

St John the Baptist, Greatham

The parish church of Greatham stands on the west side of the village street, close to the buildings of the ancient Hospital. The church, approached from the north, and set close to the south side of a roughly rectangular churchyard, consists of a five-bay aisled nave with a west tower and north-west porch, and a chancel flanked by a shorter vestry on the south and organ chamber on the north.

Description

The Exterior

The **Tower** is built of squared and tooled grey sandstone and rises in three stages, divided by chamfered set-backs. There are clasping buttresses at the angles and a larger projecting square stair turret at the south-west corner. There is a two-part plinth (the lower member chamfered, the upper moulded); on the west a feature projects beneath this, formed by a lower course of three blocks, chamfered on their upper angles, supporting a single square-edged block.¹ The West window (three cinquefoil-headed lights with panel tracery under a casement-moulded hood with turned-back ends) and the Clock Chamber window on the west of the second stage (two trefoil-headed lights, again with panel tracery) both have segmental-pointed arches, but the larger openings of the belfry, each of two trefoil-headed lights with panel tracery, have four-centred heads. A chamfered set-back, set just above the heads of the clasping buttresses, is carried up and over the heads of the belfry openings as a hoodmould might be. There is a moulded string below the embattled parapet, broken by projecting stone spouts, set midway along each side and diagonally at the angles. The stair turret, lit by a series of small square-headed loops with chamfered only to their heads, is carried up a little above the parapet. On the north side of the second stage of the tower is a large crocketed niche with a stone figure of St John the Baptist, with a clock face above.

The only external walls of the **Nave**, of coursed Magnesian Limestone, are at clerestory level and in the east gable that rises above the chancel roof; at the west end are a pair of stepped buttresses, with the space between them now infilled by the 1908 tower. The clerestory consists of five pairs of circular windows with quatrefoil cusping. The east gable is of snecked limestone, and has a steeply-pitched coped gable with the base of a finial cross at the apex.

The **North Aisle** is built of roughly-coursed blocks of limestone, with tooled ashlar dressings.; there is a chamfered plinth. The eastern bay is clearly of a different build. The westernmost bay is concealed by the porch; the four windows are each of two trefoil-headed lights with a different form of foiled circle in the head of each, under hoodmoulds; there is another similar window in the west end. There is an obvious patch in the masonry, presumably a former doorway, between the window in the third bay. Stepped buttresses, which from the evidence of their plinths seem additions to the wall, are set between the third and fourth bays, and at the east end of the wall. Beneath the window of the fifth bay are a pair of memorial tablets (to the Rev John Brewster d.1842 and his wife) set within a square-headed panel with a moulded frame.

The fabric of the **South Aisle** is similar to that of the north, although the courses are perhaps a little more regular. Again there is a chamfered plinth, and buttresses (which again look like

¹ It is suggested that this represents the steps leading up to the west door of the pre-1908 tower, although an old photograph shows this to have been considerably smaller than its successor.

additions) on the south, between the first and second bays, between the third and fourth bays and set diagonally at the south-east angle. The windows - five on the south and one in the west end - are of markedly different character to those in the north aisle; each is of two trefoil-headed lights with a quatrefoil in the spandrel, with outer arches of roughly-shaped voussoirs. Directly below the third window in the south wall is a projecting corbel or bracket of uncertain purpose; its line of egg-and-dart ornament gives it away as a post-medieval piece. The eastern bay is again clearly an addition; here the plinth steps up in level, and there are again a pair of tablets, to further members of the Brewster family, set within a moulded frame.

