

St Laurence's Church, Pittington

The old parish church of Pittington is situated c 1 km to the south of the 19th-century village of the same name, in the hamlet of Hallgarth, near the foot of the Magnesian Limestone escarpment and c 5 km north-east of the City of Durham. This is a substantial parish church with a six-bay aisled nave, western tower, south porch, and chancel flanked by side chapels and a vestry.

Description

The heavy western **Tower** rises in three stages, and clearly displays fabric of several different phases, all of squared and coursed sandstone. There are heavy clasping buttresses at the western angles, diminishing by an irregular series of steps and set-backs, which rise to the top of the second stage, and shallower buttresses at the east ends of north and south walls. In addition there are narrower mid- buttresses to west and south, the former now only rising to the sill of the west window, and the latter rising to the top of the first stage but almost entirely encased in later buttressing. On the north a semi-octagonal stair turret rises to mid-way up the second stage.

The tower has a plinth of early-13th century type, with a roll moulding above two sloping members, which extends around the original buttresses and the stair turret. The south-west clasping buttress has been almost entirely reconstructed and extended in large squared masonry, re-using pieces of the original plinth in the reconstructed section, which now extends along the south face of the tower as far as another secondary buttress built into the angle of tower wall and the west end of the adjacent aisle.

The mid-buttress on the west wall has a sloping 19th-century top beneath the sill of the west window which is a lancet with dressings of 19th-century diagonally-tooled ashlar and a moulded hood with foliate stops, set in an area of secondary masonry that extends up to a string-course chamfered on its lower angle, set a little higher than the moulded string which divides first and second stages on north and south.

On the south the stepping-back of the face of the extended south-west buttress reveals the face of the upper part of the mid-buttress, now flush with the secondary masonry on either side. On the north the stair projection has no external doorway; the only openings below the moulded string are a vertical pair of chamfered square-headed loops. The string does not extend across the short length of wall between stair projection and the west end of the nave; this may have been re-faced, although at its foot the 13th-century plinth is continuous with that of the projection.

The second stage of the tower has a round-headed window on the west. This has a chamfered surround, apparently undisturbed original work., with the clock face directly above. On the south there is a central disturbed area of masonry, which looks more like the scar of a removed upper section of the mid-buttress (which now has a sloped top at the same level as that of the adjacent secondary buttresses, a little above the moulded string); internal evidence (see below) suggests that there was a small window to the east of this buttress.

On the north the upper section of the stair projection has another chamfered loop, and a pyramidal cap of stone slabs; to the east is a shallow buttress rising from a sloped section of

masonry which seems to represent the coping of an earlier pre-clerestory west gable of the nave.

The unbuttressed belfry stage of the tower, set above a slight set-back, is largely of substantial blocks of grey gritstone, although smaller coursed fabric extends up to the level of the springing of the belfry opening in the eastern part of the south wall. In the centre of south, west and east faces is a two-light opening, with a depressed arched head enclosing a pair of lancet-headed lights; there was presumably a similar opening on the north now represented by an irregular patch of secondary masonry. Above these is a moulded string and a crenellated parapet, with a renewed crocketed pinnacle at each angle; a stone spout projects from the parapet on the north.

The external walls of the **Nave** are exposed only at the east and west ends, and in the clerestories. At the north end of the west wall are the angle quoins of the early Norman aisleless nave, laid in alternate fashion but of no great size (up to c 0.20 m height), with some original diagonal tooling still traceable; at the head of the angle is the springing of the contemporary west gable, the coping blocks having an integral coping, chamfered on its lower angle. The corresponding quoining at the south-west angle is concealed by the buttresses added to the tower. The east gable has a cut coping, chamfered on its lower angles, and a ring-cross finial.

The clerestory walls are of coursed squared stone, very heavily mortared on the south; on the north the fabric seems more irregular, with some patches of rubble. The clerestory itself is of five bays, the square-headed windows each having two cusped ogee-headed lights, with cusped piercings in the spandrels, with alternating-block jambs and moulded hoods with turned-back ends. All those on the south looks of 19th-century date, despite the erosion of their dressings; on the north the alternating-block jambs of the western three windows look less regular than the others, and might be genuine medieval work. Above them is an oversailing hollow-chamfered eaves course; on the north parts of this look to be genuine medieval work.

The external walls of the **South Aisle** are of coursed roughly-squared stone, again heavily mortared. There is a small chamfered plinth (with in places a rough projecting footing below) and a moulded string below the sills of the windows. The west end of the aisle has no features other than a cut stone coping, chamfered on its lower angle. The south wall is in six bays, the porch projecting from the second, with large stepped buttresses at the ends of the wall and lower ones set between the fourth and fifth and fifth and sixth bays; directly above the fourth/fifth bay buttress is an early sundial set in the wall (see below). Each bay has a window of two cinquefoil-headed ogee lights with foliated mouchettes, varying in number and arrangement, in the arched heads, which have moulded hoods with turned-back ends, and the typically Victorian feature of an additional order of rough voussoirs outside the hood. All the dressings of the buttresses and windows are of 19th-century ashlar.

