internal face of the south wall of the nave above the arcade includes two large blocks, high above the eastern pillar, with diagonal grooves indicating that they have been re-used from some earlier structure; there is a third similar block towards the west end of the internal face of the north wall. A ragged break above and a little west of the western pillar indicates the west end of the phase I nave. In the section of wall to the west of this is a blocked opening c 1.5 m wide, shown on the 'at present' drawings accompanying the 1881 faculty as being a low window of three lights; it was almost certainly a late 185th or 19th century insertion lighting the western gallery.

The outer face of the wall has been re-faced to some extent, with neither the junction between the phase I and phase II masonry or that between the phase II masonry and the tower being very clear; in addition the masonry in the spandrel above the western pier seems to have been disturbed. Just below the aisle roof is a string course of plain square section; to the west it ends against a 19th-century corbel, directly above the eastern respond of the arch

into the tower. The apex of the outer order of the eastern arch of the arcade is actually cut into this string.

The arches of the north arcade are semicircular, and each of two orders; towards the nave both orders have narrow chamfers on their angles, but to the aisle the outer order is left square. To the nave there is a hoodmould, chamfered above, and with indented or 'nutmeg' ornament on its lower angle. The responds and piers have moulded capitals rather different to those of the south arcade, the bells being concave in section, and the bases are of 'holdwater' type. The western respond has a semicircular shaft; two of the blocks on its south side have what looks like an infilled socket c 1.8 m above the floor. The western pier is semi-octagonal; its base and plinth are largely restoration. The eastern pier is circular and the eastern respond semi-octagonal.

The internal face of the wall above the north arcade shows a possible ragged vertical joint above and about 1 m to the east of the eastern pier, and a clearer break around 1 m west of the western pier, indicating the west end of the phase I nave. On the external face of the wall the two quoins of the north-west corner of the phase I nave remain visible above the western arch, one tall upright block and a long one above, with directly above that a square-section string course, which is interrupted by 19th-century corbels. This has a joint a few cm west of the phase I angle quoins, as if it returned across the original west end. The string has been extended west, to end more or less on the line of the north-west quoins of the phase II nave. These are of side-alternate type and are substantial rather than massive; the quoins, a metre or so west of the western respond of the arcade, remain intact up to c 2.5 m above the floor; above this the tower walling has been keyed in with that of the nave, Two quoins appear to survive in situ directly below the string, but these are set a few cm to the east of the line of those below. The walling of the phase II nave is of rather more regularly coursed and squared blocks than the phase I masonry.

The west window of the **South Aisle** has a trefoiled rear arch that seems genuine medieval work. The three-light window on the south of the western bay of the aisle has a very broad internal splay, and cut stone jambs, with curved corbel-like blocks at the top suggesting that its rear arch was formerly of a shouldered form (like the west window of the tower), but there is now a shallow rubble arch set between them. The sill (along with those of all the other windows in the aisle) is of 19th-century date. The south door has a segmental rear arch, with a infilled drawbar tunnel in the east jamb. The two three-light windows further east have segmental-pointed rear arches, with chamfers to their heads only. All their dressings are 19th-century, except for part of the internal east jamb of the western, which has a small and fairly rough lancet-topped niche or recess, now infilled. Immediately to the east of the eastern window is an old piscina with a chamfered trefoiled arch, and its bowl broken away.

The outer parts of the internal jambs of the east window of the aisle are splayed, but the inner cut square to the wall, implying that a narrower opening has been widened. The rear arch is of segmental-pointed form, with a chamfer to its head; its masonry appears medieval.

The internal walls of the **South Porch** are rendered, and lined to simulate ashlar. The wooden benches at the sides are carried on brick piers, and the roof is boarded above the exposed purlins.

