

The Church of St Andrew, Bolam, Northumberland

Analysis of the Fabric & Archaeological Assessment

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The church from the south

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St Andrews Church, Bolam.

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Bolam parish church, its village long gone, lies in pleasant wooded countryside 3 km south of Hartburn and 3.5 km north of Belsay. Now accompanied only by the former vicarage, and, some distance away, the Hall, the church is a picturesque building best known for its Saxon west tower.

Description

The church consists of a nave with a west tower, a three-bay south aisle with a south porch, a north-west vestry, and a chancel with a southern chapel. The chancel was formerly divided into two parts by an arch, the jambs of which remain; in the following account the shorter western part is termed the Choir and the longer eastern one the Sanctuary.

The Exterior

The **West Tower** (right, seen from the south) is constructed of coursed sandstone; there is a marked fabric change at around 1 m below the string course at mid-height, with rather larger and rather better-squared blocks in the upper section. Just below the parapet there is a single course of roughly-shaped stones laid diagonally, in herringbone fashion. The angles quoins are laid in rough side-alternate fashion, the largest being at the base.

The present west window is a plain opening with a roughly-pointed head, clearly cut through the pre-existing fabric; above it are the remains of the upper section of a much narrower light, with its roughly-arched head cut into a single large block. There is a very similar arrangement of a crude inserted window replacing an earlier light on the south. There is no external division between the lower and second stages of the tower, the latter being lit by narrow lights with slightly segmental heads, with very narrow chamfers to both jambs and head, on north, south and west. On the north of the tower this first-stage window comes just above the vestry roof; c 0.50 m outside the line of the vestry wall, and c 1 m below the window, is what looks to be an infilled rectangular socket of uncertain purpose.



Location Map

from OS 1:25000 Explorer sheet 325
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The string course, now very weathered (Taylor & Taylor consider it of plain square section), marks a very slight set-back in the tower walls. Immediately above it are the belfry openings, tall paired lights with their jambs (which include some large blocks) cut square to the wall. The lights are divided by heavy mid-wall shafts with moulded bases and broad through-stone slabs as capitals, carrying the individual blocks into which are cut the roughly round-arched heads of each light. The topmost stage of the tower has a single-light opening in the centre of each face; that on the south has a slightly shouldered segmental-arched head, at the level of the single herringbone course. There is a course of slightly-projecting stones at the level of the base of this window, a feature not seen on the other walls. On the other three walls these uppermost windows have roughly triangular heads.

The parapet, clearly a later addition, is carried on a chamfered oversailing course, and has a plain chamfered coping. Stone drainage spouts, set slightly off-centre, emerge just below the oversailing course on north, south and west, whilst there is a lead spout on the east.

The lower part of the south-west angle quoin of the **Nave** is exposed to a height of c 3 m, on the south of the tower, and is made up of quite substantial blocks; the corresponding quoin on the north is now inside the 19th-century vestry, and is of similar construction, although its upper metre or so, in lighter-coloured stone, seems a later rebuild.



The north wall of the nave (above), to the east of the vestry, is of coursed roughly-squared blocks, some of those in the lower courses being quite large (c 0.40 m high). The wall has two large 19th-century stepped buttresses one overbuilt by the east wall of the later vestry, and the other towards the east end; at the head of the wall is a parapet carried on a single oversailing course; here is one stone drainage spout below this, just to the east of the western buttress. The north door now opens into the vestry; its east jamb is overlapped by the west face of the western buttress, suggesting that the doorway was blocked when the buttress was built, and later re-opened when the vestry was added. It is a simple square-headed opening with a narrow chamfer to lintel and jambs. Above and to the west of the doorway (and inside the vestry) one course has two large squarish blocks that project slightly from the wall face; the significance (if any) of these is uncertain. East of the vestry and between the buttresses is a window of two lights with roughly elliptical heads; its head is a very

