

ST CUTHBERT, BILLINGHAM

St Cuthbert's church stands on the west side of the green at the centre of Billingham, before the 20th century a village but now a major part of the Teesside conurbation. The old parish church consists of a five-bay aisled nave with a west tower and south porch, and a 20th-century eastern arm consisting of a four-bay aisled chancel and a vestry block on the north.

Architectural Description

The Exterior

The **Tower** is square in plan, and only broken externally by an eroded string course at rather more than half its height. It contains a variety of fabric types. The lower section is of large roughly-squared and coursed blocks, of a mixture of pinkish and grey/buff sandstone; the angle quoins are not particularly massive; some are the height of one course, some of two. One or two of the large blocks in the lower courses on the west have cuts which might be Roman lewis holes. The size of walling stones decreases with height; this is especially noticeable on the north. On each side there is a large patch of white limestone blocks between a third and a half way up the tall lower stage, and another few courses just below the string. The belfry stage is virtually all of limestone, except for sandstone quoins and dressings. There is another course of sandstone above, then more limestone before the parapet itself.

On the west of the tower there is no evidence of any west doorway; a shallow triangular-headed recess presumably relates to a former wall tablet, possibly an earlier position of the one to the Rev Philip Rudd d.1901 now set close to the south end of the wall/ is square in plan. In the upper part of the lower stage is a round-headed window, its monolithic head cut into a large rectangular block. On the south a window in the lower stage has its head cut square externally, perhaps a relatively recent modification of an original opening. To the right is a straight joint, rising to about half the height of the lower stage, between the tower wall and the south-west angle quoins (again substantial, but not massive) of the earlier nave. Below the string-course is a high-level doorway with a round arched head, cut into a single large block, springing from projecting imposts which link it to a strip-work surround with projecting blocks on either side of the sill, and immediately above the imposts; about a metre beyond the eastern impost is what looks to be a putlock hole.

Several pieces of pre-Conquest sculpture have been identified built into the external walls of the tower; the only one now apparent is on the north, close to the north-east angle, just above the coping of the west end of the north aisle.

The belfry openings are each of two round-arched lights with megalithic lintels, carried by a roughly circular mid-wall shaft with a through-stone capital. The impost blocks look to be hollow-chamfered on their lower angles (certainly the eastern one of the south opening does, but this may be a replacement). There is a strip-work surround of the same type as that of the high-level doorway below, but the tympanum is pierced by an opening, cut through a single block, which is roughly circular on east and west but an eight-pointed star in shape on north and south. The northern belfry opening is the best-preserved of the four.

Above the belfry openings is a course of sandstone blocks (perhaps secondary) and then rather rubblier limestone up to an eroded hollow-chamfered string course and three courses of sandstone(?) below a moulded hollow-chamfered oversailing course and then the embattled coping. On the west side there is a rough opening in the sandstone walling c 1.0 m high by c

0.50 m wide, lighting the low chamber between the belfry and the roof.. As with the belfry openings, the parapet and its details are better preserved on the north. One merlon on the north has been replaced in new stone, and one on the south is currently missing.

The only external walls of the nave to be exposed at clerestory level above the aisle roofs. On the south the clerestory wall is almost all of coursed roughly-square limestone blocks; many are almost square, and look of 12th-century character. There are a few sandstone blocks, perhaps patched in, in the lower part of the wall below what appears to be an earlier line for the aisle roof; some of the blocks seem to infill sockets for timbers associated with this older roof.. At the base of the parapet is a hollow-moulded string interrupted by three fine gargoyles, the western two in the form of lion masks; the crenellated parapet has a moulded coping..

There are five clerestory windows; the western is a simple square-headed light with a chamfered surround, and seems old (although it does look to be an insertion); the others, alternately paired and single, are trefoiled ogee lights under square heads, and look of 19th or early 20th-century date in their present form, and their sills cut down below the old roof-line.

The height of the north aisle wall makes it difficult to see the north clerestory wall from ground level. The four windows are all square-headed chamfered lights of some age; the string above has three more gargoyles in the form of large grotesque heads and there is a crenellated parapet as on the south.

Several older accounts refer to the remains of a bellcote on the east gable of the nave; there is now no sign of this.

