

St Michael's Church, Heighington

St Michael's parish church stands near the centre of the large green of Heighington, one of the classic 'green' villages of County Durham; the village lies on rising ground 8 km north-west of Darlington, and the church tower commands an extremely extensive prospect to the south, east and north-east.

The church consists of a three-bay aisled nave with a western tower, a south porch, and a chancel with a slightly-narrower eastern section (generally termed the 'sanctuary'); there is an organ chamber on the north of the chancel and a vestry on the north of the sanctuary, with a sunken boiler room between them.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Exterior

The **West Tower** rises in three stages, each slightly set back, divided by strings (largely renewed) that are chamfered on their lower edges. The fabric is of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, the courses varying in height; there is more rubbly small stone in the lower part of the first stage. The angle quoins are not especially large, being rather irregular in form and in parts barely differentiated from the walling stones. The lower stage is entered by a round-arched doorway on the south; this has an inner order with a continuous narrow chamfer, and a roll-moulded outer order carried on jamb shaft with simple cushion capitals; there is a hoodmould (actually integral with the outer order) chamfered above and below. All the dressings of this doorway are of 19th century character, although some are now quite badly weathered. Around the doorway the 'ghost' of the side walls and gabled roof of a former porch can be faintly seen; above this is a small round-headed window which appears to be genuine 12th-century work. This and the other contemporary windows in the church all have monolithic heads, and are without any external chamfer or rebate. In the west wall there is a similar window at the same level.

The second stage of the tower has a third window of the same type in the lower part of its west wall; there is fourth similar window in a corresponding position on the south. Disturbed areas of masonry above indicate the original positions of these openings, which were moved, probably c.1868, after the construction of the present clock faces. The southern window was re-set within the jambs of a larger blocked opening. The western jamb and sill of this are visible, and are long thin stones, as if insertions, possibly of 18th or early-19th century date.

The belfry stage of the tower has an opening in the centre of each face, consisting of a pair of round-arched openings divided by a mid-wall shaft with a cushion capital, enclosed by a larger semicircular arch, of one square order, with a hoodmould chamfered below. This springs from imposts carried by jamb shafts that again have simple cushion capitals.

At the base of the embattled parapet is a third string-course, hollow-chamfered on its lower angle, with large gargoyles in the form of dragons at each corner; the string look of 19th century date in their present form, but the gargoyles may be older (15th century?). The embattled parapet has a simple moulded coping to both merlons and embrasures; these again are of 19th-century date, except on the east where the embrasures have level sills and the stonework appears considerable older.

The only external walling of the **Nave** is at its angles, and in the east gable which rises above the

chancel roof. The south-west angle quoin is of squared blocks only slightly differentiated in length; in general character they are not dissimilar to the quoins of the tower, but appear to be of a darker gritstone that has not weathered so heavily. The south-eastern quoin, rising from a plain square plinth or footing course, is of similar form. The quoins at the north-west corner have been removed, to key in the walling of the Victorian north aisle; the removed blocks appear to have been re-used in the lower parts of the angles of aisle and organ chamber. The walling of the east gable is all of 1875, and is of roughly-squared and coursed stone; the coping is carried on hollow-chamfered kneelers, and the gable is topped by an openwork foliate cross finial.

The **South Aisle** shows a variety of fabric types; the parapet, with a moulded coping and a moulded string at its base, is of 1875. The west wall is of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, with some unusually elongate squared quoins at the south-west angle. The wall has a single light window with a trefoiled slightly-ogival head.

The short section of the south wall to the west of the porch has a square-headed window of two cinquefoiled ogee-headed lights with cusped piercings over, under a moulded hood returning down the jambs, but without any carved stops; the jambs are of alternating blocks. The ashlar dressings of the window are entirely of mid-19th century date; alongside its west jamb is a disturbed area of masonry (possibly pre-dating the window) which seems to cut into the angle quoins already described. At the foot of this section of wall a low square-section plinth or footing is exposed.

There is an area of disturbed masonry above the porch roof, indicating the position of an other mid-19th century window (shown on the old print now hanging in the vestry).

The walling of the bay east of the porch has quite small coursed and roughly-squared stones in its lower part, with larger roughly-shaped stonework higher up; it contains another mid-19th century window, of the same form and detail as that west of the porch, except that it is of three lights; there are quite extensive areas of disturbed masonry on either side. Above the head of the window part of a shallow relieving arch is visible, which appears to relate to a previous opening. To the west of this is an 18th-century sundial, now quite badly weathered, in a nowy-headed panel. Above and to the left of the sundial a grotesque gargoyle at the base of the parapet is probably of 19th-century date.

The eastern bay of the aisle wall is flanked by a pair of narrow stepped buttresses, with a chamfered plinth to their bases. The wall between the buttresses, largely of coursed rubble, may have been entirely rebuilt; its face is set c 0.13 m inside the line of the wall-face further west, and above the western buttress the earlier masonry seems to have been roughly cut back. Between the buttresses is another of the mid-19th century three-light windows; a vertical break in the masonry just outside its east jamb probably relates to its insertion. The south-eastern angle quoin of the aisle, a short distance beyond the eastern buttress, is clearly differentiated into a lower section of weathered blocks and an upper section of much less worn ones, some quite elongate, that are of the same general character as the south-western quoin of the aisle.

