

ST EDMUND'S CHAPEL, GATESHEAD

St Edmund's Chapel stands on the east side of High Street, Gateshead, on a site anciently known as 'Gateshead Head'; it remains in ecclesiastical use, although the attached late Victorian church, now serves as the Trinity Community Centre.

DESCRIPTION

The Exterior

The medieval chapel is a rectangular building, 24.4 by 8.6 m externally, and five bays in length, now forming the south aisle to church of 1894-6; the south, east and west walls of the chapel remain, as well perhaps as some fabric at the east end of the north wall.

The west end of the chapel is of squared stone; the south wall and lower part of the east end are of roughly-coursed fabric, varying between rubble and roughly-shaped stone; the upper part of the east end, of squared stone, is largely a 19th-century refacing.

The west front is of some note architecturally as a fine piece of mid-13th century Early English work. At its foot is a chamfered plinth, continuous below the west door, which is flanked by two-bay blind arcades at two levels, divided by a moulded string. Above is a second string, forming the sills of a stepped arcade where blind arches alternate with a triplet of lancets; the present gable, of relatively shallow pitch, is all 19th-century work.

The west doorway has a surround of four orders, the outer three carried on detached shafts with moulded capitals and bases and the inner on attached filleted shafts; there are similar filleted mouldings between the shafts of the outer orders. The inner three orders of the head each have a filleted roll between two hollows, and the outer a more complex moulding seen again in the two lower tiers of blind arcading. There is a moulded hood with spiral terminals. Of all this, only the central two orders of the arch look genuine medieval work; the rest appears to be 19th-century restoration, although probably following the original design.

The two levels of blind arcade have level sills and trefoil-headed arches on detached shafts with moulded capitals; the arches all have a complex moulding with two fillets and a central sharply-pointed member; the lower arch on the far right alone is different, having nail-head in the arch; all have moulded hoods. The stonework of these arcades is largely restoration; the lower tier seems to have unrestored medieval work in parts of their hoodmoulds, and the upper in parts of their jambs.

The upper arcade has detached shafts springing from a sloping surface continuous with the upper chamfer of the main string course, which is moulded on its lower angle. The arcade has nail-head, and a moulded hood; here most of the stonework seems genuine medieval work, with the exception of the shafts and most of the capitals.

The gable is capped by a cut coping, and a plain 19th-century cross finial.

The south wall of the chapel is much plainer, and is divided into five bays by stepped buttresses; the buttresses are of squared stone, but the wall is of mixed rubble and roughly-squared stone ,

appearing to include some re-used material, eg a large triangular block low in the westernmost bay. The chamfered plinth is continuous along this side of the building, except that it has been cut back on the outer faces of the third, fourth and fifth buttresses (numbering from the west) and seems to be absent over much of the easternmost bay; at the east end of the bay are two blocks which seem to represent a cut-back plinth, but between these and the next buttress (which seems to have been partly rebuilt) there is no sign of any plinth. There are signs of disturbance in the wall here, in what seems to be a large patch of later rubble; a diagonal cut in the masonry of the partially-rebuilt buttress may relate to the roof of a former adjacent structure of some sort.

Each bay of the south wall has a single lancet window, with a chamfered surround, and jamb shafts carrying a chamfered outer order forming an arch of almost semicircular form; the western shaft and capital of the easternmost lancet alone look 'unrestored'. The capitals all have square abaci, of the same form as those of the internal shafting in this wall. Directly below the lancet in the central bay is a blocked rectangular window with a chamfered surround, its head cut into the underside of the block forming the sill of the lancet. This lower window appears medieval or early post-medieval work, although apparently an insertion.