crude piece of stonework, and looks of post-medieval date. The mullion is relatively recent, but the chamfered jambs may be genuine medieval work. The section of wall east of the second buttress is of rather smaller blocks, as is the north-eastern nave quoin, which is of smaller and more regular blocks than the western angles, laid in side-alternate fashion. Briggs (1982, 126-8) describes and illustrates the tower and nave quoins; he suggests that a series of small slots in the eastern face of three of the blocks of the north-eastern quoin may have housed pins for some structure such as an altar screen. A rather more prosaic explanation as fittings for a former down-pipe (the plinth below is partly cut away as if for a drain) seems rather more plausible. The line of the quoin steps back c 0.10 m westwards at the level of the chancel eaves. In this eastern section of the wall is a mid-19th century window with dressings of diagonally-tooled ashlar, of two trefoil-headed lights with an octofoil in the two-centred arched head.

On the south of the nave, only the very top of the nave wall is exposed above the aisle roof, but at its east end this breaks forward to hold a square-headed window; the window is topped by a projecting slab, chamfered on its lower edge, above which is a step-back of c 0.30 m; the whole feature projects c 0.60 m from the line of the main wall.

The **South Aisle** (right) is built of neatly-coursed squared sandstone blocks, and has a chamfered plinth, although a rise in the ground level means this is not exposed to the west of the porch, which is set very close to the west end of the south wall. The west window of the aisle is a simple roughly-pointed light, of exactly the same type as those in the south and west walls of the lower stage of the tower. There are some disturbed areas higher in the wall; the wall has a plain projecting square-section coping, returned on its footstone in a typical early-19th century manner.



The south wall has an odd set-back c 0.60 m below the eaves; to the east of the porch this has been chamfered, although the chamfer is broken by a wide gap above the eastern of the two windows. Above the set-back are three courses of blocks with a distinctive tooling, not seen elsewhere in the church. Both of the windows looks to be insertions, and are simple two-centred arched lights with surrounds of diagonally-tooled ashlar, of early-mid 19th century character. They have leaded glazing, with intersecting glazing bars in the heads.

The **South Porch** is also built of squared and coursed blocks of sandstone, but a little more roughly shaped than those of the aisle. The outer archway is of two-centred form, with a continuous chamfer; it is flanked by low buttresses with chamfered off-sets at the heads and bases; the eastern buttress stands on a plain square footing, and there is also an irregular footing exposed at the base of the east wall. The porch gable has a coping returned at its feet as at the west end of the aisle, and a plain Greek cross finial.

The **South Chapel** is built of coursed and squared sandstone, and seems of one build with the adjacent aisle; the chamfered plinth seems continuous, although as one proceeds eastwards the ground level (ie the base of the perimeter drain) drops and a rough footing beneath the plinth becomes exposed.. The Chapel has its own gabled roof parallel to that of the chancel, with capped gables capped by 19th-century finial crosses like that on the porch.

On the south of the Chapel is a plain square-headed priest's door, without any chamfer or moulding, now blocked, with a small chamfered window, perhaps a 'low side', set in the blocking. There are several irregularities hereabouts; structural cracks, a stepping-in of the west jamb of the doorway just below its head, and the sill of the small window apparently being set inside-out all may result from reconstruction of this area follow World War II bomb damage. To the east of this is a window of two-light window with simple Y-tracery, and a hoodmould chamfered above and below, with simple carved stops. The central mullion has an ovolo moulding, but the actual jambs and arch are simply chamfered. The external surround of the opening looks of early-19th century character.

The east wall of the chapel has a single light with a four-centred arched head and a continuous quite broad chamfer; its head is cut into two odd L-shaped blocks shaped to course in with the adjacent walling. Above it, but not quite central in the present gable, is a vesica window that has a monolithic surround, now flush with the wall face, looking rather as if a projecting moulding might have been hacked back. The gable above has the usual square-section early-19th century coping, with its footstones set at different levels. To the north of the main window is an obvious area of more recent masonry, indicating that the internal recess here must have been broken through to form a window at some stage.

