

# St Andrew's Church

## Corbridge

Analysis of the Fabric and Archaeological Assessment

November 2002



**PETER F RYDER**  
B.A., M.Phil, F.S.A  
**HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSULTANT**

1 Ford Terrace  
Broomhaugh  
RIDING MILL  
Northumberland  
NE44 6EJ

Tel (01434) 682644  
E mail: PFRyder@broomlee.org



## **St Andrew's Church, Corbridge.**

The parish church of St Andrew stands at the centre of the Tynedale village of Corbridge, on the north side of the Market Place. The church consists of a three-bay nave with aisles, transepts, a south porch and a west tower flanked by extensions of the aisles, on the north what may have been a priest's chamber and on the south the choir vestry. There is a two-bay aisle on the west side of the north transept, and a clergy vestry set in the angle of north aisle and transept. The chancel has a four-bay north aisle, the western bay of which has been extended north to form an organ chamber.

### **Description**

#### **The Exterior**

The **West Tower** is tall and slender, broken only by a string-course and slight set-back at the base of the belfry; the string course is certainly chamfered on its lower angle, but is so worn as to make its original section rather hard to determine, at least from ground level. Only the west face of the tower is fully exposed externally; it is constructed of coursed squared stone with very substantial alternating quoins to the western angles, these become smaller and less regular c 2 m below the tops of the walls of the adjacent aisles, marking the top of the original western porch which was later raised into a tower. Quite a number of the lower quoins are re-used Roman blocks with lewis (cramp) holes. At the base of the south-western quoin is a projecting block, almost as if it were the base of a clasping pilaster strip; the base of the north-western is concealed by a puzzling little buttress-like features c 0.5 m high and 0.25 m square, which looks to be of relatively recent stonework. Taylor & Taylor (1965, I, 173) refer to 'remains of walls continuing to the west' and 'a step which runs across the foot of the west wall like a plinth'; neither of these are now evident.

There is an early western doorway, now blocked, which seems contemporary with the original structure. Its jambs include some large blocks with lewis holes like those in the quoins; above are two arches, the lower slightly depressed and the upper almost horseshoe-shaped; the latter has several voussoirs with very worn saltire crosses. The relationship of these two arches has been the subject of considerable archaeological discussion (eg Parsons 1962)<sup>1</sup>. The doorway now contains a late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century window of three lancet lights; the stonework below its sill may be of the same date. Directly above the doorway is an early round-arched window with its head cut into a large block with a lewis hole; it appears to have been extended downwards at some stage, cutting through the higher of the two arches of the door head, but this section has been infilled.

Higher up the wall is virtually featureless. Although Taylor & Taylor (op.cit, 174) state that 'there is no sign of the gable of the earlier porch' its shape can perhaps be traced, with the eye of faith, in fabric distinguished by a higher proportion of yellow stone.

Above the string-course/set-back is the belfry opening, which seems to have old jambs (coursed in with the walling) but much more recent impost blocks and two-centred arched head. Above is a second and much thinner string-course (and again a slight set-back) and then the crenellated parapet, which contains, directly over the belfry opening, a tall and narrow blocked opening. It is not clear whether its square-headed survives, or whether it is simply cut across by one of the elongate blocks forming the central merlon of the embattled parapet.

It is clear, especially on the east, that the topmost section of the parapet has been rebuilt at some time in smaller stone.

On the south of the tower there is no visible evidence of any feature below the large clock-face that is set just beneath the string at the base of the belfry; the buttress-like feature, now cut with two sloped off-sets, on the east, rising above the nave clerestory, is part of the original lofty west gable of the early nave.

On the north the remains of the early gable have been similarly fashioned into a buttress. Adjacent to it on the west, and immediately above the roof of the aisle roof, is a patch of smaller stonework that may represent a blocked opening. Above and to the right the possible outline of the gabled roof of an adjacent building can be traced, most noticeable through a higher proportion of the stone below being reddened (by fire?) than above. Higher up, c 1.5 m below the string course, is a small square-headed window, its roughly-cut jambs inclining inwards. The belfry opening on this side seems to be a little narrower than its predecessor, the original jambs being visible on either side; the imposts and head are as on the other sides.

On the east side of the tower there is a round-arched window immediately above the apex of the nave roof; it has a broad external splay, originally internal as this window is seen 'back to front', as it was originally at the top of the tall western gable of the early nave, before being covered when the porch was raised into the present tower. Above it the very steeply-pitched nave gable can be traced, set slightly proud of the tower wall above. Over the window is another clock face, and then the very worn string at the base of the belfry; the central section of the string has been cut back flush with the wall, presumably because the apex of the gable would have cut across it. The belfry opening is like that on the north, in that the jambs of its predecessor appear just outside the present ones. Above the upper string, in the parapet, is a blocked door-like opening, rather wider and not quite as tall as that on the west, and in this case set a little south-of-centre, so that its north jamb is in line with the centre of the belfry opening below. The crenellated upper section of the parapet is in smaller stone; there are two square-headed openings to carry drainage through to the down-pipes.

At the west end of the **Nave** the sides of the original west gable project as buttress-like features on north and south of the tower, above the aisle roofs; the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century clerestory abuts on these, and is of snecked squared stone with ashlar quoins and dressings, with moulded kneelers to the end gables and a hollow-chamfered eaves cornice. The windows are similar to those of the north vestry, square-headed with elliptical-arched lights and hollow-chamfered surrounds. The main part of the clerestory has on the south from west to east, a single light, a three-light, a two-light and then a three-light window; and on the north a three-light window with a two-light one on either side. On both sides there is a separate short length of clerestory wall to the east of the transepts with a single-light window (of the same type) at its east end.

On the south of the tower is the **South Vestry** (Choir Vestry) constructed of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone; its south wall has clearly been heightened by a few courses in the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century.. It has irregular quoins at its south-west angle, and no plinth; on the north the wall is butt-jointed against the massive Saxon quoins of the tower. Near the south end of the west wall is a doorway with a broad chamfered surround and a lintel (now cracked) cut to an elliptical-arched form; it looks of late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century character. On the south is a square-headed window with a chamfered lintel and squar-section jambs,

now holding a plain sash window with diamond leading on each leaf. There is clear evidence that its sill has been 40 - 50 cm lower at some time.

The west part of the south aisle wall is covered by the **South Porch** of 1919, built of snecked stone with yellow ashlar dressings. It has broad clasping buttresses with sloped tops at its outer angles, a chamfered plinth and a large chamfered set back on each side wall, c 0.60 m below the hollow-chamfered eaves cornice. The outer arch of porch is a semicircular Romanesque one of three moulded orders, the inner two carried on jamb shafts with scalloped capitals and moulded bases, and the outer continuous ; there is a hoodmould chamfered above and below, and a small round-arched light in the gable above, which has a broad flat coping on shaped kneelers. The west wall of the porch has a square-headed window of three round-arched lights with hollow-chamfered surrounds; the shorter east wall has no opening; on each side are rainwater heads dated 1920.

