

Br St Brandon, Brancepeth.

Description

The parish church of Brancepeth consists of a three-bay aisled nave with an engaged western tower, north and south porches, and north and south transepts; the chancel has a chapel on the south and a sacristy or vestry on the north. Unusually for Durham, whilst the church is a substantial and relatively well-preserved medieval structure, it is the richness and variety of its fittings and monuments that have attracted most antiquarian attention.

The **West Tower** is roughly square in plan, and is engaged by the aisles. It is constructed of coursed roughly-squared stone, and rises in four stages. The lower three stages have alternating rather irregular quoins of no great size. At the foot of the west wall is a chamfered plinth with a 45° slope, of 12th-century character, with a slightly-projecting footing course below; the 0.6 m of walling below this is probably underpinning inserted when the perimeter drain was constructed. The west wall of the lower stage has quite an amount of recent stone replacement; the west window is of two trefoil-headed lights with a pair of trefoiled couchettes under the arched head; all its stonework is be tooled-and-margined ashlar of 19th-century character. A chamfered set-back marks the base of the tall second stage, which has single-light windows, just above the set-back, on west and north. The former seems to have a slightly-pointed arch, but the latter a semicircular head; both have simple chamfered surrounds. At this level the stonework on the north seems more regularly coursed (and lighter in colour) than on the west.

At the base of the third stage, which seems to have been the original belfry, is a string-course, apparently chamfered above and below; in each wall is an opening of two lancet-arched lights cut into a monolithic head and chamfered jambs, divided by a circular shaft with a moulded capital that has a square abacus. On the east the head and shaft have been renewed, and on the north the shaft.

A similar string course masks the base of the present belfry; its fabric is generally similar to that of the tower below, except that the quoins are rather larger and more regular. The belfry openings are very similar to those in the stage below; again the head and shaft of the eastern opening have been renewed; the other windows also seem to have been restored to some extent, perhaps in the 19th century. A bold string marks the base of the tower parapet, carried on a series of variously-shaped corbels, several with masks and one (on the south) with a saltire cross. At either end of the west wall are boldly-projecting stone spouts, set just above the string. The parapet is of rather better-quality squared stone than the wall below, and has a single embrasure in the centre of each side, with a chamfered coping; at each corner is a small moulded pinnacle, clearly post-medieval, each capped by a weather vane.

The only walls of the nave exposed externally are the clerestory on each side and the eastern gable, above the chancel roof. The clerestory walls are of roughly-coursed stone, little better than rubble in parts. The south clerestory is of four bays, the western a little shorter than the others, articulated by shallow stepped buttresses; similar buttresses are set diagonally at the eastern angles, whilst at the west end the masonry of the clerestory simply abuts against the eastern angles of the tower. The square-headed clerestory windows are each of three cinquefoil-headed lights, within a chamfered frame. There is a chamfered oversailing course at the base of the parapet; above the buttresses (which end just below the parapet) stubs of

crocketed pinnacles rest on the coping (probably re-set after a rebuilding of the parapet), except above the buttress between the eastern bays.

Although the clerestory windows on the north are of the same type, their arrangement is quite different; the baying is much more irregular, the westernmost bay being long and the two eastern bays relatively short; neither are the windows set central to the bays. The buttresses are continued up through the parapet, and again carry the remains of crocketed pinnacles.

The shallow-pitched east gable of the nave stands well above the chancel roof, and is of roughly-coursed stone and rubble; it is capped by the eroded remains of an unusual Sanctus bellcote carried on slabs cantilevered out from the apex of the gable, and consisting of a pair of piers linked by an eroded arch of rough triangular form, perhaps once capped by a gable

The **South Aisle** is constructed of roughly coursed and roughly-squared stone, little better than rubble in parts, and has a shallowly-pitched roof. The west end has a chamfered plinth (partly renewed) a little lower in level than that of the adjacent tower, and with a steeper angle to its chamfer. The plinth is continued round a stepped buttress, rising to about half the height of the wall, which projects southwards at the south-west angle of the aisle, but not along the south wall; on the south face of this buttress are traces of an incised sundial, a faint circle and a socket for the gnomon remaining visible. The west window of the aisle is a pair of lancets, with chamfered surrounds, divided by a mullion. Its stonework seems old in parts, although the sill is tooled ashlar and must be a replacement; a curving line in the stonework to the north of the window head may indicate a previous window, but this remains uncertain.

The south wall of the aisle is in four bays, with a late 19th-century porch in the second. There is an ashlar parapet (partly renewed) carried on a chamfered oversailing course, with a chamfered coping. The first, westernmost, bay has no openings, although there seems to be a vertical line of disturbance to the left of centre which presumably relates to one of the buttresses shown here on the 1825 plan. Inside the porch is the old south doorway, which has a two-centred arch with a single chamfer, broken by moulded impost blocks with leaf ornament of 13th-century character; there is a hoodmould, chamfered beneath, with worn mask stops. The two bays to the east of the porch are divided by an old stepped buttress rising to about two-thirds the height of the wall; its base seems to have been disturbed (and underpinned, presumably when a perimeter drain was created) and has a plinth on either side but not on its external face. Each bay has a 19th-century two-light window, with dressings of a grey sandstone with vivid ferruginous staining; each has trefoil headed lights, with a larger quatrefoil in the spandrel, within a hollow-chamfered arch.

The late-19th century **South Porch** is of ashlar, with a moulded plinth and stepped buttresses at the end of each side wall. The outer arch is of four-centred form with a continuous casement moulding between two waves, and a chamfered hood with turned-back ends; above is a shield with the monogram 'ihc'. and a shallow gable; the parapet has a moulded string at its base, a moulded coping, and a cross finial on the gable. The side walls each have a stone spout breaking the string at the base of the parapet.

The west wall of the **North Aisle** is built of coursed squared stone. There is a steep chamfered plinth, like that of the south aisle, but here set only slightly below the level of the adjacent tower plinth; it does not continue round the large stepped diagonal buttress at the north-west angle. The uppermost four courses of the wall are laid on a slope following the

roof pitch, which is rather steeper than that of the south aisle; there has been considerable replacement in modern stone. The west window of the aisle is similar to that of the south aisle; the north jamb and head look old, and there is a crude relieving arch directly above the head.

The four-bay north wall of the aisle is of similar fabric, more regular than that of the south aisle, but as on the south, it has no plinth. There is a parapet, partly of renewed stone, with a chamfered oversailing course at its base and a chamfered coping. The bay west of the porch has a considerable amount of renewed stone, and no sign of any structural feature. The north door, inside the porch, is very plain, with a segmental-pointed arch that has a simple continuous chamfer. East of the porch the third and fourth bays are divided by an old stepped buttress, rising almost to the base of the parapet.

The third bay has a cement-topped plinth-like feature extending for c 2 m beyond the porch, of uncertain purpose and possibly of relatively recent date. The third and fourth bays each have a window of two trefoil-headed lights with an elongated quatrefoil in the spandrel, under a steep two-centred arch with a chamfered frame; that in the fourth bay has its sill set a little higher than the other; their jambs seem old but their other dressings are clearly 19th-century restoration.

The **North Porch** is a 17th-century addition, and quite a notable piece from an architectural point of view. It is constructed of ashlar, badly weathered in parts; there is chamfered plinth. The principal entrance is on the north, and has a round arch with a pendant keystone carrying an elaborate mask (a boar?), and a chamfered surround broken by a chamfered impost band carried across the stepped Ionic pilasters, with strapwork decoration, which frame the arch, and rise to a frieze with cherub's heads and a large moulded cornice; above this is a segmental-arched gable between two small finials capped by balls. The side walls have similar but narrower arches with two-centred heads; that on the west is now walled up; above are shields with Cosin's fret. The side walls have, above the cornice, an embattled parapet with a moulded coping.