The **Choir** only has an external wall to the north. This is of roughly-coursed rubble, with three courses of better-squared stone, obviously an addition, just below the eaves. There is a chamfered plinth resting on a rough projecting footing, largely obscured by vegetation., in the centre of the wall is a two-light window with Y tracery and an ovolo-moulded mullion, identical to that on the south of the South Chapel. At the east end of this section of wall is a shallow pilaster buttress, which the plinth is continued round.

The south wall of the **Sanctuary** is quite complex. At its west end, and now overbuilt by the east wall of the south chapel, is a pilaster buttress, opposite to that on the north wall; only its east face is now visible. Adjacent to this is an area of rubble fabric (only extending to the full height of the wall at the extreme west end) that seems to extend eastward as far as a step-down of c 0.30 m in the chamfered plinth, about a third of the way along the wall. East of and over-riding this is better-squared masonry, up to a continuous 'thin' course c 2 m above the ground, above which is better-quality squared sandstone with rather larger blocks. There is a two-light window, set west-of-centre, with simply Y-tracery and a chamfered surround; as with the South Chapel window it looks as if the external opening is early-19th century restoration, and the large blocks of the dressings of its east jamb do not course in with the adjacent fabric.

The north wall of the Sanctuary has a similar chamfered plinth to the Choir to the west, although there is an odd break in it immediately to the east of the single pilaster buttress. Below the plinth there is a rough projecting footing, which Briggs (1982, 134-5) suggests may relate to an earlier chancel, that runs along the western section of the wall then abruptly ends c 0.90 m east of the pilaster buttress. The wall itself is of coursed roughly-squared sandstone; c 0.50 m east of the buttress are the remains (two blocks) of the west jamb of an early window. Beyond these is a two-light window, a simple pair of chamfered lancets, which may be of 13th century date. Around 1.5 m from the east end of the wall is a stepped buttress of uncertain date, perhaps medieval, that seems to over-ride the plinth; east of the buttress the plinth re-appears, c 0.30 m lower in level, but might be later restoration. The topmost two courses of the wall, above the heads of both buttresses, look like a later heightening.

The east end of the Sanctuary shows the same two types of fabric, coursed and smallish quite square stones below and larger blocks above, divided by a 'thin' course, as seen in the eastern part of the south wall. The east window, set immediately above the 'thin' course, consists of three lancet lights set close together, without any enclosing arch or piercings to the spandrels. The extrados of the head of the centre light closely follows the line of the arch, whilst the heads of the flanking lights are cut into more irregular blocks. Once again the external surround of the opening looks at least partly 19th-century (?) restoration. The gable above the window, of roughly-squared snecked stone, certainly looks 19th-century, as does its coping, which is returned on deep footstones.

The **Vestry** adjoins the western part of the north wall of the nave, and overlaps the west tower. It is built of squared coursed sandstone with diagonally-tooled ashlar dressings; on its north side is a simple shoulder-arched doorway and on the west a window of two shoulder-arched lights that appears to be an insertion. The end walls have an ashlar coping, chamfered on its lower angle, the east being topped by a 20th-century ashlar chimney.

The Interior



The internal walls of the church are bare of plaster.

The **Tower** opens to the nave by a broad semicircular arch of plain square section (left); none of the voussoirs extend the full thickness of the wall, and all have a light diagonal tooling, on both faces and soffit, suggesting that it is in its original condition. The arch springs from imposts chamfered on their lower angle (towards the nave the impost is continued back along the wall on the south, but not on the north); at the eastern angles of the responds are attached jamb shafts with shallow

acanthus-carved capitals (which look as if they might be a secondary reworking of the impost blocks) and simple moulded bases. One block of the southern respond, c 1.0 m from the ground, has an incised circle upon it, of uncertain purpose.

At the north-west corner of the tower is an internal buttress-like feature, a square block of masonry with a rough bevel to its angle, which is an inserted 19th-century chimney stack serving a fireplace in the vestry. The present west and south windows have clearly simply been crudely cut through the earlier masonry of the walls, whilst above them the internal rear arches and parts of the deep splays of the earlier openings have been exposed, showing them to have neatly-cut voussoirs and diagonal tooling.

