

# **Egglescliffe Parish Church County Durham**

## **An Archaeological Assessment**

1993 revised 2004



Interior looking east

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# EGGLESCLIFFE PARISH CHURCH

## COUNTY DURHAM

### An Archaeological Assessment

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## The Parish Church of St John the Baptist, Egglecliffe

Egglecliffe Parish Church stands on a prominent bluff on the north side of the Tees valley, overlooking the town of Yarm on the opposite (Yorkshire) side of the river. The churchyard forms the western half of an elongate oval area, bounded by roads and lanes, the eastern half of which (between the church and the village green) is occupied by the Old Rectory and its grounds. The church consists of a nave with a two-bay south chapel and a south porch west of the chapel, a west tower, and a chancel with a vestry and organ chamber on the north.

### Architectural Description

#### The Exterior

The **Tower** is constructed of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared sandstone, and rises in three stages, divided by chamfered string courses; stepped diagonal buttresses at the western angles rise to just above the base of the third (belfry) stage. There is an additional string at the level of the sill of the west window, and a chamfered plinth; on the south-east is a projecting rectangular turret, rising to an embattled parapet at the level of the base of the belfry. There is an odd discrepancy in the line of the south wall; the short length of wall between the turret and south-west buttress is set at a noticeably oblique angle, up to a level a metre or so below the top of the turret, where a set-back (diminishing from c 0.15 m at its west end to nothing against the buttress) returns the wall face to one set square with the turret. There is a fourth moulded string (recently renewed) at the base of the parapet, the upper part of which is of late 19th or early 20th century squared stone; it is embattled, with small pinnacles at the corners.

The west window is of three lights, under a four-centred arch, both frame and mullions being hollow-chamfered; each light is cinquefoil headed, with simple uncusped panel tracery above; there is no hoodmould, but a rough relieving arch above the head. On the west side of the second stage of the tower (the ringing chamber) is a single trefoil-headed light, which the VCH account describes as 'modern' but in fact looks to be coeval with the tower (except that its lower jambs and sill have been recently replaced in new stone). The belfry openings are each of two cinquefoil-headed lights, with a quatrefoil in the spandrel, under two-centred arches; the mullions and tracery were cut away in the 18th century or earlier, but have been recently restored. The stair turret is lit by two square-headed loops, with hollow-chamfered surrounds, one on the west and one, at its head, on the south.

The south wall of the nave is in line with that of the stair turret, and is of similar fabric; plinth and the lowest string are continuous, both ending just short of the south porch. There is a vertical joint in the upper part of the wall, the most obvious interpretation of which is that the nave wall was heightened after the construction of the tower and turret<sup>1</sup>. In this section of wall, immediately west of the porch, is a window of two cinquefoil-headed lights under a four-centred arch, without a hoodmould; above is an embattled parapet with a moulded string at its base.

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<sup>1</sup>The upper part of the stair projection has larger and more neatly-alternating quoins than the lower, and the stonework has less squarish dark stones, raising the possibility, already suggested by the odd set-back west of the turret, that tower and turret incorporate fabric of more than one phase.

The north wall of the nave is a patchwork of several fabric types. The masonry of the lower half of the wall appears to be rubble, although this is obscured by inserted openings and much later repair. Above is larger roughly-squared stone, and a moulded string and embattled parapet as on the south. At the west end of the wall is a large stepped buttress; this, together with the adjacent sections of both north and west walls of the nave, appear to be relatively recent<sup>2</sup>; there is another large patch of relatively recent stonework to the west of the western of the two windows. The windows are each of three cinquefoil-headed lights, under four-centred heads, with hoodmoulds that have turned-back ends. The eastern window is partly medieval, but in 1993 the western was entirely of Roman cement (with a brick relieving arch above), and seemed to be a 19th-century copy; it has since been replaced in new ashlar. Immediately to the east of this window is the blocked north door, a small four-centred arch with a continuous casement moulding. Above it a few stones of a larger arch are visible; it is not clear whether this is another Romanesque doorway (as on the south), or simply a relieving arch; recent patching complicates the situation. At the east end of the wall, in the angle between nave and organ chamber, are the projecting footings of a large buttress destroyed when the organ chamber was added in 1908; to the west is a rough projecting footing, apparently ending just west of the western window, at the start of the short section of rebuilt or refaced walling adjacent to the north-west buttress. This footing seems to have been exposed when the ground level was lowered to create a drain. There are several 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>-century architectural fragments built into the upper parts of the wall:

