

ST MARY MAGDALENE, HART

Hart parish church stands on rising ground on the north side of the village, immediately to the east of the site of the medieval Brus manor house. The church consists of a nave with a two-bay north aisle (its east end partitioned off the form a vestry), a four-bay south aisle with a south porch, and a short chancel.

The Exterior

The **West Tower**, virtually square in plan, has three storeys; there is a single chamfered set-back above the lower stage; there are no buttresses or plinth. The fabric is squared and coursed Magnesian Limestone, the courses varying in height. The quoins generally course in with the adjacent walling, and include a pair of very elongate slabs at each of the western angles, c 2.5 m above ground level. These slabs, each c 2 m long, may be re-used grave slabs; at the north-west corner there is a similar pair just above the chamfered set-back.

The lower stage is lit by small lancet windows on the west and south, with have chamfered surrounds. Both have the unusual feature of larger stones set directly above their heads, that on the south having a roughly-incised line following the shape of the lancet head below. The second stage of the tower has another lancet, with a rather flattened head, on the south; its jambs are each a single upright block, hinting that its external opening at least may be a post-medieval remodelling. To the east of the window is a short straight joint, on the line of the external face of the west wall of the nave, apparently indicating that this once extended to a greater height.

The east wall of the tower, above the present low-pitched nave roof, shows the tabling for a previous roof at an angle of around 45 degrees; this tabling is integral with the masonry of the wall, and therefore contemporary with at least the upper sections of the tower.

The belfry has a plain square-headed opening on the south, set a little west of centre, which seems to have been roughly cut through the wall masonry, without any cut dressings; on the west is a taller opening, probably originally a lancet but with its head now cut square. On the east there is a single lancet, and on the north no opening at all. There are a pair of oversailing courses at the base of the parapet, the lower with a chamfer and the upper with a wave moulding; the parapet itself which has a moulded coping, and a small pinnacle, little more than a spike above a square base, at each corner.

Little of the **Nave** walling is exposed externally. The south end of the west wall, to the south of the tower, shows fabric quite similar to that of the tower, although the quoins are a little larger, and one or two are quite elongate, they are not of the dimensions one would normally associate with Pre-Conquest work.

The western section of the north wall of the nave, a length of c 2 m, extends beyond the west end of the north aisle, and has a stepped buttress at its west end. There is no evidence of any quoining here, suggesting that the nave angle was rebuilt when the buttress was added; the quoins might have been moved to the outer angles of the buttress. The fabric of the north wall is quite irregular and rubble, with sundry bulges; just below the eaves the beginnings of a string-course (better seen inside) are visible, of square section, chamfered beneath.

The south-east quoin is exposed at the east end of the south aisle, and is again of similar character

(blocks generally c 0.25 m high); high up there is one much larger block that seems to have served as a kneeler an earlier east gable, with above it a triangular block with a cut-out to carry the next stone of the former coping. The east walls of aisle and nave now share a continuous coping at a fairly shallow pitch. The adjacent fabric of the east wall of the nave looks rubblier than the west wall; there are evidences for a steeper roof line to a previous chancel. The quoins of the north-east angle of the nave are only partially exposed (in the embayment between aisle, nave and chancel walls; see below) but are again of no great size, and indeterminate character.

The **South Aisle** is built of creamy Magnesian Limestone; at the south-west angle are neatly cut quoins, not much taller than the adjacent coursing. At the head of the wall is c 0.5 m of darker stone, clearly a later heightening; the parapet above, of large squared blocks, has a casement-moulded string course at its base, and a moulded coping.

The west wall of the aisle has a lancet window, with a chamfered surround and a hoodmould decorated with nail-head, with worn terminals; the southern appears to be an eight-petalled flower, but the northern has been virtually destroyed by erosion. At the north end of the wall, c 3 m up and set against the earlier nave quoin, is a re-used block with a roll moulding on one angle.

The south wall of the aisle is in three bays, with the south porch projecting from the western; between the central and eastern bays is a stepped buttress. These bays each have a two-light window with a segmental-pointed head of two orders, the outer with a broad casement moulding or hollow chamfer, and the inner stepped and hollow-chamfered; each has a single mullion, with a straight chamfer, set centrally, and rising vertically to join the arch. Although the combination of arched window head and simple vertical mullions can occur in medieval windows (eg Middleton Tyas and Eggleston Abbey in North Yorkshire) here it seems to result from secondary alterations (19th century?), as the window heads seem to have traces of cut-back tracery. The surrounds of the windows look medieval, but the present mullions are relatively recent. Beneath the sill of the eastern window is a re-used voussoir with a deep chevron moulding. At the south-east angle of the aisle is a shallow diagonal stepped buttress.

The east wall has a larger window of the same form as those on the south, but in this case of three lights; once again the present mullions are relatively recent.

The **South Porch** has side walls of rubble, but the front wall has more squared stone (a mixture of limestone and sandstone, variously tooled; much of this material has clearly been re-used, and the whole porch has the appearance of having been rebuilt at some relatively recent date. The roof is of graduated Westmorland slate. The outer archway is old, and has a segmental head, and two continuous orders with hollow chamfers; on the east of the arch, c 1 m above the ground, is a stone with an incised double circle, probably a sundial. The gable has a recent coping, chamfered on its lower edge.

