

] **THE CHURCH OF ST MARY MAGDALENE, TRIMDON**

Trimdon is one of the well-known 'green villages' of County Durham. The small church, originally a chapel of Kelloe, stands on a slightly-raised island site midway along the elongate green. It consists of a nave with a south porch and a three-bay north aisle, and a chancel with a north vestry.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Exterior

The **Nave** is constructed of a variety of fabric types. The bulk of the walling is of roughly-coursed sandstone rubble, with some scatters of larger blocks. Rather better-coursed stone occurs at the head of the south wall, above the chamfered set-back, and in the upper parts of the western gable. The western quoins are irregular sandstone blocks, of no great size; they seem to be associated with areas of rebuilt walling noticeable for the absence of the large blocks seen elsewhere in the walling. The lower part of the south-eastern quoin, is quite different again, and is of well-squared blocks of Magnesian Limestone; an adjacent patch of walling (which is markedly out of alignment with the remainder of the south wall) is also largely of limestone. The Victorian openings all have ashlar dressings, set slightly proud of the wall-face.

The south and west walls both have a chamfered plinth, absent only for the 1.3 m short of the south-east corner (the gap corresponding with the patch of limestone walling already mentioned). At both western angles the plinth appears to have been over-built by projecting roughly-squared sandstone footings, corresponding with the rebuilt angles of the walling above. The plinth also appears to continue beneath the central buttress on the west end. There is a chamfered set-back three courses below the eaves of the south wall, formed of weathered sandstone blocks; at the same level a set-back runs across the west end, but its fabric is concealed by cement.

The west end has a central buttress that rises through an irregular series of set-backs, to die into the wall just below the bell-cote. This has a single opening with a shallow segmental arch, and a shallow gabled top. On the south side of the buttress are slight traces of a possible blocked window; one elongate block may form part of its sill. Above the cemented set-back, traces of an earlier and steeper roof line can be seen on either side of the buttress.

The south wall of the nave has three two-light windows of 1873, one to the west of the porch and two to the east. Each has two lancet-headed lights with an open circle in the spandrel; there are no hoodmoulds or enclosing arches, although the ashlar

dressings of the window heads are enclosed by radially-set rubble voussoirs. There are traces of a possible straight joint just to the west of the ridge of the porch roof; this may relate to other features seen inside the porch, in the walling above the south door (see below)

The east gable of the nave, above the chancel roof, is largely of 19th century masonry; there is a rectangular light or vent, with a stop-chamfered lintel, at the apex of the gable, with the base of a finial above. The gables are not coped.

The **South Porch** is of roughly-squared and roughly-coursed stone; the angle quoins are cut blocks of purplish sandstone, and are probably 19th century. The outer arch has a semicircular head, and a continuous chamfer, stopped on the lowest block of each jamb; the openings is rebated internally for a door. The porch has stone benches which are clearly of 19th century or more recent date.

The **North Aisle** is of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, with ashlar quoins and dressings; the top four blocks of the north-west quoin are more neatly squared than those below - the reason for this discrepancy is not apparent. There is a projecting footing of rough stonework. The west wall of the aisle contains a single trefoil-headed lancet, with its head outlined by radial voussoirs in the same manner as those of the windows on the south of the nave. The north wall contains three windows, each of two trefoil-headed lights; there are some large squared blocks (presumably re-used) in the wall between the central and western windows.

The **Chancel** is lower and narrower than the nave; like the nave it shows some variety in fabric type, notably in the south wall. The rather irregular eastern quoins are mostly of sandstone. A chamfered plinth appears towards the east end of the wall; it is not clear how far west it extends, as it disappears beneath concrete.

At the west end of the south wall is a small round-headed 'low-side' window, with a continuous external rebate; its jambs and head are of limestone, and its sill sandstone; this is the only pre-19th century window in the church, and is described in detail by Hodgson (1902, 230-231). The walling around this window is all of sandstone. To the east is the first of two two-light windows, each of two trefoil-headed lights (similar to those in the north wall of the aisle), with below its sill an area of eroded sandstone with possible straight joints to either side, possibly indicating a former doorway. East again is a patch of limestone in the lower metre or so of walling, with sandstone above, and then comes the priests' door, a pointed arch with a continuous chamfer, again entirely of 1873. East of

the doorway is a large sandstone block at the foot of the wall, which may be the base of the eastern quoin of an earlier chancel; the plinth emerges here from beneath recent concrete, but the first exposed block of the plinth, beneath the large sandstone block (and extending just beyond it to the east, as if returning northwards at this point) is only roughly shaped, in contrast to the neatly-chamfered blocks further east. East of the door the walling contains much more limestone; here is the second two-light window.

