

The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Norton

St Mary's parish church, 'one of the most rewarding village churches in County Durham' (Pevsner) stands to the north-west of the large green at Norton, which preserves something of a village atmosphere despite being a suburb of Stockton, within the greater urban agglomeration of Teeside. The church is a building of considerable architectural interest; it consists of a three-bay aisled nave with a southern porch, a central tower, transepts, and a two-bay unaisled chancel, with an organ chamber and a vestry on the north.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Exterior

The only walls of the **Nave** exposed externally are the west end and the upper parts of the side walls, above the aisle roofs.

The west end is entirely of 1875 and is constructed of squared and coursed stone, with ashlar dressings. There is a moulded plinth, and a frieze of quatrefoil panels just below the sill of the west window, which is of five lights. With free Geometric-style tracery is set under a four-centred arch with a moulded hood that has turned-back ends. On either side of the window are stepped buttresses with moulded off-sets, from the third of which rise diagonally-set attached shafts that continue beyond the parapet as panelled and crocketed pinnacles. The embattled parapet, above a hollow-chamfered oversailing course, runs horizontally with a gable rising behind; this has a coping with large crockets of carved foliage, and an elaborate finial cross.

In the lower part of the wall, between the plinth and quatrefoil frieze, large squared blocks of varying sizes are laid in irregular courses, perhaps a deliberate antiquarian conceit; some are clearly re-used material (see 'Carved Stones' section).

The side walls of the nave, above the aisle roofs, are of limestone ashlar, up to courses of darker stone immediately above the window heads. Pilaster buttresses divide the walls into three bays; those at the west end are continued down as projections in the angles between the buttresses flanking the west wall and the adjacent west walls of the aisles. A string-course, chamfered above and below, rounds these western buttresses at the level of the aisle roofs. In the centre of each bay is a round-arched window with a monolithic head; the modern glazing disguises the depth of its splay, except in the central bay on the south, where there is a larger square-headed window with two round-arched and trefoiled lights, under a hoodmould; all its stonework is relatively recent restoration, the detail of the hoodmould not being very convincing.

The roof-lines of the pre-1823 aisles are visible, especially on the north, as a chiselled out horizontal joint that cuts across the clerestory windows about half way down; below this cut sockets in the buttresses presumably relate to the timbers of this roof.

The embattled parapet is carried on a hollow-chamfered oversailing course, and appears to be genuine later medieval work.

The walls of the **Aisles** are entirely of 1875; their fabric is similar to that of the west end of the nave, with irregular and roughly-tooled squared blocks perhaps intended to give an appearance of antiquity. There is a moulded plinth, a moulded string at the level of the sills of the windows, and stepped buttresses with moulded off-sets between the bays and at the western angles (a pair on the north but only one on the south, the need for a southward-facing partner being obviated by the proximity of the south porch) ; the parapet is copied from that of the nave; at the west end it runs horizontally, with half-gables set behind it. Each bay has a pair of windows, each of three cinquefoil-headed lights with simple tracery above, with linked hoodmoulds.

The **South Porch** is similar in its fabric and architectural details to the aisles. It has a moulded Tudor-arched doorway with attached shafts in the jambs, and a square-headed window of two cinquefoil-headed lights in each side wall. The hollow-chamfer at the base of the parapet is studded with square-flower ornament, and grotesque carved birds at the angles; the moulded parapet is carried round horizontally, with a steeply-pitched hip-ended roof rising behind it, and carrying a wrought-iron finial cross.

The lower part of the **Central Tower**, architecturally the most notable feature of the church, is constructed of roughly coursed and squared stone; there has been considerable recent renewal of the facing, generally respecting the shape and size of the individual blocks but not the evidence of the earlier roof lines. The angle quoins are quite large, but follow no regular pattern. The upper third of the tower is of smaller and rubblier stone, with more regular quoins.

In the centre of each face of the tower, above the adjacent roof, is a tall gable-headed doorway, now converted into a window; on the west the lower part of this doorway is covered by the present nave roof. The heads of these are each formed by a pair of inclined slabs; there have been projecting impost blocks, later cut back. Above these doorways is the line of an earlier gabled roof, of very steep pitch; on east and west there are second roof-lines at a lower level, just enclosing the gabled head of the doorway. On either side of the apex of the higher roof lines are small windows lighting the clock chamber. Published descriptions imply these are all round-headed, which is not the case. On the west both openings are simply rectangular piercings in large blocks, and are now utilised as channels for pipework. On the east the southern opening is of similar monolithic form, but the northern is taller and round-arched, and formed from four separate blocks; however, all these are recent replacements. On the south both openings are of the taller round-headed form; the eastern is in replaced stone, but the western is old, and shows a slight chamfer to its head. On the north both windows are again round-headed; the western retains its old head, with a chamfer, and the eastern is old except for its head, which is in new stone and has no chamfer, the frame of each being formed by four blocks.