The west wall of the **North Aisle** is of roughly squared and coursed limestone, and contains a small square-headed window with a chamfered surround. The north wall of the aisle is of two bays, articulated by stepped buttresses; it contains a complex mixture of fabrics, the greater part being of roughly-squared and roughly-coursed stone, although there are some areas of rubble and others of larger squared blocks (notably in the upper part of the western section of the wall), probably re-used; in general the fabric is much more irregular than that of the south aisle. To the east of the western window a series of mullions have been re-used, distinguishable by their end

sections; one has a small incised cross fleury, almost like a consecration cross. The western buttress, of squared stone, looks as if it may have been rebuilt; c 0.15 m east if it is a straight joint in the lower courses of the wall, which might either relate to a reconstruction of the buttress, or possibly represent the eastern jamb of a former north door (of which there is apparently a tradition). Low down on the buttress are remains of a broad concave moulding, seen again on the central buttress, and akin to the odd base mouldings on both arcades. The two windows in the wall are each of two lights under slightly-stilted semicircular arches with a continuous hollow chamfer; as in the south aisle, the central mullions simply rise to intersect the arch, but in this case the mullions have deep hollow chamfers; the stonework of both windows looks post-medieval (18th or early 19th century?) and is probably contemporary with the rebuilding of the upper parts of the wall. There are slight traces of possible earlier openings; half way between the western window and the west end of the wall there are remains of what might be the jambs of a small opening (the eastern is the clearer), quite high up in the wall, in the area of larger squared blocks. Between the western window and the central buttress a slight and irregular set-back two-thirds of the way up the wall may mark a rebuilding line. The central buttress contains a fair amount of reused stonework; it shows remains of the same concave moulding seen on that to the west. A metre or so east of the eastern window are traces of another straight joint, quite high up, possibly indicating an earlier opening. The east end buttress looks relatively recent (19th century?). The aisle has a parapet like that on the south.

Set in the angle between the west end of the aisle and the nave wall is a brick boiler house of 19th or early 20th century date, its floor c 1.5 m below the level of the adjacent churchyard.

The east end of the aisle is placed rather oddly a little to the east of the line of the east wall of the nave, leaving a strange recess or embayment at its south end, between itself, the east wall of the nave and the north wall of the chancel. The wall is largely of rubble, and has quoins at each end; it contains a window of three lights, with pointed arches, under a square head, with pierced uncusped panels in the spandrels. Both inner and outer surrounds have plain chamfers; all the stonework is 'old' and quite heavily weathered.

The **Chancel** is largely built of square and coursed limestone, the blocks varying in size and doubtless including some re-used material; the eastern quoins are regularly-cut sandstone blocks. There is no plinth, or any buttresses, but there is a plain projecting eaves course of square section. On the south there is a ragged straight joint c 0.30 m from the west end of the wall, indicating the survival of a stub of medieval walling; this includes the weathered remains (sandstone) of one jamb and the hoodmould of what must have been a low-side window, and above this a vertical line of three limestone blocks that might conceivably represent the west jamb of a second window higher up the wall. It is possible that old fabric also survives in the lower courses of the wall as far as a break midway along the wall (beneath the single window), east of which there are large diagonally-tooled blocks of sandstone of 18th/early 19th century character (also seen in the lower courses of the east end) at the same level. The only window in the wall is one of three lights, under a segmental head. The surround, of diagonally-tooled sandstone ashlar, is set proud of the wall face; the mullions rise unbroken to intersect the head, and there is a simple chamfered surround. Set c 1.5 m to the east of the window, and c 3.0 m above ground level, is a limestone block with a relief carving of St George and the Dragon, clearly a later medieval piece. The east window has a similar raised surround to that on the south, although the head is of segmental-pointed form; the trefoiled heads of the three lights are apparently a later modification.

The north wall of the chancel is of regularly coursed stone, much obscured by heavy pointing. Near the centre is a single window under a segmental arch, this time with its chamfered surround set flush with the wall; the inner frame (enclosing three trefoiled ogee-headed lights, with pierced spandrels) looks like late 19th century. The outer frame is older stonework, and might even be late medieval work; it is not clear whether this is a re-used piece, or whether a substantial part of the wall may be in situ medieval work retained in the 1806 rebuilding.

The Interior

The internal walls of the church are bare of any plaster, the joints between the stone are accentuated by an almost-black pointing. The floor of the nave is at a considerably lower level than the external ground level, three steps descending from the south doorway into the aisle; the tower floor is raised three steps above that of the nave.

The internal walls of the **Tower** are of squared stone. The lancets on west and south have rear arches of an almost four-centred form, with curving lines where the head meets the splayed sides; the internal heads are considerably higher than the external, an awkward arrangement which seems to imply that there are two phases of work here (see 'structural history' section). There are no other features in the internal walls except for two shallow corbels towards either end of the west wall, quite low down, and larger roughly-shaped corbels, three on the north and four on the south, which support the ends of the (19th century) transverse beams that carry the floor of the second-stage chamber

In tower arch in the west wall of the nave is a good piece of 12th-century work. This has attached shafts to the jambs, to both nave and tower, with their bases c 1 m above the present (nave) floor, cushion capitals, and an impost chamfered beneath; the semicircular arch itself has a roll moulding on each of its lower angles. On the north side of the arch is a very puzzling feature; what appears to be a continuation of the impost of the arch (a projecting string chamfered beneath) is displaced c 0.60 m above it; there is no sign of any such continuation on the south. The walling above the tower arch is of very similar fabric to the internal wall faces of the tower, and may have been re-faced in the 12th century.