The south wall of the **South Aisle** is in two parts, the eastern set further south than the western. The western has one small window, a short and broad lancet in a double-chamfered surround, with dressings of late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century character, set above and to the west of the ridge of the porch; its lower east corner is cut by the stone slate roof of the porch.

The eastern section of the aisle wall is built of coursed roughly-squared stone, and contains two trefoil-headed lancets with moulded hoods, with tooled-and-margined dressings of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century character. There is a square projecting course at eaves level.

As the south aisle is continued westward alongside the tower as the choir vestry, so the **North Aisle** is continued by a two-storeyed western annexe, sometimes thought to have been an early priest's residence or anchorage. Its west wall has a chamfered plinth and a chamfered off-set c 2.5 m above the ground; below the off-set is a small slit window, set a little north of centre<sup>2</sup>, with to the south of that, close to the tower quoin, a pair of straight joints that might define either a blocked opening, or possibly the scar of a removed wall returning westward<sup>3</sup>. Above, set centrally, is a tall lancet window. The head of the lancet is almost clipped by what seems to be the line of a former more steeply-pitched roof pre-dating the heightening of the north wall; the uppermost two quoins at the north-west angle are clearly of relatively recent date. Below this level both wall, and plinth, appear to have continued further to the north.

The north wall of the annexe has a straight joint c 1 m from west end, which seems to indicate the line of the internal face of its truncated west wall; this rises to c 1.2 m below the eaves, the level from which the north wall has been heightened. To the east of the joint the walling is of coursed roughly-squared stone. The western part of this stretch of wall has a rough plinth, possibly originally chamfered; to the east is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century two-centred doorway with a chamfered surround. In the centre of this part of wall is a lancet-headed loop with a monolithic head and a single block forming each jamb.

The external face of the north wall of the north aisle proper is largely concealed by the north vestry; above the vestry roof is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century trefoiled lancet.

The **North Vestry** (Clergy Vestry) is built of snecked squared stone with neatly-tooled ashlar dressing; it has a chamfered plinth and a hollow-chamfered oversailing course at base of the parapet which has a moulded and crenellated coping. In the west wall is a broad square-headed three-light window with elliptical arches to the lights and sunk spandrels; its internal

surround has a hollow and its outer frame a straight chamfer. There is a two-light window of the same type in the centre of the north wall.

The west wall of the **South Transept** is of coursed roughly-shaped stone/rubble, and is devoid of features except for a buttress at its south end; this is constructed of tooled-and-margined stone, with a chamfered plinth and three-offsets. The south wall has a buttress at each end; that to the west is similar to the adjacent one on the west wall, but is rather shallower, and of older (medieval?) fabric; its upper section contains a sundial dated '1694'. At the east end of the wall is a corresponding and similar buttress, now leaning a little to the right. The lower part of the wall is of coursed squared stone, many of the blocks being almost square, with a chamfered plinth now virtually buried; a low buttress in the centre has medieval masonry at its base but is largely diagonally-tooled ashlar of 19<sup>th</sup> century character. The upper part of the wall, containing three stepped lancet windows, with chamfered surrounds and moulded hoods, seems to have been completely rebuilt in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The tooled-and-margined dressings of these lancets, and the buttresses at the south end of each side wall, are of slightly different character to those of the north transept and chancel aisle, the tooling of the 'field' being coarser and less regular. The gable is coped, with a cross fleury finial.

The east wall of the transept is of coursed rubble (with many cobbles) like the west wall, and has a similar stepped buttress at its south end. At its north end the wall incorporates the remains of the westernmost of the series of buttresses on the south side of the chancel; its chamfered plinth and a little of the stage above are clearly visible. Above this is a square-headed window, possibly of 18<sup>th</sup>-century date, with a chamfered surround; the sill and lower part of each jamb are restoration. The patch of squared stone above the window probably infills the area of the upper parts of the removed buttress. Further south is a window of three lights with simple intersecting tracery and a chamfered surround, its mullions flush with the external face of the wall, and a hoodmould chamfered above and below. Stylistically this looks to be a piece of c1300; it seems 'unrestored' and its dressings seem to course in with the wall.

Unlike its southern counterpart, the **North Transept** has a western aisle. The north wall of the transept itself is of coursed roughly-squared stone; it has a large two-stepped buttress at either end and a short central buttress beneath the windows, all in 19<sup>th</sup>-century tooled-and-margined fabric; the fenestration, like the gable ends of south transept and chancel is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century triplet of stepped lancets with tooled-and-margined alternating-block jambs and moulded hoods, under a coped gable with a ring-cross finial. The north end of aisle has identical dressings and a shorter lancet, similar except that in this case it has a trefoiled head; all these 19<sup>th</sup>-century lancets have simple disc stops to their hoods. At the north-west angle of the aisle is a clasping buttress.

At the north end of the west wall of the aisle is a plain two-centred doorway and then a short trefoiled lancet of the usual type. The wall, of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date, has clearly been heightened, probably when the vestry was built at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the north end of this upper section is a peculiar corbelled-out feature, with hard up against it, above the doorway,

a square-headed window of three elliptical-arched lights with hollow-chamfered surrounds in a chamfered outer frame, like those in the adjacent vestry. Further south, above the vestry roof, is a single light of the same type. The parapet with a moulded coping.

The short length of the east wall of the transept to the north of the organ chamber is of much older coursed and roughly-squared stone, with a chamfered plinth exposed above the steps that lead down to boiler room beneath the transept. Above is a tall trefoiled lancet window given a superficial appearance of antiquity by the degree of weathering of its tooled-and-margined dressing. Further south, behind the organ chamber, a tall chimney stack rises from the wall; it looks to be a recent rebuild.

The **Chancel** is a good example of a typically elongate Northumberland group, typified by several other churches in Tynedale (Bywell St Peter, Ovingham, Newburn) and Rothbury. It is constructed of coursed and squared sandstone blocks. The south wall is divided into four bays by strong buttresses, and has a two-stepped chamfered plinth with steep chamfer to its upper member and a projecting roll moulding above, continued round the buttresses which in their present form rise only to height of bold moulded string at the level of the sills of the lancet windows. At this level the buttresses have gabled set-backs with sunk triangular panels and roll-moulded tops. These have the air of being a post-medieval modification, or at least heavily restored; above the set-backs the upper sections of the buttresses are much shallower, little more than pilasters, and rise to just above yet another string with a big casement moulding on its lower angle, that is carried up to form hoodmoulds over the lancet windows.