The **South Transept** is built of squared and coursed stone; it has a two-part chamfered plinth, with a course of large blocks between the steps, which is continued round the stepped buttresses set diagonally at the southern angles of the transept. In the centre of the south wall is a window of three trefoil-headed lights, the centre one with an ogee arch, with cusped couchettes above, under a chamfered four-centred arch; only its mullions have been restored. The parapet is carried on an oversailing hollow-chamfered course, and has a moulded coping; it is continued at the same level across the south end of the transept, without any gable. The east side of the transept is largely concealed by the adjacent south-east chapel.

The **North Transept** is also of good-quality squared stone, with similar plinth, buttresses and parapet to its southern counterpart; re-used in the vertical section of the plinth on the east side are two pieces of medieval cross slabs (see 'Sepulchral Monuments' section). The three-light window on the north of the transept has dressing of tooled 18th-century ashlar (except for the lower part of its sill); it is of three cinquefoil-headed lights with flowing tracery above. There is a disturbed area in the masonry round its head, as if it replaces a slightly larger opening.

The short west wall of the transept is considerable taller than the adjacent north aisle, the

oversailing course at the base of the parapet returning vertically down to join the aisle parapet.

On the east of the transept is a window of three cinquefoil-headed lights, the central one with an ogival top, with cusped mouchettes over, under a chamfered four-centred arch; the mullions and tracery are restoration but the outer arch seems medieval.

The **Chancel** has a large two-stepped plinth, the upper element having a bold convex moulding; there is also a moulded string course directly below the windows; the plinth is continued round the stepped buttresses which articulate the bays and are set in pairs at the eastern angles' there is a hollow-moulded string at the base of the parapet, which has a moulded coping. On the south there are two bays to the east of the south-eastern chapel, and on the north two to the west of the sacristy and one to the east. Each bay of the side walls has a window of three cinquefoil-headed lights with rectilinear tracery above, under a steep two-chamfered arch with a casement-moulded outer frame and a hollow-moulded hood with turned back ends; the frames and hoodmoulds are old but the tracery is all 19th-century restoration.

At the east end the central section of the string, below the five-light window, is 19th-century replacement, and the side sections have been partly cut away. Immediately above the string, c 0.40 m outside the jambs of the window, are projecting blocks with blank shields. The window has the same casement-moulded frame as those in the side walls; there are five cinquefoil-headed lights with rectilinear tracery above, and a moulded hood with turned back ends; all the tracery and parts of the surrounds (including the sill) are clearly restoration. The moulded string below the parapet is stepped up to accommodate the head of the east window. Built into the north face of the southern buttress is a sadly-decayed quatrefoil panel with Christ in majesty, and angels in the upper corners.

The **South East Chapel**, set in the angle of chancel and south transept, is of two bays, and is built of coursed squared stone; the east wall in particular is of rather inferior quality to the masonry of the chancel, and its fabric does not course in well with the dressings of the buttress at its southern end. Plinth, string course and parapet are of the same type as those of the chancel. In the south wall are a pair of three-light windows, again of the same type as those in the chancel, similarly restored; the buttress between the two (which awkwardly covers the end of the hoodmould of the adjacent window to the west) is entirely a 19th-century restoration, except perhaps for its base. The single south-ward projecting buttress at the east end of the all is partly restoration. On the east wall the string course is of rather different section to that elsewhere, with a level top section. Three courses of stonework intervene between the string and the window above, which is of two cinquefoil-headed lights under a square head, with a hollow-moulded hood with turned-back ends; the jambs are of hollow-chamfered section. A broad chimney stack, presumably fairly recent in date, rises behind the north end of the parapet at the head of the wall.

The **Sacristy** on the north of the chancel is constructed of squared stone, with considerable variation in course height; at mid height there is a marked change from narrower to taller courses that is most pronounced on the west, where two blocks are so elongate that they may be re-used grave covers. The moulded plinth appears to be of the same section as that of the adjacent chancel wall, and the parapet is also similar. At the south ends of both side walls are what appear to be inserted fillets of later stonework, presumably repairs following structural

movement. In the centre of the west wall is a doorway with a chamfered four-centred arch and broach stops at the feet of its jambs; all its dressings, and the manner in which it cuts through the plinth, make it look like a 19th-century insertion; to the south, just above the plinth, is a projecting stone spout serving the small recess seen internally. On the north is a window of four cinquefoiled ogee-headed lights under a shallow segmental arch; its jambs do not course happily with the adjacent walling. The east wall, unlike the others, has a string course, chamfered above and below, terminating at each end in a pair of round-ended leaves; above is a square-headed window of two trefoiled ogee-headed lights, under a chamfered hood with turned-back ends. Once again its jambs do not course in well with the adjacent walling. Beneath the window part of the string, and the masonry below, have been renewed; this marks the position of doorway shown both on the 1825 plan and in Billings' print; although the plinth below looks to remain undisturbed the print clearly shows it as cut away.

The Interior

The interior of the church is plastered and whitewashed, except for some exposed dressings.

The **Tower** opens to the nave by a segmental-pointed arch of two orders, basically square in section with only a narrow chamfer to the angle (except for the outer order towards the tower, which is left unchamfered); this section is continued down the jambs below the impost band, which is chamfered beneath; the plain square bases again have a slight chamfer only, to the edge. The west window has a rather peculiar shouldered rear arch, that seems to be the product of the widening of an earlier and narrower opening, the head of which remains. At the west end of the south wall is a doorway opening into the west end of the south aisle; towards the aisle; towards the aisle this has a flattened Tudor arch with a broad continuous chamfer and neat stepped broach stops at the base of each jamb; its rear arch is of plain square-headed form.

A 19th-century wooden stair-cum-ladder gives access to the Ringing Chamber; its floor timbers also look later 19th century. Here the windows on north, south and west all have round-headed rear arches, the diagonal tooling of their dressings, of 12th-century character, can be seen through the whitewash. The internal splay of the western window is considerably narrower than those on the north and south. On the east is another splayed recess, with a small square-headed chamfered opening into the nave, now concealed by the re-set clock face; it has clearly been altered and the present timber lintels may replace an older rear arch. In the south wall, c.1.2 m above the floor and to the east of the window is a large rough socket, and there is another to the west of the rear arch of the northern window.

The ladder/stair to the second floor is of considerable interest. It now rises from a small platform c 2 m above floor level in the north-west corner, eastwards along the north wall. Although provided with a relatively recent handrail, and with the platform at its base recently strengthened and stabilised, the stair itself is probably medieval; it consisting of two raking beams with, nailed to their upper faces, a series of triangular-section oak blocks. There are a series of pairs of pegholes (some with pegs in place) in the raking timbers, but these do not seem to relate to the present treads, so there may have been alteration at some time.

This second floor is carried on a series of old timbers, probably medieval; two show cut-outs so that a bell could be raised between them; the flooring itself is more recent.

The second-floor room is the first belfry; its four openings have round-headed rear arches, with in each case a small socket in each jamb, just within the outer opening, at mid-height. There is a recent concrete ring beam at floor level.

Another ancient ladder-stair, this time without handrail, leads up to the present belfry. At belfry level the walls are not plastered, but are largely obscured by heavy pointing. Three of the four openings have rough semi-circular rear arches, but the fourth, on the north, has a plain square lintel, evidently a later repair; there is considerable evidence of other repairs and patching, notably a large area of tile below the eastern opening, and concrete sills to all four.

The tower roof is carried by five cambered tie-beams, running north-south, of heavy square section; three look ancient, and two more recent. Access to the battlements is by a trapdoor; there is no fixed ladder.