The lower part of the east wall of the aisle is of coursed rubble, and contains a window of three stepped lancet lights, with simple chamfered surrounds, which apart from one replaced mullion appears to be an undisturbed 13th-century piece. Above and to the left of the window is a diagonal break in the walling, which seems to be a corbel with a change in character of the angle quoins; this seems most likely to represent an earlier roof-line for the aisle (as at Aycliffe, Bishop

Middleham and other Durham churches) although it has also been interpreted as a cut in the masonry, made to key in the roof of an adjacent structure (Clack 1981); this seems somewhat unlikely, although in fairness it should be pointed out that where this feature intersects the quoins, one has been partly cut away, as if to take a timber. To confuse matters further, there is also a semblance of a diagonal line running in the opposite direction; if these diagonal lines were old roof-lines for the aisle, then this would imply that the aisle, or at least its eastern bay, was at one time a low structure with its own gabled roof running parallel to that of the nave.

The **South Porch** is entirely of 1875. It is built of coursed squared and roughly-tooled stone, and has a chamfered plinth, and a small stepped buttress at the south end of each side wall; the outer opening is a pointed arch of two continuous chamfered orders, under a simple moulded hood with spiral stops; the gable above has a foliate cross finial of the same type as those on the east gables of nave and chancel. In each side wall is a small trefoil-headed light.

The **North Aisle** is entirely of 1875 and is built of roughly-squared snecked stone with ashlar dressings; as already mentioned, old quoins, presumably from the north-west angle of the nave, have been re-used in the lower parts of its angles. The west wall has a window of two lights with a cinquefoiled circle over, under a hoodmould with spiral stops. On the north the two western bays have windows of three stepped cinquefoil-headed lights, under a four-centred arch, again with a hoodmould with spiral stops. The eastern bay has a larger three-light window, set under a gable; in form this is a slightly simpler version of the east window of the sanctuary.

The south wall of the **Chancel** is of a similar complexity to that of the south aisle. The walling is basically of roughly-coursed rubble, with around a metre of coursed roughly-squared stone at the top, an obvious heightening. The two large windows are of mid-19th century date, and are each of two lancet lights with a trefoiled circle in the spandrel, within a two-centred arched frame with a simple hoodmould. Beneath the sill of the western, which is set hard up against the west end of the wall, is a disturbed area that might be associated with a former 'low-side' window. Between the windows is a priest's door with a Tudor-arched head and a chamfered surround, with above and to the east of it the western jamb, with parts of the sill and head, of what appears to have been a lancet window. The quoins at the south-east angle of the chancel are irregular but do not vary greatly in size, and are very like those of the tower. Only the eastern part of the north wall of the chancel is exposed, between the vestry and organ chamber. This is of roughly-coursed large rubble, with a similar heightening to that seen on the south. At the west end of this section of wall is a small 12th-century window, a rather shorter version of those seen in the tower.

On the north of the chancel is the **Organ Chamber** of 1875, built of similar materials to the adjacent north aisle. In its north and east walls are single-light windows with trefoiled heads under four-centred arches. The head and some of the dressings of the taller one in the east wall could conceivably be older work re-set.

The south wall of the **Sanctuary** is again of rubble, with barely any coursing; once again there is the same heightening in better-coursed stone. It contains a third two-light window of the same type as those on the south of the chancel. The walling is differentiated from that of the chancel by having a chamfered plinth (which may continue round the east end, but is lost beneath the present ground level) and the remains of two string courses, each chamfered on both upper and lower edges. Both string courses have been cut by openings pre-dating the present window; immediately west of it are a vertical series of large roughly-squared blocks which represent the remains of the west jamb of an earlier opening, and rather further away to the east is the eastern

jamb of an older, but apparently separate, window; this is of much smaller more neatly cut blocks. The blocks of the western jamb are roughly hacked, as if some projecting feature has been cut away, possibly a pilaster-like feature linking the two string courses. The quoins of the east end are again rather similar to those of the chancel and tower.

The two string courses have been continued across the east end; the lower is intact (although its central section has been restored) but only the stub ends of the upper remain, although at a still-higher level is a third string, only seen on the east wall, which stops short of the east window; it seems all restoration, but may reproduce an early feature. Below the lower string the walling is of roughly-coursed rubble, with an area of better-squared blocks, some of a distinctive purplish colour (have they been burned?) near the southern angle. The three-light east window of 1875 has geometrical-style head tracery with a combination of circles and trefoils; the frame and mullions have roll mouldings, and there is a moulded hood with spiral stops seen again in the north aisle windows terminals. Above the string course the wall has been rebuilt or refaced (with the exception of the angle quoins) with coursed roughly-squared and tooled stone. The coped gable has hollow-chamfered kneelers and is capped by an openwork foliate cross finial.