The **North Porch** is of similar tooled sandstone blocks to the tower; it has a chamfered plinth and a chamfered set-back above that is carried up as a hoodmould over the outer opening, a two-centred arch with a continuous casement moulding

Only the eastern bay of the **Chancel** now projects externally beyond the flanking vestry and organ chamber. Its walls are of squared limestone blocks, not laid in very regular courses²; there is a chamfered plinth, like that of the aisles. In both side walls are two-light windows of the same type as those in the south aisle. The east window is of three trefoil-headed lights with foiled circles in the head, all within a chamfered frame under a moulded hood with foliate stops. Near the north end of the wall, c 1.5 m above the ground, a piece of an indented string-course has been re-used. The gable is coped; close to its apex is a stone with the incised date '1792' with a carved human head, perhaps a re-used medieval piece, above.

The **Vestry** on the south of the chancel shows some hints of a quirky mid-19th century Gothic style. It is of sneaked limestone with a chamfered plinth, a deeply-moulded string below the windows, and an ashlar eaves cornice chamfered on its lower angle. At the west end of the north wall is a square-headed doorway with an overlight, beneath a projecting timber hood on timber corbels and brackets; to the east is a three-light window with odd cusping and transom set high. On the east of the vestry is a window of two trefoil-headed lights with a quatrefoil over, beneath its own hipped gable, the apex of which, like that of the steep-pitched main roof behind, is capped by a moulded terracotta finial.

The **Organ Chamber** is of similar materials to the vestry, with the same plinth, moulded string and eaves cornice. On the east is a circular window with quatrefoil cusping, with an outer ring of rough voussoirs. The roof has a hip ending to the east, capped by another terracotta finial.

The nave has a roof of Welsh slates with a serrated red tile ridge; the roofs of the chancel with its vestry and organ chamber are of graduated green Lakeland slates

The Interior

The internal walls of the main body of the church are plastered, except for the exposed dressings of the arcades and the west wall of the nave which is of large blocks of sandstone, roughly tooled, some quite elongate. Despite its contrast with the internal walls of the tower, which are of lightly-tooled ashlar, all this must be of 1908, as the west wall now shows no indications of the two trefoil-headed lancets flanking the narrower pre-1908 tower shown on old photographs.

Considerable internal alterations were made at the west end of the **Nave** were made in 1991,

2 Possibly due to older masonry being re-used. Two or three courses at the foot of the all look more regular, and could be medieval work in situ.

the western bay of the nave having been screened off as a narthex; a new stair in the north aisle gives access to an upper room (the Shannon Room) that extends a further bay eastwards into the nave, and also westwards into the lower stage of the tower.

The **Tower** arch is of two-centred form, and of two orders; the chamfered inner order is carried on imposts with moulded capitals and bases and the wave moulded outer order is continued down the jambs towards the nave (to convex-section stops), but dies into a square jamb towards the tower. The arch has a casement-moulded hood carried on a string-course of the same section that runs the full width of the west wall.

The west window has a segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfer to its head only; the internal walls of the lower stage of the tower are of closely-tooled ashlar

The newel stair at the south-west corner of the tower is entered by a doorway with a two-centred arch and a hollow-chamfered surround; access to the clock chamber is by a square-headed doorway, chamfered towards the chamber. The internal walls of the chamber are of snecked roughly-tooled stone (including some quite large blocks, probably re-used) and the west window of the chamber has a segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfer to its head only. On the east there is a plain square-headed opening towards the church.

A second square-headed doorway gives access from the stair to the belfry, within which there is a large projecting string course, rounded on its lower angle, at the level of the sills of the four openings; this carries the girders from which the bells are hung.

At the top of the newel stair a square-headed doorway, rebated externally, gives onto the leaded roof.

On each side of the **Nave** is a five-bay arcade, with two-centred arches. Each is of two orders with narrow chamfers, except for the second and fourth arches on the north which have roll-moulded inner orders and chevron ornament on both face and soffit of outer; towards the aisle the outer orders are simply chamfered. The fifth, easternmost, arch of each arcade is of mid-19th century date, and seems to be largely of cement.

