

ST MARY AND ST CUTHBERT, CHESTER-LE-STREET

The parish church of Chester-le-Street consists of a five-bay nave with a west tower, the aisles extending west to engage the tower; the aisle bay north of the tower is divided off from the body of the church to form part of the structure known as the Anchorage, which also extends north of the line of the aisle. There is also a south porch. The chancel has a one-bay north chapel, with, further east, a vestry; there has been a three-bay outer north aisle overlapping nave aisle and chancel chapel, the site of its centre bay now being occupied by the transept-like Lambton Pew.

Description

The Exterior

The lower part of the west tower is constructed of roughly-coursed rubble, except for its buttresses and the lower part of the stair turret, which are of squared stone. There are paired stepped buttresses at the angles, except that the position of the western buttress at the north-west corner is occupied by the larger stair turret, of irregular trapezoidal plan.

A chamfered plinth extends along the west wall of the tower, and the adjacent stair turret and buttress. The west doorway has a two-centred arch carrying a continuous casement moulding (a broad chamfer with a central hollow), under a hollow-chamfered hoodmould with turned-back ends; arch and hoodmould are quite badly worn. Above the doorway is the west window of three cinquefoil-headed lights with simple panel tracery over; the frame, with a broad casement moulding and an inner chamfer, is largely restoration, although parts of the tracery look original; there is no hoodmould.

Above the west window is a string course (continued round buttresses and stair turret), chamfered above and below, which marks the base of the original belfry; this has openings on north, west and south, each consisting of two lancet lights, with linked hoodmoulds, divided by a central shaft; on the west this has a moulded capital, on the south a capital with worn dogtooth ornament, and on the north a similar capital which, along with the shaft below, has been renewed relatively recently. Old engravings (eg that by Blore, reproduced by Surtees, 1820, f p. 138) show these openings being blocked, with a small square-headed loop inserted in the blocking of each light. This blocking may have been removed at the 1862 restoration.

The stair turret dies into the wall at the top of the original belfry. It is lit by three single-light windows; the lower two, in the south-west face, are square-headed and segment-headed respectively; the taller upper loop, in the west face, and above a canted off-set, is square headed; all have chamfered

surrounds.

The angle buttresses all die into the wall at the head of the former belfry. Above this, the present belfry is built of sandstone ashlar; its square base is formed by a single course of large blocks; above this the belfry itself takes on an octagonal plan, with broaches at the angles supporting slender stepped buttresses in the centre of each diagonal face. The principal faces each contain a tall opening of two cinquefoil-headed lights under a pointed arch, with a deep moulded and hollow-chamfered surrounds. There is a moulded string at the base of the embattled and moulded parapet, which is interrupted by square pinnacles carried on the four buttresses; parapet and pinnacles have been renewed in greyer stone. A square-headed and rebated opening in the south-east face of the tower gives access to the narrow parapet walk. The spire has a roll moulding at each angle.

The west wall of the south aisle is of roughly-coursed rubble, and has no features other than a chamfered plinth continuous with that of the tower. At each of the southern angles of the aisle are a pair of stepped buttresses. The south wall of the aisle, articulated by similar buttresses (with the south porch projecting from the third bay), and with a two-part plinth, the broader upper member hollow-chamfered, is of squared stone laid in courses of irregular height; there is an oversailing chamfered course at the eaves, which appears to be of 19th century date. The ground level adjacent to the aisle has been lowered, exposing a projecting foundation course to each buttress, which appears to be largely made up of re-used cross slab grave covers (see below). In the first bay is a window of two trefoiled ogee-arched lights, with a quatrefoil in the spandrel, within a chamfered frame; all its stonework is unrestored medieval work, and quite worn. The second bay has a somewhat similar window except that the stonework of the head, with a different type of quatrefoil, is all restoration; the jambs appear old, and the frame of the head, although this is made up in this case of individual voussoirs rather than elongate stones.

East of the porch the plinth steps down to a lower level, following the slight slope of the ground. The fourth bay window is of three lights, with simple intersecting tracery under a pointed arch, with a chamfered frame but no hoodmould; its stonework is of sandstone ashlar similar in character (and date?) to that of the south porch, and there is contemporary refacing of the wall around its head. The fifth bay has a window of three trefoil-headed lights under geometric tracery, the main motif of which is a circle enclosing three trefoils; the stonework is all restoration, and clearly more recent than that of the previous window; there is an obvious area of patching or refacing around this window, possibly indicating an earlier and larger opening. The window of the sixth bay is virtually identical with that in the fourth, with similar refacing around

its head.

The east end of the aisle contains a window of three trefoil-headed lights with reticulated tracery above, of 14th century style, although all its stonework is relatively recent. A square-edged foundation or sub-plinth is exposed across the whole width of the wall, again apparently made up of re-used grave slabs.

The South Porch

The south porch is constructed of sandstone ashlar, rather greyer in colour than that in other parts of the church; the blocks of the south front show neat vertical tooling. There is a chamfered plinth, and a moulded string below the parapet, which has a moulded coping. The south archway has a projecting outer order chamfered on both intrados and extrados, and a hollow-chamfered inner order; projecting blocks following the same section as the two orders form impost. In each side wall is a blind window or recess having a pointed cinquefoil-cusped head, and a projecting (restored) sill. The parapet of the front wall of the porch is stepped and embattled. The present porch roof is low-pitched, but on the wall behind the weathering of the more steeply-pitched roof of a previous porch is visible.