The west end of the **North Aisle** is of coursed squared stone; some areas of decayed stone have been recently replaced (1999). The north wall has three shallow buttresses, with chamfered plinths, one at each end and one dividing a three-bay western section from a two-bay eastern; it is built of coursed roughly-squared stone, the courses varying considerably in height. The western section has single-light Romanesque windows with surrounds of stepped-and-chamfered section; a string-course, chamfered on both upper and lower angles, is carried

up over them as a hoodmould. Below the eastern of the three windows, and midway between it and the central window, are blocked square-headed loops with eroded chamfered surrounds. These were recorded in detail during 1999 repointing works (Ryder 1999) and appear to be in-situ survivals of the fenestration of the late-12th century aisle; one of two thin courses a little above them may mark the original wall head (the internal face of the wall shows no sign of these openings, and was presumably completely rebuilt in the 19th century). To the west of the loops two large blocks in the lower part of the wall might possibly indicate the position of a former north door, shown on the early 19th century plan of the church.

The western window in the eastern part of the aisle wall is another round-arched one in the same style, although considerably wider than the others; it has a stepped-and-roll-moulded surround and a hoodmould, chamfered above and below, with terminals in the form of quite convincing Romanesque beasts' heads. The eastern window is, by contrast, in a 14th-century style, with cusped ogee-arched lights, a cusped quatrefoil in the spandrel, and a moulded hood with turned-back ends. This section of wall has a string-course, similarly chamfered to that in the western bays, running below the sills of the windows; between the two bays is a straight joint that seems to mark the east end of the medieval aisle, before its 19th-century extension, further evidence that some medieval masonry does survive.

The **South Porch** is built of coursed squared stone, and has stepped diagonal buttresses at its southern angles and a moulded plinth to the south wall and buttresses only. The outer arch is of two continuous chamfered orders under a moulded hood with turned-back ends; the gable above has a coping chamfered on its lower angle, and encloses a nowy-headed sundial (18th century) now very heavily eroded. On the west side of the porch is a small quatrefoil window pierced through a single slab.

The walls of the **Chancel** are of ashlar, with a light diagonal tooling. The south elevation is of three bays, the first behind the south-east chapel. The eastern bays have a chamfered plinth, a string, chamfered above and below, just below the windows, and at the wall head shaped corbels carrying an oversailing course with an indented ornament. There are heavy clasping buttresses at the eastern angles of the chancel, and a large stepped buttress between the eastern and central bays, which each have a pair of lancets with chamfered surrounds and moulded hoods, with Romanesque-style beasts as their terminals; those of the central-bay window are similar in character to those of the round-arched windows in the eastern part of the north aisle and the south chancel chapel, and may be have been re-used. The masonry of the 1907 eastern bay is distinguishable from the 1846 western parts by the use of more elongate blocks; the eastern clasping buttresses are clearly those of the 1846 chancel re-used.

On the north of the chancel, the two western bays are covered by the vestry and north-east chapel; the 1907 eastern bay has a plinth, string and corbel table as on the south, and a pair of lancets of the same type, but the fabric is of coursed roughly-squared stone, almost of 'snecked' character.

The east end of the chancel is of diagonally-tooled ashlar with chamfered plinth and a moulded string, running beneath a stepped triplet of lancets with stepped-and-chamfered surrounds and moulded hoods with foliate terminals; the gable above has a stepped-and-interlocked coping with a cross fleury finial.

The south wall of the **South Chancel Chapel** is of coursed roughly-squared stone, with ashlar

quoins, whereas the east wall is of tooled squared stone of near-ashlar quality. The only window is in the south wall, and is a Romanesque one of the same type as that in the eastern part of the north aisle.

The **Vestry** and **North Chancel Chapel** are built of roughly-tooled snecked stone, with ashlar quoins; on the north is a chamfered square-headed doorway with alternating-block jambs, between two small windows, each of two trefoiled ogee-headed lights; the weathering of their external dressings makes them look convincingly medieval, but they are probably much more recent. Beneath the western window is a descending stair to the boiler room, beneath the chapel. This is entered by a doorway with a flattened triangular arch, with a small trefoiled window alongside. On the east of the vestry is a square-headed window of two trefoiled arch, with sunk spandrels, and a moulded hood.

The internal faces of the north, south and east walls of the nave, and the internal walls of the tower, are plastered; other wall faces are currently bare of plaster.

The **Tower** opens to the nave by a heavily-distorted arch - it is difficult to see whether it has originally been semicircular or pointed - of two chamfered orders with a hoodmould chamfered below. The inner order is carried by responds of keeled section with moulded bases and capitals; the keeled half-shafts show vertical tooling, possibly from a 19th-century restoration.

High in the western angles of the nave are crude corbels, that at the south-western set lower than that at the north-western, which carry projections that seem to do more than support the end tie-beam of the roof structure. The wall above the tower arch has various disturbances and breaks, most doubtless relating to the structural problems which this part of the building has suffered. Above the tower arch, and set a little north of centre, is a blocked doorway, apparently square-headed, with some large blocks in its jambs. Behind the tie-beam of the roof truss is what appears to be a cut for a roof of shallow pitch, possibly infilled with brick.

Inside the base of the tower the west window has a broad internal splay with alternating-block jambs of 19th-century character and a shouldered rear arch. On the north a narrow and low square-headed doorway, with no dressing exposed, gives access to the tower stair..