- (1) High up and slightly to the east of the head of the eastern window is a cluster of three pieces including a voussoir and a section of a jamb, both with roll mouldings and dog-tooth ornament.
- (2) On the north side of a recent patch of masonry just south of the head of the same window is what looks like a small column seen in section.
- (3) Another voussoir with dog-tooth and the moulded base of a jamb shaft lie midway between the heads of the two windows.
- (4) Immediately to the east of the head of the western window is a third voussoir of the same type.

The **South Chapel** is of two bays; its external walls are of roughly-coursed rubble, except for the parapet, which is of squared stone; there is a slightly-projecting course at the foot of the wall, which seems more likely to be rough footings exposed by recent lowering of the ground level, than the eroded remains of a plinth. There are a pair of two-light windows in the south wall of the chapel, each of two cinquefoil-headed lights under a four-centred arch (very similar to the window in the south wall of the nave, west of the porch). There is an oversailing hollow-chamfered course at the base of the parapet, which has a moulded coping. The east wall of the aisle has no feature of interest, other than a built-in architectural fragment, which appears to be the springing of a pair of arches, each with large dog-tooth ornament (this is presumably the stone referred to in the 1988 Quinquennial Report as a 'piece of 11th century masonry'). There is an embattled parapet, rather strangely set back behind a flat coping.

The **South Porch**, slightly recessed in the angle between the west end of the aisle and the nave wall, appears, from the junction of its south wall with the end wall of the aisle, to pre-date the

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<sup>2</sup>See 'The Structural History of the Church' section

latter. It is constructed of square stone, quite a number of blocks having been replaced by 'ladder repairs' in thin red tiles; the west wall is of squared stone, grading upwards into smaller rubble, as far as a horizontal line roughly coincident with the base of the parapet, above which is regularly-coursed much browner stone. The entrance archway in the south wall is surprisingly low, and has a segmental-pointed arch with a continuous hollow chamfer. Over the archway is a large wooden sundial bearing the inscription 'Memento Mori'; the original was dated 1779; but the present sundial is a 1966 copy (1988 Quinquennial). Above and to the right of the archway is a stone with one end set diagonally, possibly part of the coping of an earlier gable; the wall is now topped by a parapet with a moulded coping. The west wall has a chamfered plinth at its foot, and a small square-headed window with a chamfered surround; at the wall head is a flat coping with an embattled parapet set back behind it, as at the east end of the aisle.

The **Chancel** is built of more regularly squared stone than the remainder of the church, and is of two bays; there is a chamfered plinth (much eroded), and stepped buttresses between the bays on the south, and set diagonally at the eastern angles. In the south wall each bay has a window of three cinquefoil-headed lights under a four-centred arch, with hollow-chamfers to both inner and outer frames, and to the hoodmoulds, which have turned-back ends. There is a priest's door immediately to the west of the buttress; this a four-centred arch, with a rebate within a continuous hollow chamfer; there is a moulded hood, with vestiges of carved stops. There is a chamfered oversailing course close to the wall-head.

The east end of the chancel has a large window of five lights, with simple Perpendicular tracery above; the principal lights are cinquefoil-headed, although the panel above the central light has a transom with the sub-lights quatrefoil-headed below and cinquefoil-headed above. The inner and outer frames are double-chamfered and there is a hollow-chamfered hoodmould with turned-back ends; all dressings except the outer arch appear recent. The gable has a 19th-century coping, with a finial cross.