North Aisle

The first (western) bay of the north aisle, that flanking the tower, is now incorporated into the Anchorage. East of the Anchorage the second, third and fourth bays of the aisle wall are of squared stone (with much later patching), and have a two-part plinth; the bays are articulated by stepped buttresses, the first (now adjacent to the Anchorage stair) being more massive than the others, and the second (between bays two and three) only rising to half the height of the wall. There is no buttress between bays four and five, where a mutilated section of the plinth shows the position of the west wall of the former outer north aisle. Bays five and six are the western two bays of the arcade to the former outer aisle, the arch in bay five now blocked, and that in bay six concealed by the addition of the transept-like Lambton Pew.

Bay two has a square-headed window of two trefoil-headed lights with pierced spandrels, apparently an unrestored 14th-century piece. Above the truncated buttress between second and third bays the sill and jambs of a blocked window are visible, the form of its head being obscured by re-facing. In bay three is the north door which has a pointed arch of two orders, each carrying a narrow hollow chamfer, with a chamfered hoodmould; the inner order is continued to ground level whilst the outer rests on attached shafts with moulded capitals and bases. Above the doorway is a two-light window with Y-tracery within a shallow pointed arch carrying a continuous broad hollow chamfer. It clearly replaces an earlier opening at the same level, traces

of the east jamb and sill of which are visible. The fourth bay has a window of three trefoil-headed lights with flowing tracery under the pointed head; all its external stonework is recent. Beyond this is the first of the pointed arches of the blocked arcade to the former north aisle; the arch springs from what is more an attached octagonal pier than a semi-octagonal respond, with a moulded capital and base. Only the outer chamfered order of the arch is exposed externally, with remains of a cut-back hoodmould. The arch is infilled with squared lightly-tooled stone, and a window of three trefoil-headed lights under a square head; the outer frame is chamfered and the inner hollow-chamfered; although the stonework of the window is quite worn, traces of horizontal tooling survive, suggesting an 18th-century date.

The Anchorage.

The Anchorage is a two-storeyed structure formed out of the western bay of the north aisle, and a later extension to the north; the roof slope of the aisle is continued over the addition. The west wall of the building is of coursed roughly-squared stone, with much recent patching; the north wall is of roughly-coursed rubble, and the east wall of rubble. The paired stepped buttresses at the northern angles appear to be relatively recent, as does a stepped buttress midway along the west wall (marking the north-west corner of the original aisle). The west wall of the original aisle has a chamfered plinth; a short section of two-stepped plinth immediately north of the adjacent buttress marks the base of a buttress at the west end of the north wall of the original aisle, incorporated into the extension.

In the southern part of the west wall is a plain square-headed doorway (its lintel perhaps 18th century but its jambs almost all recent stone), with above it a quite extraordinary window, cut from a single rectangular slab; the apertures take the form of a mullion-and-transomed cross window with a single narrower and shorter slit to the north. It has been ascribed a Roman or Saxon origin, but seems more likely to be a piece of clever vernacular masoncraft of late medieval or post-medieval date. Above the window is a projecting dripstone. In the northern part of the wall is a square-headed doorway with a chamfered surround (its lintel a recent replacement), with to the south a rough square-headed loop; there are traces of a possible blocked opening above and to the south.

The north wall of the structure has a recent window of two round-headed lights (clearly modelled on those in the vestry) at ground floor level; below its sill the face of the wall has been roughly cut back to a dished form. The topmost three courses of the wall, of squared stone, and the chamfered eaves cornice above, are clearly relatively recent.

The lower part of the east wall is concealed by a recent flight

of external stone steps, leading up to a doorway into a lobby set between the Anchorage itself and the first of the buttresses of the north aisle wall; the doorway is of recent timber, but it is protected by a sloping stone cap or roof continuing the slope of the adjacent off-set at the top of the buttress. The only window in the wall, at first floor level, is a square-headed loop with a chamfered surround.

The Lambton Pew

The 1829 Lambton Pew is constricted of tooled-and-margined gritstone ashlar, and has a chamfered plinth. Set high in the north end is a window of four cinquefoil-headed lights with panel tracery above, under a hoodmould with turned-back ends; above this, in the apex of the gable, is a single trefoil-headed vent. The gable coping is carried on stepped and moulded kneelers. On the west side of the structure an L-plan external stair rises to a square-headed doorway with a chamfered surround; on the east side a low square-headed opening, within a chamfered frame, contains an iron door giving access to the Lambton vault.

The Chancel

The south wall of the chancel shows a variety of fabric types. Low in the wall are areas of massive roughly-squared masonry, in particular towards the west end; one block at ground level at the extreme west end of the wall is a re-used carved stone with Pre-Conquest knotwork. Higher up are some areas of rubble (in particular around the westernmost window), whilst the upper part of the wall is largely refaced in squared stone of 19th century date. There is no plinth, or any external division.

The wall contains four two-light windows, all differing in form, with a square-headed priest's door beneath the third. The first window has a pointed arch and two trefoil-headed lights, with a quatrefoil in the spandrel; all its dressings are machine-cut stone of relatively recent date. The second window is the most elaborate, and is apparently unrestored except for some cement patching; it has plain arched lights, with a quatrefoil in the spandrel, within a moulded arch carried on attached shafts with moulded capitals (with nail-head ornament) and bases; there is a moulded hood with petalled rosette stops. The third window has two plain lancet lights with a small pierced circle set low in the spandrel, without any enclosing arch or hoodmould; its external dressings are entirely concealed by modern cement, except for the sill, which forms the head of the doorway beneath, and is of relatively recent date. Head and jambs are chamfered; the jambs include upright and 'long' stones of typical 18th/early 19th century character. The easternmost window is of two lancet lights with a lozenge-shaped piercing in the spandrel, beneath a pointed arch formed by a chamfered hoodmould.