Above the early rooflines, partly erased on south and east by refacing, are the clock faces and above these the belfry openings, each of two trefoil-headed lights under a square head, in a double-chamfered surround. That on the south has been entirely renewed. There is a moulded string at the base of the embattled parapet, which appears to have been rebuilt on the south and west. The bases of the embrasures have been renewed, with plain square-section slabs, but the capstones of the merlons are old and eroded chamfered blocks, with some evidence for sockets and grooves.

The **South Transept** has side walls of coursed roughly-squared stone; the rebuilt south wall is of

coursed roughly-tooled blocks of dark sandstone (with some very large blocks set in an irregular manner in the lower part, as in the aisle walls); the ashlar dressings are of fawn sandstone. There are stepped buttresses with moulded and gabled off-sets set back slightly from the southern angles, and an embattled and moulded parapet carried on an oversailing chamfered course, and running horizontally, but at a slightly higher level, across the southern end.

On the east of the transept is a single narrow window that seems to be an insertion; its head appears to have originally been pointed but modified to a semicircular form by the use of cement (this is more clearly visible inside). The lower jambs are formed by upright blocks, perhaps suggesting that the sill has been lowered.

The south wall and its buttresses are all of 1874, although the buttresses have large squared blocks in their footings that may be old material re-used. The wall has a chamfered plinth broken by a doorway at the west end, which has a shallow triangular head with carved panels in the spandrels, below a moulded string; above the string is a four-light window with Geometric-style tracery, under a moulded hood with turned-back ends.

On the west of the transept are faint traces of the higher roof-line of a previous aisle and, high up at the south end of the wall, a patch of whiter masonry (including limestone blocks) that marks the position of a doorway giving access to the 1823-1874 south aisle galleries from a stair within the transept.

The **North Transept** is constructed of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, with megalithic angle quoins laid in roughly side-alternate fashion; the uppermost part of each angle, and the coping of the shallow-pitched gable, are clearly of 18th or 19th century date. Set low in the centre of the north wall is a late 19th-century three-light window under a four-centred arch; the lights have cinquefoiled heads, with trefoil-headed sub-lights over, and the moulded hood has turned-back ends, with a relieving arch above.

The east wall of the transept is concealed by the organ chamber; the only features visible on the west wall are part of the shallow-pitched roof-line of an earlier aisle, a patch of whiter masonry indicating the position of a gallery doorway, rather more clearly visible than the corresponding one in the south transept, and a chamfered eaves course of 18th or 19th century date.

The south and east walls of the **Chancel** are faced with ashlar, largely of Magnesian Limestone; the parapet is of darker sandstone. On the south there has been extensive re-facing (following at least the original courses), with older stonework only visible in the lower courses (and parapet); the east end displays much more medieval stonework.

A chamfered plinth may exist below the present ground level; one can just be glimpsed at the base of the south-east buttress. The two clasping buttresses at the eastern angles have chamfered angles below broad offsets at mid-height and gabled caps facing north and south. Above these is a moulded string course which, together with the embattled and moulded parapet, is stepped up to run horizontally but at a slightly higher level across the east end.

The south wall has a priest's door with a segmental head and a continuous casement moulding, set between two three-light windows with stepped cinquefoil-headed lights under shallow elliptical

arches; the western, set close to the end of the wall, has its sill at a lower level than the eastern, a distinction that has led to its being regarded as a 'low-side' window (Hodgson 1902, 220-221).

The east end has a window of three cinquefoil-headed lights with panel tracery above, laid out in a rather irregular manner, consisting of a stepped series of trefoil-headed sub-lights, under an elliptical arch with a moulded hood on head stops. The frame has a continuous casement moulding and a chamfered inner member. This window, which is set somewhat north of centre in the wall, replaces what was probably a triplet of earlier lancets, set above a string course that has been cut back, and interrupted by the sill of the three-light window. What appears to be the outer jambs of the lancets are visible, together with sections of a moulded string that has been carried up over their heads as a hoodmould; on the north the return of the hoodmould does not quite coincide with the straight joint beneath.

Only the upper part of the eastern section of the north wall is exposed above the vestry roof. This is of mixed limestone and sandstone, laid in irregular courses, below the parapet of darker sandstone ashlar. No architectural features are exposed.

The lower walls of the **Vestry**, on the north of the chancel, are of limestone ashlar, probably re-used, with tooled and squared sandstone above. There is a chamfered plinth, and a stepped diagonal buttress at the north-east corner, and the walls are topped by an oversailing moulded and embattled parapet. On the east and north are square-headed windows of three cinquefoil-headed lights, and at the west end of the north wall is a doorway with a flattened triangular head inside a square frame, with a straight label above.

The **Organ Chamber**, between the vestry and north transept, is built of similar fabric to the vestry (with old limestone re-used in the lower courses) and has a plinth and a stepped embattled parapet; in the centre of the north wall is a three-light window similar to that in the adjacent vestry wall.

The Interior

All internal walls are unplastered.

The south wall of the **Nave**, above the arcade, is of coursed and roughly-shaped stone, including some quite large and elongate blocks up to clerestory level, where there is a change to smaller and more regularly coursed fabric. On the north the whole wall is of this smaller fabric. The west end is of tooled sandstone ashlar. The thickness of the walls is difficult to measure accurately; that of the south wall appears to be c 0.65 m and the north wall c 0.70 m.