The ceiling is carried by three transverse beams, one against each end wall and one in the middle, carried on large carved ashlar corbels, with crosses carved in high relief, all clearly of 19th-century date.

Access to the upper part of the tower is by a trapdoor near the north-west corner of the ceiling. Above this there are no further floors, only a series of old beams above the principal belfry openings, from the single bell is hung, and a relatively recent platform above this. Access to the upper platform is by a ladder that is currently considered unsafe, so the upper part of the walls could not be inspected in detail.

The round-arched windows of the second stage have rear arches made up of voussoirs with rough diagonal tooling (in the same manner of those of the lower stage windows); in each case the rear arch seems slightly too wide for the jambs. Above their heads is a clear change in fabric type to larger squared blocks (also seen externally); at this level on the east (where there is no indication of any feature below the two-light belfry opening) there is a slight set-back. The two-light belfry openings, boarded over close to their internal faces, are similar internally to externally. The single-light upper belfry openings again seem similar on both faces of the wall, ie that on the south has a monolithic round arch whilst the others have gabled heads, although the internal head of that on the west could not be easily seen.

The internal faces of the parapet appear to be of recent concrete or cement, and the tower roof of later 20th century date.

The west wall of the **Nave**, as seen above the tower arch, is of roughly coursed fabric; many of the larger blocks close to the arch have the same diagonal tooling as its dressings.

The south wall of the nave, above the arcade, is of neatly coursed blocks, quite square in shape, with diagonal tooling. The arcade is of three semicircular arches, each of two plain square orders, springing from columns of quatrefoil plan, each shaft slightly keeled; these have simple square plinths carrying moulded bases and moulded capitals square at the abacus. The responds are of square plan with an attached slightly-keeled shaft, with similar bases and capitals. There is some evidence of re-tooling but not of major repair, as the capitals of both responds remain quite badly broken.

There have been two original clerestory windows, now blocked, set above the piers of the arcade; their square-headed internal openings, are quite clear but externally only the eastern can be clearly traced; it appears to have a semicircular head. Below their outer openings is a string course, apparently of square section, which runs c 0.40 m above the apex of the arches. At the west end of the arcade are some puzzling features that presumably relate to the earlier south wall of the nave, a rough set back, narrowing eastwards, one course below the string, and below this, close to the west wall of the aisle, an odd slightly tilted block, with a short straight joint below it. It is difficult to see what this might represent - one possibility (no more) might be that it is the end of the hoodmould or stripwork surround of an earlier opening. At the east end of the arcade, above the string course is a projection c 1 m wide, carried on two courses of corbelling (the upper somewhat damaged), which contains the single high-level window; internally this has a plain square head. In the internal face of the wall there is also some evidence of earlier roof timbers. The tie-beams of the present six-bay roof are carried by large 19th-century ashlar corbels just below the wall-head; c 0.60 m below each of these is an infilled rectangular socket.

The north wall of the nave is of coursed squared stone with a scatter of quite large blocks. The north doorway, now opening into the vestry, has a plain square-headed rear arch, with some large blocks in its neatly-splayed jambs. The window near the centre of the wall has a segmental rear arch and internal jambs that incline slightly inwards, all fairly rough. The sloping ashlar sill is clearly relatively recent. The eastern window, lighting the pulpit, has a segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfer only to its head; its ashlar dressings and more roughly-tooled inner jambs are all of 19th-century date.

Higher in the wall are the same range of infilled sockets as seen on the south; the eastern two seem to have earlier sockets a little to the west.

The roof of the nave is of six bays, and of shallow pitch; the trusses have moulded king posts, and are of late 19th or early 20th century character.