The east end of the chancel is flanked by a pair of clasping buttresses, each with a series of off-sets. At the base of the wall is a chamfered plinth, carried round the buttresses; the rise in ground level conceals any continuation of this plinth westwards along the south wall. The lower part of the east face of the north-eastern buttress has been cut back at some time. The lower part of the east wall is of squared coursed stone; above the east window is an area of rubble masonry, but the upper parts of the gable are of coursed roughly-squared stone. Some of the coping stones of the south slope of an earlier more steeply-pitched gable are visible; the present gable, with moulded kneelers and a finial modelled on St Cuthbert's pectoral cross, is clearly 19th century.

Centrally placed at the foot of the east wall is a low segmental-headed opening, with roughly-shaped voussoirs, now blocked by stonework; this is the entrance to a crypt or vault. The east window is of four lights, with flowing tracery, and a large sexfoil at the head, beneath a hoodmould with turned-back ends; the chamfered outer member of the frame and hoodmould are of some age (18th century?) but the moulded inner frame and tracery are all relatively recent.

The chamfered plinth of the east end is continued along the shot section of the north wall of the chancel exposed east of the vestry. There are some large blocks in the lower portion of this wall, but its upper parts, and the section of the wall above the vestry roof, are of smaller roughly-squared coursed stone. At the level of the top of the eastern buttresses is a square-section string course, continued so as to overlap the top of the north-eastern buttress. This has been cut away a little short of the present slope of the vestry roof, where a similar sloping roof-line at a slightly higher level is visible. The string has also been somewhat damaged directly above the east wall of the vestry; the position and nature of this damage might imply that the vestry wall had originally been taller, and had been built up against the string course, and later removed. Above the string course the chancel wall is largely squared stone of 19th-century character.

The Organ Chamber.

The present organ chamber continues the line of the north nave aisle, as far as the west wall of the vestry. Its north wall, visible between the vestry and the Lambton Pew, shows the blocked eastern arch of the three-bay arcade to the former north aisle. The respond is of similar character to that at the west end of the arcade (see north aisle description); the infill of the arch contains a square-headed three-light window. Both infill and window differ in character from those in the arch west of the Lambton Pew. The infill is of squared stone laid in courses of varying height, and the window (now blocked) has depressed or three-centred heads to its lights, and a hollow-chamfered hood with turned-back ends. The west end of its

hoodmould has been cut away when the Lambton Pew was built.

The Vestry

The vestry is a rather unusual structure, having a monopitch roof sloping from west to east; only its west wall rises to the full height of the adjacent Organ Chamber. The east and north walls of the vestry have a chamfered plinth, continued round a stepped diagonal buttress at the north-east corner. The south section of the east wall is of well-squared stone laid in quite regular courses; the north part of the wall is of smaller roughly-squared and roughly-coursed stone; the north and west walls are of squared stone laid in courses varying in height. The east wall contains a doorway with a chamfered surround and a flattened triangular head, of 17th-century character; the plinth is neatly stopped 0.30m short of each jamb. North of the doorway is a window of two semicircular-headed lights, with chamfered surrounds; there is a similar window in the north wall, with traces of an earlier opening above. A cut-back section of plinth just short of the west end of the north wall may point to the former position of an adjacent wall; the upper part of the wall looks to have been rebuilt.

The west wall of the vestry presents several structural puzzles; an irregular break close to the north end seems to be a result of structural failure, although this may follow the line of the bonding of masonry of different dates. There are also hints at a straight joint close to the south end of the wall. A course of small rubble at the foot of the wall may result from a plinth being cut back.

The Interior

The Tower

The west doorway, opening into the base of the tower, has a plain square-headed rear arch, and jambs which are cut at right angles to the wall, without any of the usual splay. The doorway to the tower stair is set at the north end of the west wall, and has a two-centred arch with a continuous chamfer; the voussoirs of the head look as if they may be 19th century restoration. The west window has a segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfered head.

The tower has opened to the nave and aisles by two-centred arches, each of two chamfered orders with a chamfered hoodmould; they spring, together with the western arches of the nave arcades, from piers with half-round shafts flanked by narrow hollow chamfers, and moulded capitals and bases. Above the arch from tower to nave, opening in the apex of the nave roof, is a small lancet window; its dressings appear to be of relatively recent stonework.

The arch on the north side of the tower, where the western bay of the aisle is now occupied by the Anchorage, is blocked up. The upper part of the blocking, and rear of a segmental-headed recess (containing a mural tablet to Joseph Simons d.1802) is of brickwork; the remainder of the infill is of squared stone, heavily mortared in parts. Low in the wall are a small square-headed chamfered loop, with evidence of a central iron bar, communicating with the ground floor of the Anchorage; to the east of this is a strange little rectangular recess, possibly a blocked hatch. Higher up, to the west of the segmental-headed recess, is the slit opening of a narrow squint from the first floor room of the Anchorage.

The newel stair to the upper parts of the tower is contained in a buttress-like projection; the interior of the stair is whitewashed. The doorway to the ringing chamber has a rather eroded arch, probably originally segmental in form, carrying a narrow chamfer. The walls of the ringing chamber are heavily pointed and colour washed; the three two-light windows have plain pointed rear arches of square section, whilst the dressings of the window opening into the nave look to be entirely recent.