The **Nave** is slightly wider than the tower on the south and slightly narrower on the north. The arcades are of three bays, with two-centred arches; a short block of wall (refaced in the 19th century in tooled-and-margined ashlar) separates the eastern (transept) arches from the western pair. The western bays of the south aisle have arches of two chamfered orders (with quite broad chamfers), springing from an octagonal pier with a moulded base set on a square plinth, and a moulded capital with a line of nail-head; there is a hoodmould, chamfered beneath, with a mask stop above the pier. The responds have an inner order of semi-octagonal plan and a square outer; the moulded base and plinth of the western and the capital of the eastern have been renewed. The impost moulding of the eastern respond is continued across the short block of wall to the western respond of the transept arch which, again of two chamfered orders with a hood, is taller than the others and springs from responds of similar form, except that the semi-octagonal inner order is much broader; the capitals mouldings are slightly more elaborate, with a groove on the necking,

The north arcade shows some significant differences in detail. The inner order of both arches and responds is broader than on the south, and has a broad chamfer, whilst the outer order only has a narrow chamfer; the hood is curved above and chamfered beneath, and again has a mask stop above the pier. The central pier has the upper angle of its abacus cut with large nail-head, very different to that on the south. The impost moulding of the eastern respond of the arcade and the transept arch are linked, as on the south; on the south the hoodmoulds of both arcade and transept arches come down onto this moulding, but on the north that of the transept arch is stopped short, implying that the arcade hoodmould is the earlier. As on the south, the lower part of the western respond has been renewed. The transept arch is very similar in detail and proportion to its southern counterpart, although it is difficult to judge its relative height, as the sills of the clerestory windows on this side are set at different levels. The clerestory windows have shallow segmental rear arches.

The nave roof is of seven bays; the cambered ties are carried on wall-posts supported on stone corbels; carvings at the feet of the posts include two shields with the Neville arms, borne on the north by a bull and on the south an angel, whilst other angels carry shields and musical instruments. There are arch braces from posts to ties, with large cusping of the same proportions as seen in the furnishings of the chancel. The ceiling between the ties is boarded, with moulded diagonal ribs (as in the chancel); there are carved bosses at the intersections of ribs, ties and wall-plate.

In the **South Aisle**, the west window has a three-centred rear arch; the individual lights are

rebated internally. The south doorway has a shallow segmental rear arch, and the two 19th-century winders further east, segmental-pointe rear arches with a chamfer to the head only. At the east end of the south wall is a slender semi-octagonal respond for an arch, apparently never completed, to the pier that separates the transept arch and arcade; this has swept base moulding that looks quite 'late' and a simply-moulded capital. The aisle roof is of eight bays, with fairly light principals springing from moulded corbels.

The west window of the **North Aisle** has a segmental rear arch, but the same internal step or rebate to its outer lights as is seen on the south. The north door has a segmental rear arch like that of the south, and the two windows east of the door have segmental rear arches; at the east end of the wall is another respond for an intended arch between aisle and transept, very similar to that opposite. The roof of the aisle is of five bays, with principals carried on short wall-posts, springing from variously-shaped corbels, with short arch braces from post to principal; at their upper ends, above the arcade, the principals are supported on plain corbels. There are two levels of purlins, and heavy square-section rafters.

The south window of the **South Transept** has a four-centred rear arch with a chamfer to its head only; in the east wall (covered externally by the South East Chapel) is a window of three trefoil-headed ogival lights with two trefoils and a quatrefoil over, with a segmental-pointed rear arch. At the north end of the east wall is a square-headed opening, evidently a squint (although it extends down to ground level) with a chamfered lintel, aligned on the chancel altar; Fowler (1863, 75 simply refers to it as 'a recess which has probably been connected with the staircase to the rood-loft'. The roof structure of the transept consists only of seven slightly cranked ties, carrying boards.

In the **North Transept** the north window has a segmental rear arch; the east window has a four-centred rear arch. At the south end of the east wall is another squint, narrower than that on the south, but again with a chamfered lintel. The simple roof structure is rather like that of the south transept, but has only five ties, of rather heavier scantling, four of which are carried at their eastern ends by simple corbels.

The **Chancel** is entered under the chancel arch of two chamfered orders, springing from semi-octagonal responds (of similar proportions to those of the south arcade) with simple moulded capitals and renewed bases on square plinths. In the chancel much detail is concealed by the fittings and furnishings. At the west end of the south wall is a doorway into the South-East Chapel, with a flattened ogee head and a continuous hollow chamfer; alongside it is an arch (largely concealed by a panelled surround; see 'Fittings and Furnishings' section) which appears to be semicircular, with a large hollow chamfer, springing from heavy moulded imposts of rather peculiar section. The windows in the side walls all have hollow-chamfered internal frames; they are of the type in which the tracery is set on the centre-line of the wall. There are no old ritual features exposed in the sanctuary, except that the internal sill of the easternmost window in the south wall is lowered, possibly to form a sedilia; any detail is concealed by post-medieval panelling. On its east side is a small ogee-arched recess which, together with the adjacent section of window jamb, which has a good pyramidal stop, is clearly of 19th-century date in its present form.

The roof structure of the chancel is concealed by its flat boarded ceiling, which is, as it is contemporary with the majority of the fittings and furnishings, is described along with them.

On the north of the chancel is the doorway into the Sacristy, with two-centred archway with continuous mouldings, a quarter-round and a chamfer.

In the **South-East Chapel** the arch to the chancel has a deep hollow chamfer to its eastern jamb, but the western cut back diagonal to the wall; the ogee-headed doorway alongside has a plain rear lintel. To the east of the arch a square-topped squint aligned on the chancel altar; this is now only accessible by means of a small arched recess behind a square projection in the north-east corner of the chapel, that steps back as it rises, and is then corbelled out westwards. All its detail is hidden by plaster; it seems to be related to the chimney above, and may be of relatively recent date. The south windows have casement-moulded surrounds; beneath the eastern is a piscina with a renewed semi-octagonal bowl and a pointed arch with a deep hollow moulding; its sill is now only c 0.30 m above the floor. In the west wall one sees the original external face of the earlier window in the east wall of the adjacent transept; its outer frame has a straight chamfer. In the east wall the two-light window has a slightly complex shouldered rear arch with a chamfered lintel.

The roof of the chapel is of two bays, with rather waney cambered ties against the end walls and in the centre, carrying a heavy square-section ridge and one pair of purlins, all chamfered on their lower angles.

The Sacristy

This is now known as the 'Cosin Room' and used for Sunday Schools. At the west end of the south wall the doorway into the chancel has a plain square-headed rear arch, with a re-used cross slab as its lintel. To the east the wall has a set-back of c 0.12 m, c 1.2 m above the floor; to the west of the door it steps up to the level of the door lintel. At its east end, cutting down into the set-back is a squint that provided a view of the chancel altar (now blocked by the 17th-century panelling); its sides are re-used pieces of cross slab (see 'Sepulchral Monuments' section).

The inserted doorway in the west wall has a plain square head internally; low down at the south end of the wall is a small projecting semi-circular stone bowl, with a drain funnelling back into the wall. The north window has a rough segmental rear arch, with below its western a square-headed recess; on of the slabs forming its roof has a chamfered edge, and might be a cross slab, although no design is exposed. Yet another cross slab has been re-used as the internal lintel of the window on the east; the edge chamfer of the lintel is probably original to the slab. There is evidence in the south-east corner of various repairs made to counter the structural movement evident externally.

The sacristy roof has cambered tie-beams set against the end walls and in the centre, carrying a single north-south beam, chamfered on its lower angles, as the ridge-piece; on either side are heavy square-section rafters.

Fittings & Furnishings

Brancepeth Church is unusually rich in its fittings and furnishings, primarily through the works carried out by John Cosin, who was rector from 1626-1640 and Bishop of Durham 1660-1672; Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 115) comment 'Cosin had done his church proud. There is hardly another in the country so completely and splendidly furnished in the C17'.

