

## ALL SAINTS, STRANTON

All Saints Church, the old parish church of Stranton, now stands close to the centre of West Hartlepool, raised on a grassy hill above the adjacent A dual carriageway, in what is largely a 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape.

The church consists of an aisled nave of only two broad bays, with a western tower and south porch, and a chancel with the two-bay Fulthorpe Chapel running the length of its north side; later additions are an organ chamber on the south-west of the chancel, and vestries on the north-west of both Fulthorpe Chapel and north nave aisle.

### The Exterior

The external walls of the West Tower are built of coursed square stone, mostly grey in colour, with much patching in recent whitish or fawn lightly-tooled stone, especially in the lower section. The tower is square in plan, and rises in three stages. There are diagonal buttresses at the western angles, and buttresses at the eastern angles that initially rises from the end walls of the aisle (which have been heightened, incorporating the lower parts of the squared-stone buttresses within their rubble walling) and then skew round in a awkward manner to become diagonal. The side walls and western buttresses have a chamfered plinth; on the west this is only present on a small central stepped buttress beneath the west window, but may have been destroyed when the lower part of the west wall has been entirely refaced.

The west window has three stepped lights with segmental-arched heads, within a Tudor-arched surround with a hoodmould chamfered on its lower angle; all its dressings are recent. Above the window is a recess, so weathered that the form of its head is no longer discernible. An eroded string course divides the first and second stages of the tower; it is continued around the eastern buttresses but not the diagonal western pair.

The second stage of the tower has narrow single-light windows in the centre of its west and south walls; their dressings so weathered that the original form of their heads is no longer apparent. The main buttresses end at the set-back that marks the top of the second stage of the tower, and are continued up the belfry as little more than diagonally-set angle pilasters; the belfry stage. The four belfry openings are each of two trefoil-headed lights, with the spandrel pierced, beneath what was probably a segmental-pointed arch, with a moulded hood, although all the dressings at this level are very heavily eroded. Small mid-wall pilasters spring from the apex of the hoodmoulds of the openings. The stonework of the parapet, with its moulded string, projecting drain spouts, pilasters, embattled coping and eight crocketed pinnacles, is all relatively recent replacement (1983).

The only walls of the **Nave** that are visible externally are the southern clerestory and the eastern gable above the chancel. On the south the clerestory wall includes a variety of fabrics; it is basically of roughly-squared and roughly-coursed stone, with quite a scatter of pieces of red sandstone; the upper metre or so of the wall, two courses of large better-squared blocks, is clearly a later heightening. The dressings of the three square-headed clerestory windows, each of two lancet-arched lights with sunk panels in the spandrels, do not look of any great age.

The east wall of the nave has pinkish and purplish stone in its lower section, with squared and coursed whitish limestone above, with a plain square-headed window set centrally. Its fabric seems identical with that of the heightening of the north aisle.

The west wall of the **South Aisle** is of coursed roughly-squared stone, including grey and purple sandstones and creamy Magnesian Limestone; there is a chamfered plinth set a little lower than that of the tower. The wall contains a window of three cinquefoil-headed lights with trefoiled sub-lights above, under a segmental-pointed arch with a hoodmould, chamfered above and below, with turned back ends; all its dressings look 19<sup>th</sup> century work. The plinth is continued round a stepped diagonal buttress, that seems old, at the south-west corner of the aisle, and also round the **South Porch**. The porch is built of square coursed stone; most of it has been rebuilt or at least re-faced, but medieval masonry may survive on the east. The south wall has a pointed archway with a single continuous chamfer, under a hoodmould with big block stops; above is an ogee-arched recess that also looks renewed; the gable coping above, chamfered on its underside, may be medieval.

The south doorway, inside the porch, has a two-centred arch of a single order cut with continuous pair of chamfers with a square step between; its stonework appears largely restoration but a semi-octagonal moulded corbel directly above seems genuine late medieval work.

To the east of the porch the chamfered plinth only continues to the first buttress. Between the porch and the buttress is a three-light window, very like that in the west wall, with dressings of brownish sandstone, all restoration. Beyond the buttress the wall has less purplish stone, and may be of a different build; high up is a square vent, fitted with a patterned grill, high in the wall, and then comes a second three-light window of the same type, with a small stepped buttress, probably cut down, directly beneath it. The VCH account refers to this section of wall as originally being of three bays, with a window in each, but apart from the cut-down buttress there seems little evidence for this.