The stair now terminates rather awkwardly a little below the belfry floor, and a wooden ladder gives access to the belfry; a second ladder rises to a timber floor at the base of the spire.

The Anchorage

The Anchorage in its post-medieval state consisted of four rooms, two within the original aisle and two within the extension. The ground floor room within the aisle is now the boiler room; the other three form what is now the 'Anker's House' museum.

The boiler room, its floor sunk c 1.5 m below the level of the pavement outside, shows few features of antiquity, except for the glazed square-headed loop or window opening beneath the tower; a thickening of the wall to the east of this conceals any evidence of the second ground-level opening from anchorage to church.

The ground-floor room within the extension shows several features of interest. In the north wall, to the east of the modern window, is a square-headed locker or aumbry, and near the south end of the east wall is a straight joint, partly hidden by a display board. Near the east end of the south wall is a square-headed doorway, now holding a display case, of remarkably small proportions; it is only 1.34 m high and 0.42 m wide within its chamfer. At the south-west corner of the room is a modern internal buttress (also present in the room above), cemented over.

A modern newel stair now gives access to the first-floor room

within the extension. The internal face of the east wall has been cut back on the north side of the square-headed window; on the south of the window is a square-headed recess with a slopstone and a drain through the wall; its lintel is formed by a re-used cross slab, with a second smaller recess directly above and a third, even smaller, above and slightly to the north of the second. There are the further recesses or wall cupboards in the north wall, the largest at the west end, with a timber sill which forms the lintel of a second smaller recess beneath; the third is in the centre of the wall. In the west wall is a doorway-like recess, blocked with recent brickwork, with a recent lintel; north of this is a second recess, of similar proportions but smaller, with a mutilated chamfered surround. In the south wall is the doorway into the larger room (within the aisle); this has a four-centred head, and a continuous chamfer; immediately to the east the east jamb and part of the head of a shoulder-headed doorway (?) is visible; in the wall above are various sockets for roof timbers.

The principal first-floor room is that within the aisle. Once again this shows a number of features and structural complexities, here enumerated briefly. The doorway in the north wall has timber internal lintels; to the east of the doorway the upper face of the wall begins to overhang the lower, the projection being carried on a series of chamfered stones/corbels; above these are more cuts for former roof timbers, and a series of long stones in the wall, some with chamfered edges, which are almost certainly re-used cross slabs. At the east end of the wall (beyond the position of the blocked shoulder-headed opening, of which there is no sign on this side of the wall) is the doorway to the head of the external stair; this has a rear arch carried on triangular corbels, and a low stone bench at the foot of the east jamb; there are straight joints in both jambs.

On the west side of the room, the internal jambs of the peculiar monolithic window are clearly recent reconstruction; the wall face above is carried on a segmental arch spanning the full width of the room; the wall face looks to have been rebuilt, although the plain square-section voussoirs of the arch look older.

On the south side of the room the blocked arch into the tower is exposed, with three corbels above it, and then, just below the roof, the moulded string-course seen externally on the west face of the tower. Close to the west jamb of the arch - the head of the respond and its capital are exposed - is the squint which afforded the anchorite a view of the altar at the east end of the south aisle. The inner face of the opening, set in a recess beneath a timber lintel, has a pegged timber frame, with the pins for a shutter; this frame looks as if it could well be genuine medieval work, although Blunt (1883, 14) states that the squint had been 'reopened lately'. To the east of the squint the wall is thickened by a brick projection, resting on a stone plinth; the brickwork is in English Garden Wall bond 1 & 4, and

probably relates to the Simons monument on the opposite face of the wall. On the east side of the room the blocked arch to the north aisle is visible.

The Nave

The nave has five-bay arcades, of two-centred arches, each of two chamfered orders with a chamfered hoodmould towards the nave. Each arcade is divided into two sections by piers, two bays from the west, which are in fact each a short length of wall with a semicircular respond at each end; this marks the position of a former west wall of the nave, indications of which are visible on both external and internal wall faces above the pier. The other piers are all circular. All the capitals are octagonal (and semi-octagonal), except for that of the western pier of the south arcade, which has a circular capital. All the stonework of the piers shows vertical tooling, and would appear to have been recut in the late 18th or 19th century. The elongate second pier on the north would appear to have been thickened at this time, to act as a buttress against the pronounced outward lean of the arcade.

Further pointed arches, again of two chamfered orders, spring from the tower piers (where they simply die into the flat external face of the pier) to semicircular responds on the external walls of the aisles; the respond attached to the south aisle wall has an unusually high plinth (0.65m above the present floor).

The South Aisle

The internal face of the west wall of the aisle is heavily cemented, and shows no features of interest. In the south wall, the windows of the two western bays have shouldered rear arches, the internal lintel of the second being a re-used cross slab.

The south door, now opening inside the south porch, is of precisely similar form to the north door, having an pointed arch of two orders with narrow hollow chamfers, the inner continuous to the ground and the outer carried on attached shafts with moulded capitals (the eastern badly worn) and bases; there is a chamfered hood. Above the doorway a large renewed block in the wall (its upper part concealed by the porch roof timbers) may indicate an infilled niche. The doorway has a segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfered head.

The windows with intersected tracery in the fourth and sixth bays have chamfered internal surrounds; the fifth bay has a window with a double-chamfered internal frame, the outer order of which clearly pre-dates the recent stonework of the window. Above and to the west of the window in the sixth bay is a straight joint, presumably relating to some blocked opening. Beneath the sill of the window is a square-headed aumbry or locker, presumably a medieval feature, although its lintel and

rear face are vertically-tooled stone of late 18th or 19th century character. East of the aumbry is a piscina with a trefoiled arch; the projecting front section of the bowl, and the hoodmould, have been hacked back flush with the wall. The east window of the aisle is of recent stonework except for the outer order of its internal surround.

