

## St Mary's Church, Gainford

St Mary's Church stands at the south-west corner of the large village green of Gainford, on the north bank of the River Tees c.12 km west of Darlington.

The church consists of a three-bay aisled nave with an engaged western tower, north and south porches, and an aisleless chancel with a vestry and organ chamber on the north.

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

#### The Exterior

The **Tower** rises in three stages; only the west wall of the lower one is exposed externally, and that is partly concealed by the rectangular stair turret projecting from the centre of the west side.

The tower has been subject to considerable rebuilding in the 19th century, and contains a variety of fabric types. The west wall of the lower stage is of roughly-coursed rubble. In the second stage a clear break is visible in both north and south walls, a little west of centre, between similar rubble (to the west) and coursed roughly-squared stone (on the east). The quoins at the eastern angles are more elongate than those on the west. The situation at the third (belfry) stage is rather confusing, as there is a similar break in both north and south walls, but at this level there is thin coursed rubble to the east and larger roughly-squared stones to the west. Also, at this level the eastern quoins look to be of machine-cut 19th-century ashlar.

Large stepped buttresses at each end of the west wall rise almost to the string-course, chamfered above and below, which marks the top of the lower stage. The projecting stair turret, of similar smallish rubble to the west wall of the tower, has a similar string-course much lower down, forming the sill of a narrow square-headed loop on the west, and stepped up over a gable-headed doorway (clearly 19th-century) on the south. There is a chamfered set-back above the square-headed loop, and above this a lancet window, with a stepped and chamfered surround on the west, and then another square-headed loop; the string-course between the lower stages of the tower is not continued round the turret.

The only opening to the second stage of the tower is a tall lancet in the centre of the south wall, apparently wholly of 19th-century date. In the centre of the north wall is a 19th-century clock face, but no indication of any other openings.

The chamfered set-back forming the base of the belfry extends round the stair turret, above which it has a plain square-headed window on the south, and a pent concrete roof. The belfry has square-headed windows of two cinquefoil-headed lights on north, east and south, beneath hoodmoulds with turned back ends; the stoneworks of the heads and hoodmoulds looks 19th century, but the chamfered jambs appear older.

The tower is topped by an oversailing parapet, set on corbels (which appear of some age); there are no crenellations, but at each angle is a small pinnacle with a ball finial.

The walls of the **North Aisle** are of coursed roughly-squared stone; there is clear evidence at

the west end of the outer wall being almost doubled in height, but the fabric of both phases is quite similar. Some stones in the lower wall show distinctive Roman diagonal broaching. There is no sign of any opening in the west wall of the aisle; at the north-west corner a clasping buttress rises to just below the original eaves line. On the north there is a full-height stepped buttress immediately west of the north porch, and a half-height stepped buttress (ie rising to the original eaves line) a short distance east of the porch. The west face of a former clasping buttress at the north-east angle can be seen incorporated in the west wall of the 1864 organ chamber.

In the western bay of the aisle is a square-headed window of two cinquefoil-headed lights; the head and mullion are 19th century but the jambs, sill and hoodmould are older. The north door, now within the 19th-century north porch, is set in an external thickening of the wall extending from the buttress to the east wall of the porch, and rising to a chamfered set-back just above the doorway, which has a pointed arch of two continuous chamfered orders.

Between the buttress east of the porch and the east end of the aisle are five windows, three in the lower part of the wall and two in the upper. From, west to east the lower windows are a square-headed two-light opening; the double-chamfered surround is clearly older than the 1864 mullion and traceried head, then a single-light opening with cinquefoiled cusping within a square head, all the stonework of which looks of some antiquity. The third window has three cinquefoiled lights and simple panel tracery above, under an almost triangular head; once again, all the tracery is 19th-century, but parts of the surround are older, including the sill which shows clear evidence of a central mullion - old illustrations show this as a two-light rather than a three-light opening. Faint traces of incised lines of the two slabs from which the window head is cut suggest that they may be re-used pieces of a grave cover. The two upper windows are both single ogee-headed lights, with in each case the head cut into a single upright block which is scarcely any wider than the jambs.

There are various irregularities in the masonry of the wall; between the three-light and the single-light windows the lower metre or so of the wall-face is set slightly forward; at the level of the heads of the lower windows is another slight set-back (most noticeable directly above the buttress east of the porch), which may mark the original eaves line.

The **North Porch** is a mid-19th century addition; it is gabled, and has low clasping buttresses at its outer angles, flanking a pointed archway of two continuous chamfered orders. The gable is coped, with a foliate cross finial. The internal wall faces of the porch, and the stone benches, are largely made up of re-set medieval cross slabs (see 'sepulchral monuments') and pieces of Pre-Conquest sculpture (see 'carved stones').

The **South Aisle** has similarly irregular fenestration. Its original fabric is largely of coursed roughly-squared stone (again with some Roman broached stones) although the greater part of the south wall east of the porch has been rebuilt in the 19th-century in smaller coursed rubble (with some larger and more irregular blocks in the lower courses). There are low clasping buttresses at both southern angles; just above the western are the remains of a projecting block, probably the kneeler marking the base of the original coping. As on the north, there is a full-height stepped buttress immediately west of the porch. The western bay of the south wall

contains a square-headed window of two round-arched lights (possibly cusping has been cut away) with four trefoil-headed sub-lights over; this appears to be the only one of the larger late medieval windows in the aisles untouched by the 19th-century restoration. It has the puzzling feature of its surround gradually standing proud of the wall face as one proceeds upwards, until around the head it projects far enough to have been shaped to simulate a hoodmould. Directly above it is another ogee-headed light, like those on the north. (For a description of the south doorway, inside the porch, see interior).