The western respond of each arcade is a corbel; that of the north arcade is of quite elaborate fluted form³, whilst that of the south is plainer, but both now partly concealed by the inserted floor and partitions. The western pier of each arcade is octagonal with a holdwater-moulded base and a moulded octagonal capital. The remaining old piers (ie the second and third) are circular, although the capitals are octagonal at the abacus; the bases, some damaged, are again of holdwater type. The bell of the capital of the second pier of the north arcade shows traces of cut-back foliage carving. The 19th-century eastern piers and responds are circular and semicircular, with scalloped capitals and chamfered bases on square plinths.

Above each bay of the arcades are a pair of clerestory windows, which have segmental-pointed rear arches with chamfered heads

The windows and doorway of the **North Aisle** all have segmental-pointed rear arches with chamfers to the head only. At east end is a stilted two-centred arch now opening into organ

3 Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 296) state 'SW corbels oddly fluted'. Their whole description is similarly confused, describing the detail of the 19th-century eastern bays of the arcades as if coeval with the remainder.

chamber, of a single chamfered order, resting on large moulded imposts and plain square jambs.

The inner doorway of the **North Porch**, which has exposed stone walls, has a two-centred arch of two chamfered orders with moulded imposts and hood. This was an external doorway before the addition of the porch; it is set in a slight projection from the wall behind, although this is no longer evident externally.

The internal window reveals of the **South Aisle** are similar to those of the north; at the east end here is a plain square-headed chamfered doorway; above it the outline of a steep stilted arch, like that at the east end of the north aisle, is just visible in the wall plaster.

The **Chancel** arch is of two-centred form, and of two chamfered orders, the inner on short shafts with scalloped ornament to both their capitals and the corbels at their bases; the chamfer of the outer order is continued to the ground.

The chancel, raised three steps above the level of the nave floor, has a panelled dado. On the south is a two-centred chamfered doorway into the vestry, with vague hints of an earlier opening visible through the plaster above; the three windows all have shallow triangular rear arches of plain square section. The opening to the organ chamber, largely concealed by the organ pipes, has a timber lintel set on moulded corbels.

The internal walls of the **Vestry** on the south of the chancel are all boarded; the windows on east and south have shallow segmental rear arches, and the doorways on west and at the west end of the south all have plain internal lintels. At the west end of the north wall is a recess with a shallow triangular head, possibly a blocked doorway.

The **Roofs** of the Church are all of 19th-century date; that of the nave is of the crown-post type, with ashlar to the eaves, whilst the aisles have regular five bay roofs, with wall-posts on moulded corbels. The chancel has a boarded panelled ceiling

Fittings and Furnishings

The **Altar** has a Frosterley marble slab, hollow chamfered on its lower edge, with its front corners carried on a pair of turned baluster shafts, described under the 'Carved Stones' section.

Some accounts (eg the VCH 246) refer to the altar slabs having the usual five incised crosses, but a close examination of it did not reveal indications of any crosses at all. The slab and its supporting balusters is shown on one of the late-18th century Grimm drawings.

The majority of the fittings and furnishings are of late 19th and 20th century dates

The **Font**, at the west end of the south aisle, is of Frosterley Marble, with a circular lead-lined bowl (with sockets for former fittings) on a shaft rising from a moulded base. This is a good late-12th century font; it is described and illustrated by the Rev. J.F.Hodgson in Transactions of the Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham & Northumberland VI, 253.

None of the older **Stained Glass** appears to be of outstanding quality; several windows are typical of their periods; the East window in memory of the Rev John Brewster (d 1860), the easternmost window in the north wall of the north aisle of 1904, and the westernmost in the south wall of the south aisle of 1952. The central window in the north aisle holds the recent 'Millennium Window' by Septimus Waugh.

Standing in the 'Narthex' is the 'Bishop's Chair', an elaborate piece of carved 17th-century woodwork, alongside an old chest, of a similar date.

In the north-west corner of the tower (in what is now a lobby containing a toilet) are two small plaques stating that the **Clock** was given in 1914 and the **Bells** in 1931⁴.