The east end has been flanked by a pair of buttresses, but only the upper stages of these remain, now carried on paired corbels of 19th-century date; below these ragged scars indicate where the lower portions have been cut away. Between are three stepped lancet windows, with chamfered inner surrounds and moulded arches carried on jamb shafts that have moulded rings at mid-height; all the stonework of the lancets seems to be restoration except for the outer jambs of the inner surrounds of the outer. The present sills of the windows are 19th-century, and set a little above the level of the original; the moulded bases of the original jamb shafts remain *in situ* below them. Below the central and northern lancets are blocked doorways, which are evidently insertions; they have cut blocks for their lintels but jambs formed of relatively small stones. It is not clear whether there has been an opening beneath the southern lancet; there is one definite L-shaped stone and a second, more dubious, which together might mark the lower corners of a window. Just below them is a large triangular block, further evidence of re-used material in the original walling. The ground level at this end of the chapel is a little higher than elsewhere, concealing any plinth.

The Interior

The interior of the chapel is plastered and whitewashed; all dressings are concealed, making it impossible to ascertain how much of the architectural detail is medieval and how much later restoration.

The west door has a segmental-pointed rear arch. Above this is a projecting string, which, like that on the external face of the wall, forms the base of the sills of the gable windows; the three lancets have filleted rolls to their inner surrounds, and roll-moulded outer orders carried on detached shafts with moulded capitals and bases; there is a moulded hood.

The south wall has a string course, chamfered above and below; above this the rear arches of the five lancets have detached shafts with capitals that have square abaci, carrying roll-moulded segmental rear arches.

At the east end the string steps up to run beneath the sills of the three lancets, which again have jamb shafts, with moulded capitals, bases, and two sets of moulded shaft rings.

The north wall of the chapel has a four-bay arcade of 1894-6, with segmental-pointed arches of two chamfered orders and a moulded hood, carried on octagonal piers and semi-octagonal responds with moulded capitals and bases. The arcade is now infilled by a breeze-block wall of c 1980, with square-headed doorways in the end bays.

The chapel has a ten-bay roof with arch-braced trusses carried on moulded corbels; there are carved and gilded bosses at the intersections of the trusses and longitudinal roof members.

Holy Trinity Church

A detailed description of the former Holy Trinity Church, now the Trinity Community Centre, is outside the remit of this report. Briefly, it consists of a four-bay central nave/chancel, with St Edmund's Chapel as its south aisle, and a much narrower and lower north aisle that has a clerestory above. There is a large western porch-cum-lobby, giving access both the church and a vestry on the north, which has a semi-octagonal end to the street; at the west end of the north aisle is a polygonal tower and spirelet. The building is constructed of snecked and tooled stone; the designs of both its end walls are obviously based on those of the adjacent gable ends of the older chapel. During the recent conversion, the main body of the church has had a full-length floor inserted, with stairs at each end; the eastern triplet of lancets still retain their late-19th century glass.

The Gateway

The Tudor gateway which, having been moved at least once, now fronts onto the south side of the Chapel forecourt, is the sole remnant of Gateshead House. It consists of an arch with a head of flattened Tudor form, within a square frame. On either side are fluted pilasters, and above a plain frieze; the gateway is topped by a moulded coping. There may have been some restoration or replacement of its components, eg the mouldings of the base of the left-hand pilaster are relatively well-preserved, but those of its right-hand counterpart are completely eroded.

The boundary wall attached to the east side of the gateway, and extending as far east as the easternmost bay of the chapel, is c 2 m high, and constructed of rubble, which obviously includes re-used material, cf some large trapezoidal blocks. Although the fabric looks of some antiquity, no wall in this position is shown on either the 1819 or 1831 maps (Goodrick 1993)

FITTINGS & FURNISHINGS

The chapel has little in the way of fittings or furnishings of historic interest; the **Stained Glass** in the southern lancets, a series of five Northumbrian saints, of late 19th-century date, is of some merit. On the interior of the west wall, to the north of the door, is a World War I memorial tablet.

SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS

One medieval grave cover survives, mentioned by Grose and rediscovered in 1836 (see above). It

is now set beneath the arch of the re-sited Tudor gateway, facing onto the forecourt of the Chapel. Although Grose quite correctly likens the form of the cross to that in the 7th-century dedication stone at Jarrow, it is in fact a late medieval floor stone that appears to have had both cross and a marginal inscription inlaid in brass; the stone is a grey fossiliferous limestone, of uncertain provenance (Ryder 1983, 89-90, plate 32); it is probably of 15th or early-16th century date.