In the **South Aisle** the three windows all have their internal splays and rear arches crudely hacked through the walling stones, like the two windows in the base of the tower; the only evidence of earlier fenestration is in the lower part of the eastern splay of the easternmost window, which has three blocks that are much more finely tooled, and presumably survive from an earlier opening in the same position. The south door has a segmental rear arch and internal splay that look later in character than the external opening. Around 1.2 m east of the doorway a rough vertical chase has been cut into the wall face from c 1.5 to c 2 m above the floor. It is clear that the outer wall of the aisle has been heightened in a yellower stone, contrasting with the grey sandstone of the older wall beneath.

The six-bay roof of the aisle is of very simple construction - principals and two levels of purlins - and is of late 19th or 20th century date.

At the east end of the aisle is a segmental-pointed arch of two chamfered orders, springing from moulded semi-octagonal corbels, and opening into the south chapel. The northern corbel springs from an odd recessed section of wall-face, cut back behind the lines of both the nave wall to the west and the chancel wall to the east. This is a peculiar feature; it presumably results from the corbel being patched into the irregular wall face left when the old east wall of the aisle, which must have been keyed-in, was demolished.



Nave looking east

The wall above the arch has good-quality squared stone above the northern part of the arch (corresponding with rubble on the opposite face of the wall) and much rubblier stone above the southern half. One cut stone in the northern part looks to be part of the coping of a gable.

The south doorway, inside the **South Porch**, has a round-headed arch of two orders. The chamfer of the inner order is studded with large nail-head, continued down the jambs (the eastern has a chamfer stop c 0.15 m above the floor). The outer order has a keeled moulding and a similar chamfer with nail-head; this is carried on jamb shafts with moulded bases (the western shaft and base renewed), moulded capitals and imposts continuous with those of the inner order. There is a hoodmould with indented moulding on its chamfer; the jambs also have a chamfer, outside the shafts, with further nailhead.

In the walling above the doorway, just under the present porch roof, are two inscribed blocks, from the odd legible word ('...December', ..'Edward'..) and general style of the lettering they would appear to be re-used fragments of a 17th or 18th century headstone.

The outer opening of the porch has its internal jambs splayed, and a chamfer only to its segmental head.. The side walls have stone benches, that on the west renewed, that on the east of old reddened stone.

The **Chancel** opens to the nave by a chancel arch set in a wall of roughly-coursed small rubble. The arch has originally been semicircular but is now sunk and distorted; it is of two orders, the inner square towards the chancel with a fat roll moulding towards the nave, and a groove outside that. Eight of the voussoirs, irregularly spaced, have had beak heads, but these have been hacked back almost flush with the face of the mouldings. The outer order is very similar, five voussoirs having had beak heads. There has been a hoodmould, but its section is lost. Towards the chancel the outer order is simply left square. The inner order is carried on a large imposts, semicircular in plan, with some interesting carving on the capitals - a face on the western angle on the north side (the eastern angle is destroyed) and scalloping on the south side. The outer order is carried on a quarter-round shaft, with scalloped capitals; toward the chancel these have been partly cut away when a screen was inserted at some time; the northern capital toward the chancel has a small figure carved on the angle.

Around 0.60 m above the crown of the chancel arch the walling becomes much better coursed; the topmost section of the wall has the look of being a 19th-century rebuild. On the east the chancel arch jambs look to have been inserted in earlier walling.

In the **Choir**, the northern window has a rear arch in the form of a rib, chamfered on both edges, with the soffit beyond set at a higher level. On the south is a semicircular arch to the side chapel, of two chamfered orders. The responds have elongated D-plan shafts carrying the inner order, with semi-octagonal capitals, whilst the chamfer of the outer order continues down the jamb. The base mouldings look like 14th or 15th century work; despite its semicircular form, the whole arch has the appearance of a later medieval copy of 12th-century work. The wall seems to have been thickened externally, ie towards the chapel, putting its outer face in line with that of the south wall of the nave. This also results in the arch having an odd outer order on this side, left rough and square; toward the head of the arch a number of voussoirs of the original outer order have been replaced by much narrower ones spanning both the old outer order and the additional one provided when the wall was thickened.