Carved Stones

Greatham Church has an important collection of lapidary material. Four items have been recognised as of Anglo-Saxon date by Cramp (1984, 90-91, plates 75-76) whose numbering and dating are here followed:

- 1 One arm and centre of cross head of early 8th century date, found in 1908 re-used in fabric of 1792 west tower (Boddington 1913, 17-19, fig.6).
- 1 One arm of a ring-headed cross, with interlace on both faces. Mid 10th to early 11th century. Boddington 1913, 15-16, fig.1.

(3a-b) The two baluster shafts which carry the front edge of the altar slab. Cramp accepts Boddington's identification of these with the mid-wall shafts from a tower belfry opening, and suggests that they have closer stylistic links with Midlands towers such as Earls Barton than with the baluster shafts known from local sites such as Jarrow., Monkwearmouth and Hart. Late 10th to early 11th century. Boddington 1913, 20-1, fig.7.

- 4 A fragment of a turned baluster of quite different character, its surface ornamented with a series of hollow grooves. Late 7th to early 8th century.

There are also a considerable number of pieces of medieval carved stone, mostly of mid- to late-12th century date:

- 5 A fragment, consisting of about half the arched head of a small light, with a socket on the inner face. Perhaps a fragment of window tracery.
- 6 A fragment with parts of two adjacent crosses enclosed in circles, each with a sunk panel containing a circular pellet between the arms. Found in the tower wall in 1908. Boddington 1913, 16, fig.2)
- 7 A fragment of stepped cross section with a square-topped ridge flanked by bands of square-edged tegulae. Perhaps part of a coped grave cover.
- 8 Fragment of a small sub-circular shaft.
- 9 The base of a small attached semicircular shaft; the rear face has a deeply cut groove, evidence of re-use.
- 10 A roll-moulded voussoir.
- 11 The remains of the bowl of a piscina, with a drain at its rear. Found in the foundations of the west wall of the nave (Boddington 1913, 19, fig 6a)

4 Two earlier bells had been cast in 1837 (VCH 246)

12 A curved block, probably part of a hoodmould, with an indented moulding. This could well come from the external or internal hoodmould over the head of one of the old chancel windows, as shown in the Grimm drawings.

13 An upright block, perhaps part of a cross shaft, with remains of chip-carved patterns. Found in the walling of the 1792 tower (Boddington 1913, 16, fig.3)

(14) - (16) are set into the internal face of the north wall of the north wall above the north door; they are thought to have been found and set in their present positions in the mid-19th century works.

14 Part of what could either be a cross shaft or a grave cover (Boddington 1913, 16, fig.4) with a cross made up of interlacing loops, and various chip-carved patterns.

15 Another piece of a curved hoodmould with an indented pattern (cf 12)

16 A square block with a chip-carved pattern.

Lying loose on top of the timber internal porch to the north door:

17 A block with an indented moulding, probably part of one of the chancel string courses.

Pieces (18) - (20) are set into the internal face of the north wall of the nave, above the arcade.

18 Above and a little to the west of the apex of the second arch from the west. Block with a groove and a roll moulding.

19 Similar but more damaged block above and a little to the west of the apex of the third arch.

20 A rectangular block with an incised pattern, possibly part of a grave slab, above and a little to the west of the head of the fourth arch. Described by Ryder (1985, 91 and pl.22)

Pieces (21 - 22) are set into the internal face of the south all of the nave, above the arcade.

21 Above and a little to the east of the apex of the third arch from the west. Stone with a groove and a chamfer below, probably part of a 13th-century string course.

22 Above and a little to the east of the apex of the second arch from the west. Rectangular block, no carving apparent, included here as it has obviously been regarded as of some significance.