Most of the furnishings date to the period of Cosin's incumbency (works were underway in 1638); a seating plan of 1639 survives (as an 18th-century copy) and shows box pews, benches, and reading desk & pulpit attached to easternmost nave piers; rood screen and chancel furnishings are not shown, but may be more or less contemporary.

The **Chancel Screen** 'is the most sumptuous piece in the church' and the most thoroughly Gothic of Cosin's introductions, although earlier influences are evidence in the incised zigzag obviously copied from the Norman nave piers of Durham Cathedral, and again seen on the roughly contemporary chancel screen at Sedgfield. In general its influences are 15th-century work (perhaps copied from the panelling re-used in the reredos) executed with such accuracy that some antiquaries have been deceived into considering it genuinely medieval work. Pevsner & Williamson see the canopies, probably based on those of the Neville screen in the Cathedral, as 'an incredible *tour-de-force*.

The **Choir Stalls** are again Gothic, although Renaissance influences appear in their strapwork below the poppy heads on the stall ends-; between the stalls balusters carry a canopy with cusped arches and an openwork cresting. East of the stalls the cresting is continued on the have **Panelling**, again basically 15th-century in style except for Cosin's introduction of cherubs' heads. The **Reredos and panelling flanking the altar** are genuine 15th-century work, re-used, although cherubs' heads have been added; the badge of Prior Castell of Durham (1494-1519), a winged and pierced heart, appears at one point; Hodgkin (1913, 74) notes that the panels behind the altar were formerly in the south chapel; it has been suggested that they originated at Durham (but see Structural History section).

The **Communion Rail**, in contrast, is a Renaissance piece, with fat diabolo balusters very like those at Haughton-le-Skerne, although here they occur in pairs, divided by square posts with arched panels on their faces, rather than a continuous run. The six-legged **Communion Table** of 1628 is largely Renaissance as well, although the shallow arches between the legs have broad Gothic cusping linking it to the chancel panelling, choir stalls and nave roof.

Above all this is a splendid panelled **Ceiling**, 'faintly Gothic', and known to be of 1638. It is basically a flat boarded ceiling with diagonal intersecting ribs, with pendants at their intersections and where they met the walls; the section over the sanctuary is divided off by a transverse moulded beam carrying an inverted version of the openwork cresting of the chancel stalls and panelling, and provided with a mock lierne-vault with a central sun, and angels carrying Latin inscriptions in both Black letter and Roman capitals, all very much a return to the 15th or early 16th century in style.

The **Creed/Pater and Commandments Boards**, flanking the east window, are coloured and gilded, and look of mid to late 19th century date. High up on the side walls are 17th-century panels with Scriptural texts, 'WE HAVE AN ALTAR' (on the south) and 'LET US DRAW NEAR WITH A TRUE HEART' (on the south).

The arch into the **South Chapel** has a panelled surround that is probably of early-16th century date; it has a cresting of crocketed leaves, and, towards the chancel, a crowned angel; the soffit (seen from the chapel) has panelling with foliage bosses and a row of shields, now blank. The arch now contains a glazed screen behind the choir stalls, which on the chapel side forms the reredos to an altar, the frontal of which is an elaborate carved piece taken in the 1970s from a Flemish **Chest** of early to mid 14th-century date (see Hodges 1892);

the remainder of the chest was apparently destroyed. Against the south wall of the chapel are two old pews with poppy head ends, and a 17th-century **Settle**; its back has arched panels like those on the fronts of the first pews in the nave.

The **Pewing** in the nave and transepts, by contrast to the chancel furnishings, is all Jacobean; the pew ends have poppy heads, rusticated bases and strapwork, very like those at Haughton le Skerne. There has obviously been considerably rearrangement in the 19th century; the backs of the pews in the south aisle have been re-set at an angle, the insides of the pew ends showing the evidence of two earlier positions of the backs. The 1863 account makes clear how much the pews were altered; prior to the restoration they were all provided with 'panelled doors, having quaint iron hinges and fasteners, and some (dare we confess it?) are provided with locks'; the floors of the pews were raised about 18" above the general floor level, with a step running along just under their door sills. Fowler, commenting again in 1901, simply pointed out the 'in reconstructing the pews, the old oak had been retained'.

Fowler refers to 'half a dozen large square boxes still more enriched, one of which is the "Castle pew"; two have high oak framework, as if to support curtains"; the 1639 plan shows these six larger box pews as being arranged in the transepts, a row of three on each side of the central aisle, with six east-west pews behind each row. The arrangements here have been completely altered, with the pulpit taking the place of the northern row; one large box pew complete with its gate remains, or has been re-constituted, in the south transept, and sections of others have been re-used in the north, but the 'high oak framework' has gone.

The **Pulpit** has been described as 'a pure and imaginative piece of early C17 design' (Pevsner & Williamson 115) with a crown-like lantern above its tester; again there is similar work, although inferior in quality, at Haughton-le-Skerne. It was installed in its present position in the 1864 restoration; what became of the corresponding reading desk a 'smaller and less imposing-looking structure' (Fowler) is unknown.

Nave and transepts have a **Panelled Dado** of 'plain and domestic' character (Pevsner & Williamson); prior to 1864 similar panelling encased the lower parts of the nave piers

The **Font** at the west end of the nave is of Frosterley marble, with a circular bowl (moulded on its lower angle), shaft and simply-moulded base, it is probably of late 12th-century or early 13th-century date (Hodgson 1912, 221). The **Font Cover** is the one piece of Cosinian woodwork thought to be of Post-Restoration date; it has a tall crocketed spire on Corinthian columns; the four iron posts which now support it are an introduction of 1972 by *George Pace*.

Set high on the east wall of the nave, over the chancel arch, are two piece of **Screen Work**, both coved and thought to be from rood screens). The upper has ribs with bosses of the Instruments of Passion and various shields, including the saltire and bull of the Nevilles. These, and the fact that the screen fits the nave so well, suggest that it may belong here; Cosin's fret is presumably an addition. Above are the Royal Arms. The lower, of oak painted white, is a very elaborate piece with three rows of nine panels of Flamboyant tracery; it has been suggested that this was brought from the Jesus Altar in Durham Cathedral at the time of the Commonwealth., although there is a tradition that this piece as well is part of the medieval rood screen of the present church. It was described and illustrated by R.W.Billings in a monograph 'The Geometric Tracery of Brancepeth Church' (Fowler 1863, 78)

The **Stained Glass** in the church is almost all 19th-century work, apart from three Flemish roundels in the eastern of the two windows in the north wall of the north aisle; Fowler refers to some texts that he thought of Cosin's date, and some mutilated remnants of 'ancient' glass in the chancel, and Hodgson (1905, 86) to a surviving shield of arms of John of Gaunt (from which he dated the rebuilding of the chancel to the period 1370-1381). but these all appear to have been lost.

Built into the north side of the buttress at the south end of the east wall of the chancel is a **Carved Stone Panel** with Christ in majesty within a mandorla, surrounded by symbols of the evangelists; it is thought to be of 13th century date. A similar panel, in rather better condition, taken from St Giles' Church in Durham is now in St Mary the Less in the same city.

On the north aisle wall immediately west of the north door is a brass plate stating 'THIS CHURCH WAS RESTORED A.D. 1864 BY GUSTAVUS FREDERICK 7TH VISCOUNT BOYNE AND EMMA MARIA, VISCOUNTESS BOYNE'. In a corresponding position on the south aisle wall another brass records 'The South Porch of this church was erected A.D. 1892 by the Rev. Arthur Duncombe Shafto, M.A., Rector of Brancepeth'.

Fowler (1863, 78) records the 'elaborate accompaniments of a **Clock**, given by one of the Calverleys, and having their armorial bearings' as lying in a corner; at some subsequent date the old clock face has been set on the west wall of the nave, above the tower arch, and its mechanism restored and set in a new frame, which now stands beside the south door. The armorial bearings are however now lost.