Three irregular corbels against the north and south walls support heavy beams set along the wall face, which in turn carry six north-south beams, all very plain, but possibly of some age. Just below this floor, on the east, is a recess formed by the lower part of the high-level doorway between nave and tower.

Evidence of major restoration work to the tower is visible inside the tower stair, in the form of a concrete ring beam below and above the second loop in the north wall. A small square-headed doorway opens into the Ringing Chamber, two wooden steps descending to the chamber floor. The walls of the chamber show more evidence of structural repairs; the walls are heavily mortared, especially on the east, where there is no sign of the upper part of the blocked high-level doorway visible from the nave, although there is a small bricked opening c 0.30 m wide and 0.15 m high set centrally about 2 m above the floor and above it are indistinct traces of a blocked opening, perhaps with a pointed arch. The south wall is heavily disturbed, although there is what appears to be one jamb of a blocked opening towards the east end of the wall. The upper section of the west window has been blocked up; the original

rear arch seems to have had a pointed head, whereas the present reduced one has a segmental top.

A wooden ladder ascends to the belfry, where the bell frames (see 'Fittings and Furnishings') are carried by six north-south beams of some age, now supported by recent metal girders.

The head of the rear arch of the westernmost belfry opening is in a state of collapse

The **Nave** has six-bay arcades.

The north arcade is the architectural highlight of the church, and is in two parts, the genuine western part of four bays separated by a short length of wall from a 19th-century eastern part of two slightly higher and wider arches. All the arches are semicircular and of two orders, the inner with a narrow chamfer to its angle, the outer with (towards the nave) bold high-relief chevrons on both the face and intrados of each voussoir, within a hood, chamfered on its lower angle. Towards the aisle both orders are simply left square and there is no hood. The responds are semi-octagonal with roll-mouldings to the angles, stopped a block short of capital and base, scalloped semi-octagonal capitals and moulded bases (that of the eastern with a beaded moulding). A small niche with a trefoil-headed pointed arch has been cut into the south-west face of the shaft of the eastern respond. The first and third piers are circular with a massive spiral moulding in high relief, with octagonal scalloped capitals and moulded bases. The central pier is octagonal with roll-moulded angles like those of the responds and has an elaborate octagonal capital, a variant on a scalloped form with floral motifs and beading. Responds and piers are set on square stepped-and-chamfered plinths. The arcade has certainly undergone some degree of restoration in the 19th century, to judge from the tooling and the 'fresh' appearance of some parts (notably the capital of the first pier; is it a replacement?). The contrast between the vertical 19th-century tooling (inner order) and the more worn diagonal tooling of the original (outer order) is well seen on the aisle side of the arcade.

The arcade is cut into an earlier wall in which two windows (opened out in the 1846 restoration) remain, one with its sill truncated by the second arch and the second, intact, above the third pier. Their internal splays are plastered, that of the western retaining large sections of an important 12th-century wall painting (cleaned in 1967) depicting on one jamb the Consecration of St Cuthbert by Archbishop Theodore and on the other St Cuthbert's Vision at the table of the Abbess of Whitby¹. The outer openings of the windows have the narrowest of chamfers to their jambs and semicircular heads, which are cut into semicircular monolithic blocks, with the curve of the extrados following the arch of the head; the jambs are of small stones, little different from those of the adjacent walling. Further east, above the short length of walling between the two parts of the arcade, the quoining of the north-east angle of the early nave is exposed; the inner face of this short length of walling, which is actually the cut-away stub of the return of the east end of the early nave, is rough rubble. The nave wall itself is of coursed rubble/roughly-squared stone, apparently largely Magnesian Limestone. The presumably-19th century walling above the eastern part of the arcade is of more regularly-coursed and yellower stone. At its west end of the earlier wall there seems to

1 Hanging at the west end of the south aisle are full-scale reproductions of the 12th-century wall paintings on the splay of the early window in the north wall of the nave, with accompanying text stating that they were executed by Mr N Hamlyn of Bishop Hatfield's Hall, Durham, around 1888.

be a disturbed area, behind plaster, on the internal face; its significance is uncertain.

The 1846 eastern section of the arcade is copies the detail of the western part, and retains two old responds (their capitals look to have been renewed) of precisely the same type; the western is an in-situ survival from an arch added when the nave was first extended eastwards c 1200, the eastern was re-set in 1846. The central pier is a monolithic block carved with the raised spiral moulding an impressive piece of Victorian workmanship.

The south arcade also comprises a four-bay and a two-bay section, but here all the arches are pointed and of two chamfered orders, with a hoodmould, chamfered below, on both faces of the wall. As on the north, the two eastern bays have rather higher and wider arches. The western section has circular piers with moulded capitals and moulded holdwater-type bases set on octagonal plinths. The outer order of the arches has a single large dogtooth ornament on the block above the arcade capital, on both aces of the wall, and the hoodmould terminates above the piers in mask stops. Towards the nave the mask - a knight - above the central pier look genuine medieval work, but the other two seem Victorian. Towards the aisle there is a medieval mask above the centre pier; it is not clear whether there have been similar tops above the other piers - possibly they have been broken away

The walling above the arcade has two early windows, opposite to, and very similar to, those on the north; here the eastern window still has its lower section walled up. Below the windows are two sockets which presumably relate to an earlier roof of the aisle. Above the elongate 'pier' between the two parts of the arcade the quoining of the south-east angle of the original nave is exposed, and is again of similar character. The masonry of the eastern two arches looks genuine medieval work (the western is in situ, the eastern moved in 1846 from the north wall); the pier and responds have square plinths. The pier is presumably Victorian, although its base looks quite convincing; the hoodmould stop above, a king's head, is clearly Victorian. As seen from the aisle, the walling above the greater part of the western arch seems to be undisturbed medieval work, and has a feature rather like a cut-back string-course extending for c 2m eastward from the original nave quoins. The walling above the pier, and to the east, is presumably Victorian, although the eastern section has a couple of infilled sockets.