On the south wall of the chapel is a marble tablet to Colonel Robert Ellison, d.1843, signed by G.G.Adams, of London.

CARVED STONES

The chapel does not currently preserve any lapidary material. There is a record of an 'ornamental cross head', possibly the gable cross described by Grose, and possibly shown in Billings' plate. along with other stones, in the Journal of the British Archaeological Association series I, I, p.362. These have long been lost; the gable cross is thought to have been bought by an Alderman Call of Low Fell to add to a collection of antiquarian material in his grounds (Martin).

HISTORICAL NOTES

- c1200 A chapel dedicated to the Holy Trinity was in existence, the establishment consisting of a chaplain and three poor brethren
- 1248 Bishop Farnham united the older chapel of the Holy Trinity with his now foundation of 'The Chapel and Hospital of St Edmund, King and Confessor, and of the glorious Bishop Cuthbert, Gateshead'; the new foundation was to consist of four chaplains or priests one of whom was to be master.
- 1292 The clear annual revenue of the establishment was £18.
- 1325 A record of the buildings of the hospital include, in addition to the chapel, a buttery, a kitchen, a brew-house, a granary, a byre, and a pig-sty.
- 1448 Bishop Neville appropriated the hospital to the nuns of St Bartholomew, Newcastle
- 1540 Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the lands of St Bartholomews' nunnery were surrendered to the Crown; the hospital lands were bought by a William Riddell, who built a mansion to the east of the chapel, later known as Gateshead House.
- 1544 The hospital must have continued to function as such, as in 1544 there is a record of Doctor Belassis being master of the hospital, and a clear annual revenue of £7.7s.9d.
- 1746 When the Duke of Cumberland and his army were marching through Gateshead, on their way to Scotland, some of the watching crowd climbed onto the garden

wall of Gateshead House; the gardener set dogs on them, a riot ensued, and the house, and apparently also the chapel, were burned.

- 1774 The antiquary Grose gives a print showing the roofless chapel, with the ruins of Gateshead House beyond, which he identifies as 'Goatshead, or, Gateshide, Monastery'. His description of the remains is quoted by Hutchinson (1787, 455-456): 'Nearest the road stands the chapel, whose west end is handsomely ornamented with a number of pointed arches and niches, though the inside seems remarkably plain: It consists of a single aisle, twenty-one paces broad, by twenty-six long; some steps at the east end leading to the altar are still remaining; near them is a grave stone, on which is cut a cross similar to that on the jamb of the church door at Jarrow; it has also the marks of an inlaid border about it, but the brass is gone. The arches of the windows (except those at the east and west ends, which are entirely pointed) are round within, and pointed on the outside. A remarkable ornament is mounted on the east end, on a slender rod, being a small circle chequered by several bars crossing each other at right angles.'...
- 1820 Surtees (1820, 125 et seq) argued that the link between the ancient monastery supported to have existed at Gateshead and the medieval hospital was 'totally unsupported by evidence'. He gives a little more detail on the ruins of Gateshead House, as being a building 'in the high stile of Elizabeth or James, with large bay windows divided by heavy stone mullions and transoms; a heavy stone gateway faces the street'..
- 1836 Cuthbert Ellison, lord of the manor, gave the ruined chapel and site to the Rector and Churchwardens of Gateshead. The medieval grave slab, mentioned by Grose, was rediscovered on August 29th; the old gateway of Gateshead House was moved (Fordyce 1857, 762-3)
- 1837 In October the chapel, restored by John Dobson, the well-known Newcastle architect, was re-opened for public worship.
- 1845 Billing's print shows the restored chapel, with the Elizabethan gateway 'which modern innovation has attached to the north side' attached (1846, 42-43); a steam train is shown passing beyond the building, suggesting that the ruins of Gateshead House had been cleared by this date..
- 1894-1896 The new church of Holy Trinity was built, incorporating the old chapel as its south aisle; the architect was Stephen Piper.
- 1969 Holy Trinity Church was declared redundant, although the old chapel as partitioned off, and remained in use.