The **South Aisle** is built of coursed roughly-squared stone, with many large sandstone blocks in the lower courses, almost certainly doubly-recycled Saxon stone, which must have been used in the medieval south aisle rebuilt in the 19th century; the dressings are all of 19th-century ashlar. The aisle is of five bays, with the porch projecting from the second; it has a chamfered plinth, a moulded string at sill level (on the south only) and stepped buttresses, that at the western angle set diagonally; an oversailing casement-moulded course carries the parapet, which has a moulded coping. The south doorway, inside the porch, has a pointed arch of two orders the inner with a continuous roll moulding, the outer also roll-moulded, but carried on moulded imposts set on jambs shafts with carved capitals in a late-12th century style; there is also a moulded hood. with angels' heads as stops. The windows of the aisle are mostly of two lights, and have hollow-chamfered surrounds and moulded hoods with big block stops. That in the west end has two lancet lights with a trefoiled circle above, that in the north wall west of the porch trefoiled ogee-headed lights with a quatrefoil in the spandrel, and the first two east of the porch trefoiled lights with cinquefoils above. The easternmost window in the north wall is of three stepped lancets, with two cinquefoils and a trefoiled circle over.

The chamfered plinth and moulded string are continued round the **South Porch** has a pair of shallow buttresses flanking an archway of segmental-pointed form, with a continuous chamfer and a hoodmould, carried up in ogival fashion at its apex, with head stops, a king to the left and a bishop to the right.. Above is a corbel carrying a statue of St Cuthbert in front of a trefoiled niche; the steep gable, which carved kneelers and a coping chamfered on its lower angle, rising to a ring cross finial.

The **North Aisle**, externally of three bays, is built of square and coursed stone, with many large sandstone blocks in the lower courses (notably at the west end), probably re-used from Saxon parts of the building; higher in the wall there is more limestone, including squarish

diagonally-tooled blocks of 12th-century character, all apparently re-used. The wall has a fairly broad chamfered plinth; there are stepped buttresses, dying into the wall at about two-thirds of its height, set between the bays on the north, and diagonally at the north-west corner. An oversailing chamfered course carries the parapet, which has a plain chamfered coping.

At the west end of the aisle there has been a small sunk outbuilding, probably a boiler roof, set in the angle of aisle and tower; it has been infilled, but the footings of its brick walls remain, and the line of its roof can be traced on the walls. The west window is clearly of 19th-century date, and has two lancet-arched lights with a trefoil in the spandrel, under a moulded hood with simple block stops; there is an outer line of rough voussoirs above the hood. The wall has an oversailing coping chamfered on its lower angle. On the north each bay has a similar window, but in these the principal lights are trefoil-headed; the easternmost differs in having carved stops to its hoodmould, now very weathered as to appear medieval; does the hood survive from a medieval window?. Built into the wall c 0.30 m above the head of and 1.5 m to the east of the western window is what appears to be a section of the shaft of a 13th-century cross, with big dog-tooth ornament at the angles. The blocked north door, in the eastern part of the western bay, has a two-centred arch with a chamfered surround and a hoodmould chamfered on its lower angle.

The Eastern Arm

The eastern parts of the church are all of 1937 (there is a dedication tablet below the east window) and are mostly constructed of yellowish snecked ashlar. The side aisle are of four bays, articular by shallow buttresses; an organ chamber projects from the western bay of the south chapel, and a two-storeyed vestry block from the eastern two bays of the north wall of the north chapel; the east end of the sanctuary projects slightly beyond those of the chapels. The windows are mostly of three lights, with trefoiled cusped heads, under shallow segmental arches and hoodmoulds; the vestry block has square-headed mullioned windows with recessed-and-chamfered surrounds. To the west of the vestry the north wall of the western two bays of the north chancel aisle is built of coursed and square limestone, probably recycled from the 19th-century chancel, and has a chamfered plinth; the buttress at its north-west angle (the chancel aisle being slightly wider than the nave aisle) is of very weathered stone, and would appear to be the medieval buttress from the north-east angle of the nave aisle, simply re-sited and re-orientated a metre or so from its original position.

The Interior

The walls of the ancient section of the church are now bare of plaster, although their fabric is to some extent concealed by heavy pointing; the walls of the 20th-century eastern arm are plastered.

The internal walls of the basement of the **Tower** are whitewashed; . The window on the south has a roughly-tooled rear arch cut into a single block. It is flanked by two deep sockets, one cut into the west jamb and the other just outside the eastern jamb; a pair of corresponding sockets in the north wall are partly hidden by a modern shelf. The basement has a clearly-inserted quadripartite vault, with chamfered ribs springing from large corbels (which almost look like the capitals of angle shafts) in the angles . A section of the vault against the west wall has been cut away to allow the insertion of a steep ladder stair, now boxed in. A modern lamp conceals any detail at the intersection of the vaulting ribs. There is a cut-out in the western compartment of the vault, and two smaller holes for bell ropes.

The doorway into the base of the tower is of considerable interest; it is usually interpreted as

the original west door of the church, pre-dating the addition of the tower. It has a semicircular head, cut from the soffits of two large blocks, and springing from imposts chamfered on their lower angles. These extend the full thickness of the wall, but below them is a rebate, set roughly at the centre of the wall. The wider western half of the opening as a second chamfered course, immediately below the impost. What Taylor & Taylor (1965, I, 67) describe as a 'semicircular stone tympanum' is a relatively thin piece of stonework, set more or less centrally in the wall (its west face flush with the rebate) and carried on timbers that are of no great age. It is not clear whether the 'tympanum' is an original part of the opening.