The **South Aisle** is entered by the south doorway, now within the porch. It has a semicircular-arched head of two orders, the inner with a continuous chamfer, the outer with a big roll moulding, carried on jamb shafts with moulded bases and simple block capitals carrying imposts chamfered on their lower angles; there is a hoodmould, grooved and chamfered below. Virtually all the stonework of the opening is concealed by a skin of Roman cement; it is not clear how much of the original survives. The rear arch of the doorway is semicircular, and has a large drawbar tunnel in the east jamb; this would seem unlikely to have been replaced if the doorway had been reset in a totally-rebuilt section of wall; further evidence that the doorway may survive in situ is seen by the fact that its internal dressings are not quite in the same plane as the face of the wall on either side.

The aisle windows have pointed rear arches without any cut dressings. Between the first and second windows to the east of the doorway is a single elongate block c 1.5 m ,with an indent cut in its upper face as if for the sill of an opening; there is a similar block to the east of the second window, not quite extending as far as the third. Beyond the third window, and roughly in line with the pier of the eastern part of the arcade, is a vertical straight joint extending for most of the height of the wall. The internal opening of the fourth (easternmost) window is

quite different in character to the others, having a segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfered head. At the east end of the aisle is a pointed arch (largely concealed by the organ) of two chamfered orders, springing from moulded capitals, opening into the south chancel chapel.

Inside the **South Porch** the rere arch of the outer archway of the porch, partly cemented over, is of brick.

In the **North Aisle**, the three Romanesque windows in the western part of the north wall have plain roughly semicircular rear arches and ashlar sills which project slightly from the wall face. There is no evidence internally of the two small blocked windows low in the wall. The fourth window is similar internally to the others; then, in line with the east side of the pier of the eastern section of the arcade, comes a vertical straight joint, partly concealed by a wall memorial. The fifth window has an internal surround of ashlar with a chamfered head and alternating block jambs; there appears to be disturbed area around the window head, as if the window is an insertion in an older section of wall. At the east end of the aisle is an acutely-pointed archway of two chamfered orders on semicircular responds with moulded bases and capitals re-used in 1846 from the blocked arcade upon the north side of the chancel. The capitals are rather elegant, with crockets.

The **Chancel** is entered under a pointed arch of two chamfered orders, with a hood, chamfered below, with foliate stops. Towards the nave the chamfer of the outer order is continued down the jamb, whilst towards the chancel it dies into the wall. The inner order is carried on keel-shaped responds with moulded capitals (with nail-head) and bases; all of this looks entirely Victorian.

The side walls of the chancel are largely of snecked fairly roughly-shaped stone, and were almost certainly plastered. The present heavy pointing does not assist in a detailed inspection of the fabric, although it is clear that some patches of fabric survived the 19th century rebuilding.

At the west end of the south wall of the chancel a segmental-pointed arch of two chamfered orders, the outer continued down the jambs whilst the inner dies into them, opens into the organ chamber (or south-east chapel); beyond this is an area of old walling including the eastern internal jamb of a window (immediately to the right of a wall monument to John Pemberton), with just the turn of what may have been a pointed rear arch. To the east of the monument is a ragged straight joint between c 2.5 and 4 m above the floor, with 19th-century masonry to the east; below this older masonry extends further east to a straight joint c 0.30 m east of the west jamb of the first of the paired lancets. The two pairs of lancets have rear arches in ashlar, with shafted jambs that have moulded caps and bases, and richly-moulded rear arches with hoods with foliate stops; between them is a semblance of a joint marking the early-20th century extension. Below is a recess housing the early-20th century wooden sedilia; east of this is a genuine medieval piscina with a roll-moulded trefoiled arch and a semi-octagonal moulded shelf (not a bowl) with a moulded edge supported on a 19th-century corbel below it..

On the north, again from west to east, is another segmental-pointed arch to the north-east chapel, then a shoulder-arched doorway to the vestry, then a nine-bay arcade, the first seven bays blind and the last two enclosing the pair of lancet windows at the east end of the wall.

Beneath the arcade is a shallow three-bay arcade, rather like a sedilia, with trefoiled arches and carved capitals, flanked by pilasters with roll-moulded angles and pyramidal caps with tegulated ornament, below the paired lancets is a further recess in the panelled dado, containing a seat.

The triplet of lancets in the east wall have shafted jambs with carved capitals and richly-moulded rear arches and hoods with foliate stops.

The north-east chapel has plastered walls; at its east end is a boarded partition, with a doorway at its north end, dividing it from the vestry, which is also plastered and whitewashed, except for the exposed ashlar surround of its east window..