Each of the arcades is of three bays, with two-centred arches of two orders. The inner order has a keeled moulding at each angle; the outer order has a keeled moulding and a hollow towards the nave, and a grooved roll moulding to the aisle; there is a hoodmould, chamfered above and below, to the nave only. The piers are circular with moulded capitals having octagonal abaci, and have moulded bases on square plinths. The western pier of the south arcade has a capital ornamented by simple foliage with curling leaves, also seen in the capitals of all four responds; the eastern pier has what appears to be a beaded moulding to its capital. Three of the responds are rectangular in plan with attached semicircular shafts, except for that at the east end of the south arcade has a keeled shaft; all have their lower parts renewed.

A moulded string immediately above the arcades forms the internal sills of the clerestory windows. On the north the western clerestory window has an odd internal splay, as if it had been partly reconstructed. On the south the later central window has a shouldered rear arch, and a re-used cross slab (see Sepulchral Monuments section) as the internal lintel. The internal west jamb survives from its 12th-century predecessor.

The west window has a segmental-pointed rear arch; below its sill the wall face carries a large panel forming a World War I memorial.

The roof of the nave is of six bays, with moulded cambered tie-beams carrying short king posts or blocks supporting a heavy square-set ridge; there is one similarly heavy purlin on each side, resting directly on the tie; this structure is probably of 15th century date.

The internal walls of the **Aisles** are of tooled sandstone ashlar, like the west wall of the nave. The south doorway and all the aisle windows have four-centred rear arches with a narrow chamfer.

Inside the **South Porch** the south doorway has a moulded Tudor arch with square-flower ornament and a hoodmould with turned-back ends. The porch itself has stone benches, and the windows in the side walls have the usual shallow segmental rear arches.

The **Crossing** is of exceptional interest. The massive quoins of the external angles of the tower project slightly into the aisles, the tower being slightly wider than both nave and transepts. The eastern and western arches of the crossing are of later 12th-century date and contemporary with the nave arcades, the northern and southern, although mutilated, appear contemporary with the tower.

The arches to nave and chancel are of the same type, of slightly distorted semicircular form and of two orders, with a hoodmould chamfered above and below on the external faces of the walls. Both orders have keeled mouldings at the angles, and the inner a demi-roll on the soffit. The arches spring from responds with keeled attached shafts that have been largely cut away, with simple much-restored capitals with square abaci.

In the west face of the tower, above the western arch of the crossing, is a broad blocked opening, with hints of a curving head; above this the lower part of the western gable-headed doorway opens just beneath the present roof. On the opposite face of the wall, inside the tower, a much narrower blocked opening is visible, below and slightly offset to the south of the gable-headed doorway. A pre-1875 photograph (currently hanging at the west end of the south aisle) shows a gallery in this position, with what appears a broad round-arched recess spanning the full width of the wall behind; this is puzzling - perhaps it was simply formed in the plaster.

The narrower lateral arches to the transepts have been badly mutilated. They are semicircular, and in their present form of a single square order, made up of elongate curved blocks, none of which extend the full thickness of the wall, the faces of these project some distance from the wall above, showing that what survives is the stripwork surround after the original arch beneath has been cut away. The arches spring from pairs of large square blocks which seem to be the cut-back remains of impostes; below these the present jambs, of a distinctive greenish sandstone, with simply chamfered angles, are clearly secondary, and may be of later medieval date. On the south

face of the eastern impost block of the north transept arch is an incised pattern of intersecting triangles, possibly an elaborate medieval mason's mark.

Two or three courses above the heads of the transept arches the masonry of the tower walls changes somewhat in character, larger and rather better-squared blocks being used. The upper stages of the tower are reached by a modern ladder which rises within the south transept to a doorway placed above and to the west of the transept arch. The head of this, partly concealed by the adjacent roof truss, is of shallow segmental form, but its stonework is of no great age; on the north face of the wall the opening has a rough square head, and is considerable taller. At this level, just above the change in character of the masonry, there is an opening set centrally in each wall. These openings have steeply gabled heads carried by projecting impost blocks, with jambs formed by large through stones. The eastern opening seems the least altered; its jambs are cut square, and its impost blocks project internally and into the opening, with a chamfer on their lower angles. The sill slopes down inwards; it is not clear whether this is an original feature. The opening in the west wall is very similar, but its imposts have been partly hacked away. The openings in the north and south walls have both been widened internally; the northern has its imposts left square, whilst those of the south are badly damaged.

Above the gable-headed openings and just below the ceiling (formed by two heavy east-west beams with stopped chamfers that could be later medieval work, and secondary members which are probably more recent) are two features. At the north-east corner a projecting block of masonry, bound by an iron strap, is the base of a brick flue that survives at higher levels. At the west end of the north wall is a socket infilled in brick, of uncertain function.