The internal walls of the first stage of the tower, reached by a recent metal ladder, have been heavily pointed. The only feature is the window on the south which has a shouldered rear arch. Whilst many medieval churches have evidence of a high-level doorway between tower and nave roof, there is no sign of anything of the sort here, although the upper half of the east wall is rendered. The ceiling of the chamber is carried by three modern iron girders, running east-west, providing additional support for four older north-south beams, which rest on roughly-shaped corbels like those below.

Another modern metal ladder gives access to the belfry. Here the east window has a shouldered rear arch, and an inner lintel formed by a stone with an incised pattern of intersecting circles; the west window has a similar rear arch, virtually obscured by render.

The low-pitched roof of the tower is relatively recent, and has a central north-south tie-beam carrying the ridge and purlins.

Inside the **Nave**, the organ at the north-west corner hides the internal face of the surviving length

of the north wall. This wall is 0.88 m thick; the inserted arcade is of two broad bays, with arches rather more segmental than semicircular in form. Each has three chamfered orders, the chamfers narrowing from inner to outer orders. The central pier is octagonal, with quite an elaborate moulded capital, and a tall moulded base incorporating a deep overhanging casement moulding, resting on a square base with spurs at the angles. The semi-octagonal responds have had similar detail, although the eastern has been partly cut away; a large square socket, presumably for a screen, remains. At the west end of the arcade, the inner face of the west wall of the aisle appears to have been cut back to expose the outer order of the arch, perhaps implying that the wall has been rebuilt.

The walling above the arcade is of a mixture of fabrics, mostly coursed stone with small packing pieces. There are remains of a very small window visible only from the aisle, in the spandrel above the central pier. All that is visible is the sill, two stones of the right (west) jamb and one of the left. High up the wall, above the arcade, is a plain square-section string course with a chamfer on its lower angles (briefly visible outside at the west end of the wall). A disturbed patch of walling, at the same level as the small blocked window, directly above the eastern respond of the arcade, which might conceivably represent a second early window. A gap in the string above the eastern arch of the arcade probably indicates a rebuilt section of wall; there is more evidence of disturbance close to the east end of the wall. Below the string are a series of ten corbels, apparently 12th-century work, carved as grotesque heads.

The south arcade is of four bays, and pierced through a wall only 0.50 m thick, which is generally thought of as a rebuild; ragged breaks visible on both east and west walls seem to indicate that the internal face of the original wall was c 0.48 m north of its successor, although there are also similar breaks in the arcade wall itself, a short distance from each end (see 'Structural History' section for an alternative interpretation). The arches are of rather stilted (almost 'horseshoe') four-centred form, and each of two hollow-chamfered orders. The piers are octagonal, with moulded capitals and bases each with a series of hollow chamfers; the bases are somewhat similar to those of the north arcade (noticeably in that they have spurs at the angles), the capitals less so. On the outer face of the wall there are a series of corbels above the arcade, much simpler than those on the north; these appear to have carried earlier roof timbers of the aisle. On the same face of the wall the remains of a blocked opening, presumably a window, are clearly visible, c 0.60 m wide and intersected by the second arch (from the east); it may have been square-headed, although this is not certain. There are possible hints of a second opening at the same level further to the west.

The internal walls of the **South Aisle** are of roughly squared and roughly-coursed stone. The western lancet has a distorted rear arch of vaguely four-centred form, its internal sill c 2.5 m above the floor, with below it several re-set stones (see 'carved stones' and 'sepulchral monuments' sections) and a large tablet commemorating the 1890 restoration, with the vicar and churchwardens' names. The south doorway, inside the porch, has an almost semicircular arch of two continuous hollow-chamfered orders, similar to but much less weathered than the outer arch. The doors themselves have fielded panels, and are probably of early 18th-century date. The rear arch is of similar form, rebated, but without any chamfer. The two southern windows, and that in the east wall, have plain rear arches, of stepped section, their form following that of the window heads. At the east end of the south wall is a medieval piscina with a lancet-shaped chamfered arch; the shallow circular bowl, with a central drain, is contained within the trapezoidal recess.

The internal walls of the **North Aisle** are of coursed roughly-squared stone. The small west window has a plain stone lintel internally, and the two north windows plain rear arches of splayed and stepped section internally, similar to those in the south aisle. On the east side of the western window are the remains of the internal eastern jamb of a predecessor. Some vague areas of disturbance higher up may relate to earlier roof timbers. The east end of the aisle is now partitioned off as a vestry; at the extreme east end of the north wall is a feature resembling a shallow internal buttress; this must relate to a relatively recent repair as the VCH plan shows a fireplace in this corner of the aisle.