The **Roofs** of the church are all of 19th or early 20th century date. That of the nave is of nine irregular bays, divided by slightly-cambered moulded tie-beams with wall-posts carried on moulded 19th-cent corbels, with solid arch braces or spandrel pieces. Above the tie beams are principal rafters of fairly shallow pitch, with a moulded ridge and one purlin on each roof slope; the rafters themselves have hollow-chamfered angles. The six-bay roof of the south aisle has principals supported by wall-posts on simple corbels on both side walls, with braces and a single purlin. The north aisle roof is precisely similar. The chancel has a boarded wagon roof of six bays, with arch-braced and brattished moulded wall plates, with short wall posts coming down onto carved corbels, with painted coats or arms above. There are gilded bosses at the intersections of the trusses and two levels of purlins.

Fittings and Furnishings

The openwork Chancel Screen with its traceried panels has an inscription stating that it was given in 1893; it is by W.S.Hicks (Pevsner 1984, 381). The Choir Stalls look to be roughly of the same date. The Altar Table is richly carved, in a Jacobean style. The Reredos has canopied tabernacle work. All this work, including the simple altar rails and the moulded wooden cornice that runs the full length of the side walls, is of later 19th century date.

The lectern, in the form of a carved wooden angle, is c 1871; the octagonal pulpit also appears to be of later 19th century date.

The benches in the nave also look of 19th century date, although some have poppy heads that may be older.

The Font stands beneath the tower and is a plain circular bowl, of some age, on a 19th-century stem, base and step. A 17th-century 'Cosin-style' font cover, brought from Durham cathedral, was stolen from the church a few years ago..

The **Bell Frames** are of considerable interest, certainly being one of the oldest sets in the county; the illustration on the left is from the Gentleman's Magazine for September 1874, reproduced by Barmby (1887, 30) There are three parallel pits (Pickford 3.1) and four trusses are of short headed type with sills, king post, short head, and raking struts from braces to head (Pickford type 3C). Many of the timbers show evidence of re-use from some earlier context; many are badly decayed (the easternmost sill is broken) and care has evidently been taken to preserve the frame in position. The three bells are now hung from a recent beam carried on the heads of the old trusses.

Published accounts, including the recent guidebook, state that all three bells are ancient. Boyle (92, 478) gives their inscriptions as:

1 +Sca maria ora pro nobis

1 +Sca trinitas vnvs devs miserere nobis

1 +Sancta marineta

Only two of these now remain; no (2) is certainly the central of the three. The third (westernmost) bell is by Charles Garr, Smethwick, and is dated 1897

On the north wall of the tower a brass plate states that the tower **Clock** was dedicated in 1898, when 'the church was restored and the chancel aisles were added under the care of W.S.Hicks at a cost of over £2000 A.D.1898-1899'. The clock has a maker's plate by W.Potts & Sons of Leeds, dated 1896.

Stained glass. In the west window is a figure of St Lawrence; a tablet below states that the window is in memory of Thomas Crawford d.1887. The north aisle windows (including St Cuthbert 1903, St Gregory the Great 1899 St Paul 1899 and Jesus teaching, with Mary and Martha 1900) are all of similarly good quality.

An old safe in the south wall of the vestry has what appears to be the date '1813' cast into the door (or was an older safe door re-used?)

Sepulchral Monuments

The earliest monuments are a number of medieval **Cross Slab Grave Covers**; ten of these (one now lost) are described and illustrated by Ryder (1984, 109-110 & plate 47); they lie under the tower and at the west end of the south aisle. The earliest is a small slab with one of the best examples of 'Early Geometric' decoration in the county; it probably dates from the early 12th century and may be more or less coeval with the oldest parts of the church. In addition to the cross slabs there is a small coped stone with semicircular tegulations on the sides and a cross at the end

Lying at the east end of the south aisle is a Frosterley marble grave slab that simply bears an inscription, reading:

+ NOMEN ABENS CRISTI TUMULO TUMULATUR IN ISTO
+QUI TUMLUM CERNIT COMMENDET CUM PRECE CRISTO

(One having the name of Christ is buried here, Let him who beholds this grave commend him with a prayer to Christ). This is thought to commemorate a Christian recorded as holding lands in South Sherburn in the 12th century, and who was one of Bishop Pudsey's masons. The stone appears to have been repaired and the inscription probably recut in the 19th century; the earlier antiquarian accounts refer to it as lying in the churchyard.

In the north aisle is the **Effigy** of a cross-legged knight with a square helmet or bascinet; the heraldry of the shield indicates this to represent one of the Fitz Marmadukes, lords of

Horden; it is thought to date to c 1280. This also lay in the churchyard for many years. It has been described at length by Barmby (1887, 25-27) and others.

There are a considerable number of Post-Medieval Monuments, including a series of **Ledger Stones**. Two in the sanctuary floor, partially obscured by the reredos and altar, are both of 19th century date. In the floor of the westernmost bay is a slab with a foliate cross dedicating the chequerboard black-and-white marble pavement of the chancel pavement to the memory of Isabella Baker Baker of Elemore Hall, 1897. In the central of the five sections of the stepped chancel floor are three stones, from north to south:

- 1 A large armorial slab with a Latin inscription to Thomas Hall of Elemore Hall d.1680
- 2 George Baker of Elemore Hall d.1774
- 3 An armorial slab with a Latin inscription to Ralph Shipperdson d.1719.

