

St Mary's Church, Holy Island.

St Mary's Parish Church stands immediately to the west of the ruined Lindisfarne Priory, on the southern edge of Holy Island village. The church consists of a four bay-aisled nave with a western bellcote, north and south porches, and an aisleless three-bay chancel. The distinctive silhouette of the building is provided by the lofty bellcote, and the shallow-pitched roofs of the broad aisles contrasting with the steeply-pitched ones of nave and chancel.

The Exterior

The west end of the **Nave** is built of coursed roughly squared stone of a variety of colours including pink, bluish-white and yellow/brown. In the centre of the wall, between the two buttresses which carry the bellcote, is a broad and tall lancet with a double-chamfered surround; although its dressings, of yellowish sandstone, are fairly worn that may be no older than the 19th century. The large buttresses on either side have a chamfered plinth (unlike the wall behind) and a series of chamfered off-sets; they are linked by a tall two-centred arch, of plain square-section, that carries the bellcote; there is a string course, chamfered on its upper angle, at the level of the springing of the arch, and above that a series of chamfered set-backs on the sides of the bellcote, which itself appears to be an 18th-century rebuild, and is of pink



sandstone. There is a square band at its base, then in each face a segmental-headed arch, with a square impost band and raised keystones; above this is a moulded cornice, now much eroded, and a pyramidal cap carrying a weather vane.

Beyond the bell-cote, at each end of the west wall of the nave is a large buttress. That on the south has a chamfered plinth at the same level as that on the buttresses which carry the

bellcote; above it is an odd recess, and then a section of walling showing what looks like the top of a shallow pilaster buttress, and then steep roof-line and coping of an earlier nave gable, later heightened and the pitch of the roof slightly reduced. This upper section of walling is oddly set slightly forward from the lower part, where there seems to have been extensive re-facing. The northern buttress is considerably more massive, and has a rough square plinth and then a chamfered plinth at a higher level than the others; there is no sign of the earlier gable-line on this side, the very top of the wall looking like a 19th-century rebuild. However, the north return of the buttress shows a straight joint a few cm from its east end which gradually converges with the wall face lower down. As the buttress extends well beyond the north face of the north arcade it is difficult to see this as the angle of an earlier aisleless nave – it is not in the right place – but what is it? Might it be the corner of a buttress to such an angle? All this raises problems when it comes to considering the structural development of the church (see Structural History section)

The side walls of the nave are completely concealed by the added aisles, but evidence of the original eastern angles can be seen externally on either side of the chancel. A straight joint marks the south-eastern angle, although re-facing seems to have largely destroyed the original quoining, except perhaps for one large block at two-thirds height. Above the chancel roof the external face of the original east wall of the nave is of roughly-coursed rounded blocks, perhaps sea cobbles; the gable itself., of more regular coursed stone, is clearly a 19th-century rebuild, along with its coping and finial cross. Rather more of the original north-eastern quoin is visible; its lower section is not of particularly distinctive character but higher up (above the upper of the two strings on the adjacent chancel wall) are several large blocks which at least approximate to the characteristic Anglo-Saxon 'long-and-short' form. Above these, and set back a little from the line of the quoin, is a sloping line delineating the roughly-coursed cobble walling of the original gable (has an original coping been removed), truncated by the 19th-century rebuilding of the upper section of the gable.

In the west wall of the **South Aisle** is a double-chamfered lancet window like that in the west end of the nave, although its present dressings are of 20th-century ashlar; above it are two stones of the head of an earlier opening, of rough round-arched form, and to the north of it an irregular break in the masonry with below it, at ground level, a small two-centred arch that looks like the head of a small half-buried doorway. Its dressings are quite worn, but above it is a rough relieving arch of roughly-shaped stones, often an indication of 19th-century date; might the opening have given access to a post-medieval vault? The parapet is clearly secondary, being carried down as a series of steps, with an older gently-sloping roof-line visible below.

The south wall of the aisle, of four bays¹ is much patched, with masonry of a variety of dates; the ground surface falls gently to the east, and a chamfered plinth to the east of the buttress between the second and third bays. This is a slender single-stepped buttress of similar form to the pair at the south-west angle; there is a broader and slightly lower buttress between the third and fourth bays, apparently of the same build as the clasping buttress at the south-east angle. The parapet has a very eroded string course at its base and a rough chamfered coping.