East of the porch are, from west to east, another ogee-headed light (set a little lower in the wall than that in the western bay), then a square-headed window of two cinquefoil-headed lights with cinquefoiled sub-lights over; the head is of 19th-century date but the jambs, sill and parts of the hoodmould seem older work, re-set when the wall was rebuilt. Beyond this is a large pointed window of three cinquefoiled lights with reticulated tracery and a hoodmould with turned-back ends; all its stonework is 19th-century. Then comes a second full-height stepped buttress, beyond which is another high-level ogee-headed window, (this time differing from the others in being of rather more squat proportions, and having its jambs made up of large blocks rather than small). East of it is a second large three-light window precisely like the other, and then a ragged break, just before the end of the wall, marking the edge of the 19th-century rebuilding.

The east wall preserves the only part of the original fenestration of the aisles to survive, a lancet window with a vesica above; above these the old steeply-pitched roof-line is very clearly visible, the heightening being in rather larger blocks.

The **South Porch** was either remodelled or rebuilt in the 19th-century; its fabric and heavy angle quoins may be medieval, but the double-chamfered outer archway, and the coped gable with trefoiled cusping at the apex, and a foliate cross finial, are clearly Victorian.

The **Chancel** is constructed of roughly-coursed rubble; each side wall has been heightened by three courses of larger squared blocks. Later paving partly conceals a chamfered plinth; this is visible to the west of the former buttress, along with another length (which seems to have been cut back) at the east end of the wall. The wall has been divided into two bays by a full-height buttress, but only the scar of this remains; immediately east of this is a 19th-century priest's doorway, with a pointed chamfered arch and a hoodmould. Above this is a chamfered set-back, running below the sills of two lancets, one to each side of the former buttress. The lancets are quite sizeable, with chamfered surrounds and simple hoodmoulds. Immediately to the east of the doorway is an area of masonry with rather better-squared blocks abuts against rougher rubble; it is not clear whether this is of any structural significance.

At the eastern angles of the chancel are clasping buttresses which have risen to the original eaves height. The chamfered set-back is continued round the buttresses, and across the east wall; below the set-back is a central pilaster buttress, and above it a triplet of lancets, the central slightly taller, similar in detail to the two on the south. Above the central lancet is a vesica, which appears to be of 19th-century date; the gable has clearly been heightened, and the moulded kneelers, coping and foliate cross finial are clearly Victorian.

The north wall of the chancel is largely obscured by the vestry and organ chamber; only the upper part of its eastern half is visible, showing the same heightening as on the south, and the head of a blocked lancet window.

The **Vestry** has a shallow-pitched pent roof, and a diagonal buttress at its north-eastern angle. In the east wall is a window with a pointed head and a hollow-chamfered surround; its head looks later than the jambs, and seems to cut into the lower part of a higher window, now blocked, a narrow square-headed slit. Just below the eaves line is a moulded oversailing course, and the parapet is also moulded.

The quoins of the upper part of the north-east angle of the vestry do not rest squarely on the shaped capstone of the short diagonal buttress at the corner of the vestry, perhaps suggesting that the upper storey is an addition (although the adjacent wall faces do not show any other evidence of this).

In the north wall of the vestry is a small lancet window; its head seems old, but the jambs and sill are of 19th century date; it is set within the outline of a larger blocked opening, also with a pointed head. The moulded oversailing course and parapet, both badly weathered, are continuous along the wall.

To the west of the vestry is the taller 19th-century **Organ Chamber**, projecting like a transept, and built of rubble with ashlar dressings. There are clasping buttresses at the north angles, and between them a window of two lancet lights with a sunk quatrefoil in the spandrel. The gable is capped by a chimney, recently truncated.

### **The Interior**

The interior of the church is plastered, except for the east wall, and for exposed dressings. The following description deals with visible features and fabric; irregularities in plan are discussed in the 'Structural History' section.

The **Tower** opens to the body of the church by three large pointed arches, each of two chamfered orders; the north and south arches have hoodmoulds towards the tower, and the eastern arch towards the nave. The piers and responds are rectangular blocks of masonry with attached semicircular responds, with 'holdwater' bases (those of the eastern responds of the side arches cut back) and moulded capitals; the capital mouldings are continuous around the piers which carry the eastern angles of the tower. Towards the tower, the outer chamfer of the western arch has a broach stop above the southern pier, but above the northern it ends abruptly above a block with an incised pattern in the form of saltire cross, which seems quite out of character. Is this a re-used piece? Springing from the outer faces of these piers to span the aisles are smaller arches, with similar detail, but these appear to be entirely of 19th-century date.

Access to the upper stages of the tower is now by the 19th-century doorway on the south side of the stair turret. The present newel stair appears to relate to the 19th-century doorway and

thus may be secondary<sup>1</sup>. The treads are neatly chamfered on their lower angles<sup>2</sup>. There is a blocked square-headed doorway part-way up the stair, which presumably gave access to a former gallery beneath the tower, although its splay towards the nave is rather strange, almost suggesting that it was originally a window. A doorway with a simple square-edged round arch opens into the clock chamber, with 19th-century inner lintels replacing Pre-Conquest cross shafts which had been re-used here (see 'Carved Stones'); its jambs have been recut, the outer sections surviving from a narrower splayed opening, almost certainly a window.

One now steps down from the stair into the clock chamber. The walls of the chamber are of roughly-squared and roughly-coursed stone, heavily mortared; on the west are two set-backs (possibly marking former floor levels), one just above the sill of the doorway into the stair, and one just below the ceiling.

The stair continues up the belfry; there appear to have been some alterations at its head, as it appears to have continued for at least two steps beyond the present doorway into the belfry, which is rather awkwardly contrived, with only one chamfered jamb.

From the belfry a modern ladder gives access to the roof.