The **Vestry** poses some puzzles. The southern part of the east wall is built of irregular rubble, partly keyed in with the east wall of the chancel (some of the chancel quoins have been removed to allow this); the upper parts and north end of the wall are of better-squared stone, and date from 1875. The wall contains a round-headed light with a roll-moulded surround and a hoodmould, probably of mid-19th century date, and a more recent doorway with a flattened triangular head and a narrow chamfer to its surround. The north wall, which has a chamfered plinth, is of roughly-squared and roughly-coursed stone; all this looks 'old', which must mean it was re-used in 1875 when the vestry was extended northwards. The west wall, of coursed roughly-squared stone, looks more convincingly Victorian, and has a single trefoil-headed light; from the coping of the wall rises an ashlar stack of 1875, with vents in its side walls below a truncated pyramidal cap.

The Interior

The internal wall faces of the church are generally plastered and whitewashed, except for exposed dressings.

The **Tower** opens to the body of the church by a semicircular arch of two orders, the outer square and the inner with a big half-roll on the soffit and hollow chamfers on the angles, springing from an impost band, chamfered beneath, which is carried the full width of the west wall of the nave. The jambs, somewhat patched, are simply square masses of masonry (the wall here is 1.23 m in thickness).

Within the base of the tower (now the baptistery) the south door has a crude basket-arched rear opening (plastered over); the two 12th-century windows at a higher level have plain internal splays and round-headed rear arches. There is a late-19th century panelled ceiling.

An iron ladder gives access to the clock chamber in the second stage of the tower. Here, and in the belfry, the internal wall faces are skimmed with plaster and whitewashed. The two second-stage windows have plain internal splays and semicircular rear arches, which, as far as can be judged, seem perfectly genuine; there is no sign of the wider blocked opening in which the external face of the southern window is set.

The clock chamber is ceiled by plain beams which may be pre-19th century; another ladder rises to the belfry, where the four openings have tympana which are recessed internally as they are externally.

In the **Nave**, the side walls, in as far as can be judged, appear to be in the order of 0.80 - 0.85 m in thickness. Both of the arcades are of three bays, with two-centred arches of two chamfered orders, with hoodmoulds towards the nave only. The south arcade has a hoodmould which is chamfered above and below; above the eastern pier it is carried on a mask stop that looks medieval, whereas that over the western pier is clearly a Victorian piece. The piers are octagonal, with moulded capitals and simple hollow-chamfered bases. The responds have smaller semi-octagonal shafts, and similar capitals and bases. The 1875 north arcade has a moulded hoodmould without stops, and is carried on circular piers with moulded capitals and bases; the responds have full-size semi-octagonal shafts. The roof, of 1875, is of trussed rafters with collars and scissor-braces, with ashlaring.

In the **South Aisle** the west window has a late-19th century four-centred rear arch, carrying a chamfer, but the jambs are genuine medieval work. The three south windows have similar rear arches. The south doorway, now within the porch, was moved here in 1875 from the north wall of the nave; it has a semicircular arch of two orders, the inner moulded with a roll on the angle and a hollow, the outer with a channelled zigzag, springing from impostes chamfered beneath, which are carried by jambs shafts with worn cushion capitals and simple much weathered bases. The impostes extend to carry a hoodmould with a billet moulding on the lower angle and a chamfer above. The carved slab above the doorway formerly occupied a corresponding position in the north wall; it bears a triangular headed panel containing two seated figures, one a crowned king holding a sceptre over his r. shoulder, and the other a mitred bishop with pastoral staff or crozier over his l. shoulder.

On the internal face of the wall, immediately to the east of the south doorway, is a square-headed recess (the head is plastered. And may not be original) containing an oval bowl 0.40 by 0.35 m, and 0.28 m deep; this has been interpreted as a benitura, in which an infant could be baptised by immersion. Close to the east end of the same wall is a small piscina with a simple pointed arch and a slightly-projecting bowl, which has a drain running out through the wall.

The east window has a shallow segmental-pointed rear arch; its sill is level (with a chamfered front edge) and may possibly have served as an altar. The roof structure of the aisle - three bays with by principals that have short curved braces to wall posts, set on plain corbels - certainly looks older than the other roofs in the church, and could be later medieval.

Inside the South Porch the small windows in the side walls have shouldered rear arches, and the rather sophisticated roof structure consists of five pairs of trussed rafters with scissor braces intersecting above a central purlin, ashlaring and moulded wall plates.

In the **North Aisle** the windows have four-centred rear arches with chamfered heads; in the east wall is a quadrant-shaped arch, of two chamfered orders, into the organ chamber. The roof structure is broadly similar to that of the south aisle, but is entirely of 1875.

The **Chancel** opens under a broad semicircular arch, of similar form to the tower arch, except that the hoodmould (towards the nave) has a much-restored moulding with the indentations

between the billets cut out square rather than to a chamfer. The imposts, chamfered beneath, are continued back the full width of the wall face towards both nave and chancel, and supported on semicircular shafts with simple scalloped capitals and moulded bases. Towards the nave the wall below the impost band has an ashlar facing, apparently contemporary with the arch.

The 19th-century windows on the south side of the chancel have four-centred rear arches with chamfered heads; on the north the arch to the organ chamber is tall with a segmental-pointed head of two chamfered orders, the inner chamfer dying into the jambs and the outer continued to pyramid stops just above the floor. East of this is the plastered-over internal opening of the small 12th-century window.