A ladder continues up to a trapdoor in this ceiling, giving access to the clock chamber, the walls of which are plastered and whitewashed. The eight small openings lighting the chamber are only c 0.3 m wide internally, and all have plain internal lintels; some are partly obscured by pipework etc. In the north-east corner is a brick shaft rising the full height of the chamber. The ceiling, which carries the bell frames, is formed by a series of north-south beams; on north and south these are carried by a wall-plate resting on a set-back, whilst on the west there is a set-back at the same level, but apparently none on the east.

A ladder gives access to the belfry. Here the north and south openings have recent concrete internal lintels, whilst that on the east has a concrete lintel inserted above its old stone internal lintel, now badly weathered. All four openings have shouldered rear arches, although little remains of the shouldering on the south.

The **Bell Frames** are of considerable importance. They are of timber (oak) and appear to have originally been of short-headed form, later converted to long-headed. There are four trusses of type 5 a (Pickford 1993) with sills running east-west, resting directly on the beams beneath, king-posts (Pickford type 6 - Norton is in fact his type example), straight braces (Pickford type 1) from sill to the jewelled head of the king-post (with notches for both transoms and apparently diagonal braces). That the frames have been reassembled at some time is shown by the fact that there are empty mortices in the sides of the king-posts below those now occupied by the braces. There are also end-posts notched into the long heads, supporting further longitudinal beams; the sills, which extend to the side walls, also carry floor-level longitudinal beams at each end. In plan the frames are of type 3.1.

The roof structure of the tower seems to be of late-19th century date, and is carried by two north-south cambered tie beams, one with the incised inscription 'A NAYLOR PLUMBER 1889'

The internal walls of the **South Transept** are formed of large roughly-squared stone. The narrow window in the east wall has a small two-centred arch, cut straight through the wall with a narrow chamfer on the angle of both head and jambs, with imposts chamfered beneath, now cut away towards the nave aisle. In the east wall the small window has a peculiar surround, the northern side of the inner splay being framed by upright blocks whilst the southern is clearly a relatively recent patching. On this side of the wall it can be seen that the head of the window was clearly originally a lancet. On the west is an arch opening into the south aisle, obviously inserted into an earlier wall. This is of simple two-centred form, with a narrow chamfer to both jambs and head, and impost blocks chamfered beneath, projecting except on the west, where they have been cut back.

In the south wall, the south doorway has a shallow segmental-pointed rear-arch springing from a corbel on the west; the large window above has a segmental-pointed rear arch.

The **North Transept** has an arch into the nave aisle, of similar form to that in the south transept, but rather wider. Its head is all restoration, and the imposts have been cut away towards both aisle and transept. On the east is a blocked opening or recess, set quite low towards the centre of the wall; only the jambs are visible. Above, but out of line with this, is what appears to be the internal north jamb of second opening, largely obscured by a wall monument. At a lower level, at the south end of the wall, is a small piscina with a chamfered two-centred arch and a projecting bowl that has been badly damaged.

Above the segmental rear arch of the late-19th century north window is a long block that may be the lintel of a previous opening, and above that the outline of a semicircular arch faintly visible.

The roofs of both transepts, each of three bays, are of 19th-century date.

The interior of the **Chancel** displays a considerable number of features of interest.

On the west wall, on either side of the crossing arch, are the ragged stubs of the side walls of the narrower original chancel still projecting 0.20 m or so.

The south wall is particularly complex internally. The two large 15th-century windows have elliptical rear arches, and casement mouldings similar to their external surrounds. The priests' door has a segmental rear arch; immediately to the east of it is a blocked two-centred archway, usually described as a sedile. This has jambs with attached shafts that have moulded capitals and bases, and a richly-moulded arch with a line of large nail-head between a bowtell and a fillet, under a moulded hood with cruciform foliate bosses as stops. Within the outer order appears the square edge of an inner, flush with the blocking, implying that this has been a doorway rather than a sedile. East of this archway, and beneath the internal sill of the eastern window, is a recess with a projecting block, chamfered on its lower angle, forming a seat; this looks all restoration, although the slight projection in the rough masonry beneath it may be old. At the rear of the recess is a small piscina with dogtooth in the arch, and a projecting fluted bowl, which again looks all restoration, although the moulded base of a truncated shaft at the east end of the recess looks old; its mouldings are of rather different character to those at the bases of the shafts of the

archway further west.

In the wall face above these features are indistinct remains of further openings. Above and to the left of the mysterious archway part of the sill and the western jamb of a window are plainly visible, with a less distinct break in the masonry suggesting that it had an arched head. Further west there is a possible straight joint above and between the archway and the priest's door, and a clearer one above the priest's door. Near this, high in the wall, is a block cut with a deep groove, presumably re-used. However, close to the west end of the wall, above the western jamb of the western window, a similar groove cuts through the blocks just below the wall-plate; there seems no ready explanation of this.