The north side of the chancel is concealed externally by the **Vestry** and **Organ Chamber**, built of squared and tooled stone with ashlar quoins and dressings. The organ chamber projects transept-like from the western bay, with the narrower vestry, pent-roofed against the chancel, covering the eastern bay. Both parts have a chamfered plinth; in the north wall of the vestry is a re-set medieval three-light window of the same type as those on the south of the chancel, and in the east wall of the vestry a window of three cinquefoil-headed lights under a square head. In the west wall of the Organ Chamber is a shoulder-arched doorway set within a larger blank pointed arch (visible both externally and internally), suggesting that a western extension was intended.

### **The Interior**

The interior of the body of the church is plastered and whitewashed, except for some exposed dressings.

The **Tower** opens to the nave by a four-centred arch of two chamfered orders, dying into the wall except for the outer order towards the nave, where the chamfer is continued down the jambs. Above the head of the arch is a narrow square-headed loop, with a chamfered surround. The west window has a rather irregular four-centred rear arch.

The access to the tower stair is by a doorway in the west wall of the nave, to the south of the tower arch; this has a square head, disguised by an arched wooden frame. The stair rises straight

for some distance, before continuing as a newel to the square-headed doorway into the ringing chamber, set beneath a segmental arch carrying the wall face above. The internal wall faces of the stair show several changes in masonry type, with rubble in the initial section, and much more squared whitish sandstone above; a ragged patch on the east side at the first turn may possibly mark a former access to a gallery.

The newel section of the stair ends in a landing at the level of the doorway into the ringing chamber; the few steps that continue beyond probably have no structural significance; the square-headed doorway (with a chamfer to its west jamb only, broach-stopped at its base), is set beneath a rough relieving arch.

The ringing chamber has a low opening in the east wall, communicating with the loop above the tower arch; this slopes downwards so as to give the ringers a view of the east end of the nave. South of this opening is a stone aumbry or wall cupboard; at ceiling level there are four large corbels against both east and west walls; these look as if they may be of relatively recent date.

Access to the belfry is by a timber ladder. There are sockets for earlier bell frames at either end of both north and south walls, a little above the level of the present frames. The belfry openings have rough segmental rear arches.

The **Nave** has a two-bay south arcade, with pointed arches and a central octagonal pier. The arches are each of two chamfered orders. At the responds, the inner order dies into the wall whilst the outer are continued down the jambs to broach stops (that on the north side of the eastern respond having been cut away). The pier has a simply moulded capital, with a hollow chamfer to the base, above big broaches. The three nave windows all have elliptical rear arches; the south door has a four-centred rear arch.

The **Nave Roof** is of six bays; the trusses are of simple collar beam form, with two purlins on each slope, and a ceiling at the level of the collars; it appears to be of 18th or early 19th-century date.

The two south windows of the **South Aisle** again have elliptical rear arches; between them is a tomb recess with a low four-centred arch, its head chamfered but its jambs left square. There are five rough corbels above the arcade, to carry the roof timbers, which are clearly of 19th or early 20th century date.

The south doorway opens into the **South Porch**. Towards the porch the doorway has a four-centred archway, with a continuous moulding closer to a wave than a hollow chamfer; the two stones forming the door head looks to have been renewed. This opening is set within a larger and earlier one, which has a semicircular arch of one square order; there is a fragment of what may have been an outer order above the western impost. The imposts are chamfered beneath, and carried by jamb shafts - the eastern circular, the western apparently octagonal, with carved capitals (much worn) bearing simple volutes on the faces and human heads on the angle. Any remains of the bases of the shafts are concealed by the present floor. At the head of the wall above the doorway are two old corbels, carrying more recent roof timbers.

There are stone benches on each side of the porch; above the eastern bench is a segmental-arched recess with a chamfered head, any details obscured by whitewash.

The **Chancel** from the nave under a pointed arch of two chamfered orders, springing from roll moulded imposts which are square in plan; the moulding is returned along the wall towards the chancel, but has been cut away towards the nave. The jambs have chamfers with broach stops at the bottom. The outer order of the arch has a narrow chamfer towards the nave but a much broader one towards the chancel; there is a hoodmould, chamfered beneath, toward the nave only; it has been cut away above a pair of sockets, presumably for the rood beam, positioned some distance above the imposts. The voussoirs of the arch are of red and white sandstone, the two colours alternating in parts. All the dressings of the arch look to have been tooled over relatively recently.

