

# The Parish Church of St Andrew, Heddon on the Wall

## Analysis of the Fabric and Archaeological Assessment

November 2006



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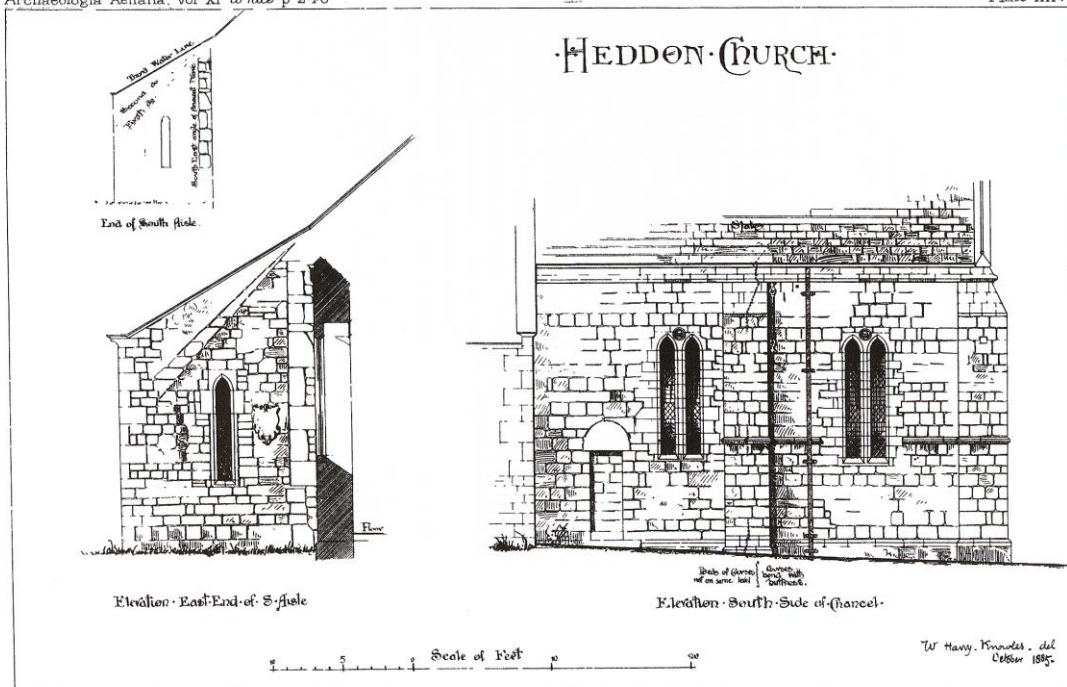
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Drawings of East end of South Aisle and South side of Chancel after Bates (1886)

## The Parish Church of St Andrew, Heddon on the Wall

### Analysis of the Fabric and Archaeological Assessment

Heddon on the Wall parish church stands on a hilltop site in the centre of the present village. It consists of a four-bay aisled nave with a south porch., and a two-bay aisleless chancel with a north organ chamber and vestry.

### Description

#### The Exterior.

The external walls of the church, apart from the chancel, east end of the south aisle and south porch, appear to be of a single build, of coursed roughly-squared stone, many blocks with a coarse pecked tooling, and with alternating tooled-and-margined quoins. The windows of these parts are all either single or paired lancets, their dressings of brown ashlar with a light diagonal tooling. Each has a monolithic head, and jambs made up of a tall upright block and a short horizontal one above.



(Left)

West view

The west end of the **Nave** has a pair of stepped buttresses dividing the nave from the aisles; there appears to be a plinth, but it is right at ground level, and any detail hidden by cement. The west window, set, is a pair of lancets, with an elongate roughly-tooled block, possibly a

lintel, a course below its sill; below this there is an irregular patch of rather lighter stone. Above the west window is a blind lancet, this time in an alternating-block surround, above which the coping of the gable, chamfered on its underside (and carried on shaped kneelers) is returned horizontally below the bell-cote, which has a step at mid-height and a single two-centred opening in a chamfered surround below a gabled top with a coping of overlapping slabs. At the east end of the nave, the south-east angle quoins are of megalithic but irregular form and clearly of Pre-Conquest character; there has been some antiquarian debate as to whether they are of the side-alternate or long-and-short type; there are certainly two horizontal stones higher up that are reminiscent of the latter form, but this is not really a quoin that one can characterise. The second massive block above ground level has been removed, to key in the wall of the adjacent aisle. appear The east end of the nave has a coping of the same type, continuous with that of the aisles on either side, and is topped by a cross finial.