There are also a number of **Wall Tablets**. In the chancel are several of 19th and 20th century dates, including one on the south to John Pemberton of Sherburn Hall, d.1845, with a Gothic-arched top. Opposite on the north wall a memorial to the Rev. W.S.Guest Williams. D.1907, signed by R.Beall of Newcastle with a foliate cross, chalice, wafer and the Sacred Monogram. In the north aisle are tablets to the Baker Baker family of Elemore and one by R.Beall, of very similar design to his Guest Williams monument in the chancel, to James Bannby of Hatfield Hall, vicar of Pitlington d.1897. There is also a marble tablet to Mary Ann Westropp, 'who in the eighteenth year of her age on the evening of Sunday 18th August 1830 during the absence of her master and mistress was cruelly murdered at Hallgarth Mill in this parish by a man, her fellow servant who was executed for the offence at Durham on Monday 28th February 1831'.

On the wall of the south aisle is a brass plate relating that the organ was erected by public subscription in 1905, and 'in the same year the chancel was raised and restored to its former length'.

Carved Stones

Around 15 fragments lie loose at the west end of the south aisle, including some 12th-century architectural pieces, some Romanesque-style head stops (which may actually be 19th-century work), part of a ring-cross finial and some medieval window tracery. In addition to the medieval cross slabs lying against the west wall of the tower are two small octagonal shafts with moulded capitals and bases.

The early **Sundial** built into the buttress of the south aisle; it bears an incised near-semicircle with six divisions. Early illustrations (eg Barmby 1887, 29, reproduced below) show it in a less-eroded condition; it is described by the Evans (1999, 102) who are however are incorrect in seeing it as being in situ upon an Anglo-Saxon wall.

HISTORICAL NOTES

10th/early 11th century The villages of North and South Pittington - now Low Pittington and Pittington Hallgarth - appear to have formed part of the original endowment of the Priory of Durham at this time. It has been suggested that their settlement morphology implies that these were laid out in the around this time, but there may have been an earlier settlements; there is a 14th century reference to land termed *Aldtunestedes* in the area (Clack 1978)

c1216 A chantry dedicated to St Mary the Virgin was founded; there was also a chantry dedicated to St Katherine; the two were later united.

c1258 Durham Priory established a manor house in South Pittington, which remained in use until the Dissolution.

1787 The earliest antiquarian account of the church is by the historian William Hutchinson (II, 583-585). 'The church stands on elevated ground, with a spacious yard. There are marks of antiquity in this edifice, which has apparently undergone much mutilation and frequent repairs. The chancel is nearly fourteen paces in length and six in width: On the north side are two arches, now built up, which shew it formerly was of greater extent. The east end is lighted by three long narrow windows; but to the south is a large window, ornamented with tracery. The chancel is separated from the nave by a heavy round arch, without ornament. The body or nave of the church has two side ailes, and is in length about eighteen paces, the ailes being little more than three yards wide: The south aile has undergone much alteration; the pillars have been restored in modern times, and support five pointed arches: Three windows, of two lights each, under pointed arches, give light to this side. The north aile is also formed by a row of four pillars; that to the east is flat, supporting a pointed arch; the other three are of the old Saxon architecture, short, with plain capitals, the shafts fluted and otherwise ornamented: they support four circular arches, ornamented with the zig-zag mouldings, and seem to be of nearly the same date as the nave of Durham cathedral: This aile is lighted with two windows under pointed arches. The tower is low, and supported by buttresses, forming an oblong square of five paces east and west and seven paces north and south.

1816 Surtees (I, 116) provides a little additional information in his description. The old east window, of three narrow lights, had been removed, and he commented that the 'lights in the nave are all modern'. The pointed tower arch had been 'closed up with a modern flat roof'

1823 Mackenzie & Ross (II, 333) rather confuse matters by stating that 'the east end of the chancel has been rebuilt, and contains three narrow lights'.

1857 Fordyce (I, 403-4) provides a detailed description, augmented by notes on the 1846 restoration., including the discovery of the frescoes, and that 'the west end of the Anglo-Saxon church appears on which the Norman tower as built'.