The **Sanctuary** is marked by a stepping in of the internal wall faces, but is otherwise not expressed by any architectural feature. The 19th-century window on the south is similar to the two in the adjacent chancel wall, except that its internal east jamb incorporates in its western jamb the jamb of an earlier window, of good-quality diagonally-tooled ashlar blocks. On the north the doorway into the vestry has chamfered jambs and a renewed elliptical-arched head. The 1875 east window has a two-centred rear arch with a chamfered head.

The sanctuary has a wagon roof, its westernmost couple carried on large shaped corbels; the chancel roof is of the same trussed-rafter form as that of the nave; all of the roof structure is of 1875.

Inside the **Vestry** a shallow round-arched recess in the plaster of the south wall presumably indicates a blocked 12th-century window in the north wall of the sanctuary; below it are three cupboards recessed into the wall, but any detail is obscured by plaster. The two doorways both have straight internal lintels; that of the west window is shouldered, whilst the east window has a round-arched internal splay..

FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

The majority of the fittings and furnishings of the church are of late 19th-century date, with some notable exceptions. Perhaps the most importance is the **Pulpit, thought to be of early-16th** century date, and the only Pre-Reformation one to survive in the county. Standing on a late-19th century stone base, it has six sides, with linenfold panelling beneath late Flamboyant tracery. The inscription, partly restored, occupies panels above the tracery on five of the **sides; on the** sixth the panel is blank; it reads:

Orate paibs Alexandri flettchar et agnetis uxoris sue

(Pray for the souls of Alexander Fletcher and Agnes his wife)

Billings (1846, plate 36) illustrates the pulpit before its late-19th century restoration; most of the 'uxoris sue' is missing, and the sixth side of the pulpit is not shown at all, suggesting either that the components were differently arranged, or that it is entirely a copy.

At one period the pulpit had a canopy; the top of this, with inlaid decoration (suggesting an 18th century date), has been converted into a table, which now stands at the east end of the south aisle.

The only other old woodwork is seen in four old **Bench Ends** (of 17th century date?) with poppy heads, two set against the west end of the choir stalls on the south of the chancel and two forming the ends of the reader's set on the north. One of the latter has a carved face with tracery with a linenfold motif below; it is not clear whether this carving is original or a 19th-century addition.

The **Font**, now standing beneath the tower, is probably of 15th century date (Hodgson 1912, 227-8) ; it is octagonal, with a cup-shaped bowl (broken and repaired) and a shaft and base with concave faces such as seen on the more elaborate examples at Barnard Castle and Startforth.

The wrought-iron **Altar Rails** are probably of late-19th century date; the heavily-Gothic stone and marble **Reredos**, although mid-19th century in style, was erected in 1899 as a memorial to Rev. William Cumby (d. 1893) (see adjacent brass plaque).

Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 322) record **Stained Glass** in the north aisle by *Clayton & Bell*, 1875, north and south chancel windows and a tower window by *Heaton, Butler & Bayne*, 1875; and in the south aisle, the second window from the east by *Waffles & Strange* of Newcastle.

The **Tower Screen**, with leaded glazing, is of 1907, by Hodgson Fowler; copies of his drawings for it hang on the baptistery wall.

On the north wall of the baptistery are two painted **Benefactions Boards**, one recording an annual gift of £5.00 to the poor of the parish by John march, d.1590 (whose monument is fixed to the opposite wall - see below). It seems likely that this board is a replica of an older one; it may be roughly contemporary with a second alongside, recording a gift of £ 100 (the interest on which was to paid annually to the poor) by William Colling, d. 1842.

The **Bells** are of considerable interest; the 15th-century ring of three all survive. These have the inscriptions:

(1) (in Black Letter)

+0 mater dia me sana virgo maria

0 Mother Divine, restore me, Virgin Mary

At the beginning of the inscription is a figure of the Virgin and Child, followed by a floriated cross; the last three words of the legend are punctuated by shields of arms, the first charged with three crescents (?Ryther), the others with a saltire (probably Nevill). A casting of the inscription and devices is hung on the north wall of the baptistery; Hodgson (1907) reproduces three photographs of it.

(2) (in Lombardic capitals)

+TU PETRE PULSATUS PERVERSOS MITIGA FLATUS

Thou, Peter, when beaten assuage the perverse winds

(3) (in Lombardic capitals)

+PURGATOS AULE CELI NOS IUNCITO PAULE

O Paul, unite us who have been cleansed with the count of Heaven

The above texts are taken from Hodgson (1907, 20-21), and the translations from notes currently in the church which, however, give the wording on of bell (3) in a different order.

Three further bells, 'Faith', 'Hope' and 'Charity' were added in 1883; the **Bell Frames** are presumably of 1883; they have long-headed wooden frames, and are of plan type 6.1 (Pickford 1993, 54).

On the internal sill of the eastern window in the south wall of the south aisle is a medieval **Cresset Stone**, which is something of a rarity.

SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS

There are two medieval **Effigies**; prior to 1886 they lay side-by-side a little to the south east of the chancel (Hodgson 1907, 21) but they are now set upright against the west wall of the baptistery. They both represent females, probably members of the Hansard family of Walworth. Hunter Blair (1924, 39) describes them as perhaps of c.1330; 'one has a fine canopy, and the hands of both are joined in prayer. No details can be deciphered'.

On the floor of the sanctuary, south of the altar, is a limestone slab of 15th or early 16th-century date, with the indent of the brass of a civilian, and various 17th-century inscriptions to members of the Hilton family; part of it is obscured by the altar platform. This is probably the slab recorded by Hodgson (op.cit.22/3) as having matrices of male and female figures, and a 'modern' inscription.

A number of medieval **Cross Slab Grave Covers** are described and illustrated by Ryder (1985, 98-99, plate 39.) These comprise:

A slab, fixed upside-down against the wall, at the north-east corner of the baptistery; elaborate but worn relief design; interlaced-diamond cross rising from crocketed arch base enclosing ?dragon, sword partly cut away to accommodate 17th century(?) Inscription, 'IO: THVRSBIE: HIC: IACE'. Probably 14th century.

(2) Slab set upright against internal face of north wall of chancel. Similar design to (1) but with foliage beneath base, and without sword; also badly worn. Probably 14th century.

Smaller slab set upright at north-west corner of baptistery; bracelet cross in relief, with shears on 1. of shaft. Probably later 13th century. Recently some substance has been spilt on this slab and it is badly stained, and in need of cleaning and conservation.

(4) Two pieces of a slab built into the internal face of the west wall of the porch; cross shaft with bilobate leaf shoots, and stepped calvary base with shears beneath.

(5) In same wall; head of interlaced-diamond cross, 14th century.

(6) In same wall, base of yellow sandstone slab with incised stepped calvary.

- (7) Part of a slab with a bracelet cross head and shears on 1. Of slab; in vicarage garden in 1963, not locatable in 1982 but not on internal sill of south window in south aisle.
- (8) Slab drawn in 1900, when it was described as built into the wall of the porch; straight arm cross with fleur-de-lys terminals. Perhaps erased by weathering

In addition there are two further fragments:

Fragment on internal sill of east window of south aisle, of free-standing bracelet cross with incised decoration; late 12th or early 13th century. It might have been part of a substantial headstone cross, or might conceivably be a finial cross rather than a sepulchral monument.

- (10) A recently-discovered piece of a cross slab re-used in the external face of the east wall of the churchyard, 5 m south of the north-east corner. It has a worn relief design of a cross shaft with a fleur-de-lys springing horizontally from it, and perhaps a fragment of an emblem on the other side.

Earliest of the **Post-Reformation Monuments** is a large limestone slab now set upright against the south wall of the baptistery; Hodgson (op.cit) describes it as set north-south in the south aisle floor just inside the south door. It bears a marginal inscription to John March, Merchant Adventurer of Newcastle, d. 1590, and the coat-of-arms of the Merchant Adventurers.

The church has few **Ledger Stones**: at the east end of the nave, close to the pulpit (and the wall monuments to George Crosyer) is a limestone slab to Eleanor Crosyer d.1710 and her husband George d.,1717, with the Crosyer arms. In the sanctuary floor north of the altar is a ledger to Rev. Warcopp d.1784.

There are several **Wall Monuments**, some of which are of interest.

- (1) On the north of the sanctuary, to Captain William Pryce Cumby d. 1837; marble tablet with achievement of naval items – anchor, flag,. Cannonballs etc – with wordy description of his career at Trafalgar and elsewhere.
- (2) On the north of the chancel. Engraved brass to Anthony Byerley of Midldridge Grange, d. 1667, in stone surround with fluted pilasters, pediment with cherub, and finials.
- (3) On east wall of nave south of chancel arch. Stone tablet (recently-restored paintwork, in bright colours) to George Crosyer, d. 1669, with coat of arms, and surround with swan-necked pediment.
- (4) Above east window of south aisle; small tablet to Robert Surtees d. 1786.
- (5) On south wall of south aisle, small brass plate to Thomas Smith d. 1780

(6) On south wall of south aisle, Gothic marble tablet to William Jepson d. 1776, and family. There are also a number of 19th century tablets.

On the west wall of the nave are a series of five **Hatchments**. The two smaller ones, below the import band of the tower arch, commemorate the marriages of Sir Ralph Jennison of Walworth, on the left to Barbara Bows (d. 1655) and on the r. to Jane Carr (d.1699); notes in the church identify the former as the earliest hatchment in the county. The large hatchments above relate to the Surtees family of Redworth Hall; that on the left is dated '1819'.

HISTORICAL NOTES

c1083 The secular clergy expelled from Durham Cathedral by Bishop Carileph were relocated at Darlington, Auckland, Norton and 'Ekington' which has been thought by some to be synonymous with Heighington, although there are no later records of any collegiate foundation here.

c1183 Heighington is recorded in the Boldon Book as the centre of the Heghyn(g)tonshire estate; it is suggested that this estate was a 10th century creation, which together with the estate based on Aycliffe, and others, resulted from the break-up of a larger estate perhaps centred around Darlington.