The south porch is set a little west-of-centre of the western part of the wall; on either side of it, in the re-entrant angles between porch and aisle wall, are projecting blocks, possibly remnants of the footings of earlier buttresses. Immediately east of the porch, and overlapped slightly by it, is a large blocked window, perhaps once of three lights, with a steep two-centred arch; its east jamb (the west one is concealed by the porch) seems to have been moulded but the arched head has a simple chamfer. The sill (or possibly the lowest course of the blocking) is formed by a rough projecting course; the blocking above is of neatly-squared stone of 19th-century character. The third and fourth bays have broad lancet windows of 19th-century character, in chamfered surrounds with alternating block jambs, under hollow-chamfered hoodmoulds with turned-back ends. That in the third bay is set to the east of the centre of the bay, and c 0.60 m to its west the remains of the west jamb of an earlier window are visible; there are clear patches of secondary masonry around and above the heads of both 19th-century lancets, and also areas of obvious 20th-century re-facing lower in the wall.

The chamfered plinth is continued across the east end of the aisle, which is largely composed of whitish sandstone, with alternate quoins of purplish stone above the clasping buttress at the south-east angle; as at the west end, the parapet is clearly secondary, with an older sloping roof-line below. The darker stone of the parapet also appears in a large patch in the upper part

¹Although there is no external division between the first and second

of the wall, set against the south-east quoin of the earlier nave. Only the ragged outline is visible of a large blocked window with a pointed head; its dressings all seem to have been removed.

At the west end of the **North Aisle** is another broad lancet like those in the west ends of nave and south aisle; its dressings are of whiter stone, and rather more eroded than those of the others, but are still of 19th-century character. At the north-eastern angle of the aisle are a pair of two-stepped buttresses, with a chamfered plinth that continues south for c 1 m and then abruptly ends, with a ragged break in the stonework extending for c 1.5 m above the termination. The parapet steps down like that of the south aisle, but on this side there is no earlier roof-line visible.

The north wall of the aisle is of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, with some areas of rubble; the stone is of a variety of colours. The wall is of four bays, articulated by buttresses, although the remains of that between the first and second bays are now incorporated into the east wall of the north porch. The remaining buttresses are each two-stepped, like the pairs at the outer angles of the aisle; that between the second and third bays is slightly broader than that between the third and fourth. There is a chamfered plinth for the full length of the wall, continued round the buttresses. The wall has a parapet like that of the south aisle, of larger squared blocks of darker stone; its chamfered coping steps down in level just to the east of the north porch, and there is an odd square recess in it a metre or so from the west end, perhaps related to the square chimney stack which rises just within the parapet at this point. The only indication of any string below the parapet is one one block at the extreme east end. Just below the parapet there are indistinct traces of a blocked window above the porch, and there are even less clear indications of an opening in the second bay, where there is one elongate block at a level that might be the lintel of a doorway, although there seems to be more evidence of disturbed masonry above it rather than below. The two eastern bays each have a two-light window with pointed heads and simple Y-tracery, with roll-moulded tracery and surrounds; these have the appearance of authentic medieval work, perhaps of c1300.

The east end of the aisle is quite complex. There is a chamfered plinth (set at a slightly lower level to that of the adjacent chancel. There is a window of three stepped lancet lights, with pierced spandrels, of the same character and with the same type of moulded surround as the two-light windows in the north wall. Below the northern light of the window is the lower part of a buttress with an odd square footing; on either side of it is a conventional chamfered plinth, continued round the pair of buttresses at the angle of the aisle. To the south of this truncated buttress the lower part of the wall is of large squared blocks, whilst the masonry to the north is of rather different character, in smaller courses; this would tally with the truncated buttress marking the original north-eastern angle of the aisle before a later widening.. Just short of the angle buttress there is a rough projecting stone, possibly an image bracket, c 2.5 m above the ground.

The **South Porch** looks of 19th-century date, with purple sandstone quoins and dressings. Its moulded two-centred arch has a hood with turned-back ends; the gable above has moulded kneelers and a coping chamfered on its lower angle, carrying a cross finial.