The **Nave Arcades** are each of three bays, with circular piers and pointed double-chamfered arches, with a hollow-chamfered hoodmould towards the nave. The bases of both of the western piers are concealed by the present wooden floor, but those of the eastern, of holdwater type, are at a slightly higher level, and are exposed. The north arcade has relatively simply moulded capitals, the eastern circular and the western octagonal; above the eastern pier the hoodmould seems to have been carried in an unusual fashion on a small pilaster, the damaged moulded cap of which survives; the hoodmould terminates some distance above the western pier, but in the spandrel above this is a patera consisting of a quatrefoiled circle within a ring with nail-head ornament. The eastern respond of the arcade has a capital with stiff-leaf foliage carved on the bell, and a five-petalled flower on a short northward return of the moulding; its base has been largely hacked away. The hoodmould of the arcade seems to be cut away some distance above the capital of the respond.

The south arcade has circular capitals, the western with a band of nail-head; the hoodmould shows no evidence of any such pilaster as on the north (although one might have been removed). There is a patera above the western pier, rather more elaborate than that on the north. The eastern respond has an interesting capital, with its bell carved with alternating leaves and five-petalled flowers, below a band of nail-head; above it the hoodmould ends in the same uncomfortable manner as that on the north.

The roof of the nave, of five bays with a short half-bay at either end, is of mid-19th century date; it has principal rafter trusses with short wall-posts carried on 19th-century corbels, with

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<sup>1</sup> The 1825 plan in Archdeacon Thorps' plan book shows access to the stair from the east; there is now no sign of this.

<sup>2</sup> The second overhead slab from the bottom has had a roll-moulding – it was probably a grave cover of some sort.

shaped panels between wall-posts and tie, and tie and principals.

In the **North Aisle** the north door has a roughly segmental-pointed rear arch, with a chamfered head, of rather asymmetric shape. The window to the west of this has a shouldered rear arch; the others all have plain lintels, plastered over, except for the eastern which has a chamfered segmental-pointed rear arch following the form of its external head.

In the **South Aisle** the former south doorway opens into the south porch, now converted into a toilet. The doorway has a pointed arch of one chamfered order, interrupted by moulded imposts which carry a moulded hood, all quite eroded. The windows in the south wall of the aisle all have plain lintels (that of the lower one in the western bay being a cross slab - see 'sepulchral monuments'), except for the two three-light windows which have pointed rear arches with exposed 19th-century ashlar dressings. The lancet at the east end of the aisle has the central section of each jamb cut back to a broad chamfer, and a separate narrower chamfer to the head. The high-level window near the west end of the south wall has a stepped level sill, unlike the others which have sloped sills; all have fairly narrow internal splays and straight lintels.

The **Chancel** opens to the nave under a broad pointed arch of some interest. The arch itself is of two chamfered orders with a moulded hoodmould towards the nave, springing from semi-octagonal moulded corbels with nail-head ornament and stiff-leaf foliage at their bases. The lower jambs, below the corbels, are rather puzzling. Each has a central block or pilaster of 19th-century ashlar, set forward from earlier masonry with chamfered angles to both nave and chancel. These chamfers step diagonally carried outwards a little below the level of the corbel; at the level of the base of the corbel, on the eastern side, itself they step abruptly back again, below the continuation of the corbel capital that carries the outer order of the arch. Between the base of the corbel and the 19th-century masonry below is a single block, whitewashed over; on the north this is rather irregular, as if it had carried some projecting feature, now cut back. A possible interpretation of all this is suggested in the 'Structural History' section.

The internal walls of the chancel have a string course, of half-round section, around 1.8 m from the floor, below which the walls are panelled. On the north this is broken by a 19th-century opening into the organ chamber, rather narrower than the contemporary arch above; this is of three orders, the moulded inner one springing from detached shafts with nail-head in their caps and moulded bases, whilst the middle order dies into the wall and the outer is carried down the jambs to broach stops just above the string. East of this the string forms the lintel of the door into the vestry; its jambs, stepped in to produce , with the string, a head of shouldered form, are entirely 19th century. Just beyond the doorway is a tall recess formed by the rear arch of a blocked lancet; on the north of the sanctuary is a large aumbry, now filled with doors.

On the south of the chancel the string is broken by the segmental-pointed rear arch of the 19th-century priest's door. On the south of the sanctuary is another aumbry (its stonework now concealed by a timber surround) and, close to the east side of the priest's doorway, another recess now occupied by a steel aumbry. Prior to the insertion of this in 1987 this

recess appeared to be part of a shouldered arch, with a roll-moulding on the angle of the shoulder (reminiscent of the form of the piscina in the chancel of St Andrew's Church at Winston). The 1990 quinquennial report comments that this recess was not a piscina, and that it 'appears possibly to mark a stage in the building programme' and that it may have been used as a dole or vessel cupboard.

On the east wall, the string-course forms the front edge of a projecting shelf behind the altar (although the stonework of this section may be all 19th-century). The three lancets above have rear arches moulded with a filleted roll, carried on tall jamb shafts with moulded capitals, bases, and rings with nail-head ornament at mid-height. The vesica at the head of the gable has a similar moulded rear arch with shafted jambs, but this seems to be entirely of 19th-century stonework.

The interior of the **Vestry** is whitewashed. There is a 19th-century fireplace on the north, and near the east end of the south wall a cast-iron wallsafe (see 'fittings and furnishings') set in a recess with chamfered jambs, that on the east apparently curving at its head as if to form part of an arch. The lower part of a blocked lancet is visible as a recess in the south wall, and the projection of an earlier buttress at the south-west corner.

## FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

The majority of the furnishings of the church are of later 19th century date, and are not of especial interest.

The **Font** has a circular basin and shaft, with a moulded base 'just like those of the piers' (Pevsner & Williamson, 1983, 277), and is thought to be of early 13th century date; the **Font Cover** is a carved piece of 17th-century date; last century it retained traces of red, green and gold colouring (Proc.Soc.Antiq.Newcastle III (1888) 376).