The interior of the **South Porch** has stone benches on each side; above them three weathered medieval head corbels have been re-set in each wall; at the north end of the west wall, just above the bench, is a limestone block with two incised lines, that might be part of a cross slab.

Although the **Chancel** itself was largely rebuilt in 1806 the chancel arch and wall above are of special interest. The arch is quite broad, and of very similar form (ie somewhere between semicircular and segmental) to the arches of the north arcade; it also is of three chamfered orders. The responds are semi-octagonal, with an extra chamfered order towards the nave; they have simpler moulded capitals than the arcade, and chamfered bases.

There are a number of interesting features above the chancel arch, visible on both east and west faces of the wall. Immediately above the extrados of the present arch are the remains of a narrower predecessor, a series of ten voussoirs. These have no dateable features, but show that the semicircular arch of which they formed part was set central to the original nave (ie before the south wall was rebuilt), whilst the present arch is placed central to the nave as widened. To the north of the arch, two elongate blocks seem to be the remains of a string course, possibly of curved section, which was presumably a continuation of the impost of the early arch.

Three courses above the extrados of the earlier chancel arch is the sill of an unusual opening, apparently a doorway. This has jambs, without any rebate, cut at right angles to the wall and a gabled triangular head. Each of the jambs is made up of four large blocks, although neither the jambs nor the inclined slabs which form the head are actually through stones (contrary to Taylor & Taylor 1965, 288).

At either end of the east face of the wall irregular areas of disturbance presumably denote the cut-away side walls of an earlier and narrower chancel, although these are too irregular to allow any accurate measurement of its width to be made.

There are few features of interest within the chancel. The south window has a segmental rear arch that looks more recent than its jambs whereas the northern has a segmental rear arch that appears contemporary with the adjacent wall. The masonry around the east window (which has a simple rear arch of four-centred form) looks secondary to the wall, and that in the apex of the gable above the window is clearly relatively recent.

The **Roofs** all appear to be of 19th or early 20th century date. That of the nave is of eight bays, with low-pitched king-post trusses. The chancel ceiling is very plain, simply with a moulded wall-plate, one purlin on each slope, and a ridge, with boarding between.

FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

The **Font**, standing just in front of the tower arch, and is of some importance; the VCH account describes it as follows '(it) is a very beautiful example of 15th-century work, and consists of an octagonal bowl 2'6" in diameter standing on a shaft and pedestal of the same form, all elaborately carved. The carving on the eight sides of the bowl is as follows: east side, two figures, one holding a book in his right hand and a club in his left, and the other a book and three loaves or stones (?SS. Philip and James); south, two figures, one, much mutilated, holding a staff (?) in his right hand, and a book in his left, and the other a book in the right hand and in the left a boat (?); west, the Resurrection, with the emblems of the Passion on either side; north, two figures, one with a spear and a book, and the other a book and a saw (? SS. Simon and Jude). The other sides bear the emblems of the four Evangelists. The carvings on the shaft are: east, a crowned queen holding a book and palm branch in her hands, and through the breast, from right to left, a sword (?St. Euphemia); south-east, a pope with the triple crown and double patriarchal cross in his left hand (St. Gregory the Great); south, a crowned queen holding a book and a pair of pincers (St. Lucy); south-west, an abbot with pastoral staff and book, and over his arm a maniple; west, an abbess in coif and wimple, holding crozier and book standing upon a dragon (St. Elizabeth); north-west, a bishop in pontificals with crozier and chain and fetter-lock (St. Leonard); north, a crowned queen, sitting, with a book in her left hand and the model of a church in her right (St. Barbara); and, north-east, an abbess, holding book and key (St. Petronilla). Round the bottom of the bowl are eight demi-angels holding shields, and round the base of the shaft, at the angles, four tonsured and four unttonsured heads, between which are four-leaved flowers of various patterns.

An earlier font now stands at the south-west corner of the south aisle, and is cut from a single large square block; it has an attached shaft with a cushion capital at each angle, and is of 12th-century date. Both fonts are illustrated and described at some length in the Trans Arch.Soc.Dur. and Northumb. VI, 206-8.

The furnishings of the church are generally of late 19th or 20th century date; the **Pulpit**, on its moulded stone base, bears a plaque stating that it was a gift from Mrs W A Wooler of Sadberge Hall, in 1889. At the north-east corner of the nave is a **Vestment Chest** of some age, although it may not be pre-1800.

The altar includes a medieval **Altar Slab** with five consecration crosses, found outside the east end of the chancel, and re-instated in 1898.

None of the **Stained Glass** is of any great age; a letter dated 28.12.94 from Neil Moat (DAC records) describes all the windows but one as being by the 'dull Newcastle studio of George Joseph'; the 'stunning exception' is the western of the two windows in the south wall of the south aisle, a World War I memorial in the Arts-and-Crafts style, probably designed by Philip B Bennison, and executed by Lowndes and Drury of London.

The Bells; there are three bells, all cast by R Watson of Newcastle in 1822. A 1976 report on the bells and frame by Ronald Clouston (DAC records) states that the frame is of 18th century date, with vertical and inclined props inserted in 1822 when the bells were hung for full-circle ringing; at this time the frame/wall junctions were assessed to be in poor condition.