The ladder stair rises to a lofty chamber, containing the clock. Its walls are largely obscured by heavy pointing, although several pieces of Pre-Conquest sculpture are exposed in the jambs of the openings on the west and south.. There appears to be a vertical column of disturbed masonry above the clock housing, running up the centre of the east wall. The floor of the belfry is carried on two old east-west beams, and transverse joists

A long ladder rises to the belfry; here the internal wall faces, all of limestone, are badly eroded. The internal surrounds of the belfry openings are very ragged; the 'sound holes' open to quite large rectangular openings internally. The floor of the chamber above is carried on one old north-south beam and two iron girders, the joists above being old.

A short ladder gives access to the topmost chamber, only 2 m high, directly below the flat leaded roof, which is carried on recent timbers. The internal walls of the chamber include occasional blocks of red sandstone.

On the top of the tower, there are shallow gables, indicating an earlier low-pitched roof, to east and west. The parapet is low, the roof coming just below the sills of the embrasures.

The proportions of the five-bay **Nave** are quite remarkable, long, narrow and lofty. The west wall is of coursed and squared roughly-tooled stone, the courses varying in height although most being fairly large. Apart from the doorway already described, the only other ancient feature visible is what appears to be a doorway, set at the south end of the wall, with its sill at around the level of the capital of the respond of the adjacent arcade. Heavy pointing conceals any detail, although it is clear that the blocking of the opening is in considerably smaller stones than the main wall face. There appear to be one or two large square blocks in its north jamb, suggesting that it may be an original feature. the form of the head is unclear. A large wall monument in the centre of the wall at this level, and the old clock face higher up, may hide other features.

The arcades are each of four plus one bays, the eastern bay being separated from the main part of the arcade by a c 2 m length of undisturbed original walling. The arches are pierced through notably thin (c 0.67 m) side walls of large squared and roughly-coursed stone; the upper parts of the walls are generally of a whiter stone, although there seems no clear line of transition. On the north there are clearly re-faced areas in the spandrels of the arches.

The main part of north arcade has acutely-pointed two-centred arches, each of two orders with narrow chamfers, springing from piers of elongate cruciform plan, the arch chamfers being continued down to broach stops above the floor; the piers have capitals which follow the plan of the piers, but have bevelled angles ornamented with raised pellets (some cut back). Below the capitals the double-chamfered section of the arch is continued down to broad stops just above the chamfered bases, again following the plan of the pier. The responds are of the same type; on the elongate eastern 'pier' the base chamfer is continued along the north side (stepping up at one point) but seems to have been cut back on the south. The eastern arch is

rather different from the others, being of segmental-pointed form, and rather lower than the others; it follows their general form, but its voussoirs and jamb stones are all slightly smaller. There are various infilled sockets in its jambs.

The south arcade has circular piers with four almost-detached circular shafts at the angles. The bases are square, with a chamfer below and a holdwater moulding; the moulded capitals are square in plan, with a ring at the abacus; the responds are of similar form, except that the eastern has its minor shafts octagonal rather than circular. The arches are of two order, the inner with a big keeled moulding towards the nave and a roll towards the aisle; the outer aisle has a toll moulding to the nave and a simple chamfer. There is a hoodmould with indented or 'nutmeg' ornament, towards the nave only.

The clerestory windows on the north have large slabs as their internal lintels; they look as if they may have been cut into older walling. On the south the westernmost window seems to have a concrete lintel, then the first two-light one has a timber lintel with various sockets cut in it (possibly a re-used piece); the eastern three have tooled stop-chamfered ashlar lintels of late 19th or early 20th century date.

The east wall of the nave above the chancel arch is of squared coursed stone of quite different character to the side and west walls. The arch is very like those of the north arcade, being of two-centred form, and of two orders with narrow chamfers; towards the nave the hoodmould has been cut back flush with the face of the wall but towards the chancel it survives, chamfered on its lower angle. The jambs have simple half-shafts (with various infilled sockets); both capitals are simply moulded, but the northern is semi-octagonal whilst the southern is square. The bases (the northern much repaired) have a step and a chamfer; they have been claimed to be of earlier date than the capitals. Another odd feature is that the eastern faces of each responds stand slightly proud of the wall-face, stepping back flush with the capital two stones from the top; are these remnants of an earlier strip-work surround?.