The east end has a chamfered plinth, cut away and replaced by brickwork for a metre or so at the north end; higher up is a chamfered set-back, largely of cut limestone blocks. The present east window, is of three trefoiled lights with a large septfoiled circle above the shorter central light. There are traces of earlier openings, or at least patches in the stonework, between the sill of the east window and the set-back, and again beneath the set-back.

Only a short length of the north wall of the chancel is exposed externally, at the east end; this is largely of limestone rubble, and has no visible features.

The **Vestry** is a pent-roofed structure built against the north wall of the chancel, although not quite extending to its full length. There is a square-headed two-light window in its east wall, with stop-chamfered jambs and lintel, and two stepped buttresses on the north; west of the buttresses is a square-headed doorway without any dressings to its jambs, probably modified from a previous window opening (see 1873 faculty plan).

The Interior

The interior of the church is entirely plastered and whitewashed, except for the exposed dressings of the arcade, chancel arch and some window surrounds.

The **Nave** has walls of considerable thickness - the south wall is 0.90 m thick at the south door. The doorway, within the porch, has a round-headed arch with a continuous narrow chamfer; the rear arch is also round-headed, but considerably taller than the doorway. Above the arch are two large blocks, one above the other, flanked by patches of smaller stonework; above these, in the apex of the porch roof (and partly hidden by it) is a stone with what appears to be an infilled socket in it.

The north arcade is of three pointed arches, each has a chamfered inner order and a roll-moulded outer; the piers are circular and the responds semicircular, with moulded capitals and bases. The three windows on the south side of the nave have segmental-pointed rear arches.

The **North Aisle** has a bluntly-pointed rear arch to its western window, and segmental rear arches to the three north windows.

The **Chancel** opens from the nave by an arch of depressed, almost horseshoe, form. It is of two orders, the outer square, and the inner with a narrow chamfer, with broach stops above the imposts. The imposts have a horizontal groove and a chamfered lower angle; the responds follow the same section as the arch, with chamfered bases. There are traces of red ochre painting on the dressings of the arch, especially towards the chancel. The southern jamb has been repaired in cement.

The south and east windows of the chancel have rear arches of almost triangular shape, with the internal sill of the eastern window in the south wall being lowered to form a sedile. The door to the vestry has a pointed arch with a continuous chamfer; the priest's door on the south has a shallow triangular rear arch. The low-side window has a roughly semicircular rear arch.

The roofs of the nave and chancel have arch-braced trusses carried on moulded stone corbels, and collared pairs of rafters; they are entirely of 1873.

FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

There are no fittings or furnishings pre-dating the late 19th century. The **Font** at the west end of the north aisle is of 1873; it has a small octagonal bowl with quatrefoil panels, on circular shaft with a foliate capital; it has been painted. The **Pulpit** bears a plaque commemorating its donation by 'St Cuthbert's Quilting Club' in 1895. The only **Stained Glass** is in the 'low-side' window (St Mary Magdalene, 1873) and in the central window on the south of the nave (Ruth and Naomi, 1925). The present **Organ** is of 1983; a letter from Dr Donald E Wright dated 13 11 80 (Diocesan Office), states that its predecessor 'can in no way be regarded either musically or visually as other than a poor example of the organ builder's art'.

There is a single **Bell** in the bell-cote; examination with binoculars shows the inscription '....R WATSON' in capitals of late 18th or 19th century character.

SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS

The only sepulchral monument of any age is a **Brass Plaque** on the south side of the chancel, with a latin inscription to Brian Lancaster, a former curate (d.1759).