As already mentioned there has been a fifth buttress at the extreme west end of the wall, its remains now being incorporated in the east wall of the south transept. In the westernmost bay of the south wall the plinth commences in vertical cut midway along the bay, as if there has been a doorway at the west end of the wall where there is now a square-headed two-light low-side window with a chamfered surround and a renewed mullion. Its lintel extends to the east to form the sill of a lancet window with a plain two-centred arch<sup>2</sup>. The lower string now commences to the east of the sill of the lancet; to the west of this point it was probably cut away when the low-side window was inserted. To the west of the low-side is a clear patch of secondary masonry running up the wall; like that in the adjacent section of the transept wall this is probably infilling made after the upper part of the westernmost buttress was removed.

In the second bay is an interesting priest's door, which from the manner in which it cuts the plinth, and from the relationship of its dressings with the adjacent wall fabric, looks very like a secondary insertion<sup>3</sup>. It has a trefoiled arch with moulded imposts; the arch has very narrow chamfer and a deeply moulded hood which has lost much of its detail. The mid-height string steps up over the doorway, but the east has been lost where there has been some refacing. Above is a trefoiled lancet with its sill set higher than the others.

The third bay has another trefoiled lancet window and the fourth, a longer bay than the others, a lancet with a plain two-centred top. There is a disturbed area in the coursing to the east of lancet; not clear what this represents.

The buttress at the east end of the wall is one of a pair at the south-east corner, their upper pilaster-like sections united in a single buttress clasping the angle.

Only the lower part of the east end is of medieval fabric; the mid-height string and everything above is 19<sup>th</sup>-century restoration in coursed and squared stone, except for the north-east corner buttress; the upper section of this is of clasping type (like that of the south-east buttress) but its lower part is harder to interpret, and may have been altered. Below the string are two more short buttresses; above are three widely-spaced stepped lancets, tall and narrow, with two-centred heads, and the usual hoods. The steep gable has a projecting coping that is

chamfered on its lower angle, carried on shaped and carved kneelers, and rising to a cross fleury finial.

The east end of the **Chancel Aisle** is set back slightly from that of the chancel. Virtually all the above-ground masonry of its two eastern bays of the aisle is of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date, with the possible exception of the parts of the plinth and lower courses. The east end of the aisle has a trefoiled lancet window, set much lower than those in the chancel gable, of the usual 19<sup>th</sup>-century character. At the north-east corner of the aisle are a pair of set-back pilaster buttresses, and above a carved kneeler of the same type as those of the chancel gable.

The eastern two bays of the north wall of the aisle, with a shallow buttress between them, each have trefoil-headed lancets; there is a plinth and a square-section eaves cornice. The third bay, partially concealed behind a small gable-roofed outbuilding projecting from the north part of the east wall of the taller organ chamber, has older walling, and a short lancet window that looks medieval.

The outbuilding is of snecked stone; in its east gable is a square-headed doorway with a tooled-and-margined alternating-block surround.

The **Organ Chamber** is taller than the chancel aisle and projects further to the north. It is built of roughly-coursed and roughly-shaped stone, with tooled-and-margined quoins and dressings, and has a crenellated moulded parapet like that of the vestry, with a hollow-chamfered oversailing course at its base. The north wall has a chamfered shoulder-arched doorway at its east end, with alongside to the west a short lancet; above the doorway is broad lancet with old stonework at least in its chamfered jambs, probably re-set from the western part of the north wall of the aisle that was removed when the organ chamber was constructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the foot of the wall a flight of steps descend westwards to the boiler room under the transept.

The east wall of the organ chamber stands up above the roofs of the adjacent aisle and outbuilding, and has two pairs of broad lancets, the northern with hoodmoulds that have turned-back ends; the shorter southern pair with stepped sills and linked hood. Lower in the wall, within the outbuilding, is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century shoulder-headed window, now walled up. boiler house

## **The Interior**

The internal walls of the church are largely clear of plaster, although in areas pointed so heavily that it is difficult to get a good impression of the underlying fabric.

The lower stage of the **Tower** opens to the nave by an impressive slightly horseshoe-shaped round arch that is traditionally thought to be a re-used Roman feature. Its square jambs re-use massive blocks with obvious lewis holes, and carry impost blocks with Classical mouldings (quite different from each other); on the southern the mouldings have been cut back except on the west face, on the northern they survive on the south and west. The arch above has a single order of heavy voussoirs, on the east face of the wall all but the first above each impost are recessed perhaps 10 cm from the plane of the wall above, the step giving the misleading appearance of a hoodmould. This step in fact appears to have been neatly cut into the pre-existing squared blocks of the wall, which would strongly suggest that the archway is an

insertion <sup>6</sup>. The wall above the arch is of coursed squared stonework, with high up, just beneath the roof, the small opening, with a boarded surround, into the second stage chamber.

Inside the tower the former west doorway now forms a recess, its internal jambs cut square with the wall; the upper two stones of each jamb, and segmental rear arch that they carry are clearly secondary. Directly above is the Saxon window, with a massive monolithic internal lintel into which its slightly horseshoe-shaped rear arch is cut

The south wall of the lower stage of the tower is quite heavily mortared, with some very large blocks, especially in the lower courses. At its west end is the doorway into the south (choir) vestry, with a sharply two-centred arch with a chamfered surround, all 19<sup>th</sup>-century work, c 2 m above the doorway is a possible disturbed area.

On the north wall the patch of masonry infilling the high-level doorway, which presumably served a former gallery, is quite obvious; it is also clear that this doorway is an insertion.

Access to the second stage of the tower is now by means of a steep wooden stair in the western chamber of the north aisle, which rises to a doorway at the west end of the north wall, which has a crudely-shaped head hacked through existing masonry. It opens into a chamber in which the lower parts of the walls are concealed by a boarded dado on west and south, and various fittings and shelving on the other walls. 2 m above floor is a boarded opening in the centre of the east wall, above which the line of the gabled roof of the original Saxon porch is clearly visible, as a series of crudely cut-back areas of the wall face. Above this is a round-arched window, with a steeply-chamfered internal surround, its head cut into a single large block, the full extent of which is obscured by heavy pointing. This is actually the external face of a window in the west gable of the original nave, which looked out above the porch roof; it is thought that the chamfer on this face is a secondary cutting, made to admit more light to the tower after the nave roof was lowered.

There is no sign of any corresponding gable evidence in the opposing west wall; the walling here, and on the south, is of regularly-coursed stones, a few blocks showing distinctive Roman tooling. The clock chamber floor is carried on one heavy north-south beam set only 1 m from east wall, supporting a series of east-west timbers.

The clock chamber, the second floor of the tower, is largely occupied by the clock mechanism (of 1897 by John Smith and Sons, Midland Steam Clock Works, Derby). The walls are heavily mortared or plastered. On the north is a recess 1.5 m high, 1.2 m wide and c 0.25 m deep, with a timber lintel perhaps of 19<sup>th</sup> century date; in its centre is the small square-headed loop window visible externally. In the centre of the west wall is a vertical slot c 2 m above the floor, c 0.25m wide and 0.35 m deep, which may relate to a former strut or support for the bell frames above. A single east-west beam immediately to the south of this slot carries a series of north-south beams of some age, which in turn support a floor of tongue-and-grooved boards; there is a more recent floor c 0.30 m above this.