23 Section of indented string course now re-used in the external face of the east wall of the chancel.

24 A large part of the head of a late-12th century cross of white limestone, found in 1908 beneath the foundations of the west wall of the nave (Boddington 1913, 16-17, fig.5),

with a floral rosette at the centre, and the splayed arms linked by a ring with nail-head ornament. Both faces are identical. This is an important piece; it was obviously a free-standing monument that could either have been part of a sepulchral memorial, a churchyard cross, or a gable finial. In 1982 (when the writer sketched it; drawing on right)) this stone lay upon a windowsill in the north aisle; its present whereabouts are unknown.

Sepulchral Monuments

(Excluding those already described under 'Carved Stones')

On the north wall of the chancel to the east of the organ is a Gothic tablet to the Rev. John Brewster, Rector of Egglecliffe and Chaplain of the Hospital, d.1842. At the west end of the south wall is marble tablet to Frances, wife of the Rev John Brewster d.1818.

There are several tablets, mostly of 19th century date, on the south wall of the south aisle, including one near the east end to the Rev Richard Brewster, Vicar of Heighington, d.1772 and his widow d 1779, signed by I. Jopling of Gateshead ; the larger tablet further west is to Mary Langley 1835, and members of her family; it is signed by W. Mars of Yarm.

On the north wall of the north aisle is a marble tablet to Ralph Bradley, Esq, d.1778 'An eminent counsellor at law born in this parish who bequeathed a large fortune acquired, in a great measure by his abilities and integrity to the purchasing of books calculated to promote the interests of virtue and religion and the happiness of mankind'. Immediately beneath is a small brass plate 'By a decree of Lord Thurlow High Chancellor of Great Britain on the second day August 1791 the charitable intention mentioned in the above monument of R.A.Bradley Esq was set aside in favour of his next of kin'.

To the east is a Gothic tablet with a Latin inscription to Thomas Clennel Wilkinson d.1860

Historical Notes

c1794 The earliest detailed description of the church is that of the Durham historian Hutchinson (2nd edition 1823, III, 109): 'The church is a neat and regular building, though small; the chancel is six paces in width and ten in length, lighted by two windows north and south, together with the east window which consists of three lights. It is divided from the nave by a circular arch springing from hexagonal pilasters: the nave has two side ailes, formed by rows of three pillars, supporting light pointed arches, two of which on the north-side have zig-zag mouldings; two pillars, towards the east, in each row, are circular, the west octagonal. There are three windows on each side. The length of the nave is 14 paces, and the width including the ailes, 13 paces. At the west end a gallery. No tower.

1823 Surtees (1823, II, 134) quotes Hutchinson's description, than adds that 'in 1792, the whole structure being ruinous, was taken down and entirely rebuilt, and a bell-tower added at the West-end, with an entrance beneath. The only parts of the old structure which are retained, are the pillars and arches on each side of the nave, forming regular ailes. The lights are all modern sashes, under pointed arches, one on each side of the chancel, and a large East window. There is a handsome gallery at the West end of the nave, supported on cast metal pillars'.

In a footnote he notes that 'the expence of rebuilding Greatham Church was so

small, that it seems worth recording.

Builder paid in cash	95.15.6
Lead roof, valued at	180.00
Chancel built by the Master	40 0 0
	£315 15 6

The price of lead was remarkably high, labour very low, and the old structure supplied a large portion of the materials’.

1834 Mackenzie and Ross (I, 497) give a similar description but add that 'in the chancel are seats belonging to the Master and brethren of Greatham hospital: and at the west end of the church are others for the inmates of Parkhurst's Hospital.'

1857 Fordyce (II,300) note that ‘The church contains accommodation for 250 persons. It is now undergoing repairs and additions, by which about 60 more sittings will be obtained. Handsome windows, harmonizing with the building, will be inserted in the east and other parts of the church. The contract has been taken for the sum of £500, which will be raised by subscription, aided by grants from the Church Building and other societies...