The west end of the **South Aisle** has a single lancet window, and there are three paired lancets of the same character in the south wall, in the first, third and fourth bays, the second

bay being covered by the porch. Older masonry appears in a fragment west of the porch and the lower courses to the east, with irregular old quoins up to a height of c 1.5 m at the south-east corner. The three windows are all double lancets of the usual type. Much more old fabric - coursed roughly-squared stone - survives in the east wall of the aisle, although its present window is a lancet of the usual 19<sup>th</sup>-century type, although part of the curve of the arch of what appears to be an earlier window can be seen a little to the south of its top. Above are two earlier more steeply-pitched roof-lines, some distance below the present more gently-sloping roof, which has a coping, chamfered on its underside and carried on shaped kneelers, as at the west end. .

The west and north walls of the **North Aisle** are all of the same build; it has a low square plinth virtually at ground level. There is a single lancet in the west end, and four double lancets in the north wall; at the east end of the wall is a big stepped buttress, clearly of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date, and above it, capping the north-east angle of the aisle, a chimney stack square at its base but octagonal above..

The **South Porch** is constructed of roughly-coursed irregular stone, and has a two-centred outer arch with a continuous chamfer, with rough alternating jambs and a head made up of two blocks, with parallel curves to intrados and extrados. The gable above has simple moulded kneelers and a recent cross finial; the wall below has a sundial that is probably of 18<sup>th</sup> century

(Right)

South-east view

The **Chancel** is constructed of neatly-coursed squarish blocks; the close-jointed masonry of the lower part of the east wall is particularly impressive. There is a chamfered plinth (interrupted beneath the blocked priest's door on the south) and an oversailing chamfered course below the



eaves; there are broad clasping buttresses at the eastern angles, and a similar pilaster buttress midway along the south wall. A string course, chamfered above and below, commences on the mid-wall buttress and continues around the east end. The buttresses have inclined tops, with a 45E section below a steeper slope, just below the eaves. The priest's door, blocked and forming a shallow recess, is set a little to the west of the centre of the western bay; it is a plain square-headed opening, but the extrados of its monolithic lintel is cut to a stilted semicircular form. To the east of it is a two-light window, medieval but clearly an insertion, consisting of two chamfered lancets with an oval (vesica) opening set low in the spandrel, with a carved human head within it; there is a second window of precisely the same form in the eastern bay, cutting through the mid-height string . Just above the head of the western of these windows is a stone with traces of some incised design.

On the east end the central section of the string course has been renewed beneath the east

window, a stepped triplet of 19th-century lancets, with alternating block jambs of diagonally-tooled ashlar. Above these another string-course,, chamfered below, crosses the gable, which contains a blocked round-headed slit, apparently of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date, as is the gable coping, which has cross-gabled foot-stones and a ring cross finial.

Most of the north wall of the chancel is concealed by the adjacent structures, but to the east of these the plinth and mid-height string continue, and there is a narrow round-headed 12<sup>th</sup>-century window, its jambs coursed in with the walling; its monolithic head has three small drilled holes, perhaps relating to some external grille of bars.

The **Organ Chamber** forms in effect an eastward continuation of the north aisle; its walling, and its twin lancet window, are of precisely the same character as those of the aisle. The lower part of its wall is covered by a peculiar construction consisting of a timber shed with an asbestos roof, built within an ornamental wrought-iron screen or railings. Beyond is the projecting **Vestry**, again of similar stonework, but this time having a tall chamfered plinth of ashlar. Its north end has another paired lancet of the usual type, and a gable capped by an octagonal chimney stack. On the east there is a single lancet, and, at the south end of the wall, a shoulder-arched doorway, chamfered round, with the wall above being recessed so as to clear the 12<sup>th</sup>-century window in the north wall of the sanctuary.

## The Interior

The interior of the **South Porch** is whitewashed, above stone benches, and has a two-centred barrel vault. Two steps rise up to the south doorway which is clearly earlier than the porch; it has a pointed arch of two orders, the inner with a continuous chamfer, the outer also chamfered but carried on jamb shafts with capitals that have a ring at the base and a square abacus; their bases are hidden by the benches.