The flat-roofed **North Porch** rises to little more than half the height of the aisle; it is no longer a true porch (its outer doorway being blocked) and is in fact said to have been built in the early 19th century as a mortuary for drowned seamen. Its lower walls are of large and almost square blocks of whitish sandstone, and its upper third of rubble with many large sea cobbles of dark

whinstone. The broad opening in the north wall is now blocked; only its jambs are visible, with no evidence of the form of its head. Both side walls have small lancet windows with narrow chamfers outside a square-edged rebate; the east wall has a straight joint c 0.40 m from its south end, marking the north-east angle of the incorporated buttress.

The south wall of the **Chancel** is of coursed square stone in quite large blocks, with some pinkish stone in the lower wall, the upper courses being mostly white; there are considerable areas of 20th-century refacing, mostly below the windows. There is a chamfered plinth, which steps down twice as the ground drops away to the east; there are, or have been, two string courses. The lower is stepped over the low-side window and adjacent priest's door as a hoodmould, and then ran below the three lancet windows further east, although most of this section has been replaced in recent stone without the string being reproduced. The upper string is carried over the heads of the lancets as a hoodmould. forms heads of lancets. There is also a projecting course, chamfered on its lower angle, at eaves level.



The low-side window at the west end of the all has a very eroded chamfered surround with an internal rebate; it has a transom at mid-height, the lower light being blocked. The string/hoodmould drops vertically alongside its east jamb and is then carried up again over the adjacent priest's door, which has a two-centred arch

with a chamfered surround. The three lancets further east have chamfered surrounds.

On the north of the chancel, as often, the stonework is much less weathered than on the south², and is of coursed whitish stone, with larger blocks in the upper part of the wall. Here the two string courses are in a much better state of preservation, retaining their original profiles, the lower a symmetrical keeled section and the upper a convex moulding above and a convex below. The chamfered plinth has only one step down eastwards, between the two lancet windows. The low-side window at the west end of the wall is of similar form to that on the south (transomed, with its lower section blocked) but here the lower string runs beneath its sill (and then steps up to the level of the lancet sills), rather than forms a hoodmould. Further east there are just two lancets.

²A phenomenon well seen at Hexham Abbey; the explanation seems to be that the south-facing elevation is subject to a greater number of freeze-thaw cycles in winter, when the north remains frozen during the days.

The east end is all of whitish stone. There is the usual chamfered plinth, continued round four narrow gable-topped buttresses which flank the stepped triplet of lancet windows; the two inner buttresses rise higher, flanking the taller central window. The lower string seems to have been continued round the buttresses and below the windows, but has been cut back or eroded away, except for a surviving fragment at the north-east angle; the upper, stepping up to a slightly higher level than on the side walls is continued round the buttresses and up over each window as a hoodmould. The windows are largely original 13th century work, although the central and southern have 19th-century sills. The gable above is of coursed 19th-century stone; the coping, chamfered on its underside, is set on moulded kneelers, and has a Celtic cross finial.

The Interior

Two steps lead down into the **South Porch**, which has whitewashed walls and a bench on either side with a stone top, its outer edge simply moulded. The porch roof has a central pair of principals (without any tie-beam) and two levels of purlins with beaded edges.

The south doorway, inside the porch, has a four-centred arch with single continuous chamfer; the exposed wall face above is of rubble with disturbed areas, notably above and to the left of the door where there is a possible blocked window cut both by the west wall of porch and the roof. There is also a socket above the door, possibly for the ridge of an earlier roof, c 0.5 m below the present one

One descends two more steps to enter the interior of the church. The internal walls are of bare stonework, except for both faces of the north wall of the nave above its arcade, and the inner (north) face of the south nave wall. The render on the inner faces of the nave walls is lined to simulate ashlar.

The west wall of the **Nave** is of coursed roughly-squared stone; at first sight it appears of one build with its continuation to the south, the west end of the south aisle, but on closer inspection the aisle wall seems to be of rather larger stonework, and there is an irregular break in fabric between the two parts. The rear arch of the west window has some cut blocks in the upper part of its arch, but only rough stonework in its jambs; the steeply-sloping sill is relatively recent. To the north, beyond the line of the north arcade the wall-face steps back, with some large squared blocks on the angle.

The south arcade is of four bays, and the north of three wider bays and a narrower one at the west end. The two-centred arches are each of two orders, set on octagonal piers with moulded capitals³, but no bases are exposed. There is no western respond, the arch dying straight into the wall. All the piers look to have been tooled over; the westernmost has a small stoup in its south-west face, with an ogee arch, but the projecting outer part of its bowl cut away; the easternmost pier has various infilled sockets, presumably for screens.