The clearest evidence of the early date of the nave walls is seen in the short length of wall on the south side of the east respond of the south arcade; here the tail ends of several megalithic quoins are visible, cut into by the re-tooled dressings of the respond (see drawing).

The South Porch

The 18th-century south porch has low stone benches on each side, now largely hidden by fitted cupboards. The roof structure of the porch is of two bays, with trusses set centrally and against each end wall. The trusses consists of a tie-beam resting on the wall-plates, with a squat central king-post which simply carries a square-set ridge, on which the rafters rest.

The North Aisle

The west wall of the north aisle is formed by the infill of the arch springing northwards from the north-east tower pier; this consists of roughly-coursed and roughly-tooled stone; a recess at the north end of the wall, with a chamfered elliptical arch, now accommodates the head of one of the Lumley effigies arranged along the north side of the aisle; it is not clear whether this was its original function.

The westernmost window in the north wall of the aisle has a shouldered rear arch with its internal lintel formed by a re-used cross slab. Above and to the east the sill and jambs of the blocked high-level window visible externally are clearly visible. The north doorway has a segmental-pointed rear arch, with a chamfered head; the window above has a semicircular rear arch; the jamb of an earlier opening is visible to the east. All the stone dressings of the window in the fourth bay are relatively recent; above and to the west is a ragged break in the stonework, of uncertain origin. East again is the arcade to the former outer north aisle, with a three-light window set in the blocking of the first arch. The second arch now opens into the Lambton Pew; it has two chamfered orders, and a cut-back hoodmould.

The Chancel

The chancel opens into the nave by a pointed arch of two chamfered orders, springing from elaborate foliate corbels very like those which carry the roof trusses; arch and corbels are wholly 19th century.

The lower part of the south wall of the chancel is covered, except in the sanctuary, by a panelled dado. Above are the four two-light windows. The western has a segmental-pointed rear arch, the only part of the window to appear ancient. The second window has a wide internal splay and a moulded rear arch, its outer order carried on detached shafts (now gone), the moulded capitals and bases of which survive. The third window (the one entirely obscured by cement refacing externally) is clearly ancient, and has a two-centred rear arch. The easternmost window has a chamfered segmental-pointed rear arch.

Below the easternmost window are a piscina and three sedilia. All have trefoiled arches, with quite elaborate mouldings including a filleted roll continued as attached jamb shafts, with moulded capitals and bases. The piscina have trefoil-plan shafts, the capital of the western having nail-head ornament. All the stonework of the piscina (except its circular bowl) appears restoration, but the sedilia (excluding the eastern jamb, sill, and hoodmould) appear genuine medieval work; there is old plaster at the rear of the recess.

The east wall of the chancel is rendered and whitewashed; the exposed stonework of the east window seems all restoration.

The north wall is largely concealed by a panelled dado, and a series of large paintings above; no ancient architectural features are visible, and the vestry door (panelled round) has a plain square head. At the west end of the wall is a pointed arch into the organ chamber, of two chamfered orders, which appears wholly 19th century.

The Organ Chamber

The organ chamber opens to the north aisle by a pointed arch of two chamfered orders; the arch, and the facing of its south jamb (where one might have expected some evidence of the north-east angle quoins of the original nave to be visible) are entirely 19th century work. In the centre of the east wall of the organ chamber the jambs of a blocked doorway are visible; some upright stones hint at an 18th or early 19th century date,. The opening is infilled with relatively recent brickwork; its lintel is missing, and above the brickwork expands to cover the full width of the wall.

The Vestry

The internal walls of the vestry are entirely plastered and whitewashed; no features of any antiquity are visible, although the recess of a cupboard in the west wall may correlate with the blocked doorway visible from the organ chamber.

FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

The Font

The 15th-century font (very similar to that at Staindrop), now standing at the west end of the south aisle, has an octagonal bowl bearing shields of local families (listed by Boyle); the earlier antiquarian accounts refer to it as lying in the churchyard, but by the time Fordyce wrote (1857) it had been reinstated.

Woodwork

Virtually all the woodwork in the church is of 19th or early 20th century date; the chancel screen and choir stalls are of 1883, the vine-carved altar and reredos, by Sir Charles Nicholson, of 1928.

Stained Glass

The only fragments of medieval glass to survive are two heads in the tracery of the east window; in Surtees' time they were in the central window in the north wall of the north aisle. At this time there were heraldic fragments in the east window of the south aisle.

The Bells

One medieval bell, of the peal of three given c 1409 when the belfry was built, remains in use. It is inscribed

Magister Robertus Aschburn Decanus
Cestriae me fecit: Hac Campana data
Cuthbertus sic vocitata

(Master Robert Aschburn, Dean of Chester made me: This bell given is thus named Cuthbert)

The other two bells, being cracked, were re-cast in 1883, but their inscribed rings are preserved in the ringing chamber:

(i) Dominus Johannes Lumley me fecit fieri

(ii) THOMAS LANGLEY EPIS ME DEDIT 1409
LAVUS DEO PAX ECCLESIAE ET SALVS PAROCHIAE
CHESTRIENSI 1665
S O JACKSON EDD WATSON MINISTER GC RM IS CP
CHURCH WARDENS
SS

In addition to the surviving medieval bell, the belfry now contains eight bells of 1883, and two added in 1913, when the present frames were fitted.