The nave has a low-pitched nine-bay roof with moulded wall-plates and tie-beams, with both purlins and ridge also moulded, the purlins resting on the upper surface of the tie-beams and the ridge on a king-block. It would appear to be of 15th or 16th century date, and may be contemporary with the clerestory.

In the **South Aisle** the south door has a chamfered rear arch set in a taller segmental-pointed recess, with a chamfer to its head only; all this seems of 19th-century date. All the windows of the aisle have chamfered rear arches of 19th-century ashlar, those of the west window and the three-light eastern window in the south wall being carried on corbels; the jambs are of rougher stone, and might be older work re-used. An ashlar string course forms the window sills, and is continue along the walls as a flush band between the windows. At the east end of the aisle is a 20th-century arch into the chancel aisle, with above it a recess with chamfered jambs containing a carved human head, perhaps of 18th-century date.

The south aisle has a five-bay roof with arch braces, springing from moulded stone corbels on the aisle wall.

The interior of the **South Porch** has stone benches. The small window on the east has a broad internal splay and a segmental-pointed rear arch. The porch roof has trussed rafters with ashlaring.

The internal walls of the **North Aisle** are of coursed squared stone, with some very large blocks in the lower courses.. The west window is identical to the west window in the south

aisle. The three windows in the north wall all have internal openings with trefoiled drop arches and hollow-chamfered surrounds, all clearly of 19th-century date; the blocked north door, infilled flush with the wall face, has a segmental-pointed arch. At the east end of the aisle, as on the south, is a 20th-century arch into the new chancel aisle; it has a pointed arch with a double-chamfered head and chamfered jambs. Above it is a recess with chamfered jambs containing a carved human bust, perhaps of 18th-century date.

The north aisle has a plain six-bay roof.

The **Eastern Arm** has four bay aisles, with double-chamfered pointed arches on octagonal piers with moulded capitals and bases, broadly in a 14th-century style. The windows have segmental rear arches, except for the three at the east end, which are of segmental-pointed form. In the north wall, to the west of the door into the vestry, is a little window, probably re-set from the 19th-century chancel, that has a single cusped light with a trefoiled piercing over, all framed within a taller lancet arch.

Fittings and Furnishings

The **Font** stands in the centre of the nave, near the west end. It has a circular bowl with leaves carved round the lower edge, a shaft with moulded rings at the top, base and centre, and an octagonal base; Boyle (1892, 632) considers it contemporary with the south arcade, ie c 1200. The fine **Font Cover** is seen by Pevsner as of early-17th century date, still with some Gothic traceried motifs along with an arcade of round arches.

The oak **Chancel Screen**, re-set (in 1937?) across the western arch of the south arcade, has turned and belted pilasters, and open trefoil-arched panels on either side of a central entrance beneath a frieze of pierced quatrefoils; Pevsner states that it is dated '1625'. This screen is shown on Billing's 1844 engraving (Billings 1846, f.p.22), with its lower section much taller than at present; it is not clear whether the screen has been cut down, or the engraving is in error.

In the first-floor chamber of the tower, the clock is housed in a wooden casing that looks to be of early-18th century date, with two-panelled doors and H-hinges. Set high on the west wall of the nave is an old (late 17th /early 18th century?) single-handed **Clock Dial**.

There is no pre-Victorian **Stained Glass**. That in the western windows of the aisles is of typical mid-19th century type, and badly faded. The central of the three windows on the north of the north aisle is the World War I memorial, with the figures of Courage and Victory. There is some quite good mid-20th century glass, the easternmost window in the north aisle and the one east of the doorway in the south aisle being signed by L C Evetts and dated 1956 and 1961 respectively. The east window of the 1937 chancel is a World War II memorial (1949); the Lady Chapel east window (1952) and the South (St Oswald's) Chapel east window with SS Aidan, Cuthbert and Oswald (1953) are all good pieces, the work of Marion Grant..

The Bell Frames are of wood, and form a simple range of three pits (Pickford frame layout 3.1.) Each truss has sills, king-posts, a long head, end posts, and pairs of intersecting braces (X braces) between the tops of the posts and the sills (Pickford type 5 Y); the joints are either pegged or secured with tusk tenons, perhaps suggesting as date in the early 19th century.

Two of the **Bells** date from 1759, and are by Lester & Pack of London; the third (tenor) was re-cast in 1857 by John Warner & Sons.