Closer inspection shows that the arcade falls into two two-bay parts. The two eastern arches are considerably lower than the two western, and have their inner order, on the south face (towards the aisle) cut to a hollow moulding. Although the whole arcade uses a mixture of red and white sandstones in its dressings (with voussoirs of the two types sometimes alternating), much more red sandstone has been used in the eastern bays; the capital of the central pier is in two halves,

³There is some variation in the mouldings of the capitals (see in particular that of the easternmost pier) but this may be due to re-cutting.

the western white and the eastern red sandstone. The mouldings of the easternmost pier differ somewhat from the other two, although this might simply be the result of re-cutting. The semi-octagonal eastern respond shows a fragment of a base, just above the present floor level, and like the easternmost pier has various infilled sockets

The three full bays of the north arcade have semicircular arches, and the half-bay at the west end a sharply two-centred one, carried on circular piers with moulded capitals and bases, set on square plinths. All are of two chamfered orders, with a hoodmould towards the nave that is chamfered on its lower angle; the voussoirs of the three larger arches use alternating red and white sandstone, clearly as an intentional decorative effect, whilst those of the narrow western arch look more jumbled. The western respond is in the form of a moulded semi-octagonal corbel that carries the inner order, the outer dying into the wall, but the eastern is a half-pier. The capital of the first pier is quite different to the other two – cut in two pieces of a pinkish stone rather than four of cream sandstone – and may be more recent. There is also a peculiarity above the third pier, in that towards the nave the outer order does not rest on the capital, but is carried on a corbel directly above it, perhaps the result of re-cutting; the same pier has various infilled sockets for screens. The hoodmoulds of the arches join well above the piers, but at the eastern respond come down to the abacus.

Above the arcades the internal face of each nave wall has a series of five corbels that presumably relate to an earlier roof structure; of the five on the south the fourth, c1 m to the west of the apex of the third arch, is set at a lower level than the rest. Of those on the north the third and fifth actually interrupt the hoodmoulds of the third and fourth arches.

The external face of the south wall of the nave shows several features of interest. Three types of fabric are visible. Above the eastern two arches is quite irregular small stone, little more than rubble, quite similar to the early fabric of the east wall of the nave. Above the western two is very different, well-squared coursed whitish sandstone, quite similar to that of the chancel; the courses vary somewhat in height. Above these, and running the full length of the wall, is a heightening of c 0.8 m in four courses of more regularly coursed blocks. Above the central pier is a patch of disturbed walling, possibly an infilled socket.

In the **South Aisle** the west wall is of coursed rubble; the low-level opening visible externally forms a recess with its floor around a metre below that of the aisle; it has a roughly-trefoiled rear arch with an order of rough voussoirs. Above the west window of the aisle has a surround of rough stonework, with above and very slightly offset to the north the semicircular rear arch of the earlier window, turned in roughly-shaped voussoirs, quite like those of the west window of the nave.

The west part of the south wall of the aisle is in similar fabric to the west wall, although above it is an obvious heightening (that runs the full length of the aisle) of c 1.5 m in better-coursed and squared stone. The south doorway has a segmental rear arch with a chamfer to its head only. To the east is a large Gothic-arched ashlar panel, under a moulded arch with jamb shafts, containing wall monuments to the Himsforth family, the earliest dated 1839. It clearly occupies the position of an older window, the acutely-pointed head of which remains visible immediately above it.

To the east of the monument, and opposite the central pier of the arcade, is the chamfered west jamb, and part of the arched head of another earlier window, in good-quality squared stone; c 0.70 m beyond this is the first of the two large windows in the wall, its internal opening being in

roughly-shaped stone, like the west window of the nave. The second window is similar; and again there are similar remains of a predecessor, in this case c 0.9 m to the west. Beneath the sill of the present window are a piscina with trefoiled arch a circular bowl within the thickness of the wall, and an outer frame with a sunk moulding, and to the west of it a square-headed aumbry rebated all round. In line with the easternmost pier of arcade is rough vertical slot cut into aisle wall, perhaps for a screen.