The **North Aisle** is constructed of roughly-coursed stone, little more than rubble; the upper third of its walls is clearly a later heightening in yellowish limestone, also seen in a distinct change in the character of the quoins at the north-west angle. At the base of the angle is one massive quoin, perhaps originating at one of the western angles of the early nave. The west window of the aisle is of two elliptical-arched lights, with chamfered surrounds but without any enclosing frame; its present dressings are all recent replacement.

The north wall, between the two vestries, has a chamfered plinth, and a pair of three-light windows, of the same general form as those in the south aisle, but with a little more elaborate detailing in their hollow-chamfered surrounds and casement-moulded hoods

The **North-West Vestry** is of snecked close-jointed stone with light diagonal tooling. It has a broad gable to the north, containing a four-light window (re-set from elsewhere?) that has an elliptical-arched heads; its central two lights have trefoiled ogee heads, and those at either side trefoiled round heads. The gable has a coping that is chamfered on its lower edge, and is capped by a plain stack. The west wall of the vestry has a doorway at its south end and a two-light mullioned window further north, both square-headed and with simple chamfered surrounds; the dressings of the window are quite battered, but this may simply be a result of its being the focus for break-in attempts, rather than any particular antiquity.

The **Organ Chamber** of 1889 is built of snecked and tooled close-jointed stone, almost of ashlar quality; it has diagonal buttresses at its southern angles, a chamfered plinth and a chamfered string course continued round the buttresses and stepped up beneath the sill of the three-light window (of the same form as those in the aisle); above is another chamfered string, crossing the gable, with a cruciform loop above. On the east of the organ Chamber the plinth and sill string continue, and there are steps down to a boiler room under the chamber; above the string is a two-light window, re-set from the south wall of the old chancel. This has limestone dressings, and is of two trefoiled lights with a quatrefoil in the spandrel; the tracery is all recent restoration, but the chamfered outer frame and simple chamfered hood look old. Above and to the south of the window is a chimney, square below, with an octagonal shaft that has a moulded base and a chamfered cap.

The south wall of the **Chancel** shows no sign of any plinth; it is largely of coursed quite small neatly-squared stone, of the same mid- to late-12th century type as seen internally. There is a large window of three lights with simple reticulated tracery in the arch; the main lights have no cusping<sup>1</sup>; there is broad chamfered surround and a hoodmould chamfered above and below, with simple stops. The window is clearly an insertion in earlier walling.

The east end has a large four-light window with brown stone dressings like those of the south windows in the south aisle; it has four trefoil-headed lights with sub-lights above, in a moulded surround with a hood that has turned-back ends. The wall fabric is partly squared stone of 12<sup>th</sup>-century character, but there has obviously been considerable disturbance; a north-facing stepped buttress has been added at the north-east angle, but a few stones of the original corner - squared quoins no higher than the courses - are visible behind it. There is no clear sign of the earlier windows apparent internally. The gable has a 19<sup>th</sup>-century moulded coping and cross fleury finial.

The **Fulthorpe Chapel** has a chamfered plinth and walls of squared and coursed stone, including what look to be re-used 12th-century blocks.; most of the east elevation has been refaced and there is again extensive patching on the north.. The north wall has two two-light windows with trefoiled lights, sub-lights over, and shallow segmental heads, with hoodmoulds, turned back at the ends, of simple rounded section. Their dressings are all recent; the cusping of the main lights of the eastern window has been cut away, apparently very recently, perhaps to facilitate the insertion of protective glazing; the western is currently boarded over. The western end of the north wall is concealed by the north-east vestry.

The east wall of the chapel has a window with three cinquefoiled lights and trefoiled sub-lights above, under a shallow segmental arch and a casement-moulded hood with turned-back ends; all its dressings are restoration..

The **North-East Vestry** is built of coursed and squared limestone. Its east wall has three short lancet-like windows, each with a double-chamfered surround, and there is a chamfered doorway with a similar chamfered arch at the north end of the wall. The southern lancet has recent dressings; apparently the doorway was originally in this position, and was more recently moved to the north end of the wall. The north wall has three stepped lancets, which all look recent; the gable, which looks to have been re-faced or rebuilt, apart from its lowest course, has a hollow-chamfered coping, and rises from moulded kneelers. The west wall has a single short lancet, now bricked up.

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1 This was probably cut away 'in antiquity', and has been renewed 'as found'.