The **South Door** with its C-hinges and straps with curled terminals, is thought to be contemporary with the church; Pevsner & Williamson (ibid) quote Dr Geddes as stating that the **North Door** is of the same period, but this seems to be a mistake; this door, although re-using medieval ironwork, seems a 19th-century piece. (ibid)

The **Royal Arms** of Queen Anne (one of three examples in the North of England) are now affixed to the west wall of the tower.

The **Organ** is of 1865 and by Brindley, of Sheffield. Donald E. Wright (letter dated 3.6.81, in Diocesan records) terms it 'one of the most interesting examples of 19th-century organ building to survive in England today'.

There are six **Bells** in the tower, all dating from the 1864 restoration; prior to this there were three, details of which are given by Walbran (1847, 30-31); they were inscribed:

- 1.+ SAINT CWTBERT SAF WS VNOWERT
- 2.++ HELP MARI QWOD ROGER OF KYRKEBY

3.THO: SWAINSTON CHURCHWARDEN. GLORIA IN ALTISSIMIS DEO. 1715. (with  
beneath 'S.S. \* EBOR')

The first two were medieval; the first was given to Piercebridge Chapel, where it apparently remains, but the other two were recast.

The **Bellframes**, presumably of 1864, are of long-headed type and of bolted timber construction; the trusses have straight-sided braces but no centre or end posts (type 6A). The plan is a variant on type 6.6; three parallel pits with a second group of three, one parallel to the others and two at right angles, alongside. For classification see Pickford (1993)

### CARVED STONES

There are a large number of Anglo-Saxon carved stones either in the church, or removed to the Monks' Dormitory collection at Durham. The following list is a precis of that which appears in Cramp (1984, 80-90):

1. Cross shaft and head, in two joining pieces. Second quarter of 11th century. Removed 1864 from head of south window of clock room in tower. Monks' Dormitory (MD) collection cat.no. XXXI
2. Part of cross shaft, first half of 19th century. Found 1864, possibly in south wall of nave (ie south aisle). MD XXXII
3. Part of cross shaft, second half of 10th century. MD XL, discovery as no.2.
4. Upper part of cross shaft, of first half of 10th century. MD XLI. Discovery as no.2.
5. Part of cross shaft, in two joining pieces. First half of 10th century. Attached to west wall of nave (but recently moved to north wall of north aisle). First noted in 1846 as lintel at entrance to clock room.
6. Fragment, probably of cross shaft. 10th to 11th century. MD XLII, discovery as no.2.
7. Part of cross shaft or impost. 10th to 11th century. MD XLIII, discovery as no.2.
8. Part of cross shaft, 10th century, built into east side of north porch, outside.
9. Part of cross-shaft, of uncertain date, built into east side of north porch, outside.
10. Fragment of cross shaft, late 10th century, built into north wall of north aisle between first and second windows east of porch.

11. Cross-shaft, late 11th century; location and discovery see no.5.  
(nos 12-23, all found 1864 in south wall of south aisle)
12. Cross head and part of shaft, 10th century. MD XXXIII.
13. Centre of cross-head, 10th century. MD XXXIV.
14. Centre of cross-head, 10th century. MD XXXV.
15. .Part of shaft and head of cross, 10th century. MD XXXVI.
16. .Part of shaft and head of cross, first half of 10th century. MD XXXVII.
17. Part of ring-headed cross, possibly mid-10th to mid-11th century. MD XXXVIII.
18. Cross arm, possibly mid-10th to mid-11th century. MD XXXIX.
19. Fragment of grave cover, mid-10th to mid-11th century. MD XLV.
20. Fragment of grave cover, first half of 10th century. MD XLIV.
21. Part of grave cover. Mid-9th to mid-11th century. MD XLVI.  
Inscription on vertical face of recumbent monument:  
[A] L [RI] H [CSE] T [AE-  
'Alrihic set up...'
22. .Incomplete hog-back in two joining pieces, 10th century. MD XLVII
23. Grave cover or seat, 11th century. MD XLVIII
24. .Grave cover used as part of seat on east side of porch, 11th century. Removed 1864 from head of doorway at foot of tower stair.
25. Fragment built into east end of south aisle, outside. Late 9th to 10th century.
- 26/27 Two fragments of cross shaft built into north-east angle of north porch, inside. Uncertain date.
28. Fragment of a hogback built into west end, 4 m up, south of south-west buttress of tower. Mid-10th to mid-11th century.
29. Fragment built into east wall of ringing chamber, inside. 10th century?
30. Fragment built into base of east wall of old Rectory garden, 10th century.
31. Fragment in possession of Mrs Surtees Raine, West Edlestone, Gainford. 10th century.

Nos 32-33 see p.153 - stones of Saxo-Norman or uncertain date)

32. Round-headed grave-marker built into east wall of north porch inside; second half of 11th century.
33. Grave cover used as part of seat on west side of porch. Second half of 11th century.
34. Roman stone with chevron ornament (see p.154 - 'Stones wrongly associated with Pre-Conquest period'.

Lost Stones (p.156)

35. Two small fragments 'in north angle of church porch'
36. Hogback.

In addition to these a Roman altar, which had been re-used in the fabric and was removed in 1864, and is now at Durham. Hodgkin (138-9) states that it formed 'the capital of the westernmost pier of the south arcade' but Wooler (114) states that 'it was built into the south-east pier of the tower arch', which its form seems to bear out. It bears an inscription, discussed by Hodgkin (138/9) dedicating it to Jupiter Dolychenus, and stating that it was set up by Julius Valentinus, centurion.

In addition to these stones, there are:

- (a) Stone built into external face of west wall of nave immediately south of the stair turret, c 2.5 m above ground level; geometric pattern of lines of incised lozenges, bordered by a curving line. Possibly part of a tympanum.
- (b) Stone built into north wall of vestry, low down, above stair to boiler room under organ chamber; roll-moulded edge, perhaps part of a grave cover.
- (c) Similar stone with roll-moulded edge forming external sill of the high-level ogee-headed light immediately east of the south porch.
- (d) In external face of south wall of south aisle to west of two-light window west of south porch; piece of Saxon knotwork.

## SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS.

Gainford has one of the best collections of medieval **Cross Slab Grave Covers** in the county; they are described and illustrated by Ryder (1985, 84-88 and plates 28-30). Most are built into the internal walls of the north porch; in addition there is a slab, whitewashed over,

forming the internal lintel of the western window in the south wall of the south aisle, and two sections of a slab re-set above the doors of nos 11 & 12 High Row, in the village. Walbran (1846, 32 & 33) illustrates a further three slabs that are now lost.

In addition to the cross slabs, built into the internal face of the west wall of the porch is, or was, part of an **Incised Effigy** of a priest, illustrated by Walbran (op.cit 32) and Edleston (1936, 224-225) but between 1969 and 1982 virtually erased by the decay of the stone.

There are three medieval **Brasses**: the texts are given by Boyle and Walbran.

- (1) On a slab beneath the altar (not is original position; Walbran (1847, 38) refers to it being set diagonally on a stone south of the altar), an inscription to Roger Kyrkby, vicar of Gainford 1401 until 1412, when he died. The slab also has remnants of an 18th century (?) inscription.
- (2) Fixed on the north wall of the sanctuary, an inscription to William Pegg d.1486; when Walbran (1847, 33) wrote it was on a blue marble flag at the upper end of the nave.
- (3) Short inscription to John Stevenson and his wife, not dated, fixed on the wall beside (Walbran states that it was set on a blue marble slab beside the Pegg brass, but that in 1766 it had been 'tore off the stone, and lying in the vestry'.

On the same wall is a brass plate, with an inscription to Mrs Mary Birckbeck d.1668, beneath a coat of arms. Fixed to the internal splay of the window on the north of the vestry is a brass plate with a latin inscription to Edmund Fotherby d.1700.

There are two **Mural Monuments** of some interest. On the north side of the chancel is a tablet to the former vicar Tobias Heyrick d.1782, with a latin inscription and coat of arms. On the south wall of the south aisle immediately west of the south door is a rather grander memorial to Maria and John Middleton, 1706 and 1709, with a latin inscription within a surround with a segmental pediment on Corinthian columns flanked by grieving putti. The stonework is quite decayed in parts (even in 1847 Walbran described it as 'dilapidated'). Apart from these 18th century monuments, there are a few 19th and early 20th century brass plates and marble tablets.

There is a **Ledger Stone** set centrally at the east end of the nave, and has a worn inscription to Susan, wife of George Beachcroft of Headlam Hall, d.1837; Walbran describes a number of other ledgers and floor stones, no longer visible.

In the vestry is an old **Table** made up of re-used timbers including old commandment boards; some of the lettering, with the arms of England and France, is said to be 'still discernible underneath' (Hodgkin 138). Also in the vestry are a number of **Old drawings and photographs** of the church, which are a valuable archive relating to its structural history.

## HISTORICAL NOTES

- 801 Abbot Edwine or Eda died in his monastery at 'Gegenford' (Simeon Dunelm, de Gestes).
- 830-845 Egred, Bishop of Lindisfarne, built a church 'at the vill that is called Gegaingford' and gave it to St Cuthbert, with all that pertained to it, from the River Tese to that of Wheor, and from the way called Deorestrete to a mountain in the west' (Hist. S.Cuthberti)
- This monastery appears to have been the chef-lieu of a large estate block, having its origins perhaps in the 7th century, stretching from the Tees to the Wear and bounded on the east by Dere Street. By the 10th century the estate had been sub-divided into Gainfordshire and Staindropshire (Pevsner & Williamson 1983, 64, 111 & 276).
- c1130 The church of Gainford was given to St Mary's Abbey, York, by Guy de Balliol; after the Dissolution it passed to Trinity College, Cambridge.
- 1794 The earliest detailed account of the church is published in Hutchinson's History of Durham (III.221-223). 'The church of Gainford is a regular edifice, the chancel ten paces in length and six in width; the windows to the north and south, were exactly similar, long and round-topped; those to the north are now closed by the vestry room: the east end is lighted by three long windows, ornamented by small round pilasters, belted in the middle, and a roll at the top and bottom: it is separated from the nave by a pointed arch, springing from brackets. The nave is 28 paces in length, having regular side ailes; in the whole 13 paces in width: each aile is formed by two round lofty columns, not less than 18 feet in height in the shaft, supporting pointed arches. The tower rises on four pointed arches, springing from clustered columns towards the body of the church, and from pilasters in the west wall.
- 1840 Surtees' History (IV, 9) adds a little extra information: 'the chancel opens under a plain pointed arch springing from brackets, beneath which a portion of masonry on each side conceals the beam on which the roof loft has rested...the windows in the ailes are nearly all modern. The high ridged leaden roof of both nave and chancel was replaced a few years ago by a barn-like covering of bright Westmoreland slate. The arms of Nevill, and the cross of St George, are represented upon the ten stone brackets which support the old leaden roof of the chancel'.
- 1846 Walbran's History of Gainford provides a far more detailed description of the church than had appeared previously. He refers to evidence of a clerestory ('the whole was swept away about thirty years ago') visible on the tower wall; during what may have been the same programme of repairs 'in the early years of the present century' an ancient doorway in the chancel, surmounted by two

small shields, one with a saltire and the other with the cross of St George.