1894 Whellan’s Directory notes “The Church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, was erected over the foundations of an early Saxon building, by Bishop Stichell of Durham, in 1270. It was rebuilt in 1792, a clerestory added by the Rev. H. B. Tristram in 1869, and a new vestry and organ, at a cost of £650, by the present vicar in 1881. It consists of nave, aisles, chancel, and a square western tower of modest dimensions. The exterior of the church is neat and attractive; the recent additions, especially the clerestory, which is lighted by elegant quatrefoils, have been well carried out, and add much to the general appearance of the structure."

Faculties and Other Records of Structural Work

Date	Faculty No.	Works
12 September 1945	2900	Installation of electric lighting system
27 May 1981	6731	Protection of windows and redecoration of stonework.
24 June 1991	7334	Provision of upper room and installation of mezzanine floor
3 May 1996	8108	Re-order the church to provide a nave altar platform and sanctuary area.

Structural History

The church as it stands today is largely the product of a number of building phases over the last two centuries, the dates of which seem well attested. The Victoria County History (190, 245) gives the sequence as follows The medieval church, described in the Churchwardens’ Accounts as being ‘in a ruinous and decayed condition’, was rebuilt in 1792, only the old nave arcades being retained. In 1855 the nave was extended a bay eastwards, and a new chancel erected. The clerestorey was added in 1869 and then the organ chamber and vestry in 1881. In 1908 the west tower was taken down, and a new one built in the following year.

An examination of the fabric raises a few queries, notably as to the extent of the various phases of rebuilding. The building history is here examined phase-by-phase:

A

The Medieval Church

For our details of the medieval church we have Hutchinson's brief description, and some useful sketches by S H Grimm made a few years before its demolition. One of these shows the church from the north; the roofs were low-pitched and nave had a massive western bellcote and the narrow north aisle with a shoulder-headed doorway between two tall single-light windows with a smaller trefoil-headed light further east. The chancel was clearly of later 12th century date, and was of two bays with shallow pilaster buttresses, a moulded string below the round-arched windows, and an indented string at a higher level carried up over the windows as a hoodmould.

The sketch (from which the drawing above is taken) seems to show a straight joint at the south end of the east wall of the aisle, as if the aisle had been added to an earlier aisleless nave. An interior sketch shows the north arcade much as it stands today; it also indicates a window in the east end of the aisle, which does not figure on the sketch of the exterior. Another interior sketch shows the semicircular chancel arch with a plain square inner order and a narrow chamfer to the outer; it looks stylistically rather earlier than the north arcade and the internal detail of the chancel, depicted on a fourth sketch that shows similar string courses to those on the exterior, with later medieval windows on east and south, a trefoiled piscina on the south and a segmental-arched aumbry on the north.

Most authorities date the surviving nave arcade to the last quarter of the 12th century (the Victoria County History gives 1180-1190) ; the use of Romanesque motifs such as chevron along with the two-centred Gothic arch is again seen at Darlington, and the indented or 'nutmeg' ornament of the old chancel string courses at several Durham churches including St Helen Auckland and Staindrop.

A

The 1792 Rebuilding

Most authorities relate that the church was rebuilt in 1792, with the exception of its nave arcades.⁵ This seems quite clear, but of course the term 'rebuilding' can be interpreted in different ways. Three different scenarios are possible:

- 1 That the church was taken down to the ground and re-erected; the nave arcades being 'retained' (as Surtees states) in the sense that they were re-used.

In favour of this, the 1990 archaeological investigation (Tann 1990) showed that the pier bases of both arcades appeared to be set upon infill within an earlier trench. Also, Boddington (1912, 16) relates that in 1908 a late-12th century cross head as found 'actually beneath the foundations of the west wall contiguous to the tower'. He saw this walling as 'Norman'.

- 1 That, as is generally accepted, the arcades (and chancel arch) alone were retained in situ from the medieval church.

This is backed by the fact that the Grimm drawing of the north arcade shows it much as it stands today, and also that Boddington (op.cit 1912, 23-24) quotes an article in the former South Durham Herald, describing the 'restoration of 1860' which states that the 1792 works had left three feet of 'rubbish' that completely buried the bases of the arcade piers.