The basic components of the frames are three beams spanning the belfry from north to south, set in sockets in the side walls and supported both by braces set into the walls and struts from a beam

below.

Pre-Conquest Sculpture.

Hart church preserves an important collection of Pre-Conquest carved stones, most of which appear to have come to light during restoration works in 1886; these are described in detail by Cramp (1984,93-37), who enumerates:

- (1) The upper part of a cross shaft, of mid-10th century date
- (2) Part of a cross shaft, late 9th or early 10th century.
- (3) Part of a cross shaft, or the side of a cross base, 11th century.
- (4) Part of a cross shaft; last quarter of 9th or first quarter of 10th century.
- (5) Fragment of a cross shaft; last quarter of 9th or first quarter of 10th century.
- (6) Incomplete cross shaft, built into east wall of porch c 0.60 m above the ground; 11th century.
- (7) Incomplete cross head, ploughed up in 1967 at the east end of the village in the 'Old Kirk Field', showing the Lamb surrounded by the symbols of the Evangelists./ Second quarter of 9th century.
- (8) Fragment of centre of cross head. First half of 10th century.
- (9) Part of lower arm of cross head. 10th century.
- (10 a-b) Two fragments of baluster shaft. Early 8th century.
- (11 a-d) Four fragments of columns or baluster shafts. First half of 9th century.
- (12) Sundial (op.cit, 157)

SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS

Two cross slabs, one of 14th century date and the other possibly 12th century or even earlier, are now built into the internal face of the west wall of the south aisle, along with a fragment of a stone with a Lombardic inscription 'HIC IACET/...../IACET IN TV/M....' (for more detailed description and illustrations see Ryder 1985, 94 & plate 36). The stone re-used as the internal lintel of the eastern belfry window may be part of another medieval grave slab of some type, although its design does not fit into any readily-recognisable category.

There are only two post-medieval monuments of any note. At the east end of the south wall of the south aisle is a pedimented wall tablet to John Scurfield of Stockton, d.1780, and on the south of the sanctuary is a large wall tablet with a broken pediment and urns, with an inscription to members of the Ellerker family who died at Hart; John Ellerker d.1771

HISTORICAL NOTES

The early history of Hart is discussed by Austin (1976, 72-80); the following notes are abstracted from this account:

- 7th century. Hart was an important early estate centre, which began to break up when Bishop Ecgred (830-845) granted Billingham 'in Heorternesse' to the Cuthbert Community; the 7th-century monastery of Heruteu, probably on the headland at Hartlepool, may have drawn on the revenues of the estate.
- 1106? The manor of Hart and Harterness, now reduced in size, granted to Robert de Brus, and held by his family until 1306 when Robert de Brus VII assumed the Scottish throne, and Edward I granted it to the Clifford family.
- 1119 Hart Church and its tithes are included in the foundation grant of Guisborough Priory
- 1794 The earliest detailed description of the church is provided by the Durham historian Hutchinson (III, 35): 'the church stands in an elevated situation; the chancel is twelve paces long and five wide, with a large window to the east, and two small windows north and south; it is divided from the nave by a large circular arch. The nave has two side ailes; is in length to the tower fourteen paces, and in width, including the ailes, fifteen paces; the north aile is formed by one short column, supporting circular arches, and is lighted by two side windows, and one to the east; the south aile has three small octagonal pillars, the arches a little pointed, two side windows, and one to the east, under pointed arches: The tower is low. In the south wall of the chancel is a figure in armour, cut in relief, slaying a dragon, a cross upon the shield. The font is much sculptured, bearing the emblematical figures of the evangelists, with the figures of Peter and Paul in relief.'
- 1823 The historian Surtees (III, 95-96) recognised that 'the structure seems to include some portions of building of much higher antiquity'; his description is shorter than Hutchinson's, but includes more detail on the font.
- 1834 Mackenzie and Ross (I, 454-5) comment on the condition of the building: 'from the dampness which prevails in the church, this venerable specimen of antiquity may literally be said to have arrived at a "green old age"; the churchyard was also extremely damp, but was 'undergoing the process of draining'.
- 1843 Some extracts from the account of the church by the antiquary Sir Stephen Glynne (reproduced in Proc.Soc.Antiquaries Newcastle 3rd ser. III (1908), 185-6) illustrate the condition of the building at this time:

‘This is an interesting church with a good deal of semi Norman work of good kind....The porch has head capitals under its parapet. The windows have nearly all lost their tracery - some have been Perpendicular.. The nave is of good width, and the Tower arch not being hidden by a gallery, the effect would be fine, were it not for the hideous coats of whitewash, alternating with lamp black, which, after the Durham fashion, so barbarously disfigure the arches and walls. ...The Chancel is modern, in a hideous style, erected 1806...