Within the belfry, the lower parts of the walls and their openings are largely obscured by the bell frames; the internal jambs of the openings may pre-date their 18<sup>th</sup>-century arched heads, and are similarly cut square with the wall, without any rebate. On the north and south there is a curious arrangement whereby the fourth voussoir from the apex of these arches projects like a rough corbel from the internal face of the wall, presumably to carry some sort of timber or plate running along the internal face; at the same level at either end of the north wall (and at

the east end of the south wall) are medieval-style quadrant corbels, and c 1 m above on each wall are a series of three corbels now carrying a 19<sup>th</sup> century plate c 0.60 m below the present roof.

On east and west above the belfry openings are the lower parts of the blocked high-level openings visible externally, now forming recesses immediately below the present roof, which is a pyramidal one of c 1900, with a central king-post.

On the south of the tower the **South Vestry** (choir vestry) has plastered walls and a boarded dado, and a plaster ceiling. The south-west angle of the Saxon nave forms a projection in the north-east corner, but is all plastered; the angle has been rounded off, up to just below the level of the ceiling. The door to the tower has a plain square lintel, and the south window its internal sill carried down to form a seat

The side walls of the **Nave** are of coursed squared stone, and pierced by three-bay 13<sup>th</sup>-century arcades, cut into Saxon walling, which has been cut down and then heightened again by the addition of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century clerestory. Remains of two high-set Saxon windows are visible above the north arcade. Above the eastern side of the westernmost arch, on the internal face of the wall part of the megalithic internal lintel of one is visible, with the eastern half of a round rear arch like that of the window above the west door; on the external face of the wall only the corner of the lintel is visible, but the outer opening of the window has been completely cut away. Less survives a second window above the western side of the easternmost arch, where part of a megalithic lintel survives on the internal face of the wall; heavy mortaring makes it difficult to see if any of the rear arch remains.

The arcades are of pointed arches, each of two chamfered orders, with a hoodmould (towards the nave) chamfered above and below; the inner order has broach stops above the capitals (except the eastern of the north arcade). The piers are octagonal and the responds semi-octagonal. The capitals have some sections of their mouldings cut away, presumably to accommodate former gallery timbers, and the bases, with 'hold-water mouldings' are often badly damaged. The arches of the north arcade are of two-centred form, but those of the south rather shallower, and more of the segmental-pointed type; there are also some differences in the sections of the capitals, enough to suggest that they are of different dates, the north probably being the earlier. Two large blocks projecting from beneath the base of the western respond of the north arcade are presumably footings of the Saxon wall.

The eastern pillar of the north arcade has had a mass of masonry added to the its north face to form the southern respond of the western arcade of the north transept. During the June/July 2001 works in the transept the temporary removal of the bench-front adjacent to the pier on the west, allowed a close inspection of the base of the eastern pier of the north arcade. This showed that the base of the added respond was formed by a moulded block that was clearly a re-used piece, probably a capital used upside-down, and is almost certainly of Roman date. Its mouldings, like those of the more badly damaged impost of the tower arch, were of 'Classical' section, and of completely different character to those of the other elements of the 13<sup>th</sup> century arcades. On the east side of the block the mouldings are much more compressed horizontally, as if in its original context there had been insufficient room to accommodate a member of symmetrical section.

The corresponding pier of the south arcade also carries an arch springing southwards, spanning the opening between south aisle and south transept, but here the new arch is simply carried, slightly off-centre, on the capital rather than any added respond.

The west wall of the **South Aisle** is of coursed squared stone, without any features. The western part of the south wall contains the south door, which has a rather mutilated segmental rear arch that appears medieval work, and a small high-set lancet with a moulded rear arch, all in 19th-century ashlar. The angle at which the wall returns south is bevelled off up to a height of c 2 m, and square above that. The eastern part of the wall the two lancets have trefoiled rear arches; the so-called 'pot of lilies' stone, the base of a medieval cross slab (Ryder 2000, no.11, 62 & 92) is built into the lower part of the west jamb of the eastern. Above and between the lancets, just below the wall-late, is a medieval corbel in the form of a pair of human heads.

At the east end of the aisle is an arch of two chamfered orders, now somewhat distorted, carried on the north by the eastern pier of the south arcade and on the south by a semi-octagonal corbel which appears medieval.

The south door is now covered by the **South Porch** of 1919. The doorway is Romanesque, and is of 12<sup>th</sup>-century date, although it has clearly been dismantled and re-assembled at least once, as several irregularities demonstrate. The semicircular arch is of two orders, carved with chevron on both face and intrados; on the intrados of the inner order is additional sunk-star or chip-carved decoration. The outer order sits uneasily upon the inner, and is of far greater projection above the impost than at the head of the arch. There is a richly-moulded hood with carved stops, the eastern now reduced to a fragment and the western badly weathered. Below the moulded impost the inner order of the jambs has a moulding of two rolls with fillet between, continuous to the ground on west, but on the east having a carved scallop capital with incised zigzag ornament. The outer order is carried on detached jamb shafts with scalloped capitals that have a cabled ring at their bases; the shafts below have badly damaged bases, the western set at a higher level than the eastern.

The window in the west wall of the porch has a moulded segmental rear arch with a seat below. The east wall has a string course carried over a recess with a round-headed moulded arch, containing a tablet stating that the porch was erected in memory of Mary Edwards of Bythorn (d 1915). The porch roof has a segmental stone vault carried on a pair of hollow chamfered ribs and an oversailing elaborately moulded eaves course.

At the north end of the west wall of the **South Transept** is an odd feature rather like a pilaster buttress, its lower part in 19<sup>th</sup>-century stonework but its upper section older. The south wall has a good piscina with a circular bowl (with central drain) under a trefoiled and chamfered arch; above this is a set-back of c 0.15 m; the wall above this is probably all rebuilt. Its three lancets all have trefoiled rear arches.

The fabric of the east wall is heavily mortared. The large three-light window has broadly splayed jambs and a segmental-pointed rear arch, with a chamfer to the head only. The square-headed window to the north has a 19<sup>th</sup> century sill with a square opening dropping into a presumably 19<sup>th</sup>-century ventilation duct (one of many) in the wall directly below, and a 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century ashlar slab as its internal lintel. Above it the wall breaks forward diagonally, as if the angle of the transept has been infilled at some time and then the lower part of the infill cut away by the window.