The Organ

The present organ was constructed in 1865 by Messrs. Harrison

and Harrison of Durham; it was repaired in 1900 and restored in 1948 and again in 1968.

ROMAN AND PRE-CONQUEST CARVED STONES

The greater part of the collection of Roman and Pre-Conquest carved stones in the church is housed in the Anchorage. The recent British Academy Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture (Cramp, 1984) records 18 Anglo-Saxon stones, 5 of which are now missing; about half of these were found in the church fabric during 19th century works. The extant pieces are almost all dated to the 10th century.

SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS

By far the best known sepulchral monuments at Chester-le-Street are the fourteen Lumley effigies, placed in the church in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. John Lord Lumley established this unique collection, and identified each effigy with a wall tablet above (some now illegible); five are genuine medieval effigies, whilst the others are Elizabethan imitations. For detailed descriptions see Hutchinson (1787) 392-397 and Surtees (1820), 139-141.

An effigy of a priest of c.1300 lies beside the font.

A brass to Alice Lambton, d.1434, is now preserved in the vestry; in the 18th century it was set in a slab in the floor of the south aisle.

The church preserves a considerable number of medieval cross slab grave covers; 10 are recorded by Ryder (1985, 65-66, plates 11 and 12) whilst a further 8, drawn by Hodges (1884, plates 22 and 23), are now missing. In addition to the slabs recorded by Ryder in 1985 slab 3b, there recorded as lost, has turned up again (and is re-united to 3a in the Anchorage Museum), and there is another slab re-used as the lintel of the sink recess in the Anchorage.

HISTORICAL NOTES

First half of

2nd century A.D. Roman fort, probable name Concangis, built on site

c700 Settlement of Kunecester on site, associated with youthful miracle of St Cuthbert. The settlement may have become an Anglo-Saxon estate centre, probably with its own church.

883 Cuthbert community, fleeing from the Danes, settle at Chester le Street, which becomes an important

centre for pilgrimage.

995Threatened by further Danish incursions the Cuthbert community move to Durham.

c1056 Bishop Egelric of Durham is reported to have rebuilt a timber church at Chester-le-Street in stone, finding a 'great treasure' in digging for its foundations; he sent the treasure south to his previous monastery at Peterborough, soon afterwards returning there himself. It has been suggested (Pevsner & Williamson 1983, 125) that the timber church specifically mentioned by Symeon was the timber church originally erected on Holy Island, and dismantled and carried by the fleeing community, first being set up at Norham and later at Chester-le-Street. Bearing in mind the ecclesiastical importance of the site, and its situation within a ruined Roman fort, it would seem highly unlikely that this timber building was the only church on the site.

1286 Bishop Antony Bek changed the rectory of Chester to a college with dean, seven prebendaries and various other staff. Houses for the dean and first three prebendaries were to be built in the 'outer court' of the church. The prebendal lodgings were reported as being in disrepair in 1415 and 1430.

c1540The antiquary Leland visits Chester-le-Street, and records that;
'...in the body of the church is a tumber woith the image of a bishop in token that S.Cuthbertus was buried in his furetre (feretory or shrine) there'

1547The College was dissolved, and its staff replaced by a single curate-in-charge. The anchorage was enlarged to become a home for poor widows. In the early 17th century Roger Willis the curate displaced the poor widows - after several unsuccessful attempts - to make the Anchorage his residence.

1747The south porch was rebuilt (Blunt 1883, 50)

1787Description of church in Hutchinson's History of Durham. There was a new pavement; the pulpit is described as placed against the centre pillar of the south arcade; it had a sounding board 'heavy with rude carving'.

1820The historian Surtees' description gives further architectural details; the three windows in the south wall of the south aisle to the east of the porch are described as

'modern'; the great east window was 'modernised, and partly closed with masonry'.

1831An underfloor heating system, using hot water pipes, was installed (Blunt 1883, 61)

1851The 'modern sash' of the east window replaced by a window designed by John Dobson (Fordyce 1857, 602)

1857Fordyce's account of the church also refers to the pulpit having been removed to 'the south pillar of the chancel arch', and the sedilia having been recent rediscovered, behind plaster. The medieval font had been returned into the church.

1862The church reopened on 9th December after being closed for seven months as it underwent a major restoration (see below, under faculties etc). The Lambton Pew was given over by the Earl of Durham, to be a gallery for the sunday school children

1865 The parish became a rectory again

1883Millenary Festival; new oak choir stalls, screen, pulpit and chancel floor

1920Plans were made to remove the Lambton Pew and replace it with a War Memorial Chapel designed by Knowles, Oliver and Leeson, but were never implemented.

1928Chancel rededicated after embellishment and fitting of statues of Virgin Mary and St Cuthbert, by Sir Charles Nicholson.

FACULTIES AND OTHER RECORDS OF STRUCTURAL WORK

Faculty no. and dateWorks

24 (1717)Faculty for erecting seats in Parish Church

32 (1829)Petition for erecting a gallery and constituting a vault to Lord Durham (erection of the Lambton Pew). Bonomi of Durham was the architect.

26 (1861)Restoration (1861-2). Matthew Thompson of Newcastle was the architect. Galleries removed, all seating replaced; new roofs throughout. The walls were stripped of

plaster. Chancel arch and two adjacent arches completely rebuilt. The columns, capitals and arches were 'cleaned, chiselled and repaired' (Blunt 1883, 74) Blocking removed from tower arch. Soil excavated to depth of 2' over the whole floor, and concrete put down.