Pre-Conquest Sculpture

Cramp (1984) describes and illustrates 16 pieces of Pre-Conquest sculpture that have been recorded at Billingham, mostly built into the fabric of the church; those now 'lost' are mostly known from the drawings of Stewart (1867, p.64 & pl. cxi) who saw the re-used stones in the tower walls before the ravages of late-19th and 20th century erosion. Nos (1), (2) and (10) on the list below have been identified by Cramp, who gives photographs of them in their present condition alongside Stewart's drawings, but virtually all their detail has now gone. Without the photographs it is now impossible to identify them:

- 1 Part of a cross shaft of the first half of the C10. Built into the south wall of the tower on the west of the window below the belfry, now very worn.
- 1 Incomplete cross shaft of uncertain date. Near west edge of north wall of tower c 20ft up. Now very worn.
- 1 Part of a cross shaft of late C9 or early C10 date. Lost.
- 1 Incomplete cross shaft. Lost
- 1 Incomplete cross shaft. Lost
- 1 Incomplete cross shaft. Lost.
- 1 Part of cross shaft, in north wall of tower 25 ft up on east edge (this is the best-preserved of the pieces built into the tower, and is still very apparent)
- 1 Fragment of cross shaft with interlace. In clock room, in east jamb of south window
- 1 Part of cross shaft? In clock room, in north jamb of west window. Late C10 or C11.
- 1 Fragment of cross shaft. In centre of south face of tower between 10 and 15 ft off the ground. Very worn interlace.
- 1 Fragment of cross shaft. In clock room; western side of south window. Late C10 or C11.
- 1 Part of cross shaft and head, of mid C10 to C11 date. Now in Monks' Dormitory collection at Durham Cathedral.
- 1 Inscribed recumbent grave marker of first half of C8, now in British Museum.
- 1 Grave marker, second half of C9? On window sill in south aisle.
- 1 Grave marker or architectural fragment of late C10 or Cv11, on window sill of south aisle.
- 1 Fragment built into internal face of west wall of porch, with plant scroll within frame. Possibly C11, or could be Post-Conquest (C12) work.

In addition to these there is another fragment, with a small section of an incised geometrical pattern visible, in the north jamb of the west window of the clock room, opposite (9).

In addition to the medieval cross slabs built into the side walls of the porch, in the west wall there is a 13th-century piscina with a pointed arch and a broken-back moulded bowl and a piece of pre-Conquest sculpture. Above the window on the east is a very worn carved head (perhaps a hoodmould stop). Over the present vestry door is what appears to be one voussoir from an elaborate 12th-century arch, with zig-zag ornament.

Sepulchral Monuments

Two early head-stones on the internal window sills of the south aisle have already been listed under Anglo-Saxon Sculpture.

There are a number of medieval **Cross Slab Grave Covers**; unless otherwise noted, they are fully described and illustrated by Ryder (1985, 59-60 and plate 7)

- 1 Slab in two parts, one in each wall of south porch. Probably C14; incised floriated cross with sword and ?chalice.
- 2 Intact slab in west wall of porch. Late C12 or C13 bracelet cross, no emblem.
- 3 Base of slab in west wall; cross shaft with fleur-de-lys at foot.
- 4 Small slab in west wall, head gone. Shaft, stepped base, probable sword blade.
- 5 Part of head of C13 or C14 slab in west wall.
- 6 Fragment of head of slab with fleur-de-lys terminal, perhaps C14.
- 7 Part of slab in east wall with cross and remains of Lombardic inscription. C14?
- 8 Part of head of slab in east wall. C12?
- 9 Part of slab in east wall, with cross shaft.
- 10 ragment in east wall.
- 11 art of the head of a slab in east wall, mid C13.
- 12 art of the head of a slab in the internal face of the west wall of the south chancel aisle, above the arch into the south aisle of the nave. C13. (Ryder 1994, 43-4)
- 13 tone drawn by C C Hodges (1884, pl.12, no 34) now lost.
- 14 Part of the head of a slab with an interlaced-diamond cross set within a ring with nail-head ornament, c.1250. Built into the internal face of the west wall of the north aisle, below the sill of the window. Currently in a state of decay, with salts efflorescing. (Ryder 1994, 43-4)
- 15 The headstone with a plain splay-armed cross, on the window sill in the south aisle, included by Cramp (1984) as a Pre-Conquest piece (Ryder 1994,43-4)

Lying in the churchyard on the south side of the south aisle, east of the porch, is what Hodgkin (1913, 58) describes as the 'old threshold slab of S. door', a recumbent slab with a moulded edge; its central section is eroded but a few letters of a Lombardic inscription (which Hodgkin calls 'Sax. Characters') survive at each end, and what appears to be the blade of an incised sword.