## The Interior

The interior walls of the body of the church are now bare of plaster, although heavy ribbon pointing makes examination of the masonry difficult. The lower parts of the aisle and Fulthorpe Chapel walls are concealed by a dado made up of re-used 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup>-century pew sides. The Organ Chamber is panelled round inside, and the vestry walls plastered..

The lower stage of the **Tower** now contains a gallery of 1991, with the Clergy vestry beneath. Its walls are of coursed roughly-squared stone with some quite elongate blocks, heavily mortared.

The west window has a internal drop arch of flattened segmental form, chamfered on its lower angles, and quite broadly-splayed jambs; the stonework of the jambs shows a light diagonal tooling, and may be of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date.

The tower arch is of two-centred form, and quite steeply pointed; it is of two chamfered order; the narrow chamfer of the outer is continued down the jambs, whilst the inner order dies into the jamb without any impost; just below the present gallery are infilled sockets, perhaps indicating the position of the front beam of a predecessor.

Above the present ceiling is a square-headed doorway into the tower, cutting a groove for an earlier roof of very low pitch.

Access to the ringing chamber in the second stage of the tower is by a cast-iron newel stair of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date that rises from the north-west corner of the gallery. The floor of the ringing chamber is carried on heavy beams, probably medieval; a central north-south beam supports six east-west beams; all these old beams spring from large quadrant-shape corbels.

Within the ringing chamber the lower parts of the walls are concealed by panelling; the upper are heavily whitewashed. The single-light windows on west and south have shouldered rear arches; above the latter is an irregular socket of uncertain function. Near the north end of the west wall, within the small lobby at the head of the stair, is an old aumbry or wall locker; it may have had a shallow arched head of some form, but it is now very weathered.. On the east side of the room is a square-headed doorway, its sill c 1.2 m above the floor giving access into the nave roof.

The belfry floor is again carried by old beams, of the same type as those below, but this time with two east-west timbers and five north-south ones set above them; it would appear that all have been supported by corbels, but some of these have perished through erosion. A modern ladder gives access to the belfry, via an awkward hatch and a wriggle up through the bell frames. Within the belfry the internal faces of the walls are heavily eroded; the belfry openings appear to have segmental-pointed rear arches; the tower roof is of concrete beams

The west wall of the **Nave**, above the tower arch, shows two quite different types of masonry; above and to the left of are roughly-coursed and roughly-squared blocks of stone, some being elongate and quite large; to the right are smaller blocks with a rough diagonal tooling

The south wall of the nave is c 0.76 m thick, and has an arcade of two broad four-centred

arches, each of two chamfered orders, springing from a central octagonal column, into which the chamfers die; neither pier nor responds have any capitals. The western arch is taller and wider than the eastern; most of its dressings look relatively 'fresh', as do those of the western side of the central column, and the western respond (in as much as this can be seen, as it is largely enclosed by the recent gallery stair).; there is also a rough outer ring of voussoirs, almost like a relieving arch, which is very much a 19<sup>th</sup>-century feature. The eastern arch looks older, as does the eastern half of the central pier (with creamy-white limestone dressings) and the eastern respond

The fabric of the wall is of considerable interest; towards the nave its lower part, up to around the apex of the arches, is of coursed roughly-squared stone including some very elongate blocks, and looks of 'early' character. There is clearly secondary patching with whiter stone above and around the eastern arch; in the c 1.5 m of wall between the eastern respond and the west end of the nave are signs of disturbance including a ragged vertical joint, which could either be associated with an earlier chancel arch, or possibly with a former rood loft stair. The upper section of the wall, including the three clerestory windows, is of rather smaller roughly-squared coursed stone; the windows have shallow segmental rear arches, and are plastered round internally.

The south face of the arcade wall, as seen from the aisle, has more of the 'early' fabric (see especially the spandrel between the two arches). At the east end areas of smaller masonry may result from the patching up of the gaps left when megalithic quoining (such as survives at the north-east angle of the nave) was removed. More of this primary fabric seems to survive at the west end of the wall, but there is no clear sign of any quoining.

The north wall of the nave again has an arcade of two broad bays. At its lower levels the wall has been re-faced, and is c 0.93 m thick, but above respond level the wall thins to c 0.83 m. The arches are again four-centred and of two orders, the inner order having the broader chamfer. The heavy central column is octagonal, with a moulded capital of broadly late medieval (14th/15th century) character, and is of orange sandstone; the responds are of the same character, without any base being exposed. The relationship between the piers and responds is rather odd; at the western respond the wall is set a little to the south of the centre line of the respond, but on the centre pier the wall is displaced considerably to the north of centre as it is, to a lesser extent, at the eastern respond.