The present ring of eight **Bells** were hung in 1889, as a gift of the Eighth Viscount Boyne; Boyle (1892, 457) describes their predecessors, which consisted of three cast in 1632 (he cites their inscriptions) and three given in 1859 to replace others reputed to have been sold to provide liquid refreshment for the 'gentlemen of the Four-and-Twenty'. The cast iron low-sided frames (Pickford type 8.3 A) are of plan type 8.3., with a central range of four east-west pits with two aligned north-south on either side.

Sepulchral Monuments.

The earliest monuments to survive are a number of **Medieval Cross Slab Grave Covers**; most have been recently described and illustrated, nos 1-17 (Ryder 1985, 62-64 and plates 9-10) and nos 18-19 (Ryder 1994, 43-44). Only a brief resume of each is given here:

Slabs (1) - (5) are set in the internal face of the west wall of the north aisle:

- (1) Upper part of incised slab, bracelet-derivative cross, sword on r. Later 13th century.
- (2) Cross with bracelets between arms, with shears on left, base missing 12th or 13th century.
- (3) Upper part of slab with interlaced-diamond cross in relief, book? on left. 14th century.
- (4) Intact slab, incised cross with fleur-de-lys terminals; tongs on right and hammer? on

left, probably commemorating a blacksmith. 14th century?

- (5) Upper part of incised slab; cross crosslet with trefoil terminals; later 13th century.
- (6) In plinth on east of north transept; incised Greek cross with expanded arms.
- (7) Alongside (6). Cross shaft with stepped base.
- (8) Two pieces of slab forming sides of squint from sacristy; incised cross with shears on right.

Slabs (9) to (15) are built into the internal face of the north all of the churchyard, from west to east. They are mostly badly weathered; 19th-century drawings show much more of the designs surviving:

- (9) Double slab, with only stepped bases of crosses remaining visible.
- (10) 14th century (?) slab with fleur-de-lys terminals, badly worn.
- (11) Bracelet-derivative cross in sunk panel; late 13th century.
- (12) Base of slab with circular motif beneath arch, 14th century?
- (13) Head of slab, formerly with eight-arm cross and fleur-de-lys terminals. 14th century.
- (14) Upper part of slab, cross with bracelets between arms, within sunk circle. Late 12th or 13th century.
- (15) Section of slab with incised cross shaft only.
- (16) Stone built into south side of churchyard stile; cross with central boss, perhaps a Pre-Conquest piece.
- (17) Stone built into north side of stile; another 'early' piece, a free-standing cross head.
- (18) Internal lintel of door from chancel to sacristy, whitewashed over. Cross with four-circle or bracelet head with stepped base and sword on right. 12th or 13th century.
- (19) Lost slab drawn by Robert Blair (unpublished sketchbook in Society of Antiquaries collection, Newcastle); small slab, perhaps a headstone, with a cross within a circular panel. 12th century?
- (20) Internal lintel of east window of sacristy, whitewashed over. Cross with pair of shears.

There are also two **Brasses**:

In the floor at the east end of the south aisle is a figure of a knight in armour, in the style of the late 14th or early 15th century, set in a tapered slab. An inscription and shields have been

removed; the figure itself was stolen at one time and retrieved from a shop in London. The monument has been linked to a Thomas Claxton, Constable of Brancepeth castle from 1400 to 1402.

In the floor of the chancel, west of the effigy of Robert Neville, is a slab with a half figure of a priest in academic costume, with an inscription to Richard Drax, rector, who died in 1453; at the corners are symbols of the evangelists.

From the later medieval period there are two important **Effigial Monuments**:

The earlier is set in the centre of the chancel floor, and is a large (c 2.3 m long) stone effigy thought to represent Robert Neville, the 'Peacock of the North', who was killed fighting the Scots at Berwick in 1318. A full description is given by Hunter Blair (1929, 22; see appendix) Prior to 1864 this effigy was set against the north wall of the north transept; it was then moved to the north side of the chancel, and into its present position much more recently when the monument of Ralph Neville and wife was moved into the transept..

In the north-east corner of the north transept, close to the original position of the first effigy, are a pair of wooden effigies ascribed to Ralph Neville d.1484, second Earl of Westmoreland, and Margaret, his second wife; full descriptions are again provided by Hunter Blair (*ibid*,33-34; see appendix). These effigies originally lay on an altar tomb in the centre of the chancel; the tomb was destroyed, probably in the 19th century (illustrations of it survive) and the effigies and entablature replaced upon its plinth. The monument, in this condition, is figured by Billings (plate f.p.25); within the present century it has been moved twice, first to the south side of the chancel, and then to its present location, mounted on a modern tomb (over the old plinth).

A third Neville tomb is now set beneath the tower. This is a large tomb chest with a plain top slab and six quatrefoil panels on the sides, containing shields; three on the south retain traces of colouring but the Neville saltire which could still be 'dimly traced' a hundred years ago (Boyle 1892, 457) is no longer apparent. The ends of the tomb are plain, as prior to 1876 it stood beneath the arch between chancel and south chapel. This is thought to have been intended as the tomb of Ralph Neville, third Earl of Westmorland who died in 1523 but was actually buried at Hornby (North Yorkshire) although his wife was interred beneath it. When the tomb was removed to its present location in 1876 a second similar uninscribed altar tomb in the chapel, that of the son of the Third Earl, was buried beneath its floor 'to get it out of the way' (Hodgkin 1913, 74).

There are a few **Post-Medieval Monuments** of interest. The most ambitious is a wall tablet on the north of the chancel, which it appears was intended as a memorial to Cosin himself, but was never completed as the Bishop was buried in his palace Chapel at Bishop Auckland. Pevsner & Williamson (116) debate whether the monument was put up by Cosin himself pre-1640 or by his successor and protégée, Brevint, after 1660.

Set in the internal face of the north wall of the north aisle, close to its west end, are two **Ledger Stones** with lettering, inlaid in lead, partly concealed by furniture. One is dated 1600; the other is probably the slab recorded as bearing the inscription 'Pray for the soul of Nicholas Cokke I.C.H.W.'; this Nicholas is thought to have been a curate who died in 1644. In the chancel floor are two more ledgers, one to the south of the 'Peacock' effigy with a

Latin inscription, and coat of arms, to Thomas Calverly d.1613 and his son John d.1638, and one to the north with a worn 18th century inscription to Timothy Wilkinson .

There are several **Hatchments**, probably of 18th century date; two in the north aisle, one over the south door, one on the east wall of the south transept, and one on the north wall of the south-east chapel.

There are several 19th-century **Wall Tablets** in the chancel, and four brass plaques to members of the Boyne family in the south transept. Wall monuments in the south aisle include a tablet topped by an urn to William Foster, d.1756.

In the north aisle, set on top of the unfinished respond at the east end of the north wall, is a **Funeral Helmet** of uncertain date, possibly associated with one of the Neville tombs..