The west wall of the **North Aisle** is of coursed rubble, with an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century square-headed doorway at its foot, under a pecked sandstone lintel. On the north of the aisle the north door has old diagonally-tooled blocks in its lower jambs (re-used 12<sup>th</sup> century work?) But the top of each jamb and segmental rear arch are in stonework of 19<sup>th</sup>-century character, as is the rear arch of the trefoiled lancet window directly above.

At its lower level the western annexe of the aisle is now divided into a small kitchen (west) and a stone stair rising southwards to the upper level. The west wall is of roughly-squared stone; both jambs of the small blocked loop (better seen externally) are visible, the northern within a cupboard. The north wall is plastered; its small lancet window has a plain square internal lintel, and the doorway at its east end what looks like old dressed stonework in its internal west jamb, and a series of timber lintels, above which cracks in the plaster appear to outline a rough arch, possibly relating to an earlier window<sup>2</sup>. The doorway in the east wall has timber lintel; the wall above is rendered, and quite plain; there is a clear straight joint between it and the north wall.

Ascending the stair<sup>3</sup>, on the left (east) the north-west corner of the original nave forms a projection, with its massive Pre-Conquest quoins partly exposed. At the level of the upper floor there is a blocked square-headed doorway in the south wall (ie the external face of the north wall of the tower). This has quite broad chamfered jambs and a plain square lintel. The blocking is set far enough back to expose the rebated jambs, which have various cuts and sockets for bolts etc On the west at this level there is a lancet window, with internal timber lintels of no great age, and above it, a set-back. A wooden stair rises alongside the west wall to a doorway into the second stage of the tower (see description of tower). This is set at the west end of the tower north wall, which is plastered up to around 1 m above the sill of this doorway, above which its coursed squared stone is exposed.

Within the **North Vestry** (clergy vestry) the internal walls are plastered. The external face of the old north door of the aisle has old chamfered jambs made up of large blocks, one with a lewis hole; the uppermost block of each jamb and lintel are however of tooled ashlar of late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century character. On the east is a two-centred doorway with chamfered surround and a moulded hood, and to the north a trefoiled lancet with chamfered surround, all in 19<sup>th</sup>-century ashlar. The windows in the west and north walls have timber internal lintels. There is an attractive low-pitched east-west roof with moulded tie-beams and king-blocks, and a plaque on east wall states that the vestry was enlarged in commemoration of the fifty years of ministry of the Rev Francis Richardson, in 1902.

At the south end of the east wall of the **North Transept** is a square buttress-like projection, the outer angle of which is bevelled to its full height; this seems to represent the west end of the north wall of the chancel, as rebuilt to be a little wider than the earlier nave. The fact that it projects within the line of the west wall of the transept suggests that the chancel was completed before the transept was added. Then comes an arch to the chancel aisle, two-centred and of two chamfered orders without a hood. The outer order dies into the wall on either side, whilst the inner is carried on large semi-octagonal corbels, their mouldings differing somewhat, perhaps as a result of their being re-cut. To the north of this the wall is fairly heavily pointed; the internal dressings of the lancet window towards the north end are all of 19<sup>th</sup>-century character; a short section of straight joint to the north of this presumably

represents the internal north jamb of a window shown on old plans and illustrations, that had three lights and intersecting tracery, very like the one on the east side of the south transept.

The north wall has a segmental-arched tomb recess with a broad chamfered surround and a moulded hood, with broach stops to the jambs. The dressings of the arch all have a tooled-and-margined finish, possibly the result of retooling rather than complete renewal; in contrast the hoodmould is of 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century ashlar, as is an off-set of c 0.20 m above, c 1.5 m above the floor. The internal surrounds of the three tall lancets above, all with trefoiled rear arches, are all in crudely-pecked 19<sup>th</sup>-century stone.

On the west of the transept is a two-bay arcade, with slightly-distorted two-centred arches, each of two chamfered orders, with a hood chamfered above and below. The central pier is octagonal, with a moulded capital and a simple chamfered base; the north respond has a capital with rather different mouldings, and no exposed base. The southern respond has a capital of the same section as that of the pier, and a base largely concealed by the floor.

The internal face of the walls of the transept aisle are all in 19<sup>th</sup>-century necked stone. The door to the choir vestry at its south end has a segmental rear arch, and the two lancet windows trefoiled ones, as does the one in the north wall of the aisle. The external door at the north end of the wall has a plain timber lintel, and the two early-20th century windows at a higher level have moulded timber lintels.

The boiler room beneath the north-eastern part of the north transept has a brick segmental vault set north-south, and a pair of low segmental-arched recesses in its south wall; no pre-19th century features or fabric seem to be exposed.

The arch into the **Chancel** is of very unusual form. Its lower part has double-chamfered jambs, with no real bases, rising to moulded capitals, above which the upper jambs and head of an earlier narrower arch survive. This arch has had a pair of attached shafts to each jamb, roughly cut through at their lower ends. About 0.30 m of each shaft survives, rising to moulded rings before each pair coalesces into a second higher-level semi-octagonal moulded capital, carrying a steeply-two-centred arch, of two chamfered orders with big broach stops and a moulded hood.

On the south of the chancel there is a moulded mid-height string that is stepped up and carried as a stepped segmental arch over the broad rear arch of the priest's door; unlike the external opening of the doorway, this all appears of one build with the wall. To the west this string ends on the line of the east jamb of the westernmost lancet, which has clearly extended to a much lower level<sup>9</sup>, and thus pre-dates the present low-side window. This has its internal sill lowered 0.50 m, perhaps to form a seat, and a re-used cross slab (Ryder 2000, no.6, 62, 92) as its internal lintel. The earlier lancet above and to the east has a trefoiled rear arch, as have the other three lancets to the east. The eastern two lancets have level sills immediately above the strings; below the easternmost is a piscina with a trefoiled chamfered arch and a slightly-projecting sill chamfered on its lower angle, holding a circular bowl

The three tall trefoiled lancets in the east end have their lower parts concealed by the reredos; Dickinson (2000, 100) records that a moulding 'beneath the east window' was removed in the 1860s to make room for the reredos.

On the north of the chancel is a four-bay arcade. Octagonal piers and semi-octagonal responds with moulded capitals (but no details of their bases visible) carry acutely-pointed two-centred arches, each of two chamfered orders (with broad stops to the inner) and a moulded hood towards the chancel. The arches give the impression of being crammed together, so that the outer order is reduced to little more than a narrow tongue of masonry at the capital, with the hoodmoulds joining 1.5 m above that. It is very noticeable that the piers are set some distance to the south of the centre-line of the wall; towards the aisle the outer order overhangs the capitals by some distance.

Within the **Chancel Aisle** the lancets in the east wall, and the two in the eastern bays of the north wall, have trefoiled rear arches; the lancet in the third bay has a plain square internal lintel. From the westernmost pier of the arcade a transverse two-bay arcade of 1907 spans the aisle, dividing its main part from the organ chamber to the west; its arches reproduce the details of the main arcade, albeit on a smaller scale.