The wall above the arcade is of much more regular masonry than on the south, of roughly-coursed and squared smaller stone. There are two clerestory windows similar to those on the south, but now blocked, their recess plastered over. At the east end of the wall the lower part of the wall is concealed by an area of re-facing associated with the respond for the arcade. Above this is a shallow vertical strip of masonry c 0.55 m wide, carrying a tablet to the Rev John Gagnier (d1796); this has been interpreted as the stub of a removed chancel arch.

Towards the aisle there is a similar re-faced area at the east end, but above this a column of older masonry survives; this includes megalithic quoining of clear pre-Conquest character, indicating that the present chancel arch lies immediately to the east of, rather than on the line of, the east end of the original nave. Another column of old masonry survives at the west end of the wall, again above a re-faced area associated with the respond.

The outer face of the upper part of the north wall of the nave is visible from the roof space

over the aisle. At the foot of the exposed section, in the three eastern bays, are what appear to be the remains of corbels that must have either carried a plate or taken the principals of an earlier roof; above these is a continuous horizontal cut in the wall, indicating the earlier line of the aisle roof. Above are the two blocked clerestory windows, partly concealed by the heavy pointing; each has a monolithic lintel and is of two semicircular-arched lights; they would appear to be of late medieval or early post-medieval date, but offer little in the way of dating evidence. Higher up is a string-course, chamfered on its lower angle, which has been cut back flush with the wall face from the east end of the wall up to the western clerestory window; a little beyond this the string is interrupted by a projection or bracket, hollow-chamfered on its lower angles, now hacked back.

The nave roof has five shallow-pitched principal rafter trusses of strapped and bolted construction rafter form; from west to east they bear the carpenters' numbering, IIII, II, III (unnumbered) and II., with collars

In the **South Aisle** the west window has a segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfer only to the head; it may be an insertion in an earlier wall. The south wall is of coursed roughly-squared stone. The south doorway has jambs cut square to the wall, and a segmental rear arch, with a chamfer only to the head; above (and partly concealed by a timber internal hood) is an old semi-octagonal corbel holding the lower half of a broken statue, apparently of St George. The two windows in the south wall have shallow triangular rear arches, with chamfers to the heads; their jambs are of large roughly-tooled blocks, probably post-medieval. Set low near the east end of the aisle is a piscina with a semicircular arch, with a narrow chamfer, cut into a single large slab; the projecting front part of its bowl has been broken away. About 1 m above this is a re-set fragment of a later medieval canopy with a trefoiled ogee-arch, flanked by finials and springing from small angels.

The east end of the aisle has a two-centred arch to the organ chamber; this has a continuous chamfer. Patched masonry around and above the head of the arch indicates the position of the head of the three-light window removed in 1889. Built into the wall on either side of, and above, the arch are various carved stones found when the Organ Chamber was built (see below).

The south aisle has a sloping plaster ceiling; there is no easy access to the roof structure.

In the **North Aisle** the internal walls are all of coursed squared stone, quite similar to that of the walling above the arcade. The west window has a shallow segmental rear arch, plastered on the splays and head. The lintel is flat-arched with roughly-cut voussoirs. At the west end of the north wall is a doorway, again plastered on the inside, with a similar arch, and then two three-light windows, with internal surrounds of tooled ashlar, their alternating-block jambs being set slightly proud of the irregular wall face.

At the east end of the aisle is the broad arch into the Fulthorpe Chapel; this is of four-centred form, of a single chamfered order; its springing from the north wall, cut with a simple panelled design, is largely hidden by the modern screen that infills the opening. On the south the lowermost voussoir is similarly patterned; here the arch springs from the strange octagonal column which also carries, rather unhappily, both chancel arch and the western arch of the arcade between the chapel and the chancel.

The aisle has a flat plaster ceiling; the roof structure above is accessible from the nave roof through a hole cut into top of the north nave wall, near its west end, and a short ladder; the roof structure is of six bays, the trusses having tie-beams and two diagonal struts to the principal, junctions being strapped and bolted.