The internal walls of the **North Aisle** are all rendered, except for the west end, below the sill of its window; the masonry here is of coursed roughly-squared stone, and looks of medieval character. All the dressings of the trefoiled rear arch of the window are restoration. In the

north wall of the aisle, all four windows are wholly Victorian; the westernmost has a shouldered segmental rear arch; further east the two three-light windows have segmental rear arches, and the two-light window between them a segmental-pointed one, all with chamfers to the heads only. At the east end of the aisle is a two-centred arch into the Organ Chamber, with a continuous chamfer with broach stops at the base of each jamb.

The arch into the **Chancel** is two-centred, but now quite badly distorted; it is of two orders with a broad chamfer to the inner and a much narrower one to the outer. There is a hoodmould to both nave and chancel, with indented or nutmeg ornament; it seems rather cruder than that of the north arcade. The arch springs from half-round responds with capitals quite like those of the north arcade, except that there are two lines of nail-head ornament. The walling above the chancel arch, towards the nave, is of snecked squared stone; it appears of 19th-century date; on the north of the arch, just below the level of its capital, is a large projecting corbel, too damaged for its original form to be recognisable. Towards the chancel the wall above the arch is plastered.

On the south side of the chancel, from west to east are: a lancet with a trefoiled rear arch, parts of which are old, then two round-headed lights, the internal surrounds of which are largely ancient (apart from their sills). The jambs of the priests' door, cut square with the wall, look pre-Victorian but might be post-medieval; the chamfered segmental rear arch is Victorian. The segmental chamfered rear arch of the three-light window at the east end of the wall is again Victorian, but parts of its jambs look older.

The triplet of round-arched windows in the east end have tooled ashlar dressings, all of 19th-century date.

On the north of the chancel there is a two-centred arch into the Organ Chamber, of a single chamfered order; then comes an ancient round-arched window now opening into the Vestry. The vestry door has a two-centred arch with a continuous chamfer, and then at the east end of the wall comes a second round-headed window. The shouldered two-centred rear arch appears to be medieval work, although probably later than the external opening.

The internal walls of the vestry are plastered. The door into the chancel has a segmental rear arch with a chamfer only to its head, and the east window has a segmental-pointed rear arch; the windows into north wall of vestry and organ chamber both have square heads and stop-chamfered internal lintels. There is an arched fireplace (largely concealed by a safe) set diagonally in the north-east angle of the vestry.

The **Roofs** of the church are all of 1882. Nave and chancel have scissor-braced common rafter roofs; the aisles each have a roof of seven irregular bays, with wall-posts carried on 19th-century corbels on the outer wall, and solid spandrel pieces; all the roofs have ashlar to the eaves.

Fittings and Furnishings

The **Benches** in the nave and south aisle are described by Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 83) as 'of c.1630, with very pretty backs and ends with widely-spaced turned balusters, like settles'; there was considerable re-arrangement in 1882. The benches in the north aisle follow the same design but are largely of 19th-century date. There is another old bench of the same type in the Ringing Chamber. There is other good 17th-century woodwork in the **Pulpit** (set on a late-19th century ashlar base), a **Chair**, the **Altar Rails** (with symmetrical balusters), the **Altar Table** and the carved panels of the **Reredos**.

The **Lectern** and **Chancel Stalls** are all of late 19th century date.

The **Font** has an ancient bowl, entirely undecorated and shaped like a simple and primitive capital, which Pevsner & Williamson (op.cit) suggest may be early Norman. The lead lining to the bowl, the shaft (consisting of a central circular column with four smaller ones around it) and base are all Victorian.

The three **Bells** bear the following inscriptions:

1 VENITE EXULTEMUS DOMINO SS 1664 IR RS RH RP

1 SOLI DOE GLORIA SS 1664

These two are from the foundry of Samuel Smith, of York.

1 1869 MEARES & STAINBANK FOUNDERS LONDON

The cast-iron **Bell Frames** appear to be of 20th century date, by Gillett and Johnston of Croydon

None of the **Stained Glass** appears to be of especial note. That in the eastern triplet is of c 1866 and typical of the period; the three-light window on the south of the chancel has rather better late-19th century glass (the Presentation). The easternmost window in the north wall of the north aisle in memory of John Davie, Vicar of Aycliffe 1835-1880; there is more late-19th century glass in the west windows of nave and aisles.