At the east end of the chancel the external jambs of two 13th century lancets are exposed, with attached shafts that have moulded capitals, bases and rings at mid-height; a few voussoirs of their rear arches, with a simple chamfer, survive. The present east window has a chamfered internal frame, and a moulded internal hood. The internal jambs of the window look to be cut into the masonry which blocks the earlier lancets, which is odd; one would have assumed the blocking of the lancets and construction of the present window took place at the same time. Below the present window a moulded set-back (apparently the sill-line of the original lancets) is stepped down to form a recess behind the altar; this has a recent sill... To the north of this the cusped bowl of a large piscina is built vertically into the wall.

At the east end of the north wall is a lancet window with a segmental-pointed rear arch and a stepped sill, now opening into the vestry. Apart from part of the east jamb the internal surround of this window is all in recent stone but the inner frame, and all of the chamfered surround facing the vestry, is medieval. Further west the moulded Tudor-arched doorway into the vestry looks entirely of late-19th century date, as is the large segmental-pointed arch, of two chamfered orders, into the organ chamber.

The roof of the chancel is of four bays, and seems to be of 15th century date; in form it is similar to that of the nave.

The internal walls of the **Vestry** are all plastered. In the south-east corner part of the clasping buttress at the north-east corner of the chancel is exposed. The doorway into the chancel, that in the north wall and the two windows all have shallow segmental rear arches with a narrow chamfer. On the west two round-arched openings connect with the **Organ Chamber**; this is plastered internally except for the west wall, which is the external face of the east wall of the north transept. Any features in this are hidden by fittings. The roof has three tie-beams, carried on corbels; the western corbel; of the central tie is carved as a human head; this may well be 19th century.

FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

In general the fittings and furnishings of the church are of late-19th and 20th century date, and are not of particular interest; exceptions are an elaborately-carved 17th-century (?) **chest** at the west end of the nave and a 17th or 18th century **Book Cupboard** with an open balustraded front, beside the south door. Under the crossing is a 17th-century (?) **Chair**, and hanging high on the west wall of the south transept is a large hexagonal wooden object, with inlaid decoration, which

may be the top of an 18th-century pulpit.

The **Stained Glass** is mostly of late 19th century or early 20th century date; there are several windows by Kempe or Kempe & Co.

The Font

The present font, of 1851, is in an elaborate Romanesque style, and stands at the west end of the nave. A previous font was turned out of the church in 1823, and its remains later found in the vicarage grounds 1 (1864)); it had a fluted bowl. Hodgson (1912, drawing f.p.246) sees it as of 17th century date. In 1864 (Transactions of the Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland I) 'one half of the bowl, together with the base and much-decayed shaft, may be seen railed in at the north-east angle of the nave, in the churchyard'. The base now lies to the east of the south porch, but the remains of shaft and bowl were not located.

SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS

The most important monument in the church is an **Effigy**, now set on an altar tomb in the north transept. It has been described and illustrated on several occasions; for a lengthy description see Hunter Blair (1924) 24-26. Page (313) describes the effigy as 'an unknown knight in chain armour and surcoat, apparently of late 13th or early 14th century date (Blair cites c.1320, notes currently hanging in the church suggest the effigy represents Sir Roger Fulthorpe d.1337). Above the head is a crocketed canopy, and the feet rest on two animals ion combat. The head is bare, and on the right side is a small kneeling figure with an open book. The sword, in a jewelled sheath, hangs from a belt, and on the left arm is a shield of six quarterings cut at a later date. Behind the canopy, over the head, are two original shields of arms, one a cross moline and the other a voided scutcheon with a bend over all. The first may be the arms of Bek of Redmarshall or Fulthorpe of Grindon. The other is that assigned to John Lithegraynes....On the chamfer of the slab on which the figure rests is an artificer's mark consisting of the letter I and three interlaced rings'. The 'artificer's mark' has been suggested to be a rebus for a 'John Cheyne'.

The effigy is in extremely good condition, but there may have been some re-cutting (1990 letter from P.Giudici, on file in Diocesan Office). Hutchinson and Surtees refer to it as lying in the Blakiston Porch (north transept) but in the 19th century it was removed to lie beneath the tower, until moved to its present position in 1990.

A second effigy, of a woman was found during the 1875-1876 works, and built into the internal face of the east wall of the porch. Blair (op.cit) describes it as 'originally very finely carved' and probably of mid-14th century date.... practically nothing can be made out except the lower folds of a wimple and the outer edge of a maniple'. The head is missing.

There are two medieval **cross-slab grave covers**; for full descriptions see Ryder (1985) 108-109 & plate 47):

- (1) Slab set against internal face of east wall of south porch. Relief design of round-leaf bracelet cross rising from stepped base; late 12th or early 13th century.
- (2) Slab re-used as internal lintel of two-light clerestory window on south of nave. Round-

lead bracelet cross with petalled rosette at centre, the head carved in relief, the shaft and base incised. Probably 13th century.

Unpublished notes by C.C.Hodges, in the Society of Antiquaries collection at Newcastle, refer to three slabs at Norton, the one in the clerestory, and ones built into internal and external faces of the west wall of the nave. The one in the porch may have been moved from the internal face of the west end when the War Memorial panel was installed; that on the exterior may have been erased by weathering, or Hodges may have confused another carved stone in this wall for part of a cross slab.