On the north side of the chancel is an arch to the organ chamber, with a casement mould to its jambs; the form of the head is concealed by the organ; east of this is a square-headed doorway to the vestry. In the south wall the two windows have four-centred rear arches; the priest's door has a chamfered segmental rear arch, hidden behind panelling. On the south side of the sanctuary are three sedilia and, beneath the eastern window, a piscina. The sedilia have flattened four-centred arches, with a wave moulding; the jambs are of the same section, but the attached shafts between have a moulding of square-ended ogival section, with moulded caps and bases; the recesses are so shallow that any actual seats must have been of timber, and stood proud of the wall face; in 1993 the dressings of the sedilia were rather gaudily painted but they have now been cleaned, except for the capitals which remain gilt. The piscina has an ogee arch moulded with a hollow chamfer within a wave; the rather damaged bowl appears to have been re-used from an earlier and narrower piscina, with a circular shaft on either side; the moulded bases of the shafts survive, and a circular bowl with an odd raised disc or platform within it.

The **Chancel Roof** is of three bays; the trusses are of collar-beam type, with short wall posts resting on carved wooden corbels, a moulded and brattished wall-plate, and moulded arch braces interrupted by large carved bosses at the intersections of purlins and principals; the roof is ceiled at the level of the collars, although a moulded collar purlin (carrying central bosses) is exposed. The panels of the roof have boarding which appears considerably more recent than the principal timbers.

The **Vestry** and **Organ Chamber** are early 20th century and have no features of especial note.

## Fittings and Furnishings

The **Font** has a circular bowl with a moulded rim, set on a circular shaft with moulded rings at top (partly cut away), centre and base; the base proper has a simple convex moulding, and is set on a circular step. The font is described and illustrated in the Trans. Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham & Northumberland VI (1906-11), 251-3, but the remains of the upper band on the shaft are not shown. It is perhaps worthy of note that the spacing of bands (although not the diameter of the shaft) is almost exactly that on the moulded 'baluster shaft' in the church porch (see below). The same article refers to a 'post-Restoration' **Font Cover**, and illustrates not one but two font covers (is the ascription 'Egglescliffe' on one in error?) Pevsner & Williamson (1985, 262) refer to the font cover as 'probably...C17'. There is now a plain late 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century cover.

The **Chancel Furnishings** are of considerable interest. Pevsner & Williamson (ibid) describe them as 'in the Cosin style as found at Bishop Auckland' but concur with Boyle (1892, 645) in describing the design of the work as 'not good, and the carving ..of very inferior character'. The **Screen** has flatly-applied tracery on the dado, with the cusping rendered as fleur-de-lys, and a pulvinated leaf-carved frieze with cherubs' heads. On the top is a cartouche with scrolls. The **Choir Stalls** have poppyhead ends with swags of fruit, and the backs with balusters supporting a plain classical cornice on acanthus brackets; there is arcaded panelling at the fronts of the rear stalls, and an open arcade with balusters (more recent?) in front of the front ones. The **Altar Rails** are described by Pevsner & Williamson (1983, 262) as 'C18, with a little Gothick arcade', but Nelson (21) suggests that they were put in by Rector Maltby around 1846.

The **Nave Pews** are also of 17th century date, the fronts, sides and doors having open balustraded panels at the top (cf Aycliffe etc); those on the north of the central aisle are more heavily altered than those on the south. The front pews were removed c1959 to give more space; at the same time the present pews in the South Aisle were introduced, replacing badly-woodwormed seats described as of much inferior workmanship and plainer style than those in the nave (Nelson, 17). The pews under the tower are very like those in the aisle, and may be of the same date. The **Pulpit** was originally of three-decker type, said to have been introduced around 1825 (ibid), but the lower two decks were removed and the canopy lowered c.1959.