FACULTIES AND OTHER RECORDS OF STRUCTURAL WORK

Only those works which potentially have some relationship to the fabric of the church, or to its sub-floor deposits, are listed here. In general faculties relating to mural tablets, stained glass, moveable furnishings and works which impinge little on the fabric (ie the installation of a sound

system) are not recorded.

Faculty no.	Date	Works
357	25.2.1893	Enlargement of church
385/3	1.1.1896	Erection of organ
588	13.7.1911	Erection of a rood beam
4947	26.1.1967	(Archdeacon's Certificate). Redecoration
5131	11.6.1969	Authority for conversion of interior as a Church Centre for pastoral Work
5907	5.3.1981	Treatment of dry rot
7129	16.8.1990	Reduction in height of north boundary wall
7197	29.11.1990	Repointing and repair of south boundary wall
1979-1981		Conversion of Holy Trinity Church into a Community Centre, the architects being Hayton, Lee and Braddock, of Durham.
1981		Re-paving of courtyard outside west front (1996 QQ)

THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

St Edmund's is a relatively rare example of a medieval hospital chapel, the shell of which survived relatively unaltered until the late 19th-century. Although a single cell in plan, it was a building of some architectural pretensions, in particular its west front, which face the highway.

The one missing part of the chapel is its north wall, destroyed in 1894-6; however, illustrations and descriptions do survive. The eastern three bays appear to have been similar to the south elevation, with lancets and buttresses between; there was no buttress between the western bays; in this section of wall Fordyce describes 'two small doors (built up) one under a narrow pointed arch, one under a trefoil head. Grose's print seems to show at least one lancet window above these doors.

The presence of a pair of doorways here, together with the apparent absence of a buttress, suggests that at least one opened into some adjacent structure. One might expect a medieval hospital chapel to be linked to an infirmary hall; sometimes the chapel/hall relationship was axial, and akin to that of the chancel and nave in a church (St Agnes Hospital, Ripon, and many monastic infirmaries) but here the plan was clearly different. Some larger hospitals followed a quasi-monastic plan with buildings grouped around a court or cloister (eg the Great Hospital at Norwich) but St Edmund's was clearly on too small a scale for such formality. It seems likely that the buildings formed an L-plan group, with a block or range, running northwards along the street

front. It is not clear whether this incorporated the main infirmary hall, or whether there was a separate complex of hospital buildings set further back to the east. Little is known of Gateshead House which stood in this position; its remains were cleared away in the early 19th century; Grose's print shows extensive ruins of a house seemingly of irregular plan, which could point towards it having its origin in the remodelling of a group of earlier buildings.

Returning to the chapel itself, there are indications of some structure having adjoined the eastern bay on the south side; it seems most likely that this was some post-medieval farm building or shed, although it is possible that there was an original sacristy here. The 1996 Quinquennial report suggests that some interesting stone configuration at low level may indicate some early arch formation for a crypt or cellar below ground level' and invites archaeological comment. There are admittedly two or three stones which could be roughly-shaped voussoirs for an arch, but they are positioned on the lower edge of the patched area, with what looks like undisturbed masonry beneath. However, this disturbed area, and in particular the apparent absence of the plinth beneath it, remains a mystery.

There are minor evidences of later medieval alterations to the building. The most obvious is seen in the blocked window below the lancet in the central bay of the south wall. In its position, and size, this resembles the 'low-side' windows often found in parish churches. Their function remains obscure; one of the more credible suggestions is that they housed a lamp, to cast some light over an adjacent graveyard. Another evidence of later medieval changes is seen in the roof pitch; although the upper sections of the present gables were probably rebuilt by Dobson, the Grose print shows that they follow the previous pitch, which would be unlikely in the 13th century; low-pitched roofs such as this, probably associated with a lead covering, are more common towards the end of the medieval period.

