

Archaeological Recording at St Andrews Church, Hartburn

A scheme of works at St Andrew's Church during autumn 2011/early spring 2012 entailed various pieces of archaeological recording, both below floor levels and in the standing fabric.

(1) The Internal Face of the West Wall of the North Aisle

The west bay of the aisle had been previously occupied by the organ, and when an Archaeological Assessment of the church was carried out in March 2001 the internal faces of both north and west walls had not been accessible to examine. In January 2021 the organ had been removed; these wall faces were recorded both as measured sketch drawings and photographically. The lower 1.1 m of each wall was concealed by render.

The wall is of coursed roughly-squared stone, the courses not being quite level; higher up the coursing becomes much more irregular. This contains a single small window (A) which has a pointed (almost ogee) head externally and a shouldered rear arch, and seems contemporary with the greater part of the wall. Its internal lintel is a brown sandstone slab of tapering form, which might be part of a medieval grave slab, although a few hints of incisions do not make up any coherent pattern – its surface is only roughly dressed in any case. Close to the south end of the wall are a series of short lengths of straight joint (B); these, and similar evidence visible externally, seem to indicate that an earlier buttress is incorporated in the wall, and that sections of it have been removed to tie in the added masonry. High up there is evidence of a rather shallower-pitched roof a little below the present one, in the form of a horizontal groove in the external face of the north wall of the nave (C) and a rough course of elongate stones, probably an earlier coping (D), a few cm below the present roof.

(2) The Internal Face of the Western Bay of the North Wall of the Aisle.

The walling is of coursed roughly squared stone, with a continuous course of much thinner stones (E) c 2.4 m above the floor, interrupted 1.55 m from the west wall by what appears to be an infilled vertical socket 320 mm high and 100 mm wide (F). 2.50 m from the west end of the wall a straight joint (G) marks the west side of a column of disturbed fabric, although the horizontal course (E) continues across it. A second less distinct joint (H) may define the east side of a blocked doorway 1.50 m wide or alternatively, both may simply be the results of the structural movements that have plagued the church. Above and overlapping this putative door position, and extending further to the east, is an area of smooth-faced stone with fine dark pointing that looks relatively recent (I); disturbed fabric seems to continue above to more or less the full height of the wall. Higher up the wall there is what appears to be another socket – 200 mm high by 140 mm wide, 0.59 m from the west end of the wall and 3.40 m above the floor – infilled with a series of small horizontal stones.

At the east end of this section of wall the west jamb of a two-light window (K) is clearly inserted into older fabric.

(3) The External Face of the North Wall of the Nave

The use of the contractor's scaffolding tower facilitated a closer inspection of the external face of the north nave wall (above the arcade) than had been possible in 2001, and several features of interest were observed:

The earlier (Pre-Conquest) fabric of the eastern section of the wall terminates a little to the west of the central pier of the arcade; its quite roughly-finished stonework overhangs the cut dressings of the arcade. West of this points well-coursed and smooth-faced stone is flush with the arcade arches, and could be contemporary with them. In this section of wall, above the westernmost pier of the arcade, are a re-used block with an incised saltire cross, with just above it and a little to the east a half of a second similar block. Above and to the west again is an infilled socket, presumably for the tie-beam, of an earlier aisle roof; there is a second similar socket at this level a short distance from the west wall.

Above these features is the horizontal groove already mentioned, indicating the earlier roof line. Directly above this, more or less above the third arch from the west of the arcade (and above the putative Saxon fabric), is a course of large ashlar blocks. There appears to be a thinner course of similar blocks directly below, into which the roof-groove has been roughly cut.

(4) The External Face of the West Wall of the North Aisle

The lower part of this had been covered by a boiler house, now demolished. A number of interesting features were exposed at the junction of the north-eastern buttress of the tower and the west wall of the aisle. The base of the tower, with pairs of buttresses at its western angles and single ones at the east end of north and south walls, has a two-part plinth, the upper with a slope between two roll mouldings, and the lower with a simple chamfer. This plinth appears to abut against the west wall of the aisle,, or rather against a shallow projection – possibly the north-west angle of the aisleless nave, later incorporated into the aisle wall. Four blocks of this survive in situ immediately above the plinth, bounded on the north by a straight joint and coursing in with the fabric of the adjacent buttress. Beneath this plinth is a further chamfered step, but closer inspection shows this to be an earlier and separate plinth which has projected 0.10 m further to the west and has been crudely hacked back; it returns south beneath the middle of the buttress, which it clearly predates – in fact, structural movement within the buttress seems to result from it 'breaking its back' over the older fabric beneath. Abutting against this earlier plinth and extending to the north is the simple chamfered plinth of the west wall of the aisle.

There would seem to be three clear structural phases here:

(1) The early chamfered plinth, presumably representing the north-west angle of an aisleless nave; its general character suggests the 12th century.

(2) The tower, of c1200; possibly the west end of the nave was reconstructed at the same time, a few cm inside the original line.

(3) The addition of the aisle. Both arcades are of mid-13th century date, but the west end of the north aisle shows no sign of the original steep roof-line seen in its southern counterpart; might it have been rebuilt at some later medieval date, perhaps in the 15th century?