Inside the church the nave and aisle walls are plastered and yellow-washed, except for the exposed dressings of the arcades; the chancel has bare masonry except for plaster above the arches and between the ribs of vault.

In the **Nave** all the windows have pointed rear arches with shouldered jambs, behind plaster. In the centre of the west wall the outline of what appears to be a doorway with a pointed arch is visible through the plaster. The arcades each have four bays of two-centred arches carried on circular piers and semicircular responds, the eastern bays of each being medieval and the western a 19<sup>th</sup>-century addition, the westernmost piers cleverly incorporating the dressings of the old western responds. The north arcade has arches of a single square order, with a hood towards the nave, chamfered on its underside. The eastern respond has a moulded base on quite a tall square plinth that has a chamfered step at mid-height; its capital has volutes at the angles and some carved acanthus leaves between. The eastern pier has a moulded base on a square plinth, with a chamfer just above floor level; it has an interesting capital, octagonal at the abacus (actually nearer square, with the angles bevelled off), with acanthus leaves and volutes at the corners.

The central pier has an octagonal plinth and a capital of similar plan at the abacus, but without the decoration; it looks to have either been recut or perhaps renewed. The third pier has a much taller square base on a chamfered step; the added western half is a single monolithic block. The 19<sup>th</sup> century western arch is made up of through stones, and the western respond has a monolithic shaft and a very simple base; its capital is similar to that of

the central and western piers.

The south arcade has arches of two chamfered orders, and a hoodmould which, unlike that of the north arcade that comes right down to the abaci of the capitals, ends c 0.5 m above them. The north arcade hood comes down onto abaci. The rather damaged eastern respond has a moulded base, and a semi-octagonal capital that may have been renewed. The piers have octagonal bases (the central one set on a plinth with a big block projecting to the east, perhaps part of the footings of the original aisleless nave). On this side the composite western pier has its added western half made up of several blocks rather than a single one, and the western arch is a close copy of the others, and the western respond of the eastern one.

In the **South Aisle** the south door has a taller two centred rear arch, with only west jamb splayed and shouldered; at the east end of the wall is a small square-headed recess behind plaster, but without any exposed detail. The **North Aisle** has no medieval features; at its east end is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century arch to the Organ Chamber, two-centred and of two chamfered orders, the inner order dying into the jambs and the outer continued down to the south jamb to a stop just above floor level.



Interior looking east

The **Chancel** arch is two-centred and of two chamfered orders, with a hood (towards the nave) chamfered above and below, ending on north in petalled rosette stop c 0.5 m above capital; the inner order has big broach stops at its base. The semi-octagonal responds have moulded capitals, the northern with line of nail head and 'holdwater' mouldings to their bases, although that on the south looks all restoration. base.

The south wall of the chancel shows masonry large blocks (notably in the lower courses) that have a rough diagonal tooling. The outline of the blocked priest's door is visible, with a segmental rear arch cut into single block; a little above the level of the chancel arch respond and c 0.6 m from the west end of the wall is a large upright block that has been seen as the

jamb of a Saxon window, although there is really not enough to make a firm interpretation. The window to the east of the priest's door has shouldered jambs and a chamfer to its pointed rear arch; a 12<sup>th</sup>-century cross slab has been set into its sloping sill.

On the north side of the western bay there are further fragmentary features, although the western part of the wall has been lost to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century arch into the Organ Chamber, which is of two-centred form and two chamfered orders, the inner carried on moulded corbels and the outer continued down to the floor on the east but cuts oddly into the outer order of the chancel arch on the west<sup>1</sup> Also 19<sup>th</sup>-century is the door into the Vestry, to the east of the arch, a shouldered arch of brown tooled-and-margined ashlar. Immediately above it is what appears to be the head of an older door, cut to a shallow segmental arch on the intrados and a semicircle (like that of the priest's door opposite) on the extrados. In the wall above are two big upright blocks, c 0.6 m to the east of the Organ Chamber arch, which seem to be a remnant of some earlier feature but are again insufficient to interpret with any certainty; an adjacent wall monument does not help.