There are two **Chained Books** in a case on the internal sill of the eastern of the two windows in the south aisle. One is the Eikon Basilike of 1662 (a collection of speeches, prayers and meditations of Charles I, made with a view to posthumously asserting his piety), and the other 'An Apology of the Church of England', a defence against Roman Catholicism, printed in 1611. These books were presented to the church by the Rector Dr Basire, when he returned to the parish after his exile during the Commonwealth.

There is no ancient **Stained Glass** in the church. The two windows in the south aisle and the east window of the chancel (1891) are all by Kempe; the westernmost window on the north side of the nave (1905) is by Comper.

There are two **Bells** in the tower, hung in wooden frames which look to be of late 19th or early 20th century date. The older bears the inscription:

'+SANCTE MARIA ORA PRO NOBIS'

The 'C's and 'E's are reversed. This bell has been dated to c.1400. The second bell simply bears its date, '1665'. There is also a set of eight tubular bells, given to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

### **Sepulchral Monuments**

There are two medieval effigies of knights:

- (1) In the recess in the south wall of the south aisle. Sandstone figure in chain mail, with a belt and surcoat. The head rests on two pillows, whilst the right hand grasps the sword hilt and left the scabbard. The knees have genouilleres and the feet, resting on an animal (lion?), spurs. The shield bears the three lozenges of Aslakby or Aislaby, and a dragon bites its base. The effigy is reputed to commemorate either Sir Thomas of Aislaby (who fought in the Battle of Lewes in 1264, and died in 1291) or Sir William of Aislaby.
- (2) In the recess in the east wall of the porch. Sandstone effigy very similar to (1), except that it is more worn, and the shield is plain. Traditionally this represents Sir John of Eggescliffe, who also fought at Lewes.

There is one medieval **Cross Slab** set upright against the internal face of the west wall of the south porch, at its south end. This is a tapering slab of pinkish sandstone, with a bracelet cross carved in relief; the design shows some puzzling idiosyncrasies. The date of the slab is probably later 13th century (Ryder 1985, 83 and plate 26).

There are a few post-medieval **Wall Tablets** of some interest. On the east wall of the nave, south of the chancel arch, is a tablet to Francis Hall (d.1611) and his wife Margaret (d.1641), placed in 1663 by their son William Hall, a London goldsmith. Above are the Hall arms, flanked by cherubs, with a laurel-wreathed skull at the base.

On the north wall of the sanctuary are monuments to Mary Trotter (d.1687) (marble tablet beneath a cartouche with arms), the Rector George W.H.Clerk (d.1777), also Prebendary of Sarum (brass plate in moulded surround with broken pediment and urn above and cherub at base) and Anthony Hall (d.1799), a marble tablet. On the opposite (south) wall, above the sedilia, the monument to Mary Webster (d.1837) takes the form of a Gothic niche.

There are late 18th and 19th century **Ledger Stones** concealed by the carpeting of the sanctuary floor (Nelson, 19)

## Carved Stones

In addition to the cross slab already mentioned, there are several carved stones displayed in the porch, including three probable Pre-Conquest pieces (Cramp, 75-6):

- (1) Part of the shaft of a Pre-Conquest cross of 10th century date
- (2) A baluster shaft, with three rings. Cramp (1984, 75-6) suggests that it may of 8<sup>th</sup> century date and intended as a support for some item of furniture). Pevsner & Williamson (op.cit, 262) extend the range of possibilities to 'part of a post-Conquest or even post-medieval table tomb'; its similarity to the shaft of the font suggests a relatively early date.
- (3) A fragment of a cross head with a crucifix, built into internal face of the east wall; perhaps later 11th century.

There are also:

- (4) A roughly discoidal stone with a central piercing and traces of carving. This, together with (2), have been interpreted as the remains of another font (Nelson, 9)
- (5) The moulded base of a jamb shaft, probably 13th century.
- (6) Built into the east wall, above the window, a cartouche with arms and the date '1692'.

In the tomb recess in the south aisle, and stacked in an inappropriate manner directly on top of the knight's effigy are a moulded 13th-century voussoir with large dog-tooth ornament, and some minor fragments.