The **Chancel** opens from the nave under a chancel arch which is quite large, of two-centred form and of two chamfered orders; its stonework appears all re-tooled. The walling above is of roughly-squared and roughly-coursed stone, and seems to have some areas of disturbance, although these may simply result from structural movement. On the east face of the wall there is one very large block high up on the south, which may be a surviving megalithic quoin from the south-east angle of the early nave. On the south the arch springs from a semi-octagonal respond with a moulded capital and a badly damaged base; on the north it is set west-of-centre on what appears to be a full octagonal column, butted up on the west against the surviving column of masonry at the north east corner of the early nave. The shaft certainly has diagonal faces towards the west, although the actual west side is not seen, but the capital mouldings appear to be stopped at the present wall face. The refaced section of the north wall of the nave, coeval with the western respond of the nave arcade, overlaps this embedded column in an odd way.

Above the nave ceiling, the chancel arch wall has a small square-headed vent, and shows traces of an earlier more steeply-pitched roof-line (that clearly pre-dates the clerestory) with a lower eaves but a higher ridge than at present.

At the west end of the south wall of the chancel is a large arch into the organ chamber, of two chamfered orders, the outer continued to the ground, the inner carried on attached half-shafts with moulded capitals and bases. East of this is an area of wall that displays a clear but ragged break between neatly-coursed and squared stone<sup>2</sup>, with many almost square blocks, diagonally tooled, on the east, and more irregular stonework on the west. Disturbance lower in the wall might indicate the position of a former priest's door, but nothing is very clear. Then comes a three-light window, its internal surround probably old; it is clearly an insertion into the neatly-squared masonry, and has beneath its eastern jamb is a very attractive piscina that has a semicircular arch bearing a lien of square flower ornament; the moulded and carved projecting bowl has unfortunately been broken off relatively recently<sup>3</sup>; the detached piece lies in the recess.

The east wall of the chancel contains a large four-light window; its internal surround is of uncertain date. To the south of it, c 0.25 m from the end of the wall, are the south jamb and turn of the arched head of an earlier window, one that is clearly of one build with the neatly-squared masonry. At the north end of the wall are traces of what may be a corresponding jamb; it would appear that the original fenestration of this gable end consisted of three separate lights.

On the north of the chancel is the arcade to the Fulthorpe Chapel, two quite broad and low four-centred arches, reach of two chamfered orders, The central pier has similar detail to the pier at the west end of the arcade, as has the semi-octagonal eastern respond. The capital mouldings of this are carried back to the east end of the chancel wall. The walling above the

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2 Very characteristic of mid- to late-12th century fabric.

3 See Recommendations section, p.14

arcade is of squared blocks, and is probably contemporary.

The chancel roof is of four bays, with simple principal rafter trusses having one level of purlins on each side.

Inside the Fulthorpe Chapel the upper section of the south wall, above the arcade, is rendered over. The side walls are of coursed roughly-tooled stone, including quite a number of squarish blocks, probably 12th century material recycled. At the west end of the north wall is a doorway with a triangular arch and a plastered surround, giving access to the Vestry; east of this the pair of two-light windows have shallow segmental rear arches, only their heads chamfered, that seem of one build with the walling. The internal sills of both have been renewed. To the north of the east window is a patch in the wall that could be an infilled aumbry.

### **CARVED STONES**

A number of medieval carved stones, found during the construction of the organ Chamber in 1889, are now built into the east wall of the south aisle, around and above the arch into the Organ Chamber. Two of these, small equal-armed crosses carved in relief within cup-like sinkings, are thought to be consecration crosses. The others are thought to be pieces of sepulchral monuments (see separate section)

### **FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS**

Apart from the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early-19th century pew backs re-used as a dado, all the fittings and furnishing of the church are of late 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century date, including the chancel stalls, altar rail and reredos, the pewing in nave and aisles, and the simple font now at the east end of the south aisle; the majority probably date from the 1889 restoration. The Organ is of 1889; its maker is not known. There are eight Bells, hanging in cast-iron frames; five are of 1908, but three older ones remain, although the seventh has been re-cast both in 1898 and again in 1908. The inscriptions on the old bells are:

(Fourth) Venite exultemus Domino. S.S. 1664

(Sixth) Sca Maria ora pro nobis (the one medieval bell)

(Seventh) Clangore dulci sono psallam tibi Deus. 1699

### **SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS**

The only medieval sepulchral monuments now visible are four of the carved stones now built into the east end of the south aisle; these are described and illustrated by Ryder (1985, 117 and plate 53; see p.9). One, with an expanded-arm cross carved in relief, might be of pre-Conquest date; the others are of the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

There are reported to be two old grave slabs in the Fulthorpe Chapel, one with evidences of a brass, but these are now presumably concealed beneath modern carpeting.