The **Roofs** of the church are largely of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century dates. That of the nave (which presumably goes with the clerestory of 1922) is of six bays with king-post trusses with raking struts from the jewelled bases of the posts to the principals and short moulded braces to the wall faces; the aisle roofs may be of the same date. The south transept has a 4-bay roof; its principal rafter trusses have collars and pairs of raking struts springing from the centre of the tie-beam, with moulded wall brackets below. The chancel has a wagon roof with common rafter pairs, ashlar and scissor bracing, a typical mid-Victorian form. Only the north transept roof looks older, with its slightly-cambered tie beams carrying principal rafter trusses with collars, supporting a ridge and two levels of purlins. Although the moulded wall brackets are obviously Victorian, the remainder of the structure may be of 17<sup>th</sup> or even 16<sup>th</sup> century date..

### **The Structural History of the Church**

Corbridge church has attracted considerable antiquarian attention in the past, which has been focussed, understandably but perhaps a little unfairly, on the earliest phases of its long and complex structural history.

The walls of the nave, and the west porch that forms the lower part of the tower, are generally accepted as Anglo-Saxon work of period 'A', ie before the Danish invasions. Its proximity to Wilfrid's abbey at Hexham has been taken as suggesting a date as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Simeon of Durham records that Ealdwulf was consecrated as Bishop of Mayo at the *monasterium* of Corbridge in 786.

The nave of this early church survives in the present building; lofty as it is now, this has actually been reduced in height. Taylor and Taylor (1965, 173) give its dimensions as 14.4 by 5.38 m, with walls 0.76 m thick and originally at least 10.36 m high. Assumed to be contemporary with this are the western porch and a chancel 3.65 m wide<sup>m</sup>, the clay and cobble foundations of which were seen during late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century investigations (NCH 187). It has been suggested that foundations seen extending west from the tower relate to contemporary monastic buildings. There may also have been porches or *porticus* flanking the nave; the surviving side windows may have been set high so as to clear their roofs.

There has been antiquarian debate (Gilbert 1946, 163, Parsons 1962) as to whether the tower arch is an original feature, or whether it represents an early insertion, perhaps made when two storeys in the original western porch were thrown into one, or when the porch was raised into a tower. It is generally accepted that this took place at a much later date, probably in the late 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century, although some modern workers (eg Eric Cambridge) are now seeing them as being of the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century, the work of local masons as opposed to the continental craftsmen who at the same time were producing 'Norman' architecture in the highest-status ecclesiastical and domestic buildings.

As built, the west tower quite probably had belfry openings of the type which survive a little lower down the Tyne valley at St Andrew's Church, Bywell, and Ovingham. Corbridge may differ from these towers in having had a further stage above the belfry (if indeed the lower parts of the parapet walls, with their puzzling openings on east and west, are contemporary with the masonry below; their relationship perhaps merits further study). There is however an interesting parallel not far away at Bolam, where a Saxo-Norman overlap tower has its double belfry openings in the stage below the top, with single-light windows above.

Moving on from the Pre-Conquest period, both historically and stylistically, we come to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the Norman south door. This is the only feature of this period at present in the church, and as it stands is certainly not *in situ*. It is highly likely that other alterations were made at this period, but that they have been swept away by subsequent changes. Ornamented voussoirs thought to derive from a Norman chancel arch were found during the mid-19th century restorations (NCH, 189) and a jamb stone matching the section of those of the south door was discovered beneath the north transept floor during recent works (Ryder 2001, 4, fig.8), suggesting that there was at least one more doorway of this period.

This brings us to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a period of relative prosperity marked in this area by a great deal of church building and enlargement. Several phases of 13<sup>th</sup> century work are evident in the fabric of St Andrews; the order in which they took place is somewhat problematic. The most likely sequence seems as follows:

1. The chancel was rebuilt on typical mid-13th century lines, as an elongate rectangle in plan. It was divided into four bays by prominent buttresses; the fact that it had such a buttress (later removed) at the extreme west end of its south wall indicates that at this stage there was no south aisle or transept to the nave. This would have left the church with the unusual plan of having a nave that was both shorter and narrower than the chancel; there may of course have been Pre-Conquest chapels or *porticus* flanking the nave, of which we know nothing.
2. The north aisle to the nave was constructed; stylistically its arcade looks a little earlier than that of the south aisle. The north aisle to the chancel may be of the same date.
3. The south aisle was constructed.
4. The transepts were built; if the three-light window on the east side of the south transept is contemporary with the fabric, then a date towards 1300 would seem appropriate.
5. The west aisle to the north transept was built; at around the same time or a little later the south aisle was widened.

By the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the world had changed; England was at war with Scotland, and throughout Northumberland church building and extension almost ceased. Corbridge is known to have been sacked and burned in 1296, 1312 and 1346; marks of fire (eg the reddening of the stonework of the north jamb of the chancel arch) are still evident on the fabric. Parts of the church were destroyed and abandoned at this stage; the eastern two bays of the chancel aisle and west aisle of the north transept were only restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the nave aisle may have been damaged and partially rebuilt. Whatever structure there originally was on the north of the tower was never restored to its full extent; at some later date, possibly even post-medieval, its west wall was incorporated in a patched-up north aisle. The south aisle was rebuilt as well, narrower than at least its eastern section had formerly been. The only evidence of later medieval work in the whole building is the insertion of the low-side window at the west end of the south wall of the chancel, which might be of the 15<sup>th</sup> or even early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

This brings us to the post-medieval period. Here, as in many churches, although documentary evidence comes into play, physical evidence of changes in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries has largely been erased by 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century restoration aimed at returning the building to an idealised version of its medieval state. Recorded works include:

In the 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century the Derwentwater family pew was installed under 'the first arch in the chancel' (presumably in the westernmost bay of the chancel aisle); it was a substantial stone-built structure reached by a staircase at the rear; after the collapse of the family, it was taken over by John Grey, receiver and agent for the Greenwich Hospital Estates.

1726 A school was built. This is sometimes related to the south vestry, but could apply to an additional lower wing to the south of this shown on the 1780 tithe map and an 1823 engraving (Dickinson 100)

1767 The churchwardens' accounts record a sum 'paid to Surtees and Rewcastle for making the old steeple into a new one' (NCH 188). This seems likely to relate to the reconstruction of the late Saxon belfry openings. New bells had been provided in 1715, but the vaguely Gothick form of the present openings seems more plausible at the later date.

1772/1802 Windows 'in the style of the period' were inserted (NCH 192). One of these may have been the Venetian window in the east end, shown on a drawing of 1840 (Sketchbook in Northumberland County Record Office, ref ZAN M13/E16)

1835 Vestry 'attached to the south-west corner of the church where a school had been erected in 1726' (NCH 192). The architectural features of the choir vestry suggest that it is an older structure than this; 1835 is probably the date when the attached 1726 school was demolished.