1249 Bishop Walter de Kirkham gave Heighington church to the convent of Durham

1342-72 During the priorate of John Fossor, 'Item totum corum ecclesiae de Heynton' is recorded; taken literally this would seem to imply that the chancel was completely rebuilt, although this was clearly not the case (Hodgson 1907, 15, footnote).

1446-1456 During the priorate of William Ebchestre repairs to the choir, costing £6.13s.4d are recorded (ibid)

1794 The earliest antiquarian account of the church so far traced is that by Hutchinson (201-3): 'The church stands on the high and northern side of the square. From the tower is a most extensive view over the borders of Cleveland, and the Yorkshire vale, terminated by the Hamilton and Cleveland hills; you trace the shores of the river Tees, down to its estuary, and command a distant sea prospect. The chancel of the church is five paces in length within the altar rails; from whence, descending by three steps, it is eight paces to the nave; in width five paces, and is stilled with oak. The nave, entered by a circular arch, springing from pilasters, is 16 paces in length, and 12 in width, having one aisle on the south side, formed by two octagonal pillars, supporting pointed arches. The church is crowded with heavy galleries to the west and north. Round the mouldings of the pulpit, in the old black latter, is the following sentence: 'orate p'aibs AI****dri Flettchar et Agnetis exor ejus'.

- 1834 Mackenzie & Ross (1834, Vol II, 164), add a little further information. The east window was 'a modern sash below a low arch' and the lights in the nave and south aisle were under 'circular arches'.
- 1857 Fordyce (1857, Vol.1, 530), provides further useful information regarding the pre restoration church. The windows on the south 'beneath circular arches' had been 'renovated about sixteen years ago, by subscription'; he repeated that the east window was 'a modern sash'. A new gallery had been erected on the south 'some years ago' at the same time as the altar rails had been removed, and an old south porch taken down, the entrance being made 'under the tower' In 1852 an organ had been erected by Mr John Langley of Greatham, at a cost of a little above £100; the tower clock face had been renewed in 1853. He refers to the two effigies as lying in the churchyard to the east of the chancel.

FACULTIES AND OTHER RECORDS OF STRUCTURAL WORK

Faculty No. And Date	Works
69 (1804)	Petition etc for alterations. (This appears to refer largely to churchyard monuments, but there is a reference to 'a door leading to a gallery, newly erected).
199 (1873)	The major later Victorian 'restoration', carried out in 1875 by the architect <u>Ewan Christian</u> . Works included the addition of the north aisle and south porch, and extension of the vestry. The tower arch was re-opened and 'ringers' floor' within the tower removed. Nave and chancel were re-roofed (the pitch of the former following the old roof-line visible on the tower). The present east window was inserted, although the 1873 drawings show that it was initially intended to preserve the c1840 triplet. The previously blocked east window of the south aisle was re-opened.
396/24 (27 th July 1898)	Erection of reredos.
411/18 (20th August 1900)	Replacement of organ.
3826 (15th December 1955)	Restoration of the bells.
4731 (3rd October 1964)	Authorisation to lower churchyard wall.
4741 (3rd December 1964)	Redecoration of interior of church.
5170 (8th January 1970)	New oil-fired central heating system.
5568 (18th August 1975)	Removal of kerbs and tidying of churchyard.
5574 (8th October 1975)	Works including new gas-fired central heating boiler replacing oil-fired system.

- 5951A (23rd September 1981) Works including replacement of lead roof on. south aisle by stainless steel, and making of drainage trench around part of perimeter (this involved archaeological recording by University of Durham)
- 6068 (25th January 1983) Archdeacon's Certificate for replastering of walls of south aisle.
- 6278 (25th June 1985) Installation of floodlights and rewiring works.
- 6686 (8th September 1987) Restoration of Hatchments and 'Coach House'

THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Traditionally Heighington has been thought of as a classic Norman church; Hodgson (op.cit. 10) saw the church as being, 'beyond all question' built between 1140 and 1160.

More recently, it has been claimed that the fabric of nave and chancel, and possibly also the lower parts of the tower, are of Pre-Conquest date. This claim was put forward in an unpublished report by Brian Gill (University of Durham) and incorporated in a report on the 1981 excavations (Clack 1986); Gill's arguments have been accepted by Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 321-322) Before discussing the standing fabric, it should be noted that Clack recorded that the footings of the south wall of the sanctuary appeared to have been built within those of an earlier wall, and that these, of cobbles and river-rounded boulders, were apparently continuous with the footings of the chancel. The most likely interpretation was thought to be that the cobble footings represented a church pre-dating any of the standing fabric.

Whilst this recording of the footings exposed during the excavation provides invaluable evidence on the relationship between different elements of the church, this writer is not convinced by the claims made for the survival of above-ground Saxon fabric; the article contains a number of errors both in observation and in the interpretation of 19th-century sources. This is probably not the place for a detailed refutation of all of these, but a few points can be made:

Whilst nave and chancel have been shown to pre-date tower and sanctuary, the wall thicknesses of the nave (quoted as 70-75 cm, actually 80-85 cm) seem more characteristic of Norman than Pre-Conquest work.