There are a number of **Post-Medieval Monuments**: several wall monuments in the north transept may have been re-located from elsewhere in the church. At the north end of the east wall is a early 17th-century marble slab, with full entablature, to Thomas Davison of Blakeston, with a latin inscription; on the opposite wall is a wall monument to John Davison, d.1691. Also in the transept are several 18th century monuments to members of the Foster family. There are other late 18th and 19th century wall monuments in the south transept.

There are modern floors throughout the church (except perhaps in the sanctuary, which is carpetted); the only surviving ledger stones have been re-laid outside (see 'churchyard'), except for one to Thomas Davison, d.1715, in front of the altar rails.

CARVED STONES

Cramp (1984, 134; plates 125 & 694) describes two pieces of Pre-Conquest sculpture

- (1) Part of a cross shaft built into the 'south jamb of the chancel arch' (actually it is set in the north side of the eastern respond of the south transept arch). 10th century.
- (2) Part of a cross shaft, said to have been found built into the west wall of the nave, now built into the internal face of the east wall of the south porch. First half of 10th century.

Several other medieval carved fragments have been set into the internal walls of the south porch, in addition to the female effigy, cross slab and fragment of Pre-Conquest cross already mentioned. They include a small recess flanked by attached shafts set into the west wall, part of a 12th-century capital set in the south-west corner, a 13th-century fragment with dog-tooth set high in the east wall, and twelve chevron-moulded voussoirs re-set as an eaves cornice. Standing at the north-east corner is a moulded shaft, a three-quarter circle in plan, that looks to be of post-medieval date. Another piece of a carved 12th-century capital has been set in the north-west angle of the nave c 1 m above the floor.

Built into the external face of the west wall of the nave, low down, are a few stones that may have been carved; only one is legible, and this is shaped like a two-centred arch, with two incised border lines. This may be what Hodges' thought to be part of a medieval cross slab (see above), but looks more like a 19th-century piece. Set in the south face of the buttress at the south end of the west wall of the south transept, 4 m above the ground, is a block bearing part of a relief-carved pattern of a six-pointed star within a circle. It seems too thick to have been part of a grave slab, and may have been an architectural piece.

HISTORICAL NOTES

- Late C10 As recorded in the Liber Vitae Ecclesiae Dunelmensis Ulfcytel son of Osulf gave Norton to St Cuthbert (ie the Durham community) 'completely into his guardianship, as a protection against fighting and persecution'. Current opinion dates this reference between 966 and 992. Notes hanging in the church interpret this as suggesting that a stone church may have been built as a strong point at this time.
- 1081 Bishop Carileph of Durham transferred some of the Saxon secular clergy from Durham to Norton, which then became a collegiate church.
- 1340 Richard de Bury complained that the canons neglected to keep the chancel in order (Reg.Palat. Dunelm (Rolls Ser.) iii,299)
- 1410 Bishop Langley ordered the canons to repair the chancel (Surtees op.cit. 158)
- 1496 The chancel had 'fallen into ruin and desolation, as well in the roof, the stone walls and windows as in various other parts': Bishop Fox sequestered the incomes of the canons to carry out the necessary repairs (Hutchinson 1787, 111)
- 1787 The historian William Hutchinson (op.cit. 110) gives a brief description of the church: 'Norton church, in its present state, appears to be much inferior to what it has been. The tower stands in the centre, supported on four circular arches, forming a square of about twelve feet. The chancel is six paces in length, and five in width. The east window consists of three lights; and there are two windows to the south, under flat or low elliptic arches. The length of the cross, from north to south, is seventeen paces; the north limb, of which is called Blakiston porch, being the burial-place of the owners of Blakiston..... The nave has side ailes, formed by two round columns, not ill proportioned, with light mouldings for capitals: They support pointed arches. The nave is twenty-one paces in length from the opening of the chancel; and in width, with the side ailes, thirteen paces. All the windows are flat-topped.'
- 1823 Surtees (1823, 154) gives a brief account of the building, and in a footnote states that 'the whole structure is now in the neatest order. An organ, the gift of the present Vicar, is placed against the West arch of the central tower. A valuable painting over the altar is also the gift of Mr Anstey. The font is now placed in a recess on the South of the altar, which seems to have been an ancient piscina'. In the same year, but probably after Surtees wrote, the church underwent 'considerable repairs and restorations. The side walls of the western part were entirely taken down and rebuilt, so as to enclose a wider area...the front of the south transept was rebuilt, with a handsome lancet window. The stone-work of the chancel was re-fronted. The eastern window...was copied, and one on a larger scale, of fine and massive proportions, inserted at the western end of the church. The north side of the chancel was also ornamented with two large Gothic windows, exactly corresponding to those on the south side' (Fordyce 1857, 208-208). Mackenzie & Cross (1834, II, 5) state that the south transept was shortened during these works.