The history of the chapel after the Reformation seems obscure; by the 18th century it was generally known as the 'Popish Chapel'. This may be through its association with the Riddells and Claverings of Gateshead House, who were recusant families. They seem to have had their own private chapel within the house; it would seem unlikely that a building such as St Edmund's in an obvious street-front position would have been used for this purpose.

By the early 19th-century the ruined chapel was being used as a masons' yard; the two rough doorways knocked through the lower part of the east wall may date from this phase.

In 1836-7 John Dobson re-roofed and refurbished the ruined chapel; elsewhere this architect does not have a good record as regards his works on medieval buildings, but there seems to reason to doubt the accuracy of his restoration here. More was lost in 1894-1896 when Holy Trinity Church was built with St Edmund's Chapel forming its south aisle; at one stage it was been planned to demolish the medieval building entirely.

THE CHURCHYARD

St Edmund's Chapel has no churchyard as such; there is a recent brick-paved forecourt on the west, towards the High Street, and a narrow lane on the south, between the chapel and the boundary wall

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

The chequered history of the Chapel, and its town-centre situation, has doubtless resulted in more damage to associated archaeological deposits inside and outside the building.

Within the Chapel the present floors are largely boarded; there is no evidence of the old altar steps recorded by Grose. The degree of disturbance of sub-floor deposits is uncertain; it is possible that a 19th-century underfloor heating system has caused damage here. However, any works involving disturbance of floor and sub-floor levels will require archaeological monitoring.

Similarly, it is probable that archaeological evidence remains concealed by the present wall plaster and whitewash; at the very least, these make it impossible to define the extent of 19th-century restoration of mouldings and rear arches. It is unlikely that any medieval plaster survived the ninety years when the building lay a roofless ruin.

Outside the Chapel, it is possible that deposits of interest survive beneath the adjacent ground surface. It is possible that remains of the postulated medieval range adjacent to the chapel survive beneath the floor of the western part of Holy Trinity (now the Trinity Community Centre); there seems to be no record of any archaeological observations made during the construction of Holy Trinity, nor during its more recent conversion. However, any major sub-floor disturbances here will also arouse archaeological interest.

An excavation was carried out in 1992 to the north of the site, after the demolition of a garage (Goodrick 1993). Extensive disturbance 'made meaningful phasing impossible'; the remains of several walls were recorded, most of which were probably of 19th century date; one fragment might possibly have been medieval, but was very badly damaged. One burial, in a wooden coffin, was found; although lacking any dating evidence, it was presumed to be associated with the hospital.

Some of the surviving medieval stonework of the west front (along with some of the dressed stone of the 1837 restoration) is in poor condition; if any renewal is to be carried out, a good photographic record would be a prerequisite.

The medieval grave slab set in the Elizabethan Gateway is in poor condition, and in need of some conservation treatment; expert advice should be sought before any works are carried out here. The stone should be recorded photographically, using oblique lighting.

Peter F Ryder. October 1997

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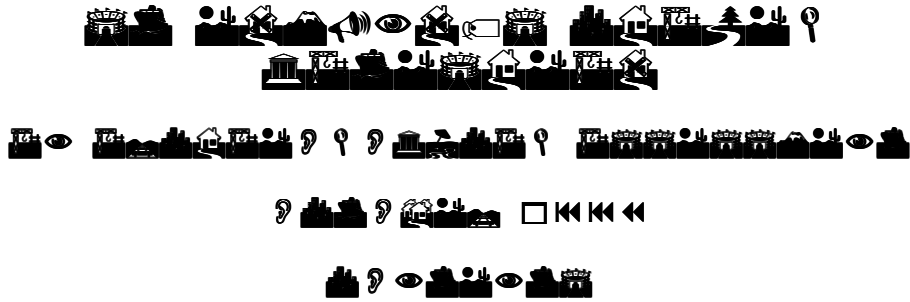
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Print after Grose (1774) showing ruins of chapel and Gateshead House beyond.

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