Other architectural fragments are built into the external faces of the north wall of the nave and east wall of the south aisle (see exterior description)

## Historical Notes

- 1085 The earliest documentary reference implying the presence of a church at Eggescliffe, referring to 'Gille clericus de Eggascliff' (Nelson, 25)
- 1502/1556 Two references in wills both mention burial within 'the church of the Blessed Virgin at Eggescliffe' (Nelson, 6)
- 1633 Archdeacon Clarke's Visitation notes that the chancel of Eggescliffe church was in good repair, but the south 'porch' (aisle), called 'Hindmer's Porch', was in great decay. The churchyard wall or dike was also in decay. The south window, which was 'dammed upp', was to be re-opened. The clock was in decay (Fordyce, 223)
- c1745 Rector Harris seeks the advice of the antiquary Dr Hunter, who for various reasons argued that the original dedication of the church was to St John the Baptist (one of which was that both effigies in the church had crossed legs, which he saw as indicative of their being Knights Templars, whose patron saint was St John the Baptist...). This dedication was formally adopted much more recently (Nelson, 6).

- 1794 The county historian William Hutchinson (137-8) gives a brief description of the church (which is equally applicable to the building today), and a woodcut showing the building from the south-east; the nave roof is shown as of low pitch (but with the weathering of a higher-pitched roof visible on the tower), and there is a weathervane on the south-west pinnacle of the tower.
- 1823 The historian Surtees illustrates the church from the same angle as Hutchinson (Vol.III, f.p.199), but shows the nave roof returned to its original pitch, and the weather vane removed from the tower.

### FACULTIES AND RECORDS OF STRUCTURAL WORK

| Faculty no. and date | Works   |
|----------------------|---|
| 489 (10.2.1908)      | Erection of organ chamber and vestry  |
| 530 (16.9.1909)      | Erection of new organ. Vestry and Organ Chamber are thought to have been designed by Hodgson Fowler of Durham; the project cost £555 (Nelson, 21) |
| 2167 (15.6.1926)     | Installation of electric light  |
| 3554 (23.10.1952)    | Restoration of reredos panel.   |
| 3865 (19.7.1956)     | New boiler house on north side of tower, new drain system, restoration.   |
| 5333 (31.5.1972)     | Removal of kerbs and improvements in churchyard.  |
| 5670 (11.5.1977)     | Archdeacon's Certificate. General repairs.  |
| 5746 (25.8.1978)     | Installation of floodlighting.  |
| 5810 (27.6.1979)     | Archdeacon's Certificate. New gas-fired heating system.   |
| 5908 (5.3.1981)      | Archdeacon's Certificate. Interior redecoration.  |
| 6018 (20.7.1982)     | Archdeacon's Certificate. Repairs and overhaul to organ.  |
| 6631 (21.12.1987)    | Introduction of aumbry and lamp   |
| 6991 (16.11.1989)    | Major repairs to tower, re-roofing nave etc   |
| 8032 (10.9.1995)     | Repair of churchyard wall.  |
| 8650 (19.3.1999)     | General repairs to boundary wall etc  |
| 9265 (26.11.2001)    | Pointing and masonry repairs; donation of sundry archaeological artefacts to Tees Archaeology.  |

## The Structural History of the Church

The overall picture of the development of the church - a late 11th or early 12th century core remodelled towards the end of the medieval period - is quite clear, but some details, in particular the date and phasing of the remodelling, remain uncertain.

Parts of the nave walls, the original south door, and the re-cut jambs of the chancel arch, survive from the earliest building. The remainder of the building is of later medieval date. The remodelling of the chancel arch is sometimes seen as of 13th century date, but the arch itself is of such 'standard' elements (chamfered orders and chamfered hood) that it could equally well be 14th or even 15th century. The south aisle (variously termed the Aislaby Aisle, Hyndmer's Porch and Pemberton's Porch) is generally seen as a mid-14th century addition (possibly as a memorial chapel to Sir Thomas of Aislaby, d.1291, whose presumed effigy still lies within it), although its architectural features look more of 15th century character; its relation to the porch suggests that the porch is the earlier addition. Structural evidence suggests that the porch had a separate gabled roof, before its parapets were raised to conform with those of the adjacent aisle. The most refined architectural features are found in the chancel, which certainly appears of mid-15th century date; it would be difficult to place the flattened four-centred arches of the sedilia any earlier. The tower also looks of 15th century type, although some features - the set-back on the south and the variety of fabric types seen inside the stair turret - suggests that some fabric may survive from an earlier tower.