1878 Spire repaired after being struck by lightning (Bunting & Brewster, 103)

3046 (1.11.1947) Conversion of east end of south aisle into War Memorial Chapel

3575 (9.1.53) Extension of central heating system

4801 (16.7.65) Restoration and repair of south wall (south aisle?)

1968 Repairs to Anchorage ; new concrete floor inserted in part within aisle.

5123 (12.5.69) Structural alterations and repairs; works to Anchorage by G.E.Charlewood and Curry include the insertion of a new floor, a new two-light window in the north wall and a new internal buttress; a large part of the west wall was 'to be taken out and rebuilt'.

5345 (18.8.72) Repairs to pinnacles of tower

5376 (19.12.72) Cleaning of exterior with necessary repairs and repointing

5906 (23.2.81) Conversion of south porch into choir vestry.

6147 (19.12.83) Repair and strengthening of church spire (upper section rebuilt after gale damage)

6360 (26.3.86) Formation of heritage centre (Anchorage)

1989 Floodlighting installed in churchyard

THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Most authorities date the earliest parts of the church to the early years of the 13th century, although there have been suggestions that the side walls of the chancel may date to Egelric's building of a stone church c1056.

The eastern three bays of the nave arcades appear to be inserted in the walls of an earlier nave; the toothing for its removed

west wall is visible on the internal walls of the nave, and traces of the external western angles are visible from the aisles; these show no distinctive quoins, but at the south-east angle of the nave (concealed externally by the east wall of the south aisle) the tail ends of several megalithic quoins, roughly squared blocks showing characteristic Roman tooling, are visible at the north-east corner of the aisle. 19th century refacing has obscured any similar evidence at the north-east corner of the nave.

The character of the south-eastern quoins, coupled with the relatively thin side walls of the nave (c 0.65 m), would seem sufficient to suggest, if not prove, that they are of Anglo-Saxon date.

The question remains as to the exact date; are the nave walls part of the Saxon Cathedral, or of Egelric's stone church of c1056? Turning to the chancel, the masonry of the south wall contains 'very big stones which would be out of character except in the Saxon period' (Taylor & Taylor 1965, II, 716). The chancel walls are again relatively thin (c 0.70 m); high on the external face of the north wall is a square-section string course (cf Aycliffe, Masham), another typically Saxon feature.

If one accepts the suggestion that the timber church rebuilt by Egelric was not the principal building on the site, then the scenario of a major stone church - the cathedral - with the re-erected timber church in alignment with it, to the east, would seem quite possible; a number of Saxon ecclesiastical sites have been shown to have had multiple churches, often sharing the same alignment.

So at the time of the Norman Conquest the church at Chester-le-Street may have consisted of a nave (probably flanked by porticus) formed by the late 9th or 10th century cathedral proper, with a chancel provided by Egelric's new building on the site of the ancient timber church brought from Holy Island. The size of this building probably meant that there was no need for the usual 12th century remodelling and enlargement characteristic of many churches in the area; Norman work is noticeable by its absence. The possibility of an early crypt below the chancel is discussed in the 'Archaeological Assessment' section (p.17).

The earliest post-Conquest fabric may be the east end of the chancel, along with its pair of clasping buttresses, which is of more regular squared masonry than the south wall, and could well be of late 12th or early 13th century date. This wall may be a rebuilding following the removal of an earlier apse.

The eastern three bays of the arcades are generally accepted as work of c.1210; the western extension of the nave, and lower parts of the tower, can only be a few years later. The windows in the south wall of the chancel, showing an instructive variety

in the very beginnings of tracery, are apparently of the same general period.

At Chester-le-Street, unlike Bek's other collegiate foundations of Lanchester and St Andrew Auckland, there appears to be no structural phase in the church fabric than can be correlated with the change of status, except perhaps for the sedilia and piscina in the chancel, which are of later 13th century date.

The outer walls of the aisles would appear to have been rebuilt, and the aisles probably widened, in the earlier 14th century; buttresses and moulded plinth, and the windows with reticulated tracery, are of this date, whilst the 13th century north and south doorways were re-set. The north chapel (now organ chamber) may be an addition of the same period, although it does not retain any original features.

The addition of the belfry and spire to the west tower is usually taken as being work of 1409 (from the date of the earliest bell); the west doorway of the tower, and the three-light window above, probably date to the same period.

The outer north aisle or Lumley Chapel would appear to have been of 15th century date; the vestry is probably coeval, and was probably originally two-storeyed, as can be seen from the damage to the square-section string course directly above the present east wall.

The formation of the Anchorage within the western bay of the north aisle may also have taken place in the 15th century; the extension outside the line of the aisle is held to be post-Reformation date, although there do appear to be remains of a first-floor doorway (with a shouldered arch) in the north wall, implying that there may have been an earlier extension.

The demolition of the Lumley Chapel presumably took place after the Dissolution of the College in 1547; the remodelling of what is now the vestry, to judge from its strange monopitch roof, probably took place before the demolition of the chapel. Subsequent post-medieval changes (except for the extension of the Anchorage, when it became a residence for poor widows) have largely been erased by 19th century restoration. Sash windows replaced medieval tracery, the tower was walled off from the body of the church, and a gallery was built at the west end of the nave lit by windows inserted high in the aisle side walls; that on the south can be seen in a print given by Hutchinson, whilst that on the north, clearly visible in the Grose drawing (reproduced by Bunting & Brewster, n.d.), is still traceable in the fabric.