Carved Stones

Aycliffe church has an important collection of pre-Conquest carved stones, described in detail and illustrated by Cramp (1984, 41-48); her numbering scheme is adhered to. They comprise:

Cross shafts (1) and (2) had been re-used as the inner and outer lintels of a square-headed north door in the north aisle, from which they were removed in the early 19th century.

(1) Cross shaft now at west end of north aisle; last quarter of 10th to first quarter of 11th century.

(2) Cross shaft , and part of head, now at west end of south aisle. Second half of 10th century.

(3) Section of cross shaft now set in internal face of south wall of chancel. Late 10th to early 11th century.

(4) Fragment of cross shaft, now set in internal face of south wall of chancel. Late 10th to early 11th century.

Pieces (5) - (12) are now set on a plinth at the west end of the south aisle. All were removed from the walls in the 1882 restoration.

(5) Piece of cross shaft. Late 10th to early 11th century.

- (6) Part of cross shaft. Late 10th to early 11th century.
- (7) Part of cross shaft. Late 10th to early 11th century.
- (8) Part of cross-shaft re-used to form the square bowl of a piscina. Late 10th century.
- (9) Arm of cross. Late 10th to early 11th century.
- (10) Part of cross arm. Late 9th to early 10th century.
- (11) Part of recumbent slab (?). Late 10th to early 11th century.
- (12) Round-headed grave-marker. Early 11th century
- (13) Round-headed grave marker now in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge.
- (14) Part of cross-shaft (?) built into the south-west buttress of the tower. No longer distinguishable.
- (15) Cross shaft now lintel of blocked window at west end of north aisle.
- (16) Triangular panel with cross in south churchyard wall. Tentatively dated to the 8th century, but may in fact be a medieval piece (see description of churchyard).
- (17) Part of a grave cover, now at the west end of the south aisle. 11th century.

Also lying at the west end of the south aisle is a chevron-moulded voussoir, and one or two other stones that it is difficult to make anything of. Beneath a 17th-century pew set against the south wall are two broken finial crosses that look of 19th-century date.

On the internal sill of the north window of the Ringing Chamber are a number of fragments of carved stone including a crocketed capital; they may be pieces of some post-medieval monument. On the sill of the west window is a rainwater head dated '1882'.

Sepulchral Monuments

At the west end of the north aisle is a knight's effigy. Boyle (1892, 675) describes it as 'of a knight, dressed in chain mail, though the material in which the rings were expressed is entirely worn away. A surcoat reaches the knees. On his left side is a blank heater-shaped shield The hands are joined in the act of prayer, the legs are crossed, and the feet rest on a dog. The effigy must be ascribed to the early part of the fourteenth century'.

The church has an interesting collection of medieval Cross Slabs, these are fully described and illustrated by Ryder (1985); these comprise:

- 1 A double slab, probably of late 12th or 13th century date, thought to commemorate a

blacksmith or armourer and his wife⁴, set in the floor of the chancel just inside the chancel arch, and currently concealed by a fitted c; it was badly mutilated in 1882 when cut down to fit into the present pavement. The r. hand cross (head now gone) has a sword on the r. and a pair of pincers and hammer on the l, whilst the l. cross has a pair of shears on the r. and a key (now cut away) on the l. Perhaps the most unusual feature of the stone is its series of five crosses (some now cut away) which seem to imply that it was re-used as an altar slab at some time.

- 2 Intact slab set in the floor at the west end of the north aisle. Relief design; simple cross with petalled rosettes, accompanied by chalice and book, on which perch birds; naturalistic oak leaves spring from the shaft. Probably early 14th century.