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
59	1727 Petition for making the steeple a flat roof; 'the steeple of our church is an ancient square building with a spire of wood on the top, which is covered by lead'; the collapse of the spire was feared.
64	1805 Petition to 'take down and rebuild the chancel'; the old chancel, a 'very ancient building' which was 'in a decayed state' had measured 39'3" by 17'6"; it was to be rebuilt 25' long by 17'6" wide.
	1884-5 Restoration works (VCH, 260)
	1889-91 Restoration works (ibid); tablet at west end of south aisle dated '1890' commemorating restoration.
396/27 10.10.98	Instructions for further restoration works include 'lower part of chancel floor, remove pulpit to south side of church, open out blocked window (on north of chancel), to erect reredos and panelling in chancel, provide new altar rails and credence table, lay a passage in the chancel with paving, place new choir fronts and one seat in the chancel, remove prayer desk to the north side of the chancel, and to move the organ out of the chancel.
292	10.1.89 Reseating etc.
2592	17.3.1936 Introduction of new heating apparatus
2605	11.6.36 Electric lighting.
3998	30.12.57 (Archdeacon's Certificate) Replacement of heating boiler.

5659	3.3.77 (AC).	Restoration of bell tower, walls and bell chamber floor.
6051	19.11.82	Replacement of lead roof with stainless steel.
6607	5.11.87	Replacement of six elms and planting of oak saplings in churchyard

THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

To make a proper interpretation of the structural history of the church would entail recording and study of the unusually-complex fabric that is beyond the scope of this assessment; the following account, which in places conflicts with published sources, is at best tentative.

Both historical evidence, and early sculptural material, point to the existence of a Pre-Conquest church at Hart. The nave walls, the earliest part of the standing fabric, have long been considered of Saxon date. This identification was first made by Hodges (1894, 1-2) whose account mentions features - the early string courses on the internal faces of both end walls of the nave - omitted by most later writers. The Taylors (1965, 287-9) consider the nave 'possibly period A' (pre-Viking). Austin (1976, 129-130) published a drawing and description only of the east wall of the nave, interpreting its lower part, along with the remains of the early chancel arch, as pre-dating the 'late Saxon or early Norman' upper wall with its gable-headed doorway, which he sees as contemporary with the widening of the nave. Austin admits that 'much work remains to be done on this structure'.

However, a number of the published descriptions of the fabric, including that of the Taylors, contain significant errors, and the question of the date of the nave walls should perhaps be reconsidered. Two possible interpretations are discussed below:

(1a) The nave walls: Early Norman rather than Saxon?

The nave quoins, although they have been described as 'massive quoin stones characteristic of the (Saxon) period' (Hodgkin 1913, 152) are in fact neither especially large nor of distinctive Pre-Conquest form. Pre-Conquest walls are typically thin (Monkwearmouth 0.61 m thick, Jarrow 0.69 m) but the north and east walls at Hart (the western may have been thickened, and the southern has been rebuilt) are 0.88 m, much more a typical 'Norman' thickness; the Taylors quote 2'4" ((0.71 m) for the north wall, but this is incorrect. This leaves us with the features in the east wall, the earlier chancel arch cut by its successor, and the high-level triangular-headed opening. Most older writers saw the present chancel arch (and north arcade) as 12th-century work, presumably on the strength of the semicircular arches; the VCH account (1908, 260) saw the arches as 12th century but the piers and responds as reconstructed in the 15th century, whilst both Austin (op.cit) and Pevsner & Williamson (1984, 303) see them as entirely 15th century. This latter view is almost certainly correct; a salient point here is that the chancel arch is set central to the nave in its present slightly widened form, ie after the south wall was rebuilt. Thus the argument for the relative age of the earlier chancel arch (ie that it must be pre-Norman as it is cut by a Norman arch) is removed. The surviving voussoirs of the arch carry no dateable feature; they could easily be 12th century; as the Taylors correctly point out, the jointing between the

voussoirs does not correlate from one wall face to the other, proving that no through stones (a distinctive Saxon feature) were used; the remains of what appears to be an impost band relating to the arch are very weathered, but look to be of an unusual convex section that might conceivably be late Saxon or Saxo-Norman.

This leaves the gable-headed opening high in the wall; here the Taylors are incorrect in seeing the jambs as constructed of through stones. Saxon influence is certainly seen in the triangular head of the opening, and the manner in which it is cut at right angles to the wall, but in two of the three other instances of gable-headed openings in County Durham, two (in Durham Cathedral east range, and the monastic buildings at Jarrow) are demonstrably post-Conquest (late 11th century) and the third, in the tower at Norton, could also be of the same date (although here the gable-headed doorways exist in conjunction with other more typically Saxon features such as megalithic quoining and stripwork surrounds).

Austin correctly notes that there is a change in the character of the stonework, to better-squared blocks, at the level of the sill of the opening; this he interprets as indicating a later build. It is perhaps worth pointing out that this scenario, of change in fabric type at the base of a gable-headed upper doorway, is repeated in the tower at Norton, where no suggestion of multiple phasing has been made; the change may simply reflect the function or status of the upper chamber(s).

Further evidence of a post-Conquest date is suggested by the proportions of the nave, which (prior to the rebuilding of the south wall) at 2.2:1 are much more typically Norman than Saxon; proportions of other Saxon naves in Durham are Billingham at 1:4.9, Escombe at 1:3, Jarrow (former nave) at 1:4.7, and Monkwearmouth at 1:3.4.