- 1864 Major restoration by J.A.Cory (see Faculties & records of structural work). Four silver pennies of Alfred (871-900) were 'discovered together outside the north-west angle of the chancel, during an excavation for the purposes of heating the renovated fabric' (Archaeologia Aeliana 2nd ser. VI (1965) 233)

## FACULTIES AND OTHER RECORDS OF STRUCTURAL WORK

| Faculty no. and date | Works   |
|----------------------|---|
| 51 1697              | Regulation for seats in church  |
| 1786                 | 'Clumsy' pinnacles, having 'a square base, round shaft, and a ball at the top' added to the tower (Walbran, 26)   |
| 49 1793              | Petition to erect a gallery in the church. This was in the north aisle, and to be 38'2" long and 11'6" wide; access was by a stair in the vestry and a door broken through the east wall of the aisle.  |
| 1864                 | A major restoration of the church by the Carlisle architect <u>J.A.Cory</u> , for which no faculty survives. Part of the south wall of the south aisle, and parts of the tower, had to be rebuilt; the church was re-roofed throughout, and an organ chamber added on the north of the chancel. |
| 444(24) 1904         | Raising the Holy Table and other alterations  |
| 1007 20.4.1921       | Stone cross in churchyard.  |
| 2196 31.12.1926      | Choir vestry  |
| 2516 16.8.1934       | Electric light  |
| 4825 11.10.1965      | Extensive alterations and improvements in the chancel (substitution of stone for glazed tiles on internal sills of east and south windows, removal of reredos, introduction of wooden platform under altars. Two brass inscriptions to be removed from face of east wall.                       |
| 6224 13 11 84        | Removal of chimney stack from organ chamber   |
| 6644 5 1 88          | Steel aumbry fixed in a cavity in the south wall of the chancel   |
| 1992                 | Conversion of south porch into toilet; removal of pews and reflooring of west end.  |
| 1992                 | Archaeological Watching Brief by County Durham SMR Archaeology Dept (Bowes Museum), when new path was laid from churchyard gate to north porch; 0.20 m of soil removed, previous cast-iron pipe on same line seen. Fragments of 19th-century pottery, bone and clay pipe. Report Niall Hammond  |

29.5.92

## THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Antiquarian opinion has always seen the church as the product of a single building phase. Fordyce (II, 316) dates this to the middle of the 13th century, but Boyle (1889, 373) Proc.Soc.Antiq. Newcastle New Series III ascribed it to c1190. Hodgkin ((1913, 136) sees it as 'very early 13th century' and Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 277), less specific, see it as 'almost entirely of the C13').

There are several evidences within the structure suggesting that the building history may be more complex than has been suggested, both in the plan and layout of the church, and in the fabric and architectural features.

### **Irregularities in Plan; a possible Saxon building.**

Some irregularities in the plan of the building, notably the change in alignment between nave and chancel, are apparent to any visitor. Examination of a detailed ground plan shows other significant features;

- (i) The nave has quite thin side walls, above the arcades (0.65 - 0.70 m) and quite elongate proportions, both of which could tally with an early date.
- (ii) Not only does the axis of the chancel deviate to the south from that of the nave, but the chancel is around 0.50 m wider than the nave, both side walls being set outside the line of those of the nave, which would be a highly unusual feature in a building of a single phase. Also the chancel walls are almost 1 metre thick, much more substantial than those of the nave. There is a marked deviation in alignment half-way along the chancel north wall.

All this suggests that structural remains survive of at least one pre-13th century building phase; unfortunately the plastering of the internal wall hides their fabric. However, one plausible explanation might be that the nave walls survive from an earlier church, either Saxon or Saxo-Norman. The addition of the tower at the west end, and the placing of the chancel walls outside the line of those of the nave means that the angle quoins, often the only visible evidence for a Pre-Conquest building, are all concealed.

The width of the chancel also strongly suggests that it is secondary; one would have expected the original chancel to be somewhat narrower than the nave. The wall thicknesses here would tie in with a Norman - i.e. 12th century - date, although the visible architectural features are all a century later. The present chancel might be a remodelling and extension of a 12th-century one, itself a reconstruction of a Saxon or Saxo-Norman predecessor; this would explain both the wall thicknesses and the irregularity in the line of the north wall.

Thus the church as it stood at the end of the 12th century might have consisted of a Saxon nave, perhaps with side chambers or porticus, with its chancel rebuilt as a substantial Norman

structure.

### **The 13th century remodelling.**

Turning to visible features, there is a clear discrepancy in building materials between the rubble of the chancel walls and the better-squared stone of the aisles, suggesting at least two phases of remodelling. Further evidence is seen in the awkward relationship between the hoodmoulds of the nave arcades and the chancel arch, which rather suggests that the latter is later in date, presumably replacing an arch contemporary with, or more likely pre-dating, the arcades. This would help to explain the odd arrangement of chamfered jambs below the chancel arch corbels; the lower section might survive from the responds of the earlier arch, and the apparent cut-back feature immediately below the corbels be the impost of this earlier arch. No dateable features survive, except that the size of the blocks might be taken as implying a date no earlier than the 12th century.

Thus one might surmise that the present church results from the two-phase replacement of the earlier building in the first half of the 13th century, the nave being remodelled first, and later the chancel. This is also borne out by the irregularities in layout, and the marked southward deviation of the chancel, which would seem unlikely in a building constructed in a single phase.

The church as rebuilt in the 13th century would probably have had a single steep-pitched roof covering both nave and aisles, the outer walls of the latter being very low; unfortunately none of the original windows in these walls have survived. A tantalising reference (Boyle 1889, 377) mentions that 'some traces of a square-headed doorway, ornamented with dog-tooth moulding, were found about the middle of the south aisle, when the church was restored'; two doorways in the south aisle would be very unusual (unless there was perhaps formerly some sort of external chapel or chapel, possibly like the little cell-like sacristy at nearby Staindrop). The tower, is clearly part of the 13th-century works.

### **Later Medieval Alterations; the 15th and 16th Centuries**

There is little dating evidence for the later medieval alterations to the church, when the aisles were heightened and the tower partly rebuilt, possibly after structural failure. Most of the present fenestration of the aisles dates to this period, although most of the windows have lost their original character through post-medieval conversion to sashes and subsequent re-gothicisation.