Historical Notes

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1085 | The earliest record of a rector of Brancepeth, |
| 1319 | The death of Robert ‘The Peacock’ Neville; it has been suggested that his father, Ralph Lord Neville, remodelled the church to provide a more suitable place for his tomb. |
| 1483 | The Jesus Chantry was founded by Ralph, Lord Neville, and Isabel his wife. |
| c1540 | John Leland the antiquary records ‘dyvers tumbes of the Nevilles’ in the church and adds ‘In the quier is an high tumbe of one of them, porturied with his wife’ |
| 1596 | The Acts of Consistory Court for Durham state that the church and chancel windows were decayed, the leads decayed, and bells broken. |
| 1638-9. | Various repairs and furnishings were carried out under the Rector John Cosin; in 1639 his curate records that ‘the timber has been sawne for sieling the roof of the middle alley’. |
| 1794 | Hutchinson (III, 314-8), the earliest of the Durham county historians, prints an enthusiastic description of the church: ‘ The church stands at the south end of the village, near the castle, is in the form of a cross, and beautifully decorated within. The chancel is in length fourteen paces, and in width seven paces, wainscotted and stalled in oak, in an excellent taste, highly finished with tabernacle-work; the roof is pannelled with oak, in diamonds, the joinings ornamented with cherubs crowned, supporting shields, on which are scripture |

sentences, in raised letters, of fine carving. The space within the rails, to which you ascend by three steps, is four paces wide, and the altar is gracefully covered by crimson velvet. The chancel is divided from the nave by a pointed arch, which is closed by gates and stalls canopied, and ornamented up to the roof, with elegant tabernacle work, in three spires. In the middle of the chancel is a tomb..... (Ralph 1st Earl of Westmoreland and wife)....There is a large porch on the south of the chancel, opened by an arch, cased with wood and ornamented with shields of arms;.... The chancel is lighted to the east by a large window of five compartments, to the north three windows and two to the south, under pointed arches, and ornamented with much tracery: there are two large windows in the porch to the south, and a smaller one to the east, of similar form. The nave is twenty paces in length, with side aisles, each formed by two octagonal pillar, long light shafts, supporting pointed arches; the ceiling is of wood, and one of the rafters on the north side is ornamented with a carved figure of a bull bearing a shield, with the arms of Nevill on the left shoulder. The stalls are of oak, regular, and ornamented with fleurs de lis; it is lighted with two old flat arched windows to the north, and three modern windows to the south: the upper windows are square and regular, four on each side. The cross is lighted at each end; the windows under pointed arches... (he also describes the monuments at some length)

1857 Fordyce (I,427) classifies the different parts of the church by their architectural styles - the tower Early English, the arcades Decorated, chancel and flanking chapels 'in the period merging in the Perpendicular style', the nave clerestory and roof 'Late Perpendicular' It appears that both entrance porches were 'decorated with pilasters bearing Ionic capitals'.

1860 Sir Stephen Glynne (1909) made notes on the church. He records the tower as 'decidedly Semi-Norman' and the south aisle windows as being of 'a Flamboyant character' (implying that their tracery had been restored). The north chapel was 'now a rubbish place' and he thought 'there is too much casing in wainscot'. He saw the porches as 'somewhat debased'.

Faculties and Other Records of Structural Work

Faculty No. And Date	Works
347 27.7.1892	Faculty for South Porch
456/3 2.1.1905	Stained glass windows with inscriptions 2 Jan 1905
2961 16.11.46	Repairs to stained glass windows
3537 1.8.52	AC Restoration of north-east vestry roof
3839 29.2.56	Restoration and repair of church
4505 1.10.62	Installation of oil-fired boiler and storage tank
4904 24.8.66	Renovation of shields and introduction of D.L.I. plaques
5226 23.12.70	New electric lighting and pendant crucifix
5415 2.5. 73	Restoration of external stonework, cleaning internal woodwork
5507 16.5.74	Restoration of font cover and other alterations
5624 2.9.76	Introduction of an aumbry and light
5672 16.5.77	Resiting the Organ & redecorations

5713	15.2.78	New oil-fired boiler, redecorations, repairs
5757	13.11.78	Restoration of ancient panels & crockets in the soffit
5771	11.1.79	AC Interior redecoration
6089	19.4.83	Restoration of hatchments
6227	6.12.84	AC Cleaning of D.L.I. brasswork
6227B	19.12.84	Consistory Court Hearing. Reordering of chancel, movement of effigies
6352	11.3.86	Restoration of north porch doors
6389	10.7.86	AC Restoration of clock mechanism and display of clock
6738	1.6.88	Restoration of stonework on north wall.
6995	28.11.89	Cleaning and restoring Frosterley marble font
7032	19.2.90	Cleaning memorial plaques
7144	20.9.90	AC Replacement of roof members
7145	20.9.90	AC Repairs to south side chancel windows
7644	5.1.93	Conversion of heating system to gas and provision of gas supply
7899	2.9.94	Restoration of entrance gate piers and tombstone

The Structural History of the Church

Most antiquarian accounts of the church concur on the general building history of the church; a late 12th century tower heightened in the 13th century, when aisles were added to the nave, followed by a remodelling when the nave was extended a bay further to the east (the old chancel arch being moved), and the transepts built. The aisles were also widened and extended west to engage the tower, and then eastern arm was entirely rebuilt, and a clerestory added to the nave; the north porch was the only significant masonry addition coeval with Cosin's great reordering of the internal fittings and furnishings. There has been some variation in the dates ascribed to the various phases.

(1) Before 1200. The Nave Walls and Tower.

The earliest fabric in the present building is almost certainly to be found in the side walls of the western part of the nave, extending as far as the elongate piers between the central and eastern bay. These appear to pre-date the tower; the relationship between the position of the south-west angle of the original nave and the east wall of the tower, which straddles the line of the external face of the old west end, makes this clear. All this fabric is now behind plaster. The nave walls are only 0.70 m thick, rather thin for the 12th century, and could conceivably be Pre-Conquest; further light on this question might be shed if the quoining of the south-west angle of the old nave could be examined, either physically or using some remote-sensing technique.

In the later 12th century a substantial tower was added, virtually the full width of the nave. The three round-arched windows of the second stage are thoroughly Norman in style, and the arch to the nave only betrays the coming Gothic in being slightly pointed rather than semicircular.

It is not clear whether there was any break in building between the second and third stages of

the tower, where the original belfry lights have lancet arches which stylistically might be taken as c.1200. The openings of the present belfry, the fourth stage, are very similar; the tower must have been heightened within twenty or thirty years of its initial completion.

(2) **The 13th Century. The First Aisles**

Aisles were added to the nave within the 13th century; it is generally thought that the nave at this stage was only of two bays, although this is not proven; if the side walls are of pre-Conquest date, then a nave of fairly elongate proportions might be expected. There is sufficient difference in design between the two arcades to show that they are of different dates; the northern may be the earlier. These first aisles were probably fairly narrow, with a low eaves line; one steeply-pitched roof would cover both nave and aisles. Stylistically the chancel arch looks to be of similar date to the western parts of the arcades, possibly implying that the old chancel (12th century?) was rebuilt at this time, as many others were.

(3) **The Earlier 14th Century. The First Remodelling; the Transepts added and Aisles rebuilt.**

The generally-accepted theory is that the nave was extended eastwards (the old chancel arch being re-erected a bay to the east of its original position) and transepts added: Pevsner & Williamson place this phase in the 'late C13 or early C14' whilst the older authorities prefer the latter. Hodgson (1895) is more specific still; he sees the transepts as being built by Ralph Neville to house the tomb of his son, 'The Peacock' (whose effigy survives), who was killed fighting the Scots at Berwick in 1319; Ralph himself died in 1331, giving a fairly narrow date-bracket for the works. Hodgson debates (in his usual wordy style) the significance of the variation in style of the transept windows, and comes to the conclusion that the east window of the south transept is of slightly earlier date, and had probably been inserted at the west end of the south wall of the older chancel, in the section destroyed by the eastern extension of the nave. He sees the other chancel windows, with their 'fully-flowing' tracery, as contemporary with the transepts, although admittedly an earlier example of their style than similar windows in Durham Cathedral known to date from the time of Prior Fossor (1341 -1374). He also sees the rebuilding of the aisles (and their western extension) as part of Ralph Neville's works.