- 1 That the arcades and much of the lower walling of the medieval church were retained, 'rebuilding' constituting the rebuilding of the upper walls and renewal of all the windows. Boddington (...12) implies this by stating that the 1792 work 'obliterated' the Norman walls 'to within a few feet of their foundation'.

This could be argued both from a brief examination of the fabric of the present building and the fact that the 'rebuilt' church still seems to have followed the medieval ground plan⁶; it would also help to explain the surprisingly modest cost of the 'rebuilding', which several authorities have commented upon.

The medieval bell cote was replaced by a slender west tower at this time; fortunately a photograph of this survives (hanging in the west end of the north aisle). At its base was a round-headed archway, with imposts and keystone, which presumably formed the main entrance to the church. Above was a Gothic-arched window holding a sash window, its glazing bars intersecting at its head. This may have been typical of the sash windows of the 1792 church.

C The Mid-19th century

5 The Rev Reynold's notes (Proc.Soc.Ant.Newcastle IX (1900), 276) give the church as being 'nearly rebuilt/ in 1788 with the tower being built in 1792. The date tablet on the east gable however gives '1792'

6 It would be very unusual for an 18th-century church to have such an elongate chancel as; it would seem more likely that the 1792 building had a short box-like chancel.

In either 1855 or 1860⁷ the church underwent , to quote Boddington, ‘one of those fatal ‘Victorian restorations’‘ when the nave was extended a bay eastward at the expense of the chancel, resulting in the destruction of the Norman chancel arch⁸. Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 296) date the enlargement to 1855-6, with the architect as J.P.Pritchett, to designs of J. Middleton. The Rev Reynolds (1900, 275) cites the bracket 1860-1873 for the rebuilding or alteration of ‘the north and south walls’.

The fact that this mid-19th century restoration took place in at least two separate phases is demonstrated by the difference in character between the windows of north and south aisles. There was clearly a concern that the building regained a fittingly Gothic character, with the result that the 1792 sash windows were replaced, and various buttresses added. The results did not please everyone; the redoubtable Rev J.F.Hodgson (1902, 200) predictably described the building as ‘rebuilt in the (sic) vulgarest sham Gothic manner imaginable’.

It is recorded that a new chancel was erected at this time. Despite the appearance of some of the fabric in the chancel, this must have been the case, as is demonstrated by setting the length of the present church against that of the medieval building, as recorded by Hutchinson. The retention of the ‘1792’ date stone in the c 1860 east gable seems unusual.

The addition of the clerestory in 1869 (by R.J.Withers, Pevsner & Williamson, op,cit) was clearly to the detriment of the proportions of the slender west tower of 1792. In 1881 came the construction of organ chamber and vestry flanking the chancel; it would appear that prior to this there were narrow lancet windows in the east ends of the aisles. That on the north was remodelled as an arch between aisle and organ chamber, that on the south replaced by a doorway from aisle to vestry. There were also narrow trefoil-arched lancets in the west wall of the nave on either side of the tower; these were presumably of mid-19th century, although it is just possible that they were medieval survivals, and had previously flanked a large buttress carrying the bell cote (cf Startforth in North Yorkshire).

(D) The Twentieth Century

In 1908/9 At this time the present west tower and north porch were built, to the design of the well-known Durham church architect C Hodgson Fowler being employed. In 1991 the west end of the church was remodelled internally; as with the earlier phases of remodelling, this was an adaptation quite characteristic of its period, but one that entailed little disturbance of the pre-existing fabric other than the concealing of some detail of the nave arcades.