Three medieval **Brasses** are now set on the north wall of the chancel, to the west of the re-set 19th-century window. The inscriptions are here taken from Boyle (1892,633)

- 1 A slab bearing a figure of a priest (his head missing), with symbols of the evangelists on circular plates surviving in the two lower angles, and a plate with the inscription:

hic iacet dns Robert' Brerley nup prebendarius siue porcon axius i ecclia
pochiali de Norton ac vicari' ecclie pochialis de belinghm dunelm' dioc' qui
obiit...die....A^o dni M'cccc^olxxx.....cui' aie ppicietur deus amen

- 2 A plate only:

hic iacet willm' dyson d'bellasys
yoma qi obiit....die mens Maii Anno
Dni MCCC.....Cui' aieds Ame

- 3 A plate only:

Orate pro aia Dni Johis Necehm capili' ac
Vicarii qudm istius ecclie qui obiit in ffesto
Sci Nicholai Epi Anno dni milimo CCCC
ivj^{lo} Cuius anime ppicietur deus Amen

There are a few **Post-Medieval Monuments** of interest; in the floor at the west end of the nave are ledger stones, with armorial bearings, to Mrs Ursula Toll of Wolviston (d.1741) and her husband; at the south-west corner is a ledger to Robert late of Bellasis, d.1778. Towards the east end of the south aisle are a limestone ledger to Mr John Grainge d.1751 and a slab with an infilled indent for a brass plate.

On the west wall of the nave, above the doorway into the tower, is a marble tablet to Thomas Robinson Grey d.1856, and at the west end of the north wall of the north chancel aisle a re-set tablet to John Grey of Stockton, d.1818, and his family. At the west end of the north wall of the north aisle of the nave is a tablet erected by John Ovington in memory of Alice Gardner (d.1797) who left £20 in her will 'to be given yearly for ever to the poor widows of Billingham, being householders who have no relief from the parish. At the west end of the south aisle are various tablets to the Lisle family of Newton Bewley, the earliest being to Thomas Lisle d 1829.

Historical Notes

830-846 Simeon records that Bishop Ecgred of Lindisfarne built Billingham, which became the property of the community of St Cuthbert. He also records that, probably around thirty years later, the church was despoiled by the usurper it was seized by Aella, King of the Northumbrians, but after his death returned to the community

c901 Bishop Cutheard granted Billingham to Elfred, who was seeking a settlement out of reach of the Danes, and became the bishop's vassal. It was however subsequently taken by the Danes, and only returned to Durham in the time of William the Conqueror.

1087-1100 During the reign of William II a royal charter granted the manor and lands of Billingham to the Durham community, with whom they remained throughout the medieval period; after the Reformation they were held, except for a brief period under the Commonwealth, by the Dean and Chapter of Durham, until 1872 when they passed to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

1710 The churchwarden's accounts include charges for four new windows (note in County Ancient Monuments and Sites Record, Tees Archaeology)

1794 The earliest detailed antiquarian account of the church is that by Hutchinson (1794, 106-8). 'The church of Billingham it is said was first built by Eanred, but there is no appearance of that distant antiquity in any part of the present structure. The chancel is five paces wide and thirteen paces long. The east window is of four lights under a pointed arch and there are four small windows to the south and two to the north. The whole chancel is neatly wainscotted with oak and enclosed from the nave by a screen, with stalls ornamented with pierced work, under a pointed arch. The nave has two side aisles formed by rows of four columns. Those to the south are square with a round pilaster projecting from each angle and supported pointed arches moulded with the zigzag figure. The pillars to the north are heavy and in no order of building being of a lozenge figure with blunted points. The arches are pointed and without ornament. The lights are irregular. The length of the nave is twenty-two paces and the width including the side aisles thirteen paces. There is a lofty tower. The patched work in this building induces us to believe the sacred edifice had not only suffered many and great alterations at various periods but also that the whole of the old church had been taken down or destroyed, not the least memorials of such antiquity remaining'.

1834 Mackenzie & Ross (I, 507) follow Hutchinson in stating that there was nothing of the antiquity of Eanred in the structure, but give a little more detail as regards the tower, which they exaggerate the height of to '48 yards' (43.9m; the real height is c 18m)

1843 The antiquary Sir Stephen Glynne visited the church; his notes are reproduced in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle 3rd ser. Vol.III (1907) p.179. He described the church in some detail; its external appearance was 'patched and ragged' and the clerestory windows 'closed, but originally small and square-headed'. The windows of the aisle had all been 'mutilated' 'except for one small Norman one which still remains at the east end of the south aisle'. At the east end of the north aisle was 'a plain niche resting on a projecting octagonal base'. The chancel was 'of excellent plain E.E. work, of a kind often found in Durham and Northumberland'; it had four lancets on each side and a blocked door on the north; there were flat buttresses, a string under the windows, and a moulded parapet on a corbel table; the east end had a parapet 'in an uncommon form, a kind of ellipse with toothed moulding'.

1857 The historian Fordyce (II., 308-9) gives details of the 1846 restoration.. The chancel 'having shrunk' was taken down and rebuilt; the plaster ceiling of the nave 'which had only been put up some few years previously' was taken down, and the arches and pillars 'chiselled over'.