Slabs (3), (4) and (5) are built into the internal face of the south wall of the chancel

- 3 Part of a relief-carved cross head of the 'interlaced diamond' type; early 14th century.
- 4 Upper part of small relief-carved slab with sword on r. of shaft and another object (perhaps the head of a key, or the buckle of a belt) on the l. 14th century.
 - 5 Slab with bracelet cross and sword; 13th century
 - 6 The head of a slab (now lying loose at the east end of the south aisle) found in 1982 in a field north of the church. Bracelet cross head within a circle. This may be part of a slab which Hodges (1884, pl.2 no.2) shows as complete, and as having a key as its emblem
 - 7 Incised fragment built into north wall of churchyard; cross shaft and sword.
 - 8 Another similar fragment also in north wall of churchyard.

Slabs (9) and (10) were illustrated by Hodges (op.cit, nos 4 and 6) but are now 'lost'.

- 9 Bracelet cross head set in square panel. Late 12th or early 13th century.
- 10 unusual cross with central disc and oval-shaped arms extending beyond an enclosing circle; sword on r. Perhaps late 12th century.
- 11 A slab that came to light in 1997 when repairs were being made to the perimeter drain. It has been re-used as a footing to the buttress on the south wall of the south aisle, to the west of the porch. The exposed section showed a cross head with fleur-de-lys terminals and a pair of shears on the l. side of the cross. Probably 13th century.

Two large limestone slabs are set in the floor at the west end of south aisle, one, partly concealed by the Saxon cross, has an indent for a brass plate.

The church has an unusual dearth of **Post-Medieval Monuments**. Apart from a few 20th century brass plates the only monument is one is set on the north wall of the chancel, to the

4 The symbolism of its emblems occasioned much antiquarian debate in the 19th century; for references see Ryder 1985.

east of the door into the vestry. This is a marble tablet with a cross, anchor, cannon balls and coat-of-arms, to Frederick Richard Hardinge 'Mate of HMS Encounter (in the China Seas;) who died from dysentery on board the Royal Naval Hospital Ship Hercules 1856'; he was the second son of Frederick Hardinge Esq of Coatham Hall, Coatham Mundeville. The tablet is signed by W.T.Haile, 63 Edgeware Road, London.⁵

Historical Notes

782 The Anglo Saxon Chronicle records that 'in this year there was a synod at Aclea'; a second synod was held in 789. The identification of 'Aclea' with Aycliffe (as against Oakley, in Essex) remains a matter of some controversy;.

990-1018 'Heaclif' - again the identification is not unchallenged - was given by Bishop Alhune to his daughter Ecgrida.

1082 A more certain reference to the manor being given to the Convent of Durham during the bishopric of Carlileph, by Scot son of Elstane.

1341-74 During the priorate of John Fossor of Durham, 'Item unum gavel cori de Acle' (a new chancel gable, perhaps implying a new east window) is recorded.

1446 Repairs to the chancel (re-roofing?) At a cost of £6 13s 4d

(The above two items recorded in Historiae Dunelmensis Scriptores Tres (Surtees Soc, ix (1839) p.cxliv and ccxcix). I am grateful to Eric Cambridge for this reference)

c1787 The earliest detailed account of Aycliffe Church is by the Durham historian William Hutchinson (1823, III, 238-40). 'The church of Aycliffe stands on elevated ground, and is a fine object from the great north road, leading from Darlington to Durham, being at a distance from the town, southward. The chancel is 13 paces in length, and five in width, studded in oak, the windows modern. The nave has side aisles, is 20 paces in length and 12 in width; the tower is about 85 feet high, and rises on four pointed arches, supported to the east on heavy clustered pillars, and pilasters in the west wall. The south aisle is formed by two round pillars, supporting three light pointed arches. In the yard, on the south side of the church, lies a colossian effigy in stone, with hands elevated; a shield on the left arm, without any armorial device; the sword sheathed; the legs crossed, the right leg uppermost, the feet resting on a dog; the personage represented, unknown.

1823 Surtees (II,325) closely follows Hutchinson's account, making the same error as regards the tower being carried on four (rather than the actual three) arches, but adds that 'The arch betwixt the nave and belfry is closed by a wooden screen, with the arms of Charles I. The pulpit, the desk, and stalls of oak, carved with considerable taste, seem of the same date'. He continues to describe the Saxon crosses, that had been re-used as the inner and outer lintels of a square-headed north door. One had lately been replaced 'on its original pedestal, which, with part of the broken shaft, remained in the church yard. The second was 'not yet restored'. He refers to the medieval blacksmith's slab 'within the altar rails'.