Two other fairly weighty facts combine with this evidence in pointing to an early Norman rather than Saxon date for the nave walls. One is that the extensive excavations on the manorial site adjacent to the churchyard in 1965-7 yielded no clear evidence of any pre-Norman structures or artifacts. Austin (op.cit,84) ascribes this to 'the lack of a recognisable ceramic tradition'. The second, which Austin does not refer to at all, is that a field to the south-east of the village, in which the 9th century cross head (7) was found in 1967, is labelled 'Old Kirk' on the 1841 Tithe Map.

All this seems to suggest that the Saxon church, which might well have been monastic, stood on a different site, and that a re-ordering of the village took place around or a little after the time of the Norman Conquest. However, one alternative (if less likely) interpretation ought to be considered:.

(1b) A Saxon church remodelled c1100?.

There are two pieces of evidence that might allow an alternative interpretation. One is that in Austin's interpretation of the east wall of the nave, the high-level fabric (including the gable-headed doorway) post dates the rebuilding of the south wall of the nave, ie he saw the secondary fabric as extending laterally above the scar of the removed 'thick' south wall. If this structural interpretation is accepted (and it is not inarguable) then one would expect the present south wall of the nave - which is admittedly of a more typically 'Saxon' thickness than the other walls, and which does include a high-level window cut by the medieval arcade - to be late Saxon or early

Norman work. If this were the case, the ‘thick’ north and east walls of the nave, and their angle quoins, would in fact be genuine pre-Conquest work, even if stylistically atypical of the period. The problem of the angle quoins could be removed if one assumed that the angles of the nave had all been rebuilt. This would be an unusual scenario, although there does seem to be some structural evidence (in the form of ragged vertical breaks visible internally) to support it.

Evidence against this theory is seen in the positioning of the 12th-century tower arch, which, like the original chancel arch, is set central to the ‘narrow’ nave.

Later Medieval Development

(2) 12th and 13th Centuries: the West Tower

It is fairly clear that the tower is an addition to an earlier west end, although the older walling may have been largely refaced when the tower was built. The most puzzling feature is the odd string course or displaced impost band north of the tower arch, which Hodges (op.cit) saw as evidence of an earlier tower arch. Apart from this, the tower arch and fabric of at least the lower part of the tower all look of mid-12th century date. The two windows of the lower stage of the tower look to have been altered to their present form; their rear arches may be those of 12th-century round-headed loops, whilst the outer openings were remodelled in the 13th century. It has been suggested (A & J Marchant) that only the lower stage of the tower was built in the 12th century, the upper stages being added in the 13th. This may well be correct, although there is little vertical variation in the tower fabric.

One slightly unusual feature is that the belfry stage of the tower only seems to have been provided with two openings, single lancets on east and west. One possibility may be that the belfry proper was at a higher level (and perhaps of timber?) and may have been replaced at some later medieval period by the spire removed in 1727, or perhaps removed along with the spire.

(3) Other 13th Century Work; Rebuilding of South Wall?

The VCH) dates the south aisle to the 13th century, solely on the evidence of the lancet in its west wall. This is clearly a 13th-century piece, but may well be re-set; its dressings do not course in well with the adjacent masonry. Everything else in the aisle, both its width and most of its architectural features, (except perhaps for the piscina - another re-set piece?) reflects a later medieval date. It is possible that the rebuilding of the south wall of the nave took place in the 13th century, and that the lancet was removed from this when the aisle was added.

(4) The 15th Century: Addition of the North Aisle.

The north arcade, north aisle, and chancel arch, are now generally seen as of 15th century date. This seems quite acceptable; the chancel demolished in 1806 may have been a rebuild of this period as well, as suggested by the fragmentary remains of its low-side window.

(5) Late 15th or Early 16th Century: Addition of South Aisle

The south aisle is more of a puzzle; its fabric is quite different from that of the north. Although the VCH interprets the south and east windows of the aisle to the 15th century, and the arcade,

south door and porch to c1600, there seems no real reason to see them, and the fabric of the aisle, as anything other than the products of a single phase of work. The date of this remains open to question; although there are clearly stylistic affinities between the two aisles, there are also significant differences in detail. It is not clear how much the differences between the two arcades simply reflect the variation in thickness between the walls the arcades were being inserted into. If the aisle is of a single phase, then the presence of a piscina would place in before the Reformation; a tentative ascription to the late 15th or early 16th century may be justified.

(6) Post-Medieval Changes

The history of Post-Reformation changes in the fabric of a church is often reconstructed on the basis both of structural evidence and of documentary sources. Whilst some important elements of what happened at Hart are clear, others are not; the faculty evidence is in particular is rather patchy.

Two early faculties survive, the first relating to the removal of a spire from the tower in 1727. It seems likely that the present tower parapet, with the mouldings at its base, and its clumsy corner finials, dates from this time.

The two windows in the north wall of the north aisle may be of later 18th, or early 19th century date. It is clear that by the mid-19th century the tracery of the south aisle windows had been removed, and wooden frames inserted. It appears that the tower arch was walled up at some stage.

Faculty evidence dates the rebuilding of the medieval chancel to 1806; it is not clear how much medieval fabric was retained in the side walls, although the east end was obviously new build at this time.