The blocked window in the east wall of the aisle has an internal surround of neatly-cut blocks (like those of the earlier windows in the south wall) infilled with coursed roughly-squared stone. There appears to have been a cavity c 0.4 m square cut into the top of the east jamb of this window, later infilled.

The majority of the internal face of the west end of the **North Aisle** is of coursed roughly-squared stone, with considerable use of black whinstone. There is a ragged break a little to the south of the window, with brownish stone in quite elongate blocks beyond, probably earlier fabric but quite different in character from that in the east wall of the aisle. The west window of the aisle has very roughly-shaped dressings except for the head which looks like recent replacement; the whole upper part of the wall looks to have been rebuilt, perhaps relatively recently, and has three horizontal courses of very thin stones within the upper metre or so of walling.

There is very similar fabric in the western part of the north wall of the aisle; the upper courses of the wall, over its whole length, look like a secondary heightening. The north doorway here, now opening into the vestry, has a tall segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfer only to its head; there is a drawbar tunnel in the east jamb and corresponding socket in the west. The pointed arch of the doorway is rebated for a door, with old pins remaining on the west jamb. Seen from the vestry the doorway has a steep two-centred arch of two continuous orders; the inner is moulded with a roll, which on the arch but not the jambs has a fillet and the outer has a hollow moulding to the head but only a simple chamfer on the jambs. There is a moulded hood with animal head stops, the eastern the better-preserved. Disturbed masonry above and to the right of the doorway may relate to the roof timbers of an earlier and lower porch.

To the east of the north door the lower part of the aisle wall is concealed by a dado, panelling and monuments. There is a possible blocked window c 1m from the doorway, its eastern jamb the clearer. The two two-light windows towards the east end of the wall both have rear arches of the type formed by a pendant rib, chamfered on both its lower angles; between them is a square-headed aumbry, rebated all round. At the east end of the aisle the three-light window has a segmental-pointed rear arch of conventional form with a narrow chamfer only to its head. There is a clear vertical break in the wall fabric below the east jamb of this window; the earlier masonry to the south is of better-quality squared stone; the steep roof-line of this early narrower aisle is very clear above the window.

Inside the **North Porch** the porch walls are all plastered and whitewashed; the former doorway in the north wall now shows as a shallow square-headed recess.

The arch into the **Chancel** is set a little north-of-centre in the east wall of the nave. It is considerably lower than the arches of the arcades, and is of segmental-pointed form and of two chamfered orders, which towards the nave are continued down the jambs with no signs of any imposts or capitals, or bases. In the southern spandrel of the arch are four courses of big squared blocks, but in the northern a mix of rubble and larger blocks. The arch has no

hoodmould; immediately above it are the remains of what looks like the cut-back hoodmould (or stripwork surround) of a narrower semicircular arch. The wall above this contains some coursed and quite elongate thin blocks and some larger ones; higher up is a square-headed opening with its jambs, the lower part of which is formed by a single large upright slab on each side, cut square to the wall. The present head of the doorway may be secondary; it coincides with a low-pitched roof-line, spinning from the present eaves; above, in more thinly-coursed fabric, is a second older roof-line, well below the pitch of the present 19th-century roof which has scissor-braced common rafters and a central purlin below their intersections.



On the east face of the wall, towards the chancel, the outer order simply dies into the wall. On either side of the arch are odd buttress-like projections of wedge-like plan, in the same coursed near-ashlar whitish sandstone fabric as the whole interior of the chancel; their faces are continuous with the western internal splays of the two low-side windows. On this side there is only one fragment of the cut-back hood of the earlier semicircular arch visible; the walling above is of very elongate thin blocks. Only the lower section of the high-level opening is visible.

On the south side of the chancel the low-side window has a two-centred rear arch and a steeply-sloped 19th-century sill (as do all the lancet windows). The priest's door has a segmental-pointed rear arch and the lancets steep two-centred ones. Beneath the easternmost lancet is a small projecting piscina bowl that is clearly of the 19th century, and

at the east end of the wall is a square-headed aumbry with a deep rebate of c 20 cm all round. On the north the low-side and lancets are treated in a similar manner; here there is a shallow square-headed recess between the central and eastern lancets. The line of an earlier low-pitched roof is very clear at the east end, just clearing the rear arches of the three lancets.