One puzzling feature that has come to light from recent research is the pre-19th century configuration of the north-west angle of the nave. As already noted, the buttress in this position, and the adjacent sections of the north and west walls of the nave, looks recent. A pre-1908 photograph in the Mitchison album (Durham Cathedral Library) clearly shows the north wall as ending in a series of substantial angle quoins, a metre or so short of the present position of the buttress. An early-19th century plan of the church in Archdeacon Thorpe's book of plans (also in the Cathedral Library) shows that a short length of wall ran diagonally south-west from this point to join the north wall of the tower - a peculiar situation, which presumably originated when the tower was built as a free-standing structure outside the original west end (thus avoiding disturbing the building as works proceeded) and then the old west end was taken down and the structures linked in this rather unconventional manner. There seems to be no documentary record of the rebuilding of this corner of the nave, and the addition of the buttress; although it would appear to have taken place in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; a photograph accompanying the 1956 faculty for the construction of the present boiler room shows the present arrangement as already in place then.

The south wall of the nave provides little clear evidence to show the original position of the west end of the 11th/12th century building. Plinth and string course continuous with those of the tower commence a little to the west of the south porch, but internally the lower part of the tower stair is cut into rubble walling clearly different from that above, so one is left a little confused.

Apart from this, the only post-medieval structural changes have been the addition of the vestry and organ chamber in 1908, the 1956 photograph shows a previous boiler house, apparently a wooden structure with a pent corrugated iron roof.

## The Churchyard

The churchyard is of sub-circular form (often an indicant of early date), and is in fact part of a large oval area, the eastern part of which is occupied by the Old Rectory, a brick house of 17th century and later dates.

The churchyard boundary wall is of a variety of dates; the oldest fabric is in the south-west quadrant, where there is much red sandstone; parts of the wall are in very poor condition. There are few monuments of any interest, and very little before the 19th century. The most dramatic lies to the south-east of the chancel, and resembles a small church spire, commemorating various late 19th and early 20th century members of the Braithwell family.

Just inside the south gate, on the east side of the path, are a pile of stones which include some fragments of medieval or 17th-century chamfered window jambs. Further pieces of medieval stonework, principally from the belfry openings, were lying on the south side of the tower in August 1993, but had been removed by the following month, presumably by the contractors responsible for the restoration works. It is arguable that these should have been left 'on site'.

### Archaeological Assessment

Whilst Eggescliffe church preserves the greater part of its medieval fabric, free from major alterations, from an archaeological point of view there has been disturbance both above and below ground.

The fabric of the church has been subject to a considerable amount of restoration - largely replacement of decayed stonework - over the last two or three decades. Whilst this is a necessary process, it is not clear whether detailed archaeological recording was carried out prior to these works. In particular, the external face of the north wall of the nave is now a patchwork of fabric types, with so much new stones that unravelling the inter-relationships of the various medieval phases may no longer be possible. Similarly, much new stone has been inserted in the belfry openings, returning them to their medieval forms; one might ask whether the various sockets for timbers, and evidence of how the openings were treated over the last two centuries or more, has been properly recorded, and what the evidence was for the details of the recent restoration..

It is difficult to assess whether early wall coverings (and possibly painted decoration?) may survive beneath the present plaster which covers all internal wall faces; there is certainly red pigment on the internal jambs of the priest's door in the chancel; whilst this may be of no great antiquity, it does suggest that the walls have not been scraped down and replastered within the last half century or so. Any removal of plaster will require monitoring.