#### **The Tower**

The upper part of the tower would seem to have been reconstructed in the 15th or 16th century (as suggested by the descriptions of the belfry before its 1864 reconstruction and by alterations to the head of the stair turret, which clearly pre-date this). Pre-1864 illustrations show the east and west parapets as low-pitched gables, presumably reflecting the form of the tower roof. The present arches spanning the aisles are of 1864, but the positioning of external buttresses, apparently later medieval work, on the same line, suggests they replace an earlier feature performing the same function. The stair turret also looks to be a later medieval

addition, although it has been subject to some alteration; it may have originally extended to the top of the tower, and later been truncated at belfry level.

### The Clerestory

19th-century references to evidence for a clerestory on the nave (Walbran, 1847, 27 & Fordyce 1857, II, 128) are a little puzzling; the marks on the east wall of the tower referred to will have been destroyed by its rebuilding in 1864. It would be unusual for an early 13th century church to have a clerestory; presumably that at Gainford was a later medieval addition. Walbran refers to the clerestorey being 'swept away about thirty years ago' but a 1778 drawing in the vestry seems to show the church with the same single roof covering both nave and aisles as remained until 1864. Possibly what the early antiquaries saw was evidence for taller nave walls (Anglo-Saxon?) cut down in the later medieval period.

### The Chancel Roof

The chancel would appear to have been heightened and re-roofed in the 15th or early 16th century, to judge from accounts of the old roof, with its heraldic corbels, removed in the early 19th century; the 1778 drawing shows a low-pitched roof, which would be in character with this period. Similar heraldry was displayed on a doorway destroyed in the early 19th century; it would perhaps seem most likely that this was the doorway from the chancel into the vestry, perhaps to the east of the present 19th-century opening.

### The Ogee-Headed Windows

The ogee-headed windows set at a high level in the side walls of the aisles pose something of a puzzle. At first sight their positioning suggests that they are post-medieval insertions to light galleries, and indeed Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 277) consider them likely to be of 18th century date; however, they appear to be contemporary with the upper parts of the aisle walls, and these in turn appear to genuinely medieval as the large three-light windows on the south (which extend into the upper section of the wall), although remodelled in 1864, had predecessors of the same general form which can hardly have been post-medieval work. The 1778 drawing in the vestry shows that the high-level windows in the north aisle certainly pre-date the 1793 gallery. However, their position is puzzling, and their form is one that does sometimes appear in post-medieval work, so the question as to whether they might relate to an earlier phase of gallery construction must remain to some extent open.

One other possibility, which has not apparently been raised, is that these small windows performed the same function that 'low-side' windows performed in many churches; the Rev. J.F.Hodgson (1902) argued persuasively that lamps were set in these to illuminate the churchyard outside, and deter evil spirits. Conventionally 'low-side' windows are set on either side of the west end of the chancel, low in the wall, but there are examples, such as at neighbouring Winston, when they are elevated considerably above ground level. Gainford is something of an exception in Durham churches in that it has no evidence of any low-side window at all in the chancel. The ogee-headed aisle windows are certainly 'high' rather than 'low', but the westernmost one in the south aisle does have a level sill on which a lamp could

be set, and all have very little internal splay, as if letting light into the building was not their prime intention.

### The Vestry

The vestry, which formerly ran the whole length of the north wall of the chancel, is probably also an addition of this period; late medieval two-storeyed vestries are a characteristic of Tees Valley churches (eg High Coniscliffe, Staindrop, Barnard Castle); it is possible that the upper floor may be a 15th or early 16th century addition to a 14th or 15th century structure.

The addition of the vestry blocked up two lancets in the north wall of the chancel, and a lancet (with a vesica over) in the east end of the north aisle (Walbran 1847, 28).

### Post-Medieval Changes

The conversion of the larger aisle windows to sashes has already been mentioned. The addition of pinnacles to the tower in 1786 is documented (see 'structural changes'); a misreading here has led some to make the error of assuming that the stair turret was an addition of the same period (eg Pevsner & Williamson 1983, 277); it is in fact shown on a drawing of 1778, now in the vestry. This was the 'gallery era' ; one was inserted beneath the tower at some unknown date, and another erected in the north aisle in 1793 (see faculties), entered from a stair inserted into the western part of the vestry and a new doorway broken through the north end of the east wall of the aisle. An 1863 photograph in the vestry shows both these galleries, along with the old box pews in the nave.

A rather naive but attractive 1839 drawing of the church, also hanging in the vestry, shows a square-headed doorway at the west end of the north wall of the vestry (probably post-medieval, but pre-dating the gallery stair) and a sash window further east, with a pointed arch.

Although antiquarian sources imply that the re-roofing of the nave with a 'barn-like covering' (Surtees) or 'one unbroken sweep' (Walbran) of 'bright Westmoreland slate' took place in the early 19th century, the 1778 drawing already mentioned suggests the change took place rather earlier.

The early 19th-century works may have been confined to the chancel, which suffered, the 'removal of the ancient doorway, and the destruction of its roof' (Walbran 1847, 28).

### The 1864 Restoration

The church owes much of its present character to the major works of 1864, under J.A. Cory, when it was returned to the rather idealised medieval character the Victorians favoured, and much archaeological evidence was inevitably destroyed. The sash windows were re-converted to a gothic form, with cinquefoiled cusplings at the heads of most of the lights.

### Partial Rebuilding of the Tower

Structural problems prompted a partial rebuilding of the tower, and of the south aisle wall. Visible breaks in the fabric suggest that most if not all of the eastern two-thirds of the structure was rebuilt, above the first stage, re-using some old stonework (perhaps the eastern quoins of the second stage, and the jambs of the belfry openings). The newel stair may have been remodelled at this time, and the old doorway from the nave replaced by one into the churchyard.