The jambs of the former arch to the **Sanctuary** are intact, and of square plan except for a sunk attached shaft towards the nave, its bases hidden by the present floor. The capitals are variations on a scalloped theme, with a cabled necking; once again the northern is rather more elaborate than the southern. In the walling directly each capital are four voussoirs from the destroyed, the two lower apparently in situ' a ninth has been reused nearby in the north wall of the sanctuary. All nine show incised lozenge patterns in a style sometimes termed 'Early Geometric', characteristic of late 11th and early 12th century carving.

In the sanctuary, the south wall is partly concealed by monuments, but 1.63 m from the jamb of the former arch there seems to be a straight joint, the west jamb of a former window, matching that on the north. The south window has a flattened segmental rear arch with a chamfer; directly below, and apparently contemporary with the window, are the triple sedilia, with two-centred arches with chamfered surrounds, continued down the jambs but between the recesses carried on detached semi-octagonal shafts with moulded capitals and moulded bases. The seats are now only c 0.15 m above the floor, showing that this has been raised. To the east of the sedilia, and possibly of the same date, is a piscina with a two-centred arch, simply chamfered, and a recess holding a simple circular bowl with a drain. Above the piscina is a rough recess in the wall, apparently made for a wall monument, now removed.

In the north wall of the sanctuary 1.65 m from the north jamb of the former arch, is the west jamb of a blocked window with diagonally-tooled dressings like those of the respond of the Sanctuary arch; below it is a small square aumbry or wall locker. The internal surround of the two-light window is identical with that of the south window, and probably contemporary with it, except for a 19th-century sill. East again is another small locker, now containing a safe.

The internal jambs and head of the east window seem contemporary with those of the two windows in the side walls, although the window itself has been altered; it is clear that the outer openings have been re-cut and widened; the sill is 19th century.

The chancel has late 19th or early 20th century six-bay boarded roof with collar-beam trusses carried on large timber corbels

The internal walls of the **South Chapel** include some large squared blocks with neat diagonal tooling that looks like re-cycled 12th-century work. In the south wall is the recess of the blocked priest's door, now with a small window; its stonework looks disturbed, probably as a result of repairs after this area of wall struck by a



bomb in World War II. The two-light window alongside has widely splayed internal jambs and a distorted almost semicircular rear arch (again due to repairs?) carried on a rib chamfered on its lower angles; the sill is more recent. At the east end of the wall is a plain square recess where one might expect a piscina; there is a second similar one opposite, to the east of the arch into the chancel. At the head of the south wall is a chamfered oversailing course.

The west wall of the chapel, above the arch into the aisle, has disturbed masonry; the northern part of the gable looks to have been rebuilt in smaller rubble.,

On the north of the Chapel, one of the large blocks of the eastern jamb of the arch into the chancel is carved in relief with a shield bearing an engrailed cross, beneath a line of inscription, 'robert' At the head of the wall is a bold projecting course with a chamfer on its lower angle, larger than that opposite, with below it a series of large quadrant-shaped corbels below, two at the west end of the wall and three more widely-spaced at the east; a modern roof truss seems to replace a fourth corbel in this section. This arrangement is all rather difficult to interpret; Briggs (1982, 137) suggests that the course represents the original valley-gutter between chapel and chancel roofs.

Remains of Sanctuary Arch (on north)

The east window of the chapel seems to have medieval stonework internally; its rere arch is of segmental-pointed form; the vesica above is partly restored.. To the north of the window is a large recess with a cusped trefoil head under an ogee arch; it is rebated as if for a door and has a more recent sill.

The three-bay roof of the chapel has collar-beam trusses and is of late 19th or early 20th century date.

The Structural History of the Church

Most authorities have considered the west tower, and some part of the nave walls, to be of Saxon date. Some of the earlier writers, eg Wilson and Tomlinson also see the north side of the choir as Saxon. By far the best description and analysis of the fabric is that by Briggs (1982); this writer only differs from his conclusions in some minor areas.