The roofs of the church all look to be of late 19th century date. Those in the nave and chancel have common rafter trusses with scissor braces, and a longitudinal beam set below the intersections of the braces; there is a moulded wall-plate, and ashlar to the eaves. The aisle roofs are each of seven bays with principals and four levels of purlins, all chamfered, boarded

over above.

The floors are all recent ones, with stone slabs and boarded areas beneath the pewing. There is only one old floor monument, beneath the chancel arch, a floor slab with an inscription to William Reed of Fenham 1604

Structural History

The obvious axial relationship between St Mary's Church and the late-11th century Priory Church to the east has long aroused comment, although the earlier antiquarians and architectural historians generally assumed that the parish church was a medieval structure, although it had been noted that the north-east quoin of the nave bore some resemblance to Anglo-Saxon work; Taylor and Taylor (1965, I, 398) discussed this and concluded that it was 'probably not pre-Conquest'. However, the removal of plaster from the internal walls c 1980 revealed various features in the east wall of the nave which are more credibly of pre-Norman date (Ryder 1983). These are discussed by Blair (1991,49) who is guarded as to their actual date - 'all that can be reliably said about the nave is that it was built before the late 12th century'...the details are not distinctively early, but neither are they incompatible with the kinds of work found in the earliest Northumbrian churches'. He does point out that the basic dimensions of the original nave are very similar to those of that at Jarrow, and that 'the axial juxtaposition of two churches is characteristic of important Anglo-Saxon minsters.... the rebuilding of one church for conventual use in the Romanesque period, leaving the other as a parish church, is also a recurring pattern' (47). Bede refers to the monastic church of St Peter as 'basilica major', the 'greater church', implying that there were at least two churches in the monastery.

Although the earliest direct evidence of St Mary's church is in 1146 when a papal confirmation includes 'ecclesiam de Halieland', despite Blair's caution it does seem highly likely that the east wall at least of the nave is of pre-Conquest date; the principal question is to whether it dates from the early monastery or, perhaps more likely, from the period after the Viking raids and departure of the monastic community left, when a continued ecclesiastical presence unmentioned in historical sources is evidenced by a number of sculptured stones retrieved from the Priory.

The medieval history of the church is complicated, and difficult to reconstruct in a satisfactory manner. By c 1100 a church was standing that had an aisleless nave, and a north aisle was added, to judge from the detail of its arcade c 1180-1200. The chancel may have been rebuilt at the same time, or a few years later, in markedly better-quality fabric.

The north aisle brings a major interpretative problem. The present west end of its arcade; a half-bay with an arch that looks to be made up of re-used material, seems to indicate that the west end of the church has been truncated, and this is the assumption followed by Blair⁴. Some undocumented disaster around the end of the 13th century – at the beginning of England's long wars with Scotland - seems a likely explanation. But a detailed examination of the west end throws doubt on the simple scenario of nave and aisle being truncated. If this had taken place, one would expect the new west wall to have been of a single build, but in fact the west end of the aisle seems to replicate the structural evidence at its east end, that is the addition of a narrow

⁴ This is Blair's assumption; the dowsed survey (Bailey et al 1988) shows no indication of any structures beyond the present west wall.

aisle to an earlier nave⁵, and then the widening of that aisle⁶. It would be possible, although a little contrived, to construct a chronology that would admit all this evidence – the narrow aisle being added, the west end wrecked, and the church initially reconstructed without the aisle (the damaged arcade being walled up); later the aisle was patched up at its original width, and later still widened, all three phases taking place within the last two or three decades of the 13th century.

Returning to less controversial areas, the surviving windows of the widened north aisle; grouped lancets with the spandrels pierced, but no enclosing arch – demonstrate the very beginnings of window tracery and date from around the end of the 13th century. The south aisle seems a little later, and has the remains of larger windows with enclosing arches, a form nearer c1300. Its arcade would tally with this, but is clearly in two parts, as is the walling above it (only the south face of which is exposed). This again defies easy interpretation; the larger and better-squared masonry of the western half of the wall looks to pre-date the arches below, and the same may be true for the more archaic rubble of the eastern half. So is the eastern half of the wall Saxon and was the western part rebuilt c1200 for some reason? One might invoke the part-by-part replacement of a range of Saxon porticus, but a convincing explanation does not come easily. The confusion is augmented by the remains of the blocked window in the west wall, which has a round head and actually looks of 12th-century date; perhaps it was re-used from some other part of the building.