⁵ Mr Oates, churchwarden, thinks that this monument may have been brought from a small church, now closed, at Coatham Mundeville. C 1 km to the south.

1834 Mackenzie and Ross (II, 157) again give a similar account, but describe a gallery beneath the old painted coat of arms of Charles I in the tower arch, and the east window as being 'a square modern sash'. The windows in the south aisle were under circular arches, and those in the north aisle are square. The two Saxon crosses were now in the base of the tower. One had been re-erected in churchyard, but 'the injury it sustained from some wanton or bigotted person caused it to be again removed'. The knight's effigy had been moved into chancel from the churchyard on the south side of church.

1857 Fordyce (I, 525) once again follows the three earlier county historians, except for correcting the height of the tower to 'about 66 feet high'. The east window 'is now restored by a triple light with stone mullions. In 1835, the whole were renewed, nearly in their primitive style'. 'A gallery was erected in 1835 by the vicar, the Rev.J.D.Eade, and other subscribers.In 1852, the greater portion of the interior was newly plastered, and the south porch re-erected'.

Faculties and Other Records of Structural Work

Date	Faculty No.	Works
1835		Major alterations; the north aisle rebuilt, new east windows in the chancel, new gallery in the nave.
1852		Further works, including the re-plastering of the interior and the rebuilding of the south porch.
18 July 1881	251	Creation of new organ chamber and vestry. This is the major 1881-2 restoration carried out under the architect Ewan Christian. The actual works carried out were far more extensive than proposed (see 'Structural History' section)
3 October 1931	2390	Repairs and renovation in belfry.
3 January 1934	2488	Installation of electric light
12 may 1951	3421	Repairing pews and sanctuary furnishings
13 August 1953	3645	Renewal of a stone mullion
29 July 1980	5846	Replacement of lead stolen from church roofs with Westmorland slate.
12 January 1981	5899	Redecoration and plastering
12 March 1985	7794	Restoration of tower.
18 October 1993	8228	Repair and re-pointing of stonework.
20 March 1997	8479	Creation of garden of remembrance at North-West Corner of Churchyard.

Structural History

Aycliffe Church received the benefit of two early studies, both by the Rev Joseph Hodgson. The first (Hodgson 1890) is in effect a paper read twenty years before, when the redoubtable cleric adjudged the building 'a fair average specimen of the rude old Durham churches of the third class', plus a supplement describing the 1882 restoration and the discovery of Saxon work in the nave walls. The second (Hodgson 1912) is largely a series of illustrations, and a discussion of medieval grave slabs. The overall pattern of the structural history outlined here largely follows an earlier article by this writer (Ryder 1988, 45-51) in which the arguments are spelled out in more detail.

A Pre-Conquest Phase I

Hodgson (1912) was the first to recognise the survival of pre-Conquest fabric in the side walls of the eastern section of the nave, identifying the upper section of the original north-west angle quoin. Taylor & Taylor (1965, 34-5) re-examined this fabric, and pronounced it as dating to 'period C' (950-1100); in addition they recognised the remains of an early square-section string course.

Insufficient survives of the north-west quoin to determine whether it was of the 'long-and-short' type (which appears the more likely) or the 'side-alternate' form commoner in the North of England.

B Pre-Conquest Phase II

Hodgson saw the westward extension of the nave, to its present length, as of 12th-century date, but the square-section string-course is continued along it, and the surviving north-west quoin is of side-alternate form. In Ryder (1988, 47) this quoin was compared with those of the nave at Heighington, which were seen as being of 10th or early 11th century date. An archaeological assessment of Heighington Church (1996) however casts doubt on the claims that this fabric is pre-Norman.

C The Tower. Pre-Conquest Phase III?