1844 A gallery built at a cost of £26.00; this may be the same as the organ loft on metal pillars built up against the tower arch (Dickinson 2000, 100). At this time the tower arch was blocked up, with a smaller doorway inserted,

1853 The restoration of the chancel; the Venetian window in the east gable was replaced by a restoration of the three original lancets, replicated in new stone. The Derwentwater/Grey pew was removed.

1867 A major restoration of the main body of the church, including the virtual rebuilding of the north transept, the reconstruction of the chancel aisle to its original extent, the rebuilding of the north nave aisle, and the widening of the eastern part of the south aisle, to the extent demonstrated by the arch in the east wall of the adjacent transept, the southern third of which must have been blocked prior to this date.. The vestry in the angle of north transept and chancel aisle was also built at this time. The NCH (192) sees both transepts as rebuilt at this time, but it is clear that much of the old fabric of the south transept was retained<sup>4</sup>.

1887 The present ring of bells were installed, cast by Gillets of Croydon, in a new timber frame.

1900 The present tower roof was constructed (letter in file EP 57/49, Northumberland County Record Office, Morpeth)

1902 The vestry on the north of the chancel was remodelled and heightened as an organ chamber

1907 The north (clergy) vestry was built (Dickinson) although a plaque inside suggests that this construction actually took place in 1902.

1919 The south porch was added.

1921 The nave clerestory was constructed

## **Archaeological Assessment**

The archaeological and historical importance of St Andrew's church has long been recognised, and it remains a site at which constant archaeological vigilance is essential. Despite the fact that recent watching briefs have demonstrated the extent to which Victorian disturbance has extended to sub-floor deposits, and all historic wall plaster seems to have been lost throughout the main body of the building, any works which entail disturbance of floor levels, or interference with the fabric of the walls (including re-pointing) will require monitoring.

The church has been subject to some minor archaeological investigation. Knowles, in his NCH account (187-188) refers to investigations made, perhaps in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, exposing the foundations of the east gable of the Saxon nave 'below ground to the extent of about 6 feet from the north and south angles respectively, indicating that the chancel arch was possibly 9 feet in width... and also that 'some loose foundation of clay and cobbles justifies the supposition that the width of the chancel was 12 feet'. He also states that no trace of foundations were discovered 'in the vicinity of the tower' despite 'excavations undertaken for the purpose'. Archaeological watching briefs in 1997 and 2001 (Ryder 1997, Ryder 2001) added little of major significance to our knowledge of the church.

Despite continuing antiquarian interest in the fabric of the earlier phases of the building, the existing plans of the building are a century old; a church as important as this should merit a good modern survey, including plans made with EDM equipment, and a proper record of wall surfaces, in the form of drawings based on rectified photography or photogrammetry. Such a record of the west tower would certainly assist future generations in their understanding of a complex multi-period structure, and quite possibly allow a more detailed structural interpretation.

Following 19<sup>th</sup>-century antiquarian interest, there has been the usual period of 20<sup>th</sup> century quiescence as regards both recording of the fabric, and the conservation of both the standing structure and artefacts associated with it. This is seen in the dispersal of lapidary material recovered during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century restorations. A number of cross slabs were given away in the 1920s; they have recently been re-located and recorded, but remain in private hands (Ryder 2000, 64-5). As regards the structure, a number of early features on the external face of the west end, recorded as recently as 1965 (see p.1) seem to have disappeared, possibly due to the ground level being raised.

It should be remembered that not only the church, but the whole churchyard is an area of great archaeological potential. This is the documented site of a Saxon monastery, which would probably have consisted of quite a complex of buildings, spread over a considerable area. Even in the medieval period it is known that there were structures, eg the block north of the tower, extending beyond the perimeter of the present building. A recent 'dowsed' survey (Bailey et al 1988), which admittedly seems highly fanciful in parts (and fails to pick up parts of the building for which there is clear structural and documentary evidence, such as the 18<sup>th</sup>-century school), indicates substantial buildings extending well to the east of the present church.

Peter F Ryder November 2002

## SOURCES

- Bailey.R.N., Cambridge,E & Briggs H.D (1988) Dowsing and Church Archaeology . Intercept.
- Gilbert, E (1946) New views on Warden, Bywell and Heddon-on-the-Wall Churches, Archaeologia Aeliana 4<sup>th</sup> ser. XXIV, 157 et seq.
- NCH (1914) Account in Northumberland County History X, 178-93 (ed H.H .E.Craster)
- Parsons, D (1962) The West Tower of St Andrew's Church, Corbridge. Archaeologia Aeliana 4<sup>th</sup> ser. XL, 171-184.
- Ryder, P.F. (1997) The Winship Vault, St Andrew's Church, Corbridge. Archaeological Investigation October 1997 (Unpublished report)
- Ryder, P.F. (2000) Medieval Cross Slab Grave Covers in Northumberland, 1: South West Northumberland Archaeologia Aeliana 5<sup>th</sup> ser. XXVIII, 51-110
- Ryder, P.F. (2001) St Andrew's Church, Corbridge, Archaeological Watching Brief June/July 2001. (Unpublished report)
- Taylor, H.M. & J (1965) Anglo-Saxon Architecture. Cambridge University Press

## End Notes

1Parsons sees only the jambs of the door as being original, both arches being later, possibly medieval, reconstruction, the upper re-using earlier patterned voussoirs.

2Splayed internally and now blocked on the line of the internal face of the wall

3If this is the case then the plinth below, which seems undisturbed, must have been carefully repaired.

4This is a clever modification; internally it can be seen that the low-side is later than the lancet (see below).

5There is less evidence of this internally.

6As was suggested by Gilbert (1946, 162)

7Although there is no sign of this externally.

8Part of the fourth step is formed by a piece of a medieval cross slab (Ryder 2000, no.12, 62, 92).

9Did its internal splay accommodate both the lancet and an earlier low-side window directly below?

10Early chancels, eg Escomb, were often more or less square

1119<sup>th</sup>-century alterations to the south transept are something of a puzzle. The 1823 drawing shows a single large window in the south gable, with intersecting Gothick glazing bars. It would seem reasonable to suppose that this originally a window of c 1300, like that in the east wall, which had lost its tracery. However an undated pre-restoration ground plan found in the Diocesan archives at Durham (see Ryder 1997) shows three lancets here, as at present, so are they work of the 1830s or 1840s?

Anglo-Saxon (probably more than one phase)

12<sup>th</sup> century (ex situ)

13<sup>th</sup> century I

13<sup>th</sup> century II

13<sup>th</sup> century III

13<sup>th</sup> century IV (c 1280?)