Also visible on the Grose drawing is a small rectangular or square structure projecting from the north-west corner of the Anchorage, which had been removed by c 1820 (see engraving by Blore accompanying Surtees' account).

The Lambton Pew, with its basement vault, was added in 1831; this involved the removal of the 16th century (?) wall blocking the central of the three arches of the old arcade to the presumed Lumley Chapel, and a square-headed window - of three lights according to the Grose drawing but of four according to Surtees' account (1820, 138).

The various mid-19th century restorations are relatively well documented (see under 'historical notes' and 'faculties and other records of structural work').

The Churchyard

The churchyard is now a level grassed rectangle, with the church more or less in its centre, open to the street (Church Chare) on the west. The wall on the north side of the churchyard, now c 2 m high, incorporates masonry of several different phases; it was lowered in 1985 (faculty 6332). The east and south walls are more recent.

The Rose Garden north-west of the Anchorage (in the form of a St Cuthbert's cross) was laid out in 1952; the supposed font in its centre (having a very shallow octagonal stone bowl set on a worn panelled shaft, thought to be a Roman altar) was found in 1938 on land adjacent to the present Church Institute. Another Roman relic is a very large millstone set into the ground at the south-west corner of the churchyard.

In a programme of works ending in 1956 the churchyard was cleared of its monuments by Chester-le-Street UDC, many headstones being re-set against the enclosing walls; the wall adjoining Church Chare was removed at this time. The only monument to survive in situ is a table tomb to the Murray family (1831-60) on the south of the chancel. The War Memorial to the north-east of the church was erected at Bridge End, and only moved to its present position within the last few years.

The floodlighting around the church was installed in 1989

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

The recorded history of the site - Roman Fort, Saxon Cathedral, and medieval Collegiate Church - makes it clear that this is potentially one of the most important archaeological sites in the North of England. The church stands at the centre of the fort, on the site of its headquarters building, and is aligned to the Roman structures rather than a true east-west axis. The difficulty is in assessing the degree of disturbance to archaeological deposits, primarily those below ground, although the complex history of the above-ground fabric has already been outlined.

Dealing first with the below-ground deposits: It is clear that, for reasons not yet fully understood, post-Roman deposits have been removed over large parts of the site of the fort; on the west side of Church Chare Roman structure lie very close to the surface (as can be seen from the recently-exposed remains of the Commandant's House, adjacent to the Salvation Army Hall). It is not apparent what the situation is beneath the churchyard, although it is obvious that hundreds of years of burial will have severely disturbed deposits here; there are records of areas of the churchyard being raised to facilitate further burials, eg in 1810 the south-east part was to be raised 'not less than 2'6"' (Blunt, 1883, 58); levels were also raised in the c 1956 works, as shown by trial excavations prior to the installation of floodlighting in 1989.

The church itself is known to stand on the site of the Roman headquarters' building; its cross hall probably underlies the chancel. It seems quite likely that the 'treasure' found by Egelric in the 1050s was Roman, and housed in the fort treasury, which would have lain adjacent to the cross hall.

The Saxon cathedral would have been centred on Cuthbert's burial place, the focal point of pilgrimage. Leland's reference to a 'tumbe with tyhe image of a boshop' makes it clear that some sort of shrine remained here throughout the medieval period, long after the community moved to Durham in 995; it has been suggested (Drury 1987, 80) that the Anchorage originated in the lodgings of a resident priest or caretaker. It is possible that Egelric's 'stone church' of c1056, here tentatively identified with the present chancel, might have housed this shrine.

With the natural eastward slope of the ground the floor of the chancel is somewhat raised above ground level outside, and there is a crypt or vault beneath which the current church guidebook (Butning & Brewster, n.d.) states was used as a 'bone house' in the medieval period, and later as the Hedworth family vault. When opened in 1983 it was found to contain 16 coffins of members of the family ranging in date from 1722 to 1755. No detailed archaeological recording of the structure seems to have taken place; if, as the above description suggests, the structure is something other than a conventional 18th-century family vault, it could be of considerable importance. It would be foolish to ignore the possibility that a sub-floor structure in this position could be related to the Pre-Conquest cathedral and later shrine.

It is clear archaeological remains do exist beneath other parts of the church; two lengths of 'post-Roman' walling were seen beneath the Anchorage in the 1960s (Rainbird 1971). The well in the same area, now covered over, may be of considerable archaeological importance. Beneath the main body of the church, continued burial, and the insertion of underfloor heating systems, will have damaged archaeological deposits; nevertheless, it seems likely that structural and stratigraphic

remains will survive, despite areas of disturbance. Thus any sub-floor disturbance whatsoever should be accompanied by at least an archaeological 'watching brief'.

As already outlined (see Structural History) it seems likely that the above-ground fabric of the building incorporates part of the pre-Conquest church, and there are a number of unsolved structural anomalies. Any works involving disturbance of the fabric, or exposures of areas of walling currently concealed by furniture or fittings, will require archaeological monitoring, and perhaps detailed recording.

The churchyard forms part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (S.A.M. County No. 105, Concangium Roman Fort), and thus any works here require special consents.

From an archaeological point of view, as yet we know very little about the Anglo-Saxon Cathedral and its associated structures at Chester-le-Street; it seems likely that much remains to be discovered both beneath ground level, and in the standing fabric, of the present parish church.

Peter Ryder March 1992

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ST MARY AND ST CUTHBERT
CHESTER-LE-STREET

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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March 1993

**ST MARY AND ST CUTHBERT
CHESTER - LE - STREET**

An Archaeological Assessment

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