A 19<sup>th</sup>-century tablet on the north wall of the north aisle commemorates Jacob Bellassis,

d.1640, whose original monument, in a badly-decayed state, was removed in 1850. A tablet to the Rev. John Gagnier, d.1796, is set on the north wall of the nave, above the eastern respond of the arcade, and on the south wall of the south aisle is an oval tablet of 1790 to a member of the Surtees family in an elaborate script now hard to read. A tablet to Isabella Gregson d. 1842, on the north wall of the Fulthorpe Chapel, is signed by R Davies of Newcastle.

### **Medieval Grave Slabs (after Ryder 1985)**

#### **HISTORICAL NOTES**

Pre-1066                      It is now thought that Stranton was a Pre-Conquest Estate centre.

1119-1129                    Between these years Robert de Brus granted the church of Stranton, together with others, to the newly-founded Gisborough priory. Stranton was appropriated to the Priory, and a vicarage ordained, before 1234.

1794                          The earliest antiquarian account to describe the church in any detail is that by Hutchinson (III, 39): 'The church stands on a fine mount. The chancel is eleven paces long and five wide, stalled on each side: The east window has four lights; and there are two windows on the south: On the north side of the chancel an octagonal pillar appears in the wall, supporting two elliptic arches, from which it seems clear there was an ancient porch annexed thereto. It is divided from the nave by a lofty pointed arch. The nave has two side aisles, the whole length being seventeen paces, and the breadth sixteen paces. The aisles are formed by one pillar on each side, supporting arches rather pointed, but very blunt. In the north aisle is an elegant monument of James Bellasis, esq; with his effigies in the attitude of rising from the tomb, and throwing off a winding sheet. The south aisle is lighted by two side windows, and one to the east. The tower is lofty.

1823                          Surtees (III, 124) thought the church 'a handsome structure of ashlar work' notes that the 'north porch' (Fulthorpe Chapel) was in use as a school; he thought its two northern windows 'modern'. He also notes that the south aisle had 'two broad modern lights, and at the East and West old windows of three lights, under blunt arches..An old West window of three lights opens into the Tower'.

1843                          Sir Stephen Glynne visited the church; his notes were reproduced in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle 3<sup>rd</sup> series III (1907), 120). He thought

the building 'of some appearance, but little good work' 'All the windows seem to be late perpendicular'. 'The nave contains several ends of benches with poppy heads'; the chancel was 'fitted up with plain stalls, the desks in front having ends with poppy heads' The North Chapel was 'now improperly occupied by a school'; against its east wall were '2 pedestals or brackets' 'In the N aisle is a large Italian monument, now in a wretchedly mutilated state'.

### FACULTIES AND OTHER RECORDS OF STRUCTURAL WORK

Date	Faculty Number	Works
1852		Fordyce (II, 284-5) records works improvements, including the opening-up to the church of a 'porch, originally entered by an arch...was afterwards closed up' in the north aisle, and the north chancel chapel (which has served as a vestry). The white-washing and plastering on the pillars had been removed, an organ erected 'in a recess on the south side of the chancel' and a 'neat vestry' on the north side of the chancel. The decayed Belassis monument in the north aisle had been removed
30 July 1888	3/289	Various alterations; J. H. Morton was the architect. All floors were relaid, plaster removed from the walls, and earth from the exterior walls. The organ chamber on the south of the chancel was constructed. The church as re-pewed.
26 June 1896	3/383	New vestry at the north-west corner of the nave, reredos
27 February 1909	3/490	Introduction of a peal of bells
20 January 1949	3/3157	Repairs, alterations & improvements
6 July 1953	3/3627	Extension of clergy vestry
24 January 1961	3/4322	Reconstruction of Organ.
31 May 1978	3/5727	Restoration of Fulthorpe Chapel
20 October 1980	3/5883	Restoration of stonework.
21 December 1982	3/6061	Restoration of stonework.
23 May 1984	3/6190	Repairs to windows etc.
14 May 1985	3/6262	Replacement of porch doors, heaters and major repairs.
22 May 1985	3/6267	Renewal of glazing, restoration of stone cill.