As often in Northumberland c1300 really brings us to the end of the medieval constructional history of the building; the troubles of the ensuing centuries precluded much new building, and in deed often saw buildings truncated or partly destroyed.

The next changes of which architectural evidences survive are well into the post-medieval period. The bellcote was remodeled in the 18th century; the '1745' inscription on its bell may date it. The heightening of the aisled walls, and the substitution of low- for high-pitched roofs are other familiar changes typical of the later medieval or even early post-medieval periods.

The 19th century, as usual, brought several phases of repair and restoration. The little north porch, said to have been used as a mortuary for drowned sailors, is shown on sketch of 1834 (?) by Richardson in the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries collection (website <http://communities.northumberland.gov.uk/007158.htm>). The architect Ignatius Bonomi is recorded as having carried out repairs in 1836, and further repairs (and re-seating) was carried out in 1860-1863 by the architect John Howison of Newcastle (Website <http://www.churchplansonline.org> (Incorporated Church Building Society archive at Lambeth Palace); Howison's plan shows the inner door of the north porch as blocked; at some later date, when the porch was converted into a vestry, the outer door was blocked and the inner re-opened. Rather confusingly the Alnwick architect F.R.Wilson is also recorded as having carried out a major restoration in 1860 (Pevsner et al 1992, 339. The present windows of the west front and south aisle presumably date to one or other of these restorations, as does the upper part of the eastern gable of the chancel; the 1834 Richardson sketch shows the chancel with a low-pitched roof and the upper part of the gable fallen.

⁵ Although the evidence is less clear; the west wall of the aisle is thinner than that of the nave and does seem to be in a slightly different fabric, as well as the odd evidence of the straight joint on the north side of the buttress between nave and aisle.

⁶ The break in wall fabric and commencement of the chamfered plinth a metre or so from the north-west angle seem to indicate the extension of the aisle, although here, unlike at the east end, the earlier phase does not have a plinth.

At some time in the post-medieval period a series of vaults were constructed in the south aisle; the south and east walls of one were recorded during a small excavation in 1986, made when an 1860 pew platform was being removed (Bailey et al 1988, 83-5). The vault had been excavated down to the natural clay at 1.08 m below the floor – subsequent clearance showed ‘that there were a series of such vaults along the line of the south aisle’. The puzzling low-level doorway at the west end of the aisle (which looks like medieval work but could be a re-set piece) may be associated with these.

Over the last century and a half the church has seen much minor repair, many areas of re-facing are apparent, especially on the external elevations

Archaeological Assessment

The fact that St Mary’s now appears to be the earliest standing building on Lindisfarne, and may even incorporate part of one of the churches of the early monastery, marks out both site and structure as of prime archaeological importance. One should add to this that the later medieval parts of the building are extremely complex as well, and not yet fully understood; the above reconstruction of the structural history should be regarded as tentative. Vital structural evidence may well be concealed by the plaster that conceals the walls above the north arcade, and the inner face of the south. Any removal of plaster should be accompanied by archaeological monitoring.

The exposed sections of ‘early’ fabric – both faces of the east wall of the nave, and the outer face of the south wall of the nave – are unusually complex, and merit proper recording in the form of stone-for-stone drawings, as might the bewildering west end; all this would enable a more detailed interpretation of the building.

It is certain that important archaeological evidence remains beneath the present floors, although there has obviously been considerable disturbance from post-medieval burials (as shown by the 1986 excavation in the south aisle) and probably also from an underfloor heating system⁷. Any works that disturb floor levels – or for that matter, in the churchyard – will require the presence of an archaeologist.

A 1985 survey by dowsing (Bailey et al 1985) recorded the plan of an apparent Anglo-Saxon church underlying the present building, with a trapezoidal nave (not extending as far east as the present one) with three porticus on either side, and a narrow apsidal chancel⁸. The 1986 excavation was on the line of the west end of the dowsed nave, but the post-medieval vault found had removed all earlier evidence.

Peter F Ryder January 2006

Sources

⁷ The plan supplied by the architect shows the position of a semi-subterranean heating chamber (no longer visible) in the external angle of south aisle and chancel.

⁸ The dowsed plan bore no relation to the standing building, except that the line of the north wall of the first north aisle was included (which in any case is evident from visible structural features). This writer prefers investigative techniques that veer less towards the paranormal.

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