The eastern bay of the chancel has walls of rather more regular squared masonry, and a string course c 1.5 m above the floor, square in section except for a small chamfer on its lower angle. This carries the triple shafts, with scalloped capitals and impost blocks with a double groove and a rounded lower angle, of a badly-distorted semicircular arch (or transverse rib) with a big chevron moulding (which unusually is set horizontally rather than vertical) and a roll, with on the west face a hoodmould chamfered on its lower margin. In the eastern angles of the chancel diagonally-set slabs resting on the string course carry single shafts, with similar capitals and imposts, carrying the ribs of the vault, each with a double roll moulding, . . . of the responds for . . .

The window on the south of the sanctuary has a shouldered arch like its companion further west, but in this case its sill is brought down, cutting through the string course to form a sedile. Although the window is clearly an insertion its inner jambs look to course in with the walling, as they are formed of older wall fabric carefully cut to the new splay; a break is visible in the centre of the wall, the outer opening being in later stone.

On the north of the sanctuary the round-headed window has a rather distorted semicircular rear arch of neatly-cut voussoirs, and is clearly contemporary with the walling.

At the east end the string is continued across the wall, but all except its end stones is restoration; the 19<sup>th</sup>-century east window has a broad internal splay and a slightly-shouldered segmental-pointed rear arch; the reredos is formed by the level top of the string course.

Inside the **Vestry** the north and east windows have shouldered and pointed rear arches, behind plaster; in the west wall is a square-headed doorway, with a chamfered surround towards the Organ Chamber into which it opens. A projection in the centre of the south wall probably contained a fireplace, now blocked. A trapdoor in the floor is reported to lead to a flight of steps down to a headstone, set in the internal face of the west wall below floor level, to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Rev Armstrong, with an inscription that includes a curse on anyone with disturb his remains.

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<sup>1</sup>When this arch was broken through 'part of the splay of a Norman window was found beneath the plaster, covered with the red and black frescoing that appears to have been general throughout the church..' (Bates 1886, 249)

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century roof of the nave is of seven bays, and has king-post trusses that have collars and arch braces, the ceiling being underdrawn on the backs of the braces; there are simple panelled ceiling to the aisles, with a simple moulded wall plate and principals. There is a panelled and boarded wagon roof to the western part of chancel, the eastern part of which is covered by the 12<sup>th</sup>-century vault already described.[]

### Structural History

Most authorities are agreed that the earliest fabric of the church is found in the nave walls, although the only visible evidence of this is in the original south-eastern angle quoin (right); the actual form of this quoin - whether 'long-and-short' of the side-alternate type more usual in this area, has aroused considerable antiquarian debate (see Taylor & Taylor 1965). Side-alternate quoins might imply a church in the early Northumbrian tradition (cf Corbridge, Bywell St Peter etc, Jarrow, Monkwearmouth), of the 7<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> century, whereas long-and-short quoins are more usually associated with later Saxon buildings. Basically, not enough of the quoin is exposed for anyone to be sure. The proportions of the nave may have a bearing on the question of early or later Saxon date. Early Northumbrian naves were usually relatively long and narrow, of proportions of at least 3:1; later Saxon ones could be 2:1 or even shorter. The nave at Heddon, before its 19<sup>th</sup>-century lengthening, was around 2:1, which would put it in the later group<sup>2</sup>; recent reconstructions (eg the plan in Senior 1987) show the Saxon church as even shorter, with its west end in line with the central piers of the arcades<sup>3</sup> but it is not clear how much weight should be given to these.



Opinions have been varied as to the date of the chancel. Senior (1987) states that unspecified 'experts' have dated the walls of the western portion to 650-680, but most authorities see the chancel as post-Conquest, but are divided as to whether the eastern bay is an addition. Bates (1886) correlated the chancel with the 1165 gift of the church to Blanchland Abbey, seeing the eastern portion being built first, and then linked to the earlier nave<sup>4</sup>. The NCH (1930) puts

<sup>2</sup>Although of course the west end might have been truncated at some early date.

<sup>3</sup>This is the position shown on the dowsed plan in Bailey, Cambridge & Briggs (1988)

<sup>4</sup>He saw the transverse arch with its chevron moulding as being intended to form the chancel arch of a new building, the retention of the nave resulting from a later change in plan.



less weight on the Blanchland connection, and seems somewhat equivocal as to whether the chancel represents one or two builds, although recognising the fragmentary survival of early features in the western part.

Pevsner et al (1992, 310) sees the western part of the chancel as 'early Norman' and the sanctuary as a later addition.