HISTORICAL NOTES

- c.1146 Trimdon and its associated lands were given to the Augustinian canons of Guisborough Priory by Bishop William de St Barbara. It has been suggested that the present church, then a chapel within the parish of Kelloe, was constructed at around this time.
- 1540 Following the Dissolution of the Priory the patronage of the chapel passed to the Whartons, then to the Roper family, then passed in the later 17th century to the Woodifields.
- 1806 The church is recorded as being "repaired and renewed"
- 1811 The burial ground around the Chapel was first consecrated.
- 1857 Fordyce's History of Durham (Vol.II, 388) seems to provide the only account giving any detail of the church before the restoration:
'The church, which stands at the centre of the village, is a ruinous-looking edifice, consisting of nave and chancel, with bell turret at the west. There are two modern arched sash windows in the chancel, and three of similar construction on the south side of the building, the north side being entirely blank. In the interior the furniture is plain and common, with texts of scripture in frames hung upon the walls. The church is exceedingly damp, and the only indications of recent attention to the edifice are, a coat of yellow ochre in the interior, and an external white-washing'.
- 1873 A major restoration, by W and I Hay, architects, of Liverpool. The works cost £700, and left the church with seating for 150.

FACULTIES AND OTHER RECORDS OF STRUCTURAL WORK

Faculty no. and date	Works
193 (1873)	Church altered, enlarged and re-seated. Specification outlines

works including taking up and clearing all pews and flooring, removal of brick chimney from porch, lowering of side walls of nave, careful cleaning of old stonework of chancel arch and south door. Rebuilding of bellcote implied, although attached drawings show this as being left untouched.

Omnibus faculty
1894/373 (8.11.1894)

Alterations (faculty not seen;

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3952 (9.8.1957)

Installation of aumbry and sanctuary lamp.

4214 (3.3.1960)

New lectern and altar rails

4280 (31.10.1960)

Archdeacon's Certificate. Repairs to heating system.

4610 (21.9.1963)

New electric light system.

4804 (20.7.1965)

Archdeacon's Certificate. Repairs and redecoration.

5433 (1.6.1973)

Removal of kerbs, mounds, railings etc in detached churchyard.

5848 (30.7.1980)

Archdeacon's Certificate/ General repairs, re-siting organ, redecoration, removal of one pew.

5994 (19.4.1982)

New organ, removal of pews etc.

1989

Relaying of chancel floor, prior to carpeting. During these works an 18th-century vault constructed by the Beckwith family was

entered and examined (Coggins
1989)

THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The earliest phases in the history of the standing fabric must be interpreted from changes in fabric type visible in the external walls of nave and chancel. On the basis of the relatively brief inspection made, it is difficult to produce a coherent story. It would seem that the earliest fabric is represented by the sections of the nave walls which include large roughly-shaped blocks (themselves possibly re-used from an earlier structure); the only architectural features to survive are the plinth, with its narrow chamfer, and possibly the south door. The section of the plinth and the thickness of the walls, would correlate well with an early to mid-12th century date. The south door is difficult to date, being very simple in character; the disturbed masonry above suggest there may have been some ornamental feature or carved stonework set in the wall above the door (cf the Agnus Dei slab at High Coniscliffe, set above a 12th-century doorway). Prior to the 1873 restoration there is said to have been a blocked north door, a plain square-headed opening, which may have been of 12th century date.

The lower part of the south-eastern quoin, and the adjacent section of limestone walling, is clearly of a different build; it is difficult to be sure, but the balance of evidence suggests that it is of later date (the last block of the nave plinth adjacent to the limestone walling is relatively small, as if cut short when the angle was rebuilt). The limestone quoins are very similar in character to the dressings of the nearby 'low-side' window; both quoins and 'low-side' may be coeval with the chancel arch, the principal architectural feature of the church, which looks to be of late 12th century date.

The rebuilding of the quoins and chancel arch may have been prompted by an early structural failure; that there have been long-term problems is obvious from the outward lean of the south wall of the nave. Further failure, at some later date (possibly still medieval) seems to have taken place at the west end of the nave, with the consequence that both western angles were rebuilt, on footings built out over the original plinth; the western buttress may be of the same build.