The base of the tower clearly post-dates the western quoins of the phase II nave; the question is as to whether it pre-dates its various 13th-century architectural features. There are features that suggest it does. One is the use of large and irregular blocks of grey sandstone up to just above the level of the ringing chamber windows, where there is an abrupt change to limestone. Another is the manner in which the courses of the sandstone dip towards the tower arches, as if some structural movement had taken place when the arches were inserted. Ryder (1988, 47) argues that the ringing chamber openings may be older ones remodelled in the 13th century, but it should be noted that similar openings, with their jambs cut at right angles to the wall (which the Taylors have argued is typical of Pre-Conquest architecture) occur in a 13th-century context in the tower of the Chapel at Sherburn Hospital. The crude shouldered arch of the doorway from ringing chamber into nave roof is paralleled in the tower at Staindrop, but this is another church where claims of a pre-Conquest date may not stand up to modern scrutiny.

The evidence does not seem conclusive either way. It is possible that the lower sandstone part of the tower is of late Pre-Conquest or 'Overlap' date (perhaps c1100) remodelled a little over a century later; it is also possible that it is of 13th-century construction, re-using earlier material in its lower section.

D The Late 12th and Early 13th Century Remodelling

A major campaign of works, spread over around half a century, left the church much in the form that it remains in today. The north aisle would seem to have been added c1190-1200; the details of the arcade, notably its nutmeg ornament, are paralleled at St Helen Auckland and Staindrop. The chancel may have been rebuilt at the same time, or a few years later. The third period of works saw the building, or remodelling, of the tower, the construction of the south aisle and the westward extension of the north aisle to engage the tower.

There is some evidence to suggest that the south aisle may have been built in two phases. Only the eastern part of the aisle has a chamfered plinth; possibly that may have been built first, to abut on a surviving pre-Conquest porticus, replaced at some unspecified later date by the remainder of the aisle. The south door looks an early-13th century piece, but could have been re-set.

E Later Medieval Alterations

The added top stage of the tower, with its simply Y-tracery belfry openings, lacks dateable architectural features, but may well date to the late 14th or 15th century; its old parapet, removed in 1882, is described by Hodgson as very similar to that at Brancepeth Church. Any evidence of the new gable end to the chancel built under prior Fossor (see Historical Notes) has long since been swept away. The timber of a low-pitched late medieval roof 'of the plainest imaginable kind', said to be of 15th century date, survived until 1882.

F Post-Reformation Changes

As often, most of the evidences of Post-Reformation alterations was erased by the 19th century restorer. The odd two-light window west of the porch, or at least its outer opening, could be of 16th or 17th century date; the only survivor of the three windows in the chancel, with round-arched lights under square frames, is much restored but could be of almost any post-medieval date. The 'square modern sash' in the east end might have been a late medieval window that had lost its tracery. The usual galleries were constructed in the 18th and 19th centuries; the south aisle was provided with a new parapet with Classical touches in its pilasters; somewhat surprisingly it survived the Victorians, albeit shorn of its finials.

G The Nineteenth Century

As often happened, the church underwent two periods of 'restoration' in the 19th century, although most sources only refer to the second. The first was in 1835, when the north aisle was rebuilt; Fordyce refers to the windows (in the aisle, and in the east end of the chancel) being renewed 'nearly in their primitive style'. A new gallery was inserted in the nave, probably an extension of one already existing in the tower, and a clerestory window formed above the south arcade to provide it with light. The two three-light windows in the south aisle may be of the same period.

The south porch was rebuilt in 1852. Then in 1882 came the major restoration under Ewan Christian. The north aisle was rebuilt a second time, with new windows in a 14th century style, and an organ chamber and vestry added on the north of the chancel. The south wall of the chancel was virtually rebuilt ⁶, the chancel arch re-set in a new wall, new high-pitched roofs

6 Canon Greenwell, passing through Aycliffe on the train on May 15th 1882

place on both nave and chancel, and the tower parapet rebuilt. Some consideration was shown to things of antiquarian interest - old architectural features were re-set in the new chancel wall, and the nave walls were left bare of plaster to display their Saxon fabric. The 17th-century furnishings were largely retained, but considerable re-ordered.