The Churchyard

The church stands close to the south side of , and west-of-centre in a roughly rectangular churchyard, the grounds of Greatham Hospital lying to the north and west. The churchyard monuments are largely of 19th-century date; as one would expect the older ones, including a

7 Fordyce writing in 1857 implies that a programme of works was continuing at this time.

8 Although Surtees says nothing about this having survived the 1792 works; might Boddington be in error here? The South Durham Herald article refers to the ‘substructure of the old chancel arch’ being seen in 1855 or 1860. Was this of an even earlier arch, or was it of the arch drawn by Grimm and demolished in 1792?

few box tombs, are to the south and west of the church. A row of 18th-century headstones, some badly eroded, have been re-set on the west, just outside the east end of the Hospital Chapel.

On the east, towards the road, a large section of the boundary wall, of 'snecked' stone is clearly a 20th-century rebuild; there is an older section, of coursed and roughly-squared limestone, to the south. The wall on the north has a steep brick coping; the ground that drops away immediately beyond has clearly been artificially scarped. At the west end of the long north wall is an opening into the Hospital grounds; its east jamb is chamfered and rebated, and looks as if it may be a medieval feature. The taller wall on the west side of the churchyard, which links to the north-east corner of the Hospital Chapel (a 1788 rebuilding of a medieval predecessor; it has a date stone in its gable very like that of the parish church chancel), is also of interest. It has a set of 'mid-wall quoins' (which include one re-used rebated and chamfered block), an odd feature sometimes found in a medieval context.

Archaeological Assessment

It is known that the remains of what was seen as an earlier building were seen beneath the floor during the mid-19th century restoration; it is highly likely that these survive, at least in part. It is difficult to make any assessment of the flooring of the present building, as the entire interior now has fitted carpets. It is quite probable that there was a underfloor heating system at some stage, which will of course have further disturbed sub-floor remains, but nevertheless any disturbance will require archaeological monitoring.

Turning to the above-ground fabric, it remains unclear whether some medieval fabric may survive in the walls of the aisles as well as the side walls of the nave. The c1860 newspaper article quoted by Boddington (1912, 23) refers to remains of fresco paintings on the walls; although these were 'far too mutilated to be renewed or preserved' it does not record whether they were actually destroyed or simply plastered over again. Any renewal of plaster in the nave, aisles or western part of the chancel will require monitoring.

Outside the building, there appears to be a perimeter drain around the circumference of the building, which will to some extent have disturbed the relationship between the building itself and associated external deposits (ie layers of masons' chippings etc). The churchyard, as in the case of all medieval churches, remains an area of archaeological interest and any ground works will require a watching brief. There may have been subsidiary building associated with the church; the pre-1908 photograph hanging in the north aisle shows a roof-line on the north side of the 'old' tower, indicating that there was some sort of pent-roofed structure set against the west wall of the nave and north aisle, foundations of which may survive.

Priorities

Whilst the building itself is in good condition, this is one church where the collection of lapidary material - largely either Saxon or Norman stonework - give cause for concern. The various stones built into the walls are safe enough, but the smaller pieces in the nave are very much 'at risk'. Most of these are small, and thus liable to inadvertent damage as they are moved around; at the time of survey they were simply piled into a narrow gap between pews and a partition wall at the west end of the nave, without any interpretative material. These are important pieces, which, together with the baluster shafts carrying the altar slab, provide our principal evidence for the earliest history of the site. Especially worrying is the fact that the fine Norman cross head, after the baluster shafts arguable the most important sculptural piece from the church, seems to have disappeared. Stones such as this should either be kept in a

locked cabinet, or be securely fixed in some manner, as theft is increasingly common.

Peter F Ryder March 2001

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Greatham**

**An Archaeological
Assessment**

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St John the Baptist, Greatham
Photographs to accompany Archaeological Assessment
March 2001, Peter F Ryder

1. General south-west view
2. Tower and nave from south-east of nave
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5. General south-east view
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22. Old photograph (pre-1908) showing 1792 west tower
23. North-west corner of churchyard, showing ?medieval jamb on left.
24. Western churchyard wall, showing mid-wall quoins.