The evidence for the eastern part of the chancel being a later addition is not really all that clear; certainly the west part has some archaic features - the priest's door on the south and reset lintel of another early opening on the north, and the odd large blocks in the internal wall faces - and its fabric does not course in as well with the central pilaster buttress on the south, as does the wall to the east. However, both walls have a chamfered plinth at the same level (whilst that of the buttress is set lower) and there look to be remains of a cut-back string at the west end of the wall, which would more or less line up with that on the eastern bay. Inside, the masonry of the lower walls seem to course through between the two bays without a break.

The subsequent history of the church is less controversial. At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century comes the north aisle, with its arches going pointed but still of a single heavy order, with acanthus decoration to the capitals of its eastern respond and pier. Then in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century comes the south aisle, chancel arch, and the two windows inserted in the south wall of the chancel. Later still comes the south porch, towards the end of the medieval period.

Then, as often, comes a jump to the 19<sup>th</sup> century; this is not to say that the fabric was unchanged between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but evidence of such alterations was particularly vulnerable to the later restorers, keen to return to the church to an idealised medieval form. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century works were extensive, but seem well documented.



Sketch of west view c 1840, showing western vestry

In a campaign of works between 1839 and 1845 the south aisle was largely and the north aisle completely rebuilt<sup>5</sup>, and the nave extended a bay to the west, with a small semi-octagonal vestry being added to the west end. The present vestry replaced the western one in 1866; between 1873 and 1877 further works included the construction of the organ chamber.

### Archaeological Assessment

This is obviously a site of considerable archaeological significance. Set so close behind Hadrian's Wall, it is likely that the hilltop was occupied by some sort of structure in the Roman period, and there may well have been a church on the site from early in the Anglo-Saxon period. It has been suggested that Heddon is the Ad-murum referred to by Bede, the

<sup>5</sup>With the date '1839' and the initials 'J A B' (J A Blackett, the vicar) on the window heads

village of Oswy King of Northumbria, where Finan, second Bishop of Lindisfarne, baptised two future kings in 653 AD, but this remains unproven. It seems likely that the Saxon church of which remains survive in the nave walls dates from the 10<sup>th</sup> or early 11<sup>th</sup> century.

It is certain that there will be deposits and probably structural remains of considerable archaeological importance beneath the floors of the present church. Any disturbance of floors must be accompanied by appropriate recording. The same goes for above-ground wall surfaces; the plaster on the nave walls may well hide Anglo-Saxon fabric, surviving above the medieval arcades; it was customary to insert arcades into earlier walling, so that earlier fabric was retained above (cf Corbridge). It is possible that the plaster itself may be of archaeological significance, as remnants of medieval wall paintings were seen on the splay of the Norman window destroyed when the Organ Chamber arch was inserted. If any renewal or removal of plaster is envisaged, a small area or areas should be investigated in advance, and appropriate actions taken; in addition, if plaster is removed, the wall faces beneath should be recorded. This does not apply to the walls of the aisles (except the east end of the south aisle, and area around the south door) as these are known to have been rebuilt in the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The present floor of the church is mostly of stone slabs, with boarded areas under the pews. It is probable that there was an underfloor heating system, which will obviously have occasioned some disturbance to sub-floor deposits and structural remains.

### **The Churchyard.**

The churchyard is of an irregular quadrant plan, the west side curving round, from a point west of the church, to the north-east corner, the highest point of the whole site. The boundary on the north and north-west is no more than a retaining wall, with a wooded slope dropping away steeply at its foot. The headstones, most of which lie south or south-west of the church, include some good-quality work of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (notably on the west of the main path from the south gate); there are occasional earlier stones, including one with an unusual serrated edge to John Berwick 'hall husbandman', to the south of the east end of the south aisle, and a 1730 stone close to the south porch on the east side of the path. To the south of the east end of the aisle are a table tomb and box tomb, of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the big family tomb of the Law family, of the same period, stands to the south-west of the aisle. Outside the west end of the nave is a 4 m long recumbent slab 'the sepulchre of Robert Steavenson of Newcastle upon Tyne', dated 1828, with another big slab immediately to the west of it accompanied by a pink granite memorial to Burdon family of Heddon House, of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. The monuments to the north of the church are largely relatively recent.

Peter F Ryder November 2006

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