Hodgson is not entirely convincing, in that the works he links to Ralph Neville, and the third decade of the 14th century, in reality seem to comprise three if not four different constructional phases. The transepts are built in much superior masonry to the present aisles, and, as far as can be made out, seem to pre-date them. However, the two transepts are slightly different both in their fabric (the southern seems of the better quality) and also in their dimensions (internal widths north transept c 4.45, south transept c 4.70 m).

The rebuilt aisles are hard to date, partly because their architectural features may be, at least in part, re-used from earlier parts of the building. The chamfered plinths, the use of which is restricted to the west end of each aisle (was this seen as the 'show front' of the church, facing the Castle?) are of quite steep sections, and on their own might be ascribed to the 13th century, as might the windows in the same wall, although close inspection suggests that their dressings may be largely post-medieval; the south doorway, and possibly also the north, also look like 13th-century pieces re-set. The two windows on the south of the south aisle entirely

Victorian in form and fabric, whilst those in the north aisle have old outer jambs but their present 14th-century style cannot be trusted, despite the fact that one is visible, in its present form, in Billings' print (1843). Hutchinson refers to them as 'old flat-arched windows' which might imply a 16th or 17th-century date. The only features one could argue are coeval with the rebuilding are the pair of responds for the intended arches between aisles and transepts; their bases have mouldings that look later 14th or even early 15th century work, quite different in feeling to the eastern arches of the arcades and anything in the transepts themselves.

(4) **1370-1381? The Rebuilding of the Chancel**

The present chancel seems to be almost entirely of one build, but again Pevsner & Williamson and earlier authorities differ somewhat as to the date. The former simply states 'in the C15' but Hodgson (1905, 86) places the chancel firmly in the bracket 1371-1381, on the strength of a surviving piece of medieval glass - now apparently lost - bearing the arms of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in a form only used during this period. He saw the rebuilding as carried out by John Lord Neville (d.1388), and its architectural detailing - on the transition between Decorated and Perpendicular - as having links with the York school, and being intermediate in style between the Lady Chapel at York Minster (completed 1374) and the Choir (c.1400).

The relationship between chancel and the earlier chancel arch is puzzling, as the central axis of the rebuilt chancel is a little to the south of that of the arch. This, together with the odd thickening of the lower part of the wall between chancel and sacristy (perhaps implying the survival of earlier masonry) suggests that the north wall of the present chancel is on the line of that of its predecessor, and that it has been widened to the south.

(5) **The Sacristy**

This poses something of a puzzle. At first glance the continuous plinth suggests that it is of one build with the chancel, but it has a number of puzzling features. One is the thick lower section of its south wall, already mentioned. If this is indeed a survival from the previous chancel, the reason for its retention may be that the sacristy had already been built (*possibly just a few years before hand). Fowler (1863, 73) suggests this, and considers that it was 'cut away in part when the present chancel was built'. The two windows of the sacristy are both of mid-14th century type, but could be re-set; more puzzling is the string course on the east wall, the line of which relates very uncomfortably to the adjacent chancel sill-string and window, although the awkwardness of the junction has been disguised by the re-cutting of the ends of the string with an unusual little ornament, which might even be post-Reformation.

The upper parts of the sacristy walls are of quite different fabric to the lower, and may have been rebuilt; possibly in its original form there was an upper floor with a priest's room (as for example at Staindrop).

(6) **c.1510-1520? The South-East Chapel.**

The two windows in the south wall of the chapel are identical in form to those in the side walls of the chancel, which leads several authorities to consider chancel and chapel

contemporary, although the much plainer window on the east has aroused comment; Boyle (1892, 452) considers that the east wall had been rebuilt in the late 15th century.

Hodgson (1905, 87) offers a more convincing explanation; he sees the Chapel as being built by Ralph Neville, Third Earl of Westmoreland (1484-1530) as a burial chapel, the southern windows and buttresses being re-used from the south wall of the chancel, whilst the 'poor, mean' east window was of 'purely local Durham work' in contrast to the earlier windows of the York school. Several other features back up Hodgson's suggestion; the two buttresses on the south wall look awkward, one obstructing the hoodmould of the adjacent window and the other with its dressings not coursing in well with the wall behind. The arch between chapel and chancel, clearly constructed to accommodate a tomb (with a separate doorway into the chapel alongside), is of relatively rough workmanship, which was inconsequential in that its stonework is largely obscured by contemporary panelling. The mouldings of its imposts look Tudor rather than Gothic; a date of c.1510-20 for the whole chapel seems likely. The panelling from the Chapel, now behind the altar, bears the badge of Prior Castell of Durham (d.1519), so may fit well with this date, although the lack of known connections between the prior and Brancepeth has led to the suggestion that the panelling is a later import from the Cathedral.

(7) **Post-Medieval Changes**

The major interest in post-medieval work at Brancepeth is of course in its fittings, here dealt with separately, rather than fabric. However, a number of changes were clearly made in the centuries between the Reformation and the Victorian restoration.

There has been some confusion in the past as to the dates of the various internal furnishings; those in the chancel tended to be classified as 'Elizabethan' on the strength of their Gothic features. This problem is also seen, to a lesser extent, in the fabric of the church. The nave clerestory and roof are usually placed in the 14th or 15th century, and the documented 1638 works there seen as merely repair; it seems possible, however, that clerestory and roof are all Cosin's work (possibly re-using some medieval material); the Bishop is known to have used convincingly Gothic forms in masoncraft as well as woodwork, as at Bishop Auckland.

As in many Durham churches, a number of 18th and early 19th century features were erased by 19th-century restoration. Although Cosin's north porch was decried as 'unseemly' by Fordyce (1856, 428) and even 'the acme of debasement' (Fowler, 1863, 79) it was fortunately allowed to survive. The south porch, which from Hutchinson's print looks to have been of 17th or 18th century date, did not.

Hutchinson's print and the 1825 plan together allow some more details of the pre-restoration south aisle to be put together. West of the porch were two tall stepped buttresses, and east of it a pair of large round-arched windows with arched central panels, clearly of 18th century date of the type often termed 'debased insertions' by antiquarian sources (Boyle, 1892, 452).

(8) **The 19th century**

It is clear from Fowler (who, writing in 1863, refers to 'most' of the aisle and transept windows as 'recently supplied with new tracery'), Glynne and other sources that

considerable 'restoration' work, ie the remodelling of window openings with suitably Gothic tracery, took place before the major restoration in 1864, although, as no faculty evidence seems to survive, it is difficult to sort out exactly when individual changes were carried out. Visible evidence in the fabric suggests that the west part of the south wall of the south aisle was at least partly rebuilt. Much window tracery was renewed, that in the chancel at least copying the old work fairly closely. The history of the south porch remains unclear; it appears on the 1825 plan but is not mentioned by later 19th-century writers after Glynne (1860), although it does seem to be shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6": 1 mile map (surveyed in 1857). Perhaps it was taken down in 1863. The present south porch was built in 1892.

Since this date there have been various repairs to the fabric, and replacement of decayed stone (especially around the west end) but no significant structural alterations or additions.

History of the Monuments and Furnishings.

As already stated, the Neville monuments and the Post-Medieval Furnishings of the church are both of especial interest. Both have been subject to various movements and re-orderings, which can be chronicled to some extent with the aid of documentary evidence. A brief summary of these follows.

The Medieval Monuments.

The earliest important monument is the effigy of Robert Neville, 'The Peacock', who died in 1319. Hodgson suggests that this was probably first located before an altar in the south transept, although the earliest record of it, the 1639 plan, shows it set against the north wall of the north transept. In 1864 it was removed to the north side of the chancel; more recently (1984) it was moved into the centre of the chancel, after the Second Earl's tomb was moved into the transept.

The tomb of Ralph Neville d.1484, second Earl of Westmoreland, and Margaret, his second wife, may have been placed in the centre of the chancel from the first. Billings' print shows it in what was probably its original position; in 1864 it seems to have been moved to the south side, then c 1984 it was re-erected, upon a new table tomb, in the north transept..