- (ii) The angle quoins at the southern corners of the nave are fairly typical of 12th-century fabric; other recognised Saxon fabrics in the area, eg Aycliffe, tend to have very distinctive megalithic quoining.

The quite broad proportions of nave and chancel are far more typical of the 12th century than any preceding period; neither do any of the architectural features shows any evidence of Pre-Conquest influence. There are no grounds at all for comparing the blocked 18th or 19th century opening on the first stage of the tower with Saxon openings at Barton on Humber (Clack, op.cit, 75).

The earliest masonry of the present church is then in the walls of nave and chancel; tower and

sanctuary have been shown to be additions, although their fabric is not dissimilar. The angle quoins of all four sections are very similar in character (although stone from different quarries may have been used); the tower is of rather better-squared stone whereas the other parts are of rubble. The earliest architectural features - tower and chancel arches, and south door, look contemporary or near-contemporary; on stylistic grounds, a date of c.1160-1170 for them now seems to be generally accepted. The most likely scenario seems to have been that a typical quite sizeable two-cell Norman church was built around the middle of the 12th century (cf Bishop Middleham), and that it was enlarged by the addition of tower and sanctuary a few years later. The thicker walls of the sanctuary might well imply that it was originally vaulted, as in several Northumberland examples of three-cell churches (eg Heddon-on-the-Wall, Seaton Delaval, and Thockrington).

The evidence of the footings seen in 1981 confirmed that the eastern bay of the south aisle predated the remainder, and it would seem that this was added in the mid-13th century as a chantry chapel. The chancel may have been altered at the same time; part of a lancet window survives on the south.

In the mid-14th century the south-east chapel was incorporated into a full-length aisle; in the third quarter of the century documentary sources point to various works in the chancel, but surviving architectural features which could be ascribed to this period are all fragmentary.

The flattened Tudor arch of the priest's door, ascribed by Clack (on the basis of documentary evidence) to 1365-6, looks more like a late 15th-century or even post-medieval piece. The pre-1875 nave roof (six bays, with low-pitched king-post trusses) looks to have been of late medieval date, as may have been the three large windows in the north wall of the nave, later converted to sashes but shown on the pre-1875 plans as having double-chamfered jambs, suggesting they were medieval features that had been stripped of their tracery.

The earliest parts of the vestry are of uncertain medieval date; if the doorway from the chancel is contemporary (and if it retains its original form) a 15th or 16th century date seems likely.

As often, the post-medieval centuries have left relatively little evidence in the fabric. On the basis of information provided by the county historians, and the pre-restoration plans accompanying the faculty for the 1875 works, we can reconstruct something of the church as it stood early in the 19th century, and the various Victorian changes.

By the early 19th-century the church appears to have had most of its windows modified to sashes; those on the north of the nave have just been mentioned, whilst those in the south aisle were 'under circular arches' and that at the east end 'under a low arch'. Hutchinson tells us the nave had north and west galleries. Then around 1840 came a first phase of 'restoration'; the old south doorway in the aisle was blocked, and a new one opened on the south side of the tower (as at Easington) and the old south porch demolished. The windows in the south wall of the south aisle were remodelled in a 14th-century style; Hodgson claims them to be 'copies, very fairly exact' of those which they replaced but all we really know is that their predecessors were round-arched sashes, which sound quite different! The three large sashes in the north wall of the nave survived until the 1875 restoration. In the chancel a triplet of Norman windows replaced the eastern sash (as at Aycliffe). These are shown on an 1840's lithograph now hanging in the vestry; a letter by Ewan Christian (Durham County Record Office, Ep/He 47) refers to them as

`altogether modern, put in about thirty years ago'; and a payment of £21.0s.10d for `John Mowbray's bill' in the churchwardens' accounts for 1839 might refer to their construction. The three two-light windows on the south side of the chancel, although different in style, are probably roughly contemporary.

The pre-restoration plan shows a gallery occupying the western bay of the nave and aisle, and extending a bay further along the north side of the nave; access was by a stair at the west end of the aisle; it is not clear where the gallery 'on the south' mentioned by Fordyce was. The tower arch was partitioned off, and there was a floor in the tower at a level just above its springing.

Then in 1875 came a second major restoration, under the architect Ewan Christian (also responsible for the major restoration at Aycliffe in 1881-2). Christian opted for an early-14th century Geometrical Gothic style, previously unrepresented in the church, when he added a new north aisle, and replaced the neo-Norman eastern triplet. The redoubtable Rev J.F.Hodgson (op.cit, 20) rather predictably dismissed his work as 'without being actually bad ...at the best, miserably tame and poor, and as utterly flavourless as the traditional egg without 'salt'. Christian preserved or re-used old features where he could; in addition to re-using the 12th-century north door when he reinstated the south doorway in its former position in the south aisle, he re-used old quoins in his north aisle, and seems to have transplanted the north wall of the old vestry, plinth, rubble masonry and all, bodily northwards when he enlarged that part of the building.

Christian left the church very much as we find it today; the only substantial changes since have been the introduction of the reredos in 1899 and Hodgson Fowler's tower screen on 1907.