FACULTIES AND OTHER RECORDS OF STRUCTURAL WORK

Faculty no. and date	Works
3/111 1805	Taking off old roof and new roofing and new pewing the church
	1807 The vestry book records that £416 was paid to Thomas Dyson, joiner and James Johnson, mason, for repairing the church (Barmby 1887, 19, footnote 18)
	1844 Reseating and repairs (including extension at east end, rebuilding aisle walls and repairs to tower' by Bonomi and Cory. Incorporated Church Building Society records (Lambeth Palace Library) Ref 3429 includes 1847 letter from vicar, who refers to discovery of clerestory and 'a much more ancient west end gable' pre-dating the tower, of local 'thin limestone' but with a coping course of brick, unlike any other found in the area and supposed to be Roman.
3/367/2 19 January 1893	Erection of a chancel screen
3/385/18 13 October 1896	Improvements . The chancel aisles were added.
3/431 29 June 1903	Improvements alterations and additions, by Hicks and Charlewood. The chancel was extended by a bay; correspondence preserved with the faculty shows that it was the opinion both of the architects and of Mr Caroe, the Ecclesiastical Commissioner, that it as being restored to its original length.
3/2558 12 April 1935	Removal of font and re-erection of old font on a new base
3/3390 3 Dec 1957	Restoration of roof of the church
3/4973 29 April 1967	Conservation of the mural painting on the north wall of the nave (1976. Re-pointing of north clerestory to protect wall paintings)
3/5803 20 July 1979	Repairs and redecoration
3/5831 6 March 1980	Conservation of the tower of the church by J and W Lowry of Newcastle (included insertion of concrete stitches and ring beams at several levels, parapet battlements partly taken down and rebuilt, new steel-framed structure to support bell frames, new floor to clock chamber whilst old beams underneath exposed to view for first time in a century structural repairs: bells now on fixed headstocks)
3/6241 5 March 1985	Replacement of beams and re-slating of south aisle roof
3/6766 18 July 1988	Introduction of stud walling to create new vestry
3/8742 26 August 1999	Recover chancel roof, repair external masonry etc
3/8798 29 Nov 1999	Installation of gas supply and gas central heating

THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Despite some claims of Saxon or Saxon-Norman date, the earliest part of the church, the walls of the western four bays of the nave, are clearly Norman; this is evident both in the form of their angle quoins, and their windows; a date of c1100 is possible. The archaic brick coping to the west gable, referred to in one account of the 1844-6 restoration, sound interesting, but no real sign of it can be seen today.

Late in the 12th century, perhaps around 1180, came the addition of the north aisle that gave the church its most spectacular piece of architecture, the north arcade; the quality of the work would suggest a wealthy patronage, probably Bishop Hugh of le Puiset ('Pudsey') himself. The next phase of work is difficult to reconstruct; the problems centre on the fact that, prior to the 1846 remodelling, there was a broad 13th-century to the east of the arcade, resting on responds identical to those of the c1180 arcade. The western of these survives in situ, whilst the eastern has been moved to the east end of the present 1846 two-bay arcade.

Hodgson (1936, 14-16) explains this by seeing the nave as being extended eastwards, and a new chancel built c 1180, but with some delay meaning that the easternmost arch was not completed. He appears to see the chancel arch removed in 1846 as being that of c1180, although it is difficult to see the 'heavy round arch without ornament' that Hutchinson records as being of the same build as the exuberant and elaborate north arcade.²

The completion of the arcade seems to have only taken place in the second quarter of the 13th century, perhaps after the west tower was constructed³. At the same time a south arcade of five bays, matching the north in its layout - four bays in the c1100 wall, separated by a short length of wall from the fifth broader bay beyond, - was built, but with much plainer pointed arches.

The chancel seems to have been rebuilt in the 13th century as well, with a two-bay chantry chapel on its north side, the blocked arcade of which survived until 1846. The crocketed capitals of its arch into the north aisle have been re-used in a corresponding position in the present arch into the organ chamber.

Later medieval changes were more minor; the nave clerestory may be of 14th century date, as may have been the old south porch; the belfry stage of the tower looks like an addition, perhaps of the 15th century.

Further changes came in the post-medieval period. At least part of the buttressing on the south of the tower was being erected in 1609, as recorded in an old parish vestry book (Barmby 1887,22) The chapel on the north side of the chancel seems to have been pulled down quite early on, perhaps in the 17th century, although it was in existence, and in use as a

2 One explanation might be that the 'additional' bay of the c1180 nave in fact occupied the choir of a three-cell church of c1100, and that the 'heavy round arch', which then became the chancel arch, was originally the sanctuary arch.

3 The lower part of the tower appears to be all of one build; later patching and buttressing appear to have misled Clack (1978) and Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 380) into identifying a projection at the south-east corner as part of an earlier and smaller tower.

vestry, in 1624 (Barmby 1887, 25). Further vestry book references (ibid.19) indicate considerable changes in 180, when the large 'churchwarden' style windows shown on old illustrations in the south aisle, and at the west end of the south wall of the chancel, may have been inserted.

Various alterations took place in 1807, when a number of windows were renewed, with wooden tracery. Then in 1846 came Bonomi's 'restoration'; the nave was extended for a second time, the broad eastern arches of the arcades each being replaced by a pair of arches; it is reported that the northern arch was taken down and added to the south arcade, whilst two new Romanesque arches were constructed on the north. A new chancel arch was constructed, and the chancel extended eastward. The aisle walls, porch and chancel were virtually all rebuilt, although a few sections of wall seem to have been retained.. Two of the aisle windows, which had wooden mullions (and may have been part of the 1807 alterations) were taken to be re-used in a reading room at North Pittington (Barmby 1887, 19, footnote 19).

Further enlargements took place in 1897, when the chancel aisles were added, and finally in 1905 when the chancel was extended to the east - supposedly to its original extent⁴ - and heightened.