The Churchyard

The churchyard is roughly rectangular; it has been extended to the west, apparently in the 1930s; the earlier west boundary is marked by a bank and a north-south line of old trees c 30 m from the church. The north, south and east walls of the churchyard are of limestone rubble, and have a bank raised against them on their inner faces. This is rather puzzling; was there originally a mound, the outer part of which has been cut away? The main entrance is on the east side, a little to the north-east of the church; it has 19th-century square piers with low pyramidal moulded caps; the short section of wall adjacent to the gateway has an ashlar coping, but the remainder is capped by rough slabs.

The War Memorial stands close to the north-east corner of the chancel; its head is a saltire cross fleury and brass plates on the base list both World War I and World War II dead. On the south is a small gateway into what is now the church car park; in the outer face of the wall between 2 and 5 m to the east are four triangular blocks of Frosterley marble, which are presumably sections of a medieval coped grave cover. In the course below are two more triangular blocks of sandstone, one with a sunk panel enclosing a splay-armed cross. Cramp (1984, 48) suggests that it may be of 8th century date and that it might either be 'a triangular panel for decorating the facade of a church' or 'the edge of a sarcophagus lid'. However, it closely resembles the end of a 12th or 13th century coped grave cover; very similar examples are found at nearby Great Stainton, Grindon, Kirk Merrington and in the collection of carved stones in the Refectory undercroft at Durham Cathedral (Ryder 1985, 41) . Two further fragments of medieval cross slabs are built into the north wall of the churchyard (see 'Sepulchral Monuments' section.

The churchyard has quite a number of attractive 18th-century tombstones; there are a few box tombs of the late 18th and early 19th century. To the north of the church most of the monuments are of 19th century date.

An old font bowl, probably of 14th or 15th century date, lies c 1.5 m to the south of the south aisle wall, west of the porch. It is octagonal with a moulded rim, now partly broken away.

Archaeological Assessment

The present flooring of the church is of a variety of types. There are late-19th century tiled floors in the sanctuary and stone flagging, probably of the same date, in chancel and nave, partly concealed by modern fitted carpets; there are boarded areas beneath the pews. Heating ducts, again partly concealed by the carpets, run the full length of building.

Deposits and structural remains beneath these floors will as usual have been disturbed by generations of burial, and the 19th-century underfloor heating system. Nevertheless, this is an important early building, and any disturbance of floors will need to be accompanied by archaeological recording. It is likely that some evidences may survive of an earlier chancel or chancels, and perhaps of ranges of porticus beneath the aisles. The amount of sandstone used

noted that 'nearly the whole of the south wall of the chancel was entirely down to the ground', Trans. Durham & Northumberland Architectural & Archaeological Society III (1882) xi.

in the tower, if not in situ Pre-Conquest or Overlap work, would point to some substantial part of the building having been demolished prior to its construction.

The nave and tower walls, now bare of plaster, have little to conceal. It is possible however that the present plaster in the internal walls of the south aisle, and possibly on the north and east of the chancel, might conceal earlier plasters; any removal will need careful monitoring. This is not the case in the north aisle, or on the south of the chancel, where it is clear that all the fabric is of 19th-century date.

Outside the building, the perimeter drain may have caused damage to archaeological deposits, although again any repairs may need monitoring, as was shown by the 1995 discovery of the medieval grave cover in a buttress footing (see p.10).

Priorities

A full record of the exposed masonry of the nave walls, preferably made with the aid of rectified photograph or photogrammetry, would be useful, and would assist our understanding of the earliest phases of this complex church.

The medieval priest's grave slab at the west end of the north aisle (cross slab no 2) is in poor condition, areas of its surface showing active decay. This important slab is urgently in need of appropriate treatment and conservation.

Peter F Ryder January 2001

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**Peter F Ryder
Historic Buildings Consultant**

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