Below ground, the church has an underfloor heating system which will clearly have disturbed archaeological deposits to some extent; there are rows of heating grates in the nave, south aisle, and chancel. There has also been disturbance round the external perimeter of the building, where a strip of gravel indicates drainage works; in particular, it is clear that the original ground level has been cut into on the north. On both north and south these works have exposed footings that were intended to be buried, so the present ground level is lower than when the church was constructed.

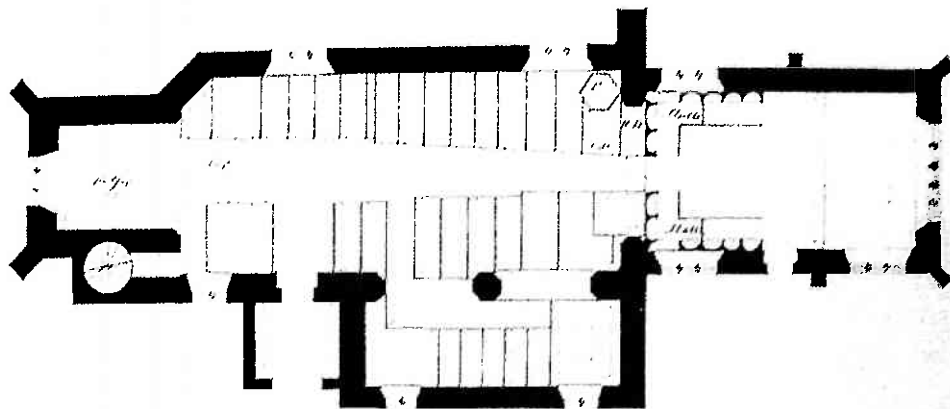
## Summary and Recommendations

Whilst the earliest parts of the standing fabric are of late 11th or early 12th century date, there was clearly a church on or near the site beforehand. The date of its foundation remains in question; it may be as late as the 10th century (the date of the cross shaft fragment) or as early as the 8th (the possible date of the 'baluster shaft'). The name 'Egglescliffe', if derived from the celtic 'Eccles', could also indicate an early church site, although there is a strong body of opinion which consider the root to be 'Egga', a Saxon personal name.

Inside the church, any disturbance of floor deposits, or of the wall plaster, will merit archaeological monitoring, and possibly a detailed recording exercise. In the case of the external wall faces, where there appears to be an ongoing programme of stone replacement, a recording programme should be embarked upon, so that details of the original masonry are recorded prior to replacement. This should (and may) have been carried out; if not, it might be thought worthwhile to prepare detailed stone-by-stone elevations of the building (using rectified photography), so that the complex fabric of, for instance, the north nave wall, can be better understood, and an accurate survey is 'in place' prior to future works.

This assessment, originally made in 1993, was revised in November 2004 when the church was re-visited in connection with proposed new works; specific comments on these, and detailed recommendations for associated archaeological recording, are the subject of a separate report.

Peter Ryder October 1993/November 2004



63 Feet

*Egglescliffe Church.*

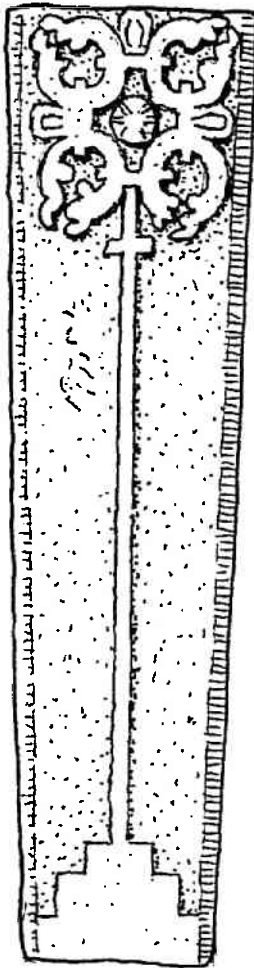
*The number of sittings 213  
These 93 are pews.*

Plan c 1830 from Archdeacon Thorp's album (Durham Cathedral Library)

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Cross Slab Grave Cover in the South Porch  
(after Ryder, 1985)

# St John the Baptist

## Egglecliffe

Provisional Phased Plan

based on survey by C Downs, architect