THE CHURCHYARD

The churchyard was already 'spacious' when Hutchinson wrote in the late 18th century. It has obviously been extended since this date, making it very large indeed. It is sub-rectangular in plan, with the church standing close to the north-west corner. One old boundary line is apparent a short distance east of the church, where there is a distinct scarp and a line of old trees; monuments east of this point are all of late 19th century or more recent. There also seems to be an old boundary line, similarly marked by a brief steepening of the valley side, some distance south of the church. The c 1860 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6":1 mile map seems to show the churchyard as delimited by these boundaries. At the entrance to the yard, on the west, are a set of 19th-century gate piers with chamfered angles and pyramidal caps

The monuments in the churchyard have obviously been considerably thinned; almost all are headstones of the 19th and 20th centuries; there are one or two older stones, including a 1766 headstone to Henry Scorer, on the south of the path midway between the churchyard gate and the church, with a good set of mortality emblems. A short distance to the west a similar headstone, to Mary Shepherd (date erased) lies loose, broken off at the base. The souther part of the churchyard, extending further down the hillside, would again seem to be a 19th-century extension. Against the western boundary in this section is a railed enclosure containing graves of the Baker Baker family.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

It is difficult to assess the degree of preservation of archaeological deposits lying beneath the present floors of St Laurence's Church; the tower has a concrete floor, the nave largely wood blocks (except for a paved area in the south aisle, around the doorway and the chancel a marble pavement. There is no sign of any underfloor heating system (the present pipes are above the

4 No clear evidence seems to have been advanced to show that the medieval chancel of this length, not was it recorded whether original foundations were seen as the works proceeded. Even in a county well provided with elongate 13th-century chancels, the proportions of the surmised chancel (also 4:1) would seem very unusual.

floor). However, in any parish church of this age one would expect large numbers, perhaps hundreds, of burials; despite this disturbance, one would expect some survival of features such as earlier wall footings, and perhaps floors, in a building like this that has undergone successive extensions. Thus any disturbance of floor levels should be accompanied by archaeological recording. Similarly, any works on the standing fabric should be monitored.

Archaeological recording as carried out in and around the church during 1999, and is the subject of a separate report (Ryder 1999). During the re-pointing of the north aisle it was shown that the two small square-headed windows visible externally were in fact in-situ survivals of the medieval building, only the internal face of the wall having been taken down and rebuilt by Bonomi. During roofing works to the chancel, the opportunity was taken to examine the 'Romanesque' corbel table, some parts of which are so weathered as to suggest re-used 12th-century work. This investigation was not conclusive, although it is perhaps more likely that the stonework in question is simply badly-weathered 19th-century work. In the churchyard, drainage trenches were cut to soak away pits north and south of the east end of the chancel. As expected, human remains were recovered and recorded, (before re-burial); in the southern pit, 7.3 m south of the south-east corner of the chancel, a stone cist, probably of medieval date, was partially exposed.

Later in 1999 a trench for a gas pipe, in the north part of the churchyard, did not reveal any archaeological material of any significance.

Priorities

As is common with churches that have some well-known architectural feature or features, Pittington church attracted rather more academic interest in the 19th than in the 20th century. Despite the restoration-cum-partial rebuilding at the hands of Bonomi in the 1840s, it remains an extremely interesting building and one that ought to have a proper modern record. There does not even appear to be an adequate ground plan available. Proper records should also be made of the various carved and worked stones lying loose in the church (which could then be interpreted to visitors) and of the important early bell frames, although this would not be an easy task.

St Laurences's has suffered a recent history of vandalism and theft, being a relatively isolated church, yet close to large areas of housing. A number of monuments in the churchyard have been damaged; at the time of writing (October 2000) a good 18th-century headstone to Mary Shepherd is lying loose with its base broken off; this really merits being taken into the church or some other safe location.

Peter F Ryder October 2000

Sources

Barmby, Rev. James (1887) Pittington and its Church, Transactions of the Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham & Northumberland III, 1-32

Boyle, J.R. (1892) Comprehensive Guide to the County of Durham, 474-8

Clack, Peter (1978) St Laurence the Martyr, Hallgarth, Pittington. Church Guide.

Evans, F & J (1999) Some Early Sundials of Northumbria. Bulletin of the British Sundial Society Vol11 (ii) June 1999, 100-103

- Fordyce, W (1857) The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham. I, 403-4
- Hodgkin, J.,E. (1913) Durham (Little Guide Series). London, Methuen & Co., 206-9
- Hodgson, Rev.J.F. (1936) Some Architectural Notes on the Parish Church of Pitlington
Transactions of the Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham & Northumberland VII, 13-24
- Hutchinson, W (1794) History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham II
583 et seq.
- Mackenzie & Ross (1834) History of the County of Durham , vol.II, 333
- Pevsner, N &
Williamson E, (1983) County Durham (Buildings of England series, Penguin), 379-81
- Pickford, C. (1993) Bellframes. A practical guide to inspection and recording.
Privately published.
- Ryder, P.F.(1985) The Medieval Cross Slab Grave Cover in County Durham.Architect. & Archaeol. Soc. of Durham & Northumberland Research report no.1.
- Ryder, P.F. (1999) St Lawrence's Church, Pitlington. An Archaeological Watching Brief. Autumn 1999. (MS report, copy with church)
- Surtees, H.C. (1816) History of Durham Vol.I, 116)

Durham Diocesan Records (D.D.R), faculty papers 3/385/18 and 3/431 deposited with Durham University Library Archives.