1843 Sir Stephen Glynne visited the church; his notes (Proceedings Soc. Ants. Newcastle Series 3, iii, 186) describe it as ;'much altered and modernised especially within'; the exterior was stuccoed. The windows in the rebuilt aisles had 'pseudo-perpendicular tracery' and the clerestory was blocked up. 'There are ugly galleries erected along every side of the nave, which is encumbered also with high though regular pews'.

FACULTIES AND OTHER RECORDS OF STRUCTURAL WORK

Faculty No / date	Works
99 (1792)	Faculty to remove old pews and erect new ones
(1854)	A small gallery was erected in the Blakiston Porch (North Transept) (Whellan 1856, 556)
206 (1874)	Restoration and re-seating of church. The plans accompanying the faculty, dated 1872, are by Alexander and Henman, architects, of Stockton and Middlesborough. The specification included the renewal of the floors and roofs (except the chancel), the removal of all pews, galleries, and all plaster, the rebuilding of the aisles, the construction of a new south porch. Discrepancies between the faculty plans and works actually carried out are discussed in the 'Structural History' section.
294 (12 March 1889)	Alterations and additions. A new vestry and organ chamber were built, to the designs of C Hodgson Fowler, and new choir stalls introduced.
(1893)	The bells were re-hung (Kelly's <u>Directory</u> 1897, 281)
(1911)	The roof of the north aisle was renewed (Page 1928, 311)
764 (27 Feb 1917)	New clock in tower etc. (A stone tablet in the south porch, dated 1916, commemorates the gift of the clock)
2382 (11 August 1931)	Alterations and improvements in the churchyard
2682 (19th August 1937)	Improvements in the churchyard.
2926 (13th June 1946)	Erection of lych gate.
3971 (28 October 1957)	Removal of a screen.
4694 (3 July 1964)	'Certain alterations and improvements'
5080 (20 September 1968)	Introduction of new pulpit etc.

5140 (29 July 1969)	New oil-fired central heating system, electric system and oak pews.
5887 (5 November 1980)	Removal of certain headstones and kerbs from churchyard.
6014 (8th July 1982)	Restoration and re-siting of organ.
6140 (4 November 1983)	Conversion of oil-fired central heating system to gas.
(1981)	Base of second column from west on south side of nave replaced in sandstone ashlar (1986 QQ)
6186 (8 May 1984)	Introduction of aumbry and light
1990	Works including moving of medieval effigy and archaeological excavation prior to lowering floor in nave and aisle by c 180 mm.

THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The earliest part of the church is the crossing tower and transepts, and also probably the south wall of the nave. These have generally been ascribed a 'Saxon date', in the 10th or early 11th century. The cruciform plan of Norton, and in particular the manner in which the central tower has salient angles projecting beyond the four arms, is a typical late Saxon feature exemplified by Stow in Lincolnshire and several churches further south; the only other example in the North East appears to be Sandal Magna near Wakefield (Ryder 1993, 19). Another distinctive 'Saxon' feature is the formation of apparent high-level chambers above the various parts of the church, reached by the gable-headed doorways in the tower. The Taylors (1965, 467) interpret these as having opened off a high-level gallery in the tower, reached by stair in the present position.

The actual date of this earliest structural phase must remain open to question; the correlation between it and Ulfcytel's 10th-century gift of lands to Durham tentatively suggested by notes currently in the church seems a little far-fetched. Contemporary opinion is now placing many 'Saxon' towers into the period immediately following the Norman Conquest; if this is accepted, then it would be hard not to correlate the building with the recorded move of the Saxon secular clergy from Durham to Norton c1081. Against this it could be cited that the tower and transepts are stylistically thoroughly 'Saxon', without any trace of Norman influences.

The first major remodelling of the church came at the end of the 12th-century, when the nave was provided with aisles and a clerestory (an unusually early example) and the east and west crossing arches were remodelled. Architecturally these can be classed as 'Transitional' (ie between Norman and Early English); re-set vousoirs in the south porch are probably from a south doorway of this period.

The rebuilding of the Saxon chancel seems to have followed within the first half of the 13th century. Subsequent alterations, in particular refacing of walls, have erased evidence of some of the features of the Early English chancel; the feature in the south wall usually interpreted as part of the sedilia seems in fact to be a doorway, presumably opening into some adjacent structure,

possibly a chantry chapel or a sacristy.

Following repeated complaints about the condition of the chancel (see 'historical notes'), major works appear to have been carried out c1496; the eastern and southern windows appear to be of this period.

The enlargement of the north and south crossing arches may have taken place in the later medieval period, although the details that date from the remodelling, such as the narrow chamfer on their new jambs, do not offer much as regards dating evidence.

The church, as often, retains little evidence of the centuries between the Reformation and the Victorian period. Brewster's drawing (1829, facing p.291) shows the church before the 1823 works; there are two plain square-headed sash windows in the south aisle, on either side of a very plain porch with an outer arch which has a depressed or segmental head, whilst the south end of the south transept has a single tall round-arched sash window.