19 March 1986	3/6358	Reslating of porch roof, cleaning of stonework, repair of paths, choir and vestry roofs etc.
23 Oct 1990	3/7165	Re-ordering of the chancel etc 3/7165
1991		Construction of gallery in tower with vestry beneath.
11 June 1992	3/7530	General repairs.
1993		Tower parapet and pinnacles rebuilt.
28 Mar 1994		Works including replacement of rotten timber floor with concrete. DAC ask for archaeologist to examine or excavate ground under timber floor
9 July 1996		Alteration of choir vestry to incorporate creche facilities Also stonework repairs to tower

## **THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH**

The earliest part of the present church is represented by the nave walls, above and at each end of the later arcades. The megalithic side-alternate quoins, best seen at the north-west corner, are a clear indicant of Anglo-Saxon construction. Their date remains uncertain, and could be anything between c 700 and c 1100. The east end of the original nave as clearly set at something of a skew angles to the side walls, as on the south the original angle seems to be in line with the present chancel arch, whilst on the north it is set further to the west.

The next dateable phase of fabric is the east end of the chancel, which from its regularly-coursed squarish diagonally-tooled blocks looks of mid-12th century character. Internal evidence suggests that this was an extension of an earlier chancel, some masonry of which survives on the south; this is not of such a heavy character as the nave walls, and so might represent an intermediate phase between the Saxon nave and Norman or Transitional east end.

The later medieval history of the church is not really very clear; the only real attempt at an analysis is the Victoria County History account of 1908; this dating scheme is tentatively followed here (with some queries), although it must be stated that little in the way of unaltered architectural detailing has escaped the 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> century changes. The VCH account puts the pier and responds of the north arcade, and the lower part of the tower, to c 1280. Their 14<sup>th</sup>-century date for a remodelling of the chancel is on safer grounds, as original features seem to survive in the form of the rather fine piscina and the south window<sup>4</sup> of the chancel (and probably also the second window transferred to the east wall of the organ chamber). The south aisle is also seen as 14<sup>th</sup>-century, probably because of the form of its

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4      Its dressings recently renewed, but apparently correctly.

rather unusual octagonal pier that has no capital<sup>5</sup>

The VCH puts the upper section of the tower, and the south aisle, into this period as well. To the 15<sup>th</sup> century are ascribed the north chancel chapel, south porch, and possibly also the clerestory. Many of the windows are broadly of 15<sup>th</sup> century character, but virtually all their stonework has been renewed, and it is difficult to know whether to trust their designs. Antiquarian accounts do not necessarily help - for instance Surtees refers to the south windows of the south aisle as 'modern' but they appear in the present form on a drawing of 1800 (Kirner, cover illustration). Billings' 1844 drawing of the church (f.p.64) shows the windows, and another similar one in the east end of the aisle; he also shows a priest's door<sup>6</sup>, apparently with a four-centred arch within a square frame, between the two windows on the south side of the chancel; its character suggest a 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century date. He shows the east windows of chancel and Fulthorpe Chapel in their present form.,

It appears to be the form of the west window of the tower - three stepped lancets - that causes the VCH to ascribe it to the 13th century. Although now renewed, old accounts regard this window as an ancient feature, but it may well have been re-set. It may be safer to see the tower as of a single period, in which case the general form and diagonal buttresses, as well as the heavily-eroded detail of the belfry, could all be put into the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The most peculiar arrangement at the west end of the north chancel arcade is probably the key to the understanding of the later medieval structural history of the church - if it can be correctly interpreted! Instead of a conventional western respond, the arcade, of standard 15<sup>th</sup>-century type, springs from what seems to be an entire octagonal pier from which, very awkwardly, the chancel arch and the arch between north aisle and chapel also spring. At first sight it would appear that the nave walling to the west is built up against this pier, but closer examination shows that whilst the pier seems to be a complete octagon, the mouldings of the capital are stopped short of the adjacent masonry, and that this masonry is in fact much earlier than the pier. The lower part of this mass of masonry has been refaced, apparently when the eastern respond of the nave arcade was constructed (c 1280 according to the VCH account), and this refacing seems to 'wrap round' the pier, as if it were of later date to the pier.

It is difficult to offer a plausible explanation that answers all the problems poses by this intriguing conjunction of fabric and features. One might be that, when the Fulthorpe Chapel was built, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was intended to rebuild the whole of the north arcade and extend it for the full length of church, removing the earlier chancel arch which was set in the old skewed east wall of the Saxon nave. However, this scheme was modified and although a new chancel arch was constructed, set square to the nave, the previous nave arcade was left undisturbed for a time.