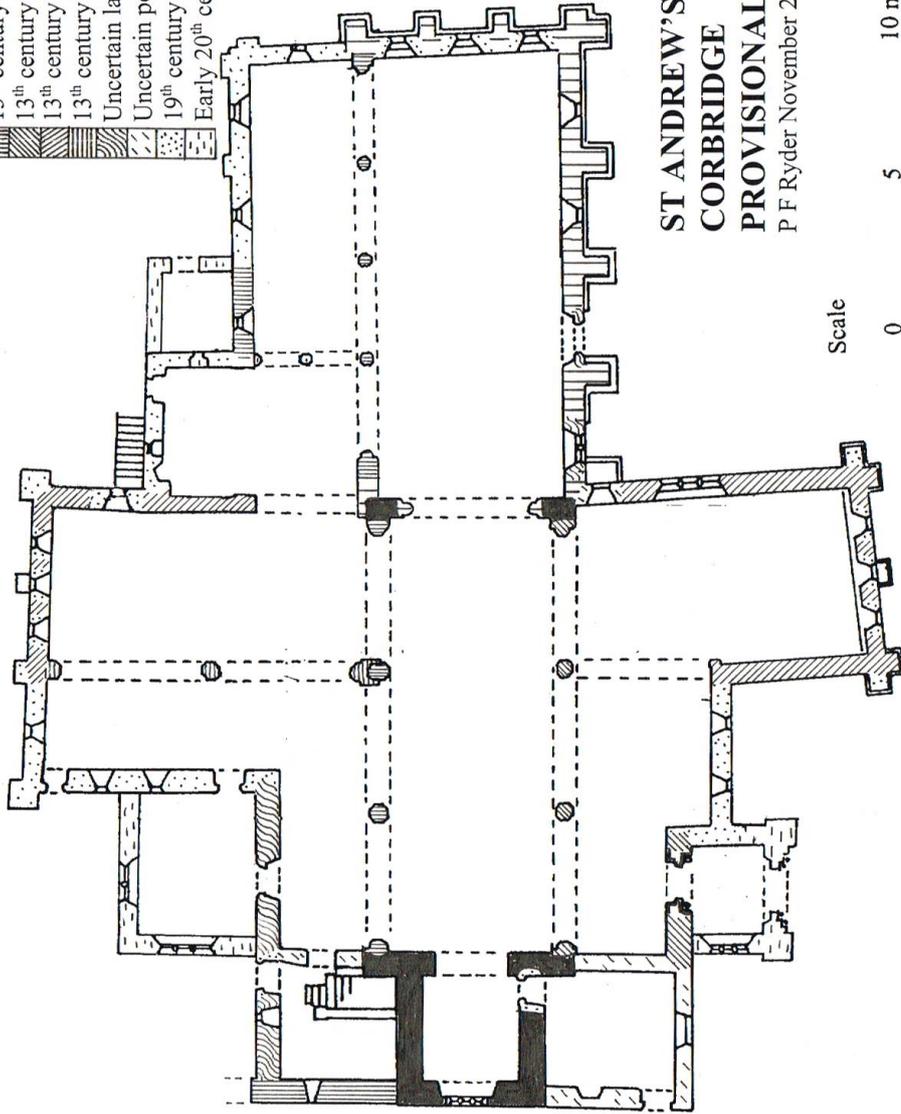
13<sup>th</sup> century VI

Uncertain later medieval

Uncertain post-medieval

19<sup>th</sup> century (various phases)

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century (various phases)



**ST ANDREW'S CHURCH,  
CORBRIDGE  
PROVISIONAL PHASED PLAN**

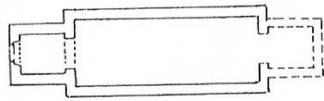
P F Ryder, November 2002

Scale

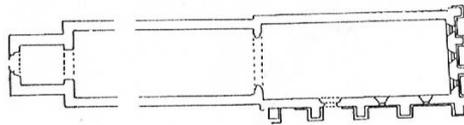


# ST ANDREW'S CHURCH CORBRIDGE

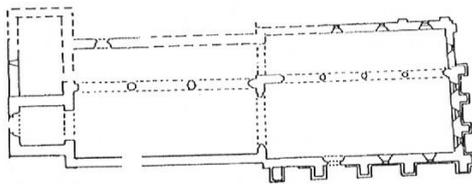
## SUGGESTED STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT



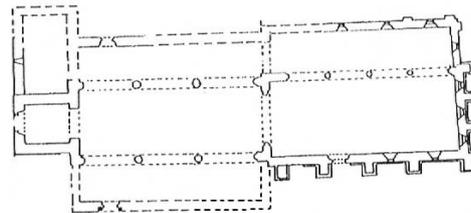
The Anglo-Saxon Church



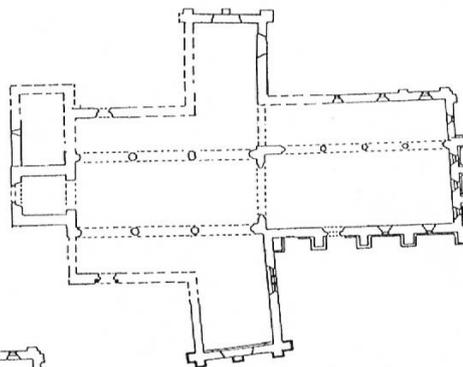
13th Century I: Chancel rebuilt



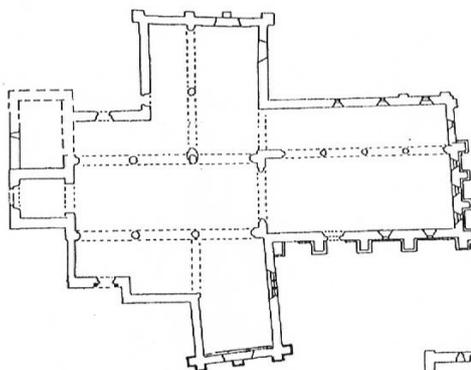
13th Century II. North aisles added  
and Priest's House/Anchorage on  
north of Tower



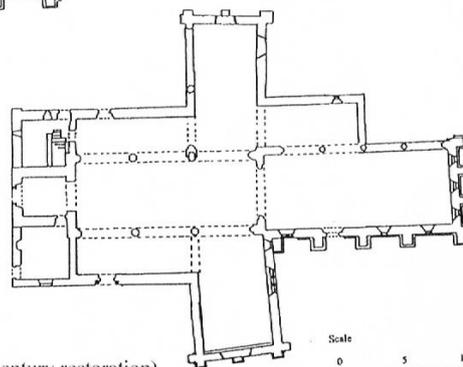
13th Century III. South aisle added



13th Century IV. Transepts added



13th Century V (fullest medieval extent)  
North transept aisle added  
South aisle widened



Post-Medieval  
(prior to 19th/20th century restoration)  
North Transept aisle and eastern part of Chancel Aisle demolished  
Nave aisle partly rebuilt