(7) Victorian Restoration

Three phases of late 19th century restoration are recorded, although only the last is attested by a surviving faculty. The VCH account refers to work done in 1884-5 and 1889-91, when 'all the old wooden windows were removed' (and presumably the present mullions substituted); the floor was lowered 3 ft to its 'original level' and the nave re-seated. The surviving faculty for the 1898 chancel restoration refers to the window in the north wall being opened out, implying either undocumented 19th century changes or the restoration of a window in a section of medieval fabric left undisturbed in 1806.

There are visible evidences of relatively recent works in several parts of the building, which have not been identified in documentary records. These include the rebuilding of the south porch, and various works at the east end of the north aisle.

THE CHURCHYARD

The churchyard is L-shaped in plan; in its original form it was a rectangle with the church set towards the north end, but at some more recent date the southern part of the yard has been extended eastward. The main approach from the village is from the south, with a subsidiary entry (from what is now a car park) half way along the west side, a little to the south of the church. The boundary walls to the old part of the yard are largely of rubble; some of the walling on the west

clearly survives from previous buildings, parts of a complex that include (further to the south-west) the standing remains of the medieval Brus manor house; this area is now a car park serving both the church and the school further west.

There are few monuments of any great interest; a number of the older headstones (some of 18th century date, mostly quite worn) seem to have been re-set, and are lined up edge-to-edge facing the main path. The few monuments in the narrow section of churchyard north of the church are all of 20th-century date.

The section of the east wall of the churchyard immediately to the north of the south-east extension has a number of fragments of headstones and other memorials, largely of 19th-century date, re-set in it, as well as a tablet in memory of Derek Otterwell (1931-1995) 'who transformed this graveyard by his care and toil'.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Hart church is obviously a building of considerable archaeological importance, even if the view proposed here, that it is an early Norman rather than a Saxon building, is accepted. Even if this is the case, and the principal church of the early estate centre was situated some distance away in the 'Old Kirk' field, it does not rule out the possibility of there having been a pre-Norman chapel on the present site, as an important estate centre might be provided with two or more churches or chapels.

It is difficult to assess the possibility of survival of early structural remains or deposits beneath the present church, as the floors are now carpeted throughout (except for the west tower, which has a concrete floor). There will obviously have been the usual sub-floor disturbance by generations of burial within the building, and it is known that a considerable depth of post-medieval deposits were removed in the 1880s when the floor was returned to its supposed medieval level. However, it appears that the further complication of a 19th-century underfloor heating system may not be present in this case; local enquiry suggests that the heating pipes may always have been above floor level.

If any disturbance of floors is carried out, then an archaeological watching brief will be necessary; this is the case throughout the building, including the area within the tower where some suggestion of lowering levels has recently been made; important archaeological features such as bell-casting pits are often found in this position.

Outside the church, it is not clear whether there is a perimeter drain; there is no open channel (except alongside the south porch) but there are a series of surface water drains, and in some areas, especially around the west end and the north aisle, the ground looks to have been disturbed relatively recently. In view of the importance of the church and site, any ground works in the churchyard (and in particular those close to the building) will require archaeological vigilance; an area of especial vulnerability is outside the east end, where it is to be expected some remains of the footings (and sub-floor deposits) of the eastern part of the medieval chancel, taken down in 1806, still exist.

Archaeological Priorities

Whilst any invasive works inside or close to the exterior of the church will require archaeological

recording, the above-ground fabric of the church, the unusual complexities of which have already been given a rather limited description, still awaits a detailed examination. The preparation of scale drawings of all wall faces, by means of either photogrammetry or rectified photography, would enable a better analysis of the fabric than has yet been possible.

Within the building the 15th-century font is an important example; it is not clear whether detailed records of this exist. The bell frames, whilst of no great age, are of unusual form and some interest, and should certainly be recorded (by means both of photographs and a series of scaled drawings) if any repair or strengthening works are proposed.

Peter F Ryder. July 1997

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ST MARY MAGDALENE, HART.

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT. AUGUST 1997

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**ST MARY
MAGDALENE
HART**

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

AUGUST 1997

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ST MARY MAGDALENE, HART

GROUND PLAN SHOWING PROVISIONAL PHASING

based on plan from Victoria County History

c1100

mid C13

C13

C15

late C15 or early C16

late C18 or early C19

1806

late C19

uncertain, C19 or C20

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1. General SW view

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2. The tower from the S.

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3. The tower from the SW

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4. The tower from the N

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5. The W end of the S aisle.

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6. The S porch.

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7. The S aisle from the S.

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8. The S aisle from the SE

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9. The chancel from the S.

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10. General NE view

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11. The chancel from the N.

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12. The N aisle, E wall.

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13. N aisle, N wall, E part,

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14. N aisle, N wall, W part

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15. The N aisle, W end

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16. The S door

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17. Interior looking E

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18. Interior looking W.

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19. E bay of S arcade

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20. Blocked window in S face of S nave wall, above arcade.

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21. N arcade

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22. Central pier of N arcade

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23. Blocked window over pier of N arcade

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24. String course and corbel over N arcade

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25. Chancel arch and wall above, E face

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26. C 12 font

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27. Pre-Conquest sculpture at W end of S aisle

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28. Medieval slabs etc built into internal face of W wall of S aisle.

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29. Carved stone re-used as internal lintel of eastern belfry opening.