19th-century alterations and restorations are fairly well documented, although in detail a number of puzzles remain. The need for extra accommodation occasioned the 1823 reconstruction of the aisles, to make additional provision for the galleries so deplored by Sir Stephen Glynne. Surviving 'ground and gallery' plans of 1825 give a good picture of the enlarged church; there were galleries over each nave aisle, each reached by stairs within the adjacent transept. There was a childrens' gallery in the south transept. There was also a vestry by this time.

Fordyce records that two large windows were inserted in the north wall of the chancel at this time, but this may be an error; the 'at present' plan accompanying the 1889 faculty shows only two lancets in this wall (one at the west end to be removed by the insertion of the arch to the organ chamber); however Hodgson (1892, 12) statement that 'the objectionable substitution for one of Bishop Fox's window in the chancel was, I believe, made in 1853' only confuses the issue further. A further gallery was constructed in the north transept in 1854, and at some time what seems to have been an organ loft was built at the east end of the nave, entered by a doorway broken through the east wall of the tower above the chancel arch but below the Saxon gable-headed doorway (this is shown on an old photograph which now hangs in the nave)

A major restoration took place, apparently in 1874, which left the church very much in its present condition, but even this is not without its puzzles. Kelly's Directory (1897, 281) refers to restoration works in 1876 as costing £3,577 and in 1879 as costing a further £900. The faculty plans, by Alexander and Hermon, dated 1872, propose a restoration in the Early English style, whereas what actually took place was one in a free variant on the Perpendicular; this discrepancy remains to be investigated. Pevnser & Williamson describe the 'low aisle windows' as of 20th century date, and 'probably by C.H.Fowler' but the faculty evidence suggests that Hodgson Fowler was only responsible for the vestry (1889); a photograph of the church from the south-west reproduced by Longstaffe (1892, facing p.1) shows the building, with its Perpendicular-style aisle windows, as at present

THE CHURCHYARD

The churchyard is large, and roughly rectangular, the church being set roughly on a central axis towards the east end. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25":1 mile map of c1860 shows the

churchyard as considerably smaller; there has been a major extension to the west, probably in the later 19th century, and a more recent one to the north (taking in the area the c1860 map shows as including a sandpit). The old boundaries are marked by lines of old trees, a slight bank on the west and a much more pronounced one on the north. 18th-century brick walls remain on the east and part of the south perimeter; the ivied stub of the former north wall has at least two worn medieval architectural fragments built into it.

A number of old ledgers and floor stones from within the church have been re-laid close to its external walls. Outside the west end of the nave are two large ledgers of blue limestone, one (with a good coat of arms) to Admiral Polycarp Taylor (d.1771); there are a number of other 18th-century ledgers nearby, and also on the south. East of the porch is a blue limestone medieval slab with the indents for brasses of a knight and lady, and for various inscriptions; alongside it is another good heraldic ledger, dated 1669, to one of the Davisons of Blakiston.

The churchyard monuments are largely headstones, and of 19th century and later dates; in the old part of the yard south of the church there are a few 18th century examples, mostly in poor condition.

To the south-east of the church is a crucifix erected as a 1914-1918 war memorial; the lych gate, on the east, is dated '1948'. To the south of the gate, just inside the churchyard wall, is an ivied stonepile; the exposed stones look to be mostly of 19th century date, but there may be older pieces currently hidden.

The churchyard was closed to burials in 1976.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Perhaps uniquely for a church in the Diocese of Durham, St Mary's has already had the benefit, prior to the re-flooring in 1990, of a proper evaluation of its sub-floor archaeology. This is set out in a report by Daniels and Tann (1990) produced by Cleveland County Archaeology Section. This work, which entailed the digging of seven small trial trenches in June 1990, and the excavation of about half the area of the north transept in November of the same year, confirmed the survival of medieval plaster floors in both north and south aisles, and exposed an 18th-century vault in the transept; 'good survival' of medieval deposits was proved, which were protected by the new floor level being raised.

The importance of the above-ground fabric of the church has long been recognised. However, relatively recent re-facing work of the tower and chancel, although apparently involving individual replacement of the major stones, does appear to have resulted in the destruction of valuable archaeological evidence, particularly in the form of early roof lines on the tower. It does not seem likely that detailed records were made of the external wall faces before this work was carried out; they certainly should have been.

Priorities

In view of the importance of the external wall faces of the central tower, and the extensive stone replacement already carried out, these should be recorded in detail by means of rectified photographs taken from the adjacent roofs. Any further works here must respect the

archaeological evidence, however ephemeral, already present. It may be thought worthwhile to plan a scheme in which all the early wall faces of the tower and transepts, external and internal, are properly recorded.

In view of the importance of the fabric, it is also important to have a modern set of plans produced; those currently available all seem to disregard the very obvious deviation in alignment between nave and the chancel.

There are also some conservation problems as regards to monuments which have been displaced from the church, and now lie outside. The medieval slab with its brass indents on the east of the porch, and at least two of the ledger stones relaid outside the walls, are of special interest, and are worthy of protection; it may be wise to consider their return into the building.

Peter F Ryder. May 1996

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THE CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, NORTON

An Archaeological Assessment

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THE CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN

NORTON

South -west after Brewster (1829)

An Archaeological Assessment

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