Faculties and other records of Structural Work

Date	Faculty No.	Works
1846		Rebuilding of chancel (see Historical Notes)
1864-5		'Restoration' (VCH 201)
1882-3		'Restoration' (VCH 201)
1890		'The whole of the south aisle wall and of the porch being taken down and rebuilt, and the nave roof and clerestory windows reconstructed' (VCH 201)
13 Sep 1900 vestry	3/411/20	Organ chamber, move brass plate and marble tablet, new
17 Sep 1927	3/2229	Appropriation of part of churchyard
4 July 1935	3/2571	Erection of a stone statue over the porch
4 August 1937	3/2679	Extension of chancel etc. G.E. Charlewood of Newcastle was the architect.
16 Nov 1946	3/2962	Erection of a reredos
6 Feb 1950	3/3278	Aumbry
13 Aug 1954	3/3730	Repointing of the tower
30 May 1963	3/4576	General repairs
24 Nov 1981	3/5975	Removal of kerbs and headstones etc
27 Apr 1982 repairs	3/5995	Installation of a secondary roof over organ and chapel
14 Mar 1984	3/6169	Removal and breaking up of damaged headstones etc
27 Feb 1997		Demolition and removal of rubble from two areas of collapsed boundary wall, and re-build.. DAC put proviso of archaeological supervision.
12 May 1999		Remove badly weathered supporting stonework from two table-top tombs which are considered dangerously unsafe. Lay flat the top slabs of the said tombs.

Structural History

Antiquarian Opinion: a Summary

Hutchinson and the earlier antiquaries were aware of the early history of Billingham, but did not consider the church of such great antiquity. The age of the tower was only appreciated in the mid-19th century, when Fordyce (1857, II, 308) saw it as belonging to the 'Anglo-Norman, if not the Saxon, period of architecture', but thought it of 'a much anterior period of architecture to any portion of the present church, which is only *attached* to it'.

By the end of the century it was accepted that both the nave walls and tower were of Saxon date (Boyle 1892, 631); subsequent antiquarian debate has centred on the original length of the nave. The Victoria County History description (1928, 200-202) saw the elongate eastern 'pier' of the north arcade as marking the east end of the Saxon nave, with an eastward extension being made c1200, but Gilbert (1948) pointed out that the bases of the chancel arch were of early Norman character, and argued that the full length of the nave walls were Saxon; he suggested that the elongate pier as marking the position of the western arch of a former central tower. The Taylors (1965, I, 69) suggested that the break in the arcade is best explained by the surmise that Saxon nave had a north-eastern porticus, at first retained as part of the aisle.

More recently Eric Cambridge has argued (in a lecture to the Durham & Northumberland Architectural & Archaeological Society c 1997) that the tower is not in fact Anglo-Saxon, but, like others of the same type (eg Ovingham, Bywell etc) of early Norman construction, perhaps c 1100.

The Saxon Building

All authorities now seem agreed that the nave walls are of Pre-Conquest date for their full length; the Taylors' explanation of the break in the north arcade is much more convincing than Gilbert's hypothetical central tower. Their actual date remains open to question; the Taylors put them, in their 'period B', between 800 and 950 presumably on the grounds of Simeon's evidence), although the elongate plan of the nave goes well with some of the earliest Northumbrian churches, such as Monkwearmouth, which may date to over a century earlier.

The west tower is a member of a sizable group, extending from Northumberland southwards through Lincolnshire; their dating remains the subject of controversy. Although their style is distinctly Saxon, clear documentary evidence shows that some at least post-date the Norman Conquest. The closest parallel to Billingham is probably Bywell St Andrew, which again has sound holes above the belfry openings.

Medieval Development

The later medieval development of the church is a little more straightforward.. The jambs of the chancel arch, as Gilbert pointed out, seem of earlier character than the arch itself, and could be of late 11th or early 12th century date, although they look to have been re-worked at some time¹.. The north arcade is of late 12th-century character, the south arcade and the chancel arch of early 13th. The old chancel may have been contemporary, to judge from antiquarian accounts and the surviving ex-situ fragments. The vault in the basement of the tower also looks to be a piece of 13th century work. At least the north aisle was rebuilt in the 14th century; the clerestory and nave roof, and the embattled parapet of the tower, all probably come at the end of the medieval period, in the late 15th or early 16th century.

1 If the apparent stripwork on the east side of the arch is real, might the stripwork, and lower parts of the responds, be of mid-11th century date and coeval with the tower?

Post-Medieval Changes and Restoration

As is often the case, Billingham church retains very little evidence of any structural changes that may have taken place between the Reformation and the 19th century. It is unlikely that there were any major alterations in this period; that there was internal repair and refurbishment is evidenced by the 17th-century screen, formerly under the chancel arch but now removed to the west bay of the north aisle. Four new windows are mentioned in the churchwardens' accounts for 1710s; were these the 18th-century sashes in the south aisle referred to in the VCH?