This brings us to the problems of the north aisle. The capital mouldings of the responds and pier could be of late 13<sup>th</sup> century date, but the eastern respond looks to post-date the chancel arcade and chancel arch. Have the pier and responds been re-set when the arcade was rebuilt?; the walling above it is of a similar character to the outer walls of the aisle, and in

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5 This pier form is seen in several 14<sup>th</sup> century churches in and around Newcastle

6 Lost when the Organ Chamber was added in 1889

plan the aisle seems far too wide for a 13<sup>th</sup>-century one. At first sight one might think that arcade and aisle are an 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century rebuild, but what can be seen of the blocked clerestory windows (only visible from the roof-space over the aisle) looks of late medieval (or early post-medieval) character.

The VCH considers that the aisle was been heightened, and received its present roof enclosing the old clerestory, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when a north gallery was inserted. Is it possible that the arcade was reconstructed (perhaps from three arches into two) and the aisle widened, perhaps in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and then in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century came the heightening and present roof.

It is possible that the western arch of the south aisle is also a reconstruction of the post-medieval 'gallery period'; one possibility here may be that the 14<sup>th</sup> century arcade had a wide eastern arch and two narrower arches to the west and that these were taken down and reconstructed as the present wide arch, to facilitate the construction of another gallery, but this remains conjecture.

It is also recorded that the Fulthorpe Chapel was walled off from the remainder of the church to serve as a school, then latterly a vestry until the 1852 restoration returned it into the body of the building.

The various restorations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are quite well recorded (see faculty list); the 1852 works including the addition of the clergy vestry, the 1889 restoration when the organ chamber was built, and the 1896 addition of the north-west vestry. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the clergy vestry was extended to the north in 1953, and tower gallery (with further vestry space beneath) constructed in 1991.

Pevsner's assertion that the body of the church was 'almost entirely renewed in the C19' and that there were 'C14 and C15 windows re-used in C19 walls' (Pevsner & Williamson 1983, 312) is quite misleading; a fairer assessment is that the medieval fabric survives, with some areas of re-facing, with the majority of the medieval windows being correctly renewed in new stone, at any rate as far as their external openings are concerned..

## **THE CHURCHYARD**

The VCH description describes the churchyard as an 'ancient and elevated site', which still today stands high above the enclosing roads. There is a marked break of slope on the south of the church. In plan it is roughly oval, with the church set towards the north-west. The walls to the south and east looks of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date; the entrance on the south is flanked by 19<sup>th</sup>-century panelled piers, now much eroded (the VCH notes that they are of 1844, when the 'burial ground was enlarged'). The north and west walls are of rubble, and partly rendered over. The monuments have been thinned, and the surviving scatter of headstones are largely of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

Stranton is a church that has seen much 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century restoration, and its exterior stonework has suffered badly from accelerated erosion due to urban pollution. However, its fabric can now be shown to span at least a millennium, and it remains a building of

considerable interest. It is difficult to assess the condition of underfloor deposits; as the interior is now fully carpeted, one cannot obtain much idea of the extent of underfloor heating systems, although there is a boiler room under the Organ Chamber, so one is likely. Even so, any disturbance of floor levels will need to be accompanied by at the least an archaeological watching brief. This is also true in the event of any ground works close to the external perimeter of the church, where, despite the creation of an external perimeter drain around most of the building, archaeological deposits may survive.

### **Recommendations**

The above-ground fabric is now bare of plaster, and the walls of the nave in particular show interesting and significant fabric changes. There would be a case for making a detailed record of these, through rectified photography; if any pointing works are embarked upon, the opportunity should certainly be taken to record the fabric in detail.

The broken piscina in the chancel, one of the best medieval features of the church, is a cause for concern, and should be professionally repaired as soon as possible.

Peter F Ryder October 2000

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**ALL SAINTS CHURCH  
STRANTON  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT  
OCTOBER 2000**

South-east view in 1844 (after Billings)

**Peter F Ryder  
Historic Buildings Consultant**

# ALL SAINTS CHURCH STRANTON

## AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OCTOBER 2000

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**Peter F Ryder  
1 Ford Terrace  
Broomhaugh  
RIDING MILL  
Northumberland  
NE44 6EJ**

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