#### Partial Rebuilding of the South Aisle

It would appear that a large part of the south aisle wall was rebuilt, although old openings, suitably 'improved' were re-instated. One puzzle is the high-level window immediately east of the large buttress, where Walbran describes (and illustrates) a blocked square-headed opening, but there is now an ogee-headed light of rather different character to the other four in the aisle walls.

#### Other Changes

Inside the church, both the gallery under the tower 'of very rude and unbecoming workmanship' (Walbran 1847, 30) and that inserted into the north aisle in 1793 were removed. The organ chamber was added, destroying both the western half of the late medieval vestry, and the east end of the 13th-century north aisle. The lancet window from the latter (or at least its head) seems to have been re-set in the north wall of the surviving half of the vestry, inside the blocking of an earlier sash window.

The church would appear to have been completely re-roofed at this period; the chancel east gable as heightened, and a new vesica introduced above the eastern lancets.

Subsequent alterations have been relatively minor; details are to be found in the 'Faculties...' section.

### **THE CHURCHYARD**

The churchyard is rectangular in plan, opening to the village green at its north-east corner. None of its boundaries are of any great antiquity; the south side is defined by a hedge and fence, at the top of a short drop to the River Tees; a few metres south of the churchyard, and roughly central to it, is St Mary's Well, quite a strong spring. Just outside the western boundary, and aligned with the church, is a tall Doric column, originally erected in 1748 as a memorial to the Peace of Aachen, at Stanwick Park, but brought here earlier in the present century.

The 1st edition O.S. 6":1 mile map (c1860) shows a western boundary much nearer to the church; its line is still visible as a slight earthwork feature, with two old trees (a yew and a sycamore) upon it. The churchyard has a good selection of memorials ranging from small and vernacular early 18th-century headstones to the usual variety of 19th century memorials; there are a number of later 18th and early 19th century box and table tombs. One earlier monument, which until the 19th-century restoration was placed inside the church, at the east

end of the south aisle, is now sited on a paved area immediately east of the aisle. It is a low limestone box tomb, with a relief black-letter inscription on the bevelled edge of its top slab, to William and Elizabeth Pudsey, and heraldry on the sides; it is probably of late 15th century date (for inscription see Proc. Soc. Antiq. Newcastle III (1888) 376-7) . A short distance south is a headstone, recently conserved and cleaned, to Thomas Williamson of Summerhouse, d. 1777, a blacksmith, bearing the often-quoted verse commencing 'my sledge and hammer lie reclined...'

### The Old Village School

When Walbran wrote the village school stood adjacent to the churchyard, at the south end of the range of houses on the west side of the green; he describes a 'door, and a square-headed window above - divided into two lights, with trefoil heads -.. apparently as old as the sixteenth century' (1847, 95). The building is shown on two of the old drawings in the vestry. It seems to have been demolished in the later 19th century, and the churchyard slightly extended at this point, so that its site now lies within the churchyard, immediately inside the gates on the west.

### The Saxon Monastic Boundary

Although strictly outside the scope of this assessment, it is worth noting that the curving line of an old lane to the north-west and west of the church, running down to the ford of Gainford Wath, and then the curving line of a fence on the south of the Tees, together make up three-quarters of a rough circle, with the church only a little removed from its centre. The remaining quadrant of the circle is made up by the village green. It would seem possible that, unless the produce of some odd coincidence, these features 'fossilise' an early boundary, perhaps the vallum monasterii of the Pre-Conquest monastery. All these features are shown on the 1st edition O.S. 6":1 mile map (c1860), which also shows a linear earthwork, labelled 'Supposed Intrenchment', linked to the Scots Dike system, approaching from the south to join the enclosure on the south side of Gainford Wath.

The section of the curving lane due west of the village is now a tarmac road, giving access to the village playing field, and a recent cemetery; the road surface is sunk below the ground on either side, and on the east side is a distinct bank, especially noticeable in the final unmade section of track (beyond the cemetery carpark) dropping down to the Tees. All this deserves more investigation!

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Historical, sculptural and possibly topographic evidence mark out Gainford as an early monastic site of major importance, which serve to award the church and churchyard (and indeed, the whole village) a high archaeological priority. The building itself may also contain Pre-Conquest fabric, and would certainly merit a more detailed survey than has been possible here.

Looking at the potential for the survival of below-ground archaeological features first, its

must be noted that sub-floor deposits within the church will have been disturbed to some extent, as is generally the case, both by generations of burials and by a 19th-century underfloor heating system (powered by a boiler room beneath the 1864 organ chamber). Nevertheless, such is the importance of the building and site that any ground works will demand at the least an archaeological watching brief. This is also true for the churchyard, and especially the areas adjacent to the building; Gainford seems to lack the usual archaeologically-damaging perimeter drain.

Turning to the above-ground fabric, evidence of the earlier phases is probably concealed beneath the plaster of the nave walls, so any repair or stripping will require monitoring. The plaster itself may be of importance; none of the 19th-century accounts refer to the walls being stripped, so it is possible that early plasterwork and even paintings may survive (except in the case of the rebuilt central part of the south aisle wall).

Of all the churches in Teesdale, Gainford is probably worthy of the most archaeological vigilance, and has the potential for major discoveries.

Peter F Ryder

June 1995/revised September 2008

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**ST MARY'S CHURCH, GAINFORD**  
**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

Architectural Description

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Photosurvey. May 1995

1. West view
2. West end of south aisle
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4. West part of nave from south
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9. East end from north-east.
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13. Nave, east part from north.
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27. 1765 drawing of Rectory, now in vestry.
28. Rectory, church and village green, 1776 drawing. Now in vestry.
29. Drawing of church in 1839, now in vestry.
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21. Photo, pre-1864, of interior looking west, now in vestry.