The Victorian era brought the usual periodic bouts of 'restoration', which resulted in the church losing quite an amount of its medieval fabric. In 1846-7 the 13th-century chancel praised by Sir Stephen Glynne was taken down and rebuilt, more or less as a copy of the original, and allegedly on its old foundations. Further restorations followed in 1864-5, 1882-3 and 1890, during the last of which the whole south aisle and south porch were rebuilt.

In the first half of the 20th century came the sudden growth of Billingham from rural village to a new town centred on the expanding chemical industry of Teesside. This social transformation was reflected in the major extension of 1937, under G.E.Charlewood, when the 1846-7 chancel was replaced by a much larger eastern arm, providing, as Pevsner comments, 'a new church for a new town'.

The Churchyard

The churchyard is large, and roughly an elongate rectangle in plan, the church being set close to the north side and not far from the east end. Rather more than the western half of the yard is an extension, the c 1860 Ordnance Survey 6":1 mile map showing the western boundary as coming only a few metres west of the church.

An archaeological watching brief in 1997, near what would have been the north-west corner of the old churchyard, was carried out when a length of the churchyard boundary wall north-west of the church was rebuilt (Annis & Anderson 1997); three articulated burials were seen, two of which were fully excavated; it is thought that they were likely to be medieval. An area of charnel was also found, thought to be re-deposited after the 1939 extensions.

Few of the surviving headstones in the old section of churchyard pre-date the 19th century. An east-west line of trees some distance south of the church might perhaps indicate a pre-1860 southern boundary, south-west of the church, and towards what would have been the south-western corner of the old graveyard, the ground is irregular and hummocky; it is not clear whether this has any archaeological significance.. The boundary walls of the eastern section of the churchyard are all of 20th-century date, although the half-timber lychgate is of 1883.

The Remains in the Vicarage Garden

Following the 1846-7 restoration, two medieval features from the church were re-erected in the garden of the vicarage, to the north of the church. One of these, a pair of 13th-century sedilia from the demolished chancel was recorded in 1948 by the Rev H.Lee (pers.comm) ; they were then 'in a terribly bad state of preservation' and have since disappeared. The other, a semicircular archway, which the Rev Lee considers may have come from the medieval

south porch, was built up together with other architectural fragments² into a sort of folly.

The low wall between the entrance court on the east of the vicarage and the churchyard includes other architectural fragments, including some old mullions. .

Archaeological Assessment

St Cuthbert's Church, with its Pre-Conquest history and surviving fabric, is obviously a building (and site) of considerable archaeological value. The extent of the Pre-Conquest church fabric is quite evident, and most of this is exposed. It does not appear that any recent record of the elevations of tower or nave has been made; with a structure of this importance this is surely a priority. The internal walls of the tower (below belfry level) are either whitewashed or rendered, and may well incorporate a number of re-used pieces of pre-Conquest sculpture, to judge from the material already recorded in the external faces of the walls (now largely destroyed by pollution-enhanced weathering over the last century and a half) and in the internal reveals of the windows. It is essential that any repair work or re-plastering here is accompanied by an archaeological watching brief.

Within the building itself, it is difficult to assess the degree of preservation of underfloor deposits. The nave has stone flagging at the west end and in the aisles, with a wooden floor to the three eastern bays; the floors of the eastern parts are all boarded and carpeted. One may expect early floor levels and structural remains to have been disturbed both by generations of burials, and probably by a Victorian heating system with underfloor ducts. However, any underfloor works will need to be carefully monitored - this also goes for works within the 20th-century eastern arm, which covers the area both within and around the earlier chancel.

The only archaeological work carried out at the church was a 1997 watching brief carried out by Tees Archaeology (Annis & Anderson 1997) ,

Priorities

The current state of some of the medieval carved stones gives cause for concern, notably those built into the walls of the south porch, some of which are deteriorating rapidly, and the inscribed slab now lying in the churchyard a little to the south-east of the porch, the surface of which is in poor condition; it is sadly in need of cleaning and conservation works. This last monument certainly merits the making of a detailed record before any more if its surface is lost.

Peter F Ryder December 2000

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St Cuthbert's Church, Billingham

An Archaeological Assessment

December 2000

**The church from the south before the 1937 extensions
(Victoria County History)**

**Peter F Ryder
Historic Buildings Consultant**

St Cuthbert's Church, Billingham

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St Cuthbert, Billingham
Photographs to accompany Archaeological Assessment
October 2000, Peter F Ryder

1. General west view
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23. Re-set chancel screen at W end of S aisle
24. Chancel looking east.