The chancel also poses problems. The western part may be coeval with the earlier masonry in the nave, ie early 12th century, in which case the 'low-side' is secondary. Thus the original chancel would be small and box-like, typical of the Norman period; slight traces of a priest's door beneath the western of the two Victorian windows may be of this period. The original

chancel would seem to have ended just east of the present priests' door, although the evidence of an apparent basal quoin and change in plinth character is perhaps not fully conclusive. The eastern half of the chancel may be a late 12th or 13th century extension, a suggestion made on the basis of comparisons with other Durham churches (cf Bishop Middleham and Medomsley) in which short earlier Norman chancels were either rebuilt or extended in the late 12th and early 13th centuries.

There is no evidence of any later medieval work in the church, and there is now little sign of post-medieval alterations, except perhaps for the south porch and bell-cote, which may be late 18th or early 19th century work. Unfortunately the faculty for the 1873 restoration does not include elevations of the church; the specification refers to the inside walls of the nave being lowered, suggesting that they had been heightened, presumably to accommodate a gallery. The chamfered set-back three courses below the top of the south wall looks to be a pre-19th century feature, and may relate to such a heightening, perhaps made in the 18th century. Prior to the Victorian restoration, whatever windows the church had (with the single exception of the 'low-side) had been converted into plain sashes.

In 1873 all the sashes were replaced by suitably 'Gothic' windows. Prior to the restoration the church had been rendered externally; the specification states that the dressings of the new opening were to be set forward to allow for rough casting, but it is not clear if this was ever carried out.

THE CHURCHYARD

The church stands more or less in the centre of a narrow churchyard, elongated east-west along the axis of the green, and raised above its general level. The churchyard wall is of roughly-coursed rubble with a roughly arched coping; on the north-west and west it is little more than a retaining wall to the higher ground inside the yard. There is no wall along much of the north side, the boundary being marked simply by the crest of a steep slope dropping to the road. On the south the internal ground level rises almost to the top of the churchyard wall. The churchyard has been largely cleared of monuments, although a few 19th century headstones and two table tombs survive to the west of the church. Other 19th century headstones have been re-set to border the north side of the main east-west path towards the east end of the churchyard, and the eastern churchyard boundary north of this path.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Trimdon would appear to be a village of early origins, although

there is little 'hard' factual evidence to attest to these. A Roman mosaic pavement and other finds are reported to have been made in the 1950s, beneath a cottage a short distance north-west of the church, but the discoveries were 'hushed up' at the time, for fear archaeologists would hold up building works.

The basic fabric of the nave and chancel are, as already discussed, of 12th century and later dates; a more detailed interpretation might be possible if the external elevations were examined in detail, and stone-by-stone drawings made, or if the plaster were removed from the internal wall faces, and the fabric there examined. Any works involving removal of plaster work should be carefully monitored; it seems unlikely, although not impossible, that pre-restoration plaster survives.

It is difficult to assess the degree of survival of sub-floor archaeological deposits, but it seems possible that these may be relatively well preserved. The present floors are very recent (the entire chancel is carpeted), and it is not clear whether there has ever been an underfloor heating system). It is known from the 1989 works that there is an intact 18th century vault beneath the chancel floor just in front of the vestry door; the 1759 brass to Brian Lancaster on the south wall of the chancel suggests that there is a second vault further south. Any further works involving disturbance of floor levels would require, an archaeological presence, as would any digging adjacent to the external wall face of the church; whilst an external concrete apron and a shallow tile drain surround the chancel and the south wall of the nave, there is no indication that deposits adjacent to the wall faces have been disturbed or removed to any depth.

In summary, Trimdon is a small church heavily altered in 1873, but one that may preserve its archaeological deposits, both inside and outside the walls, rather better than most. The elevated site in the centre of the village green, and the discovery of Roman material nearby, hints that it may stand on a very early site.

Priorities

There are no immediately pressing concerns, although, as outlined above, the humble nature of the church fabric may belie a site of considerable archaeological significance.

SOURCES USED

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THE CHURCH OF ST MARY MAGDALENE

TRIMDON

An Archaeological Assessment

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Peter F Ryder
1 Ford Terrace
Broomhaugh
RIDING MILL
Northumberland

NE44 6EJ