The tomb intended for Ralph Neville, the third Earl, was set beneath the arch between the chancel and the new south chapel, which was probably constructed for this purpose, with the tomb of his son being set alongside within the chapel. Both tombs remained in situ until 1876 when the first was removed to its present location beneath the tower, and the second apparently dismantled and buried beneath the chapel floor.

Other Monuments

The 1639 plan shows a 'tomb' set against the south wall of the south transept. No further record of this has been traced.

The Furnishings

The 1639 plan provides a valuable picture of the interior of the nave and transepts as newly fitted out under Cosin; under transept arches on each side were three square box pews, with behind them pews, six on the north and seven on the south, facing into the main body of the church. The arrangements within the nave, ie eastward of the two doors, were, on plan, much as they are today, except that instead of the second pew, the 'sermon' and 'reading' pulpits were set against the internal faces of the eastern piers. Pewing extended to the west end of the each aisle, and there were a series of boxes or pews for children beneath the tower.

Another fortunate survival is a detailed plan of the church in 1825 (Durham Cathedral Library) which shows the arrangements much as in 1639, except that the pewing in the west ends of the aisles seem to have been removed, the arrangements under the tower altered, and the three box pews at the entrance to the south transept apparently reduced to two; there were also apparently less pews in the transepts.

Whilst the 1864 restoration left the furnishings within the chancel largely intact (although some minor interesting pieces, such as carved oak facings of the altar steps described by Fowler, were removed), the transepts and nave were completely re-ordered.. Whilst the plan of the seating in the nave and aisles remains unaltered, the pews themselves have been reconstructed and the platforms on which they stood removed. The most significant change was the removal of the two nave pulpits, and the replacement of one of them - it is not clear which - on the north of the chancel arch. Although the furnishings in the transepts, including the large box pew on the south, appear at first sight to be authentic 17th-century work, a comparison of the 1825 plan and the situation today shows that nothing seems to survive in situ; the 1864 reconstruction was carried out to a high standard, and there is little obvious evidence of re-use.

The Churchyard

The churchyard is of irregular plan; its western angles are rounded, as if it may once have been sub-circular. There is a 20th-century extension on the north; the 'adjoining plot of ground' consecrated in 1853 (Fordyce 1856, 428) was presumably to the east where a slight bank c 12 m east of the chancel may mark the older boundary; the earliest monument beyond is dated 1855.

The enclosing wall is generally 1- 1.5 m high; the gateway, to the north-west, has a pair of piers with moulded finials and ball caps (later 17th or early 18th century?) and immediately to the east, an interesting and quite elaborate stile having stone steps with moulded nosings; the stile is partly constructed of medieval cross slabs, and there are further ones set in the internal face of the wall further east (see Sepulchral Monuments section). There is a second gateway west-south-west of the church with a chamfered square-headed doorway (badly weathered but possibly no older than the early 19th century) in a raised section of wall.

Although the majority of the headstones (which seem to have been thinned in parts) are of the 19th century, there are some interesting earlier monuments, A short distance from the south-east corner of the South Chapel, alongside an 18th-century table tomb, is a tapered limestone slab with a broad chamfer all round, now bearing an inscription of 1721 but almost certainly a medieval piece re-used. About 12m south of the west end of the south aisle is a headstone to Thomas Jonson, d.1791, a local surgeon, with carvings of his bag and a wide range of surgical

instruments.

In the south-east corner of the churchyard is a raised enclosure, now rather overgrown, containing the Boyne family vault. This appears to be associated with an interesting tunnel or drain, opening from the Golf Course beyond the churchyard wall. For details of this see Appendix.

Archaeological Assessment

Brancepeth Church, both in its fabric and its fittings, is clearly one of the most important within the diocese and the proper preservation and recording of its archaeological features, both below floor and ground levels, and in the above-ground fabric, is of prime importance

As often, there has clearly been considerable disturbance of sub-surface archaeological deposits within and around the building; internally there are heating grates indicating an extensive sub-floor heating system (as well as what looks like a covered -over boiler house outside the south wall of the chancel) and externally there is a substantial slabbed-over perimeter drain cut down well below churchyard level, obviously to counter rising damp problems. Any works involving disturbance of floor levels will require archaeological monitoring

The same stricture should apply for any structural works; there have been relatively recent works around the west end of the church and in the tower, which should have entailed archaeological recording. It is clear that measures have been taken to preserve the old ladders in the tower, but it is not clear whether proper records were made.

Within the body of the church it is quite possible that the wall plaster may conceal earlier plaster and possibly medieval or post-medieval paintings; no record has been seen that suggests walls have been stripped at any time; the post-medieval furnishings and panelling have clearly afforded some degree of protection. Any works at all involving disturbance of plaster must be carefully monitored; if any such works are envisaged, it is desirable that a small area be examined in advance. Brancepeth may be one of the relatively few Durham churches to retain extensive remains of its medieval mural decorations, even if completely concealed at the moment.

Some comment needs to be made about the furnishings themselves, which are obviously of great importance. The relatively recent destruction of the 14th-century chest (despite the preservation and restoration of its front panel in a new role as an altar) is to be regretted,. Whilst any disturbance of the Cosin fittings in the chancel is unlikely, it is possible that there may be moves to re-order furnishings in the nave and transepts, as the pewing here is largely a 19th-century reconstruction, re-using old materials. Despite this it may well be thought desirable to make a detailed record (plans, drawings, photographs) of any features that might be altered or moved; at the time of the preparation of this report there appears to be no recent drawn survey of the church at all (the attached phased plan was based on Archdeacon Thorp's 1825 survey...)

Peter F Ryder, June 1998

Sources

- Boyle, J.R. (1892) Comprehensive Guide to the County of Durham, 513-514
- Fordyce, W (1857) The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham.
- Fowler, J.T. (1868) 'A Visit to Brancepeth Church in 1863', Transactions of the Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham & Northumberland I, 73-81
- Fowler, J.T. (1905) Comments in account of a 1901 visit to the church by the Durham & Northumberland Architectural & Archaeological Society, Transactions of the Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham & Northumberland V lxxiii - lxxvii
- Glynne, S (1909) Sir Stephen Glynne's Church notes (relating to a visit in 1860) in Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle 3rd series III, 210-211
- Hodges, C.C. (1892) 'On Some Medieval Carved Chests'. Archaeologia Aeliana New Series XV, 295-309.
- Hodgson, J.F. (1895) 'Raby' .Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland, Transactions IV, 49-122
- Hodgson, J.F. (1905) 'On some four and five-lighted North Country "Decorated Windows"'. Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland, Transactions V, 86-88
- Hodgson, J.F. (1912) 'Fonts and Font Covers'.. Transactions of the Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham

- Hunter Blair, C.H. (1929) 'Medieval Effigies in the County of Durham'.
Archaeologia Aeliana 4th ser. VI.
- Hunter Blair, C.H. (1935) 'The Renaissance Heraldry of the County Palatine of
Durham'. Archaeologia Aeliana 4th ser. XII.
- Hutchinson, W (1794) History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of
Durham III,
- Pevsner, N &
Williamson E, (1983) County Durham (revised edition) (Buildings of England series,
Penguin),
- Pickford, C. (1993) Bellframes. A practical guide to inspection and recording.
Privately published.
- Ryder, P.F.(1985) The Medieval Cross Slab Grave Cover in County Durham.
Architect. & Archaeol. Soc. of Durham & Northumberland
Research report no.1.
- Ryder, P.F. (1994) Some Further Medieval Cross Slabs in County Durham.
Durham Archaeological Journal 10, 43-53
- Short, J & E.W. (1946) 'The Story of an English Parish Church' (guidebook
sold in aid of Restoration of Brancepeth Church)