THE CHURCHYARD

Before 1932 the churchyard was roughly square in plan, with the church set roughly centrally, but close to the north wall; at this date it was enlarged eastwards to produce the present rectangle, by the assimilation of the site of the former vicarage and, further south, its garden.

The monuments in the churchyard are not of especial interest; most are of 19th century (or, in the eastern extension) 20th century dates; south of the church there are a scatter of 18th-century headstones, mostly small. On the north of the north aisle is a 19th-century table tomb above the Surtees family vault, set within a formerly-railed enclosure. The churchyard walls are not of particular interest; the gateways on west and south have piers with moulded caps, probably of 19th-century date; just to the west of the southern gate a 1919 war memorial, a 'Saxon' cross, breaks the line of the wall. The pre-1932 eastern boundary is marked by a line of old trees. An apparent hearse house (with an arched entrance, re-using as its head parts of a previous arch, although these do not look older than the earlier 19th century) at the north end of the extension was formerly the coach house to the old vicarage. Two door heads from the old vicarage, dated '168 5' and '1720' have been re-used in the present vicarage on the south side of the Green.

At the north end of the present east wall is a stone slab inscribed on both internal and external faces, commemorating the extension and that the ground had been 'made ready by voluntary labour'. Nearby, re-used in the external face of the wall, is a piece of a medieval cross slab (see sepulchral monuments). The walling around the north-east corner of the yard is probably of 1932; further south the late-18th or early-19th century garden wall of the vicarage was retained; it is of squared stone with on the east a ramped-up section containing a round-arched gateway.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Whilst the claimed survival of above-ground Saxon fabric is dubious, there is nevertheless circumstantial evidence, possibly added to by some of the features recorded in the 1981 excavation, for the existence of a significant Pre-Conquest church here. In view of this, and also of the siting in the church at the centre of what is probably the best-known of Durham's 'green' villages, St Michael's must be regarded as a church of considerable archaeological importance.

Heighington church is also one of the very few where some below-ground archaeological investigation has been carried out, as the 1981 external drainage works were very properly preceded by excavation, which allowed the recording of the external wall footings. There is every reason to believe that archaeological deposits will survive inside the church as well, although there will obviously have been some disturbance from generations of burial and, within the last two centuries, from the construction of an extensive underfloor heating system. It is known that an Aylmer family vault, constructed outside the building, lies beneath the 1875 north aisle

Above ground, the plastered walls certainly conceal much structural evidence; in the brief for the 1875 restoration it was intended to 'cleanse all old internal masonry from white or colour wash' but it is not clear whether wall faces were stripped of plaster during these works (possibly just the ashlar dressings were cleaned), which means that Heighington could conceivably be a candidate for the survival of early plaster and even wall paintings.

Thus any works which involve either the disturbance of floor levels within the church, or of the plaster on its walls (except the 1875 parts) will require an archaeological presence.

Summary

Heighington church is of considerable architectural importance on the strength of its 12th-century features; it possesses the best Norman tower in the county. Being popular with visitors, and forming a central element in what is arguable the most important village-scape in Durham, it could be argued that the church merits the provision of some interpretative material; detailed drawings of some of the external elevations (notably the south walls of chancel/sanctuary and south aisle) would allow the complex building history of those parts of the building to be better understood, and provide an excellent example of the recording and interpretation of a multi-phase fabric.

Peter F Ryder, May 1996

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HISTORICAL NOTES

- 1794 The earliest antiquarian account of the church so far traced is that by Hutchinson (1794, 201-3): 'The church stands on the high and northern side of the square. From the tower is a most extensive view over the borders of Cleveland, and the Yorkshire vale, terminated by the Hamilton and Cleveland hills; you trace the shores of the river Tees, down to its aestuary, and command a distant sea prospect. The chancel of the church is five paces in length within the altar rails; from whence, descending by three steps, it is eight paces to the nave; in width five paces, and is stalled with oak. The nave, entered by a circular arch, springing from pilasters, is 16 paces in length, and 12 in width, having one aisle on the south side, formed by two octagonal pillars, supporting pointed arches. The church is crowded with heavy galleries to the west and north. Round the mouldings of the pulpit, in the old black letter, is the following sentence: 'orate p'aibs Al****dri Flettchar et Agnetis exor ejus'.
- 1834 Mackenzie & Ross (1834, Vol II, 164), add a little further information. The east window was 'a modern sash below a low arch' and the lights in the nave and south aisle were under 'circular arches'.
- 1857 Fordyce (1857, Vol.I, 530), provides further useful information regarding the pre-restoration church. The windows on the south 'beneath circular arches' had been 'renovated about sixteen years ago, by subscription'; he repeated that the east window was 'a modern sash'. A new gallery had been erected on the south 'some years ago' at the same time as the altar rails had been removed, and an old south porch taken down, the entrance being made 'under the tower' In 1852 an organ had been erected by Mr John Langley of Greatham, at a cost of a little above £100; the tower clock face had been renewed in 1853. He refers to two effigies as lying in the churchyard to the east of the chancel.

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THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

THE CHURCHYARD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Priorities

SOURCES USED

to rearrange for Heighington

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