The Tower and Nave Walls

It is clear that the west tower, the western angles of the nave and the greater part of the north wall of the nave represent the earliest phase of building. These include a number of features of Saxon character, notably the large side-alternate angle quoins, the relatively thin walls of the nave (0.75 m) and the belfry openings in the tower. However, other features in the tower, such as the small windows of the lower stages (with their rear arches of neat diagonally-tooled voussoirs) and the tower arch (sometimes seen as an insertion) are more of Norman character. There is also the very obvious fabric change in the tower below the belfry, which could well point to a two-phase construction. The most unusual feature of the tower, which sets it apart from the other roughly contemporary examples in the North East, is that the main belfry is set at the penultimate stage of the tower rather than the top.

Bolam in fact seems to be a classic example of what has been termed the Saxo-Norman ‘overlap’ and it is representative of a considerable number of church towers combining both Saxon and Norman characteristics, which are now seen as having been constructed after the Norman Conquest by masons who still used traditional Saxon techniques. A date in the bracket 1080-1120 would seem quite possible. The main belfry openings at Bolam are quite closely paralleled at Hornby in North Yorkshire, and the gable-headed openings of three of the upper belfry windows in the late-11th century works at Durham Cathedral and Jarrow. The change in fabric could be used to argue that earlier fabric survives in the lower part of the tower, but in this case one would have to argue that its windows are insertions, whereas the blocks of their jambs appear to be neatly coursed in with the wall fabric¹.

The tower arch is certainly of Norman character, and is generally thought to be a 12th century replacement of a smaller opening. This is probable, although perhaps some doubt ought to remain here; the carving just below its imposts, which is certainly of mid-12th century character, does look as if it could be secondary.

The greater part of the north wall of the nave appears, from its fabric, to be contemporary with the tower; its thickness of c 0.75 m is certainly in the Saxon tradition. The north door, now serving the vestry, is certainly of post-Conquest character; it has a plain square head, with a narrow chamfer to head and jambs, and splayed internal jambs. However it is possible that this may be an insertion.

No clear evidence survives for the character of the east end of the c1100 church; Briggs (1982, 134-5) suggests that the lower square-section plinth that does not continue for the full length of the north side of the chancel may survive from a previous phase of the building; an alternative interpretation of this is offered below.

¹It is the rere arches of the windows which are of Norman character, and it might be possible to argue that these are secondary, as all seem slightly too wide for the jambs on which they rest.

The Mid-12th Century Remodelling

If the earliest parts of the church date to c 1100, as seems possible, then the remainder of the building is largely the product of the ensuing two centuries. The question of the date of the present tower arch has already been raised. The first major phase of work probably took place in the mid-12th century, and saw the eastern part of the church rebuilt. The eastern quoins of the nave are clearly of a different build to the western; a clear break in build can be seen towards the east end of the north wall of the nave. The rubble of the east end of the nave, and of the walls of the choir, is in marked contrast to the much heavier blocks of the western parts, although the walls remain relatively thin, an echo of the pre-Conquest tradition. The chancel arch and what remains of the sanctuary arch are probably of the mid-12th century. To the east of the latter the internal wall faces step in to increase their thickness from 0.69 m to 0.83m. What is more problematical is the extent of the survival of mid-12th century fabric east of the Sanctuary arch; Briggs (1982, 134) suggests that the entire sanctuary is of this date, on the strength of its chamfered plinth, although heavily altered.

The pilaster buttresses midway along the chancel walls certainly look of 12th century character, and rubble walling seems to extend beyond these as far as the remaining internal west jambs of a pair of blocked windows. East of these the wall fabric changes character (this is especially noticeable internally); the continuing chamfered plinth seems similar to that further west, but there are minor differences, sufficient to accept as evidence of a change in build.²

The most plausible explanation of all this is that the mid-12th century sanctuary terminated, probably in an apse, a short distance beyond the present limit of fabric of this period. A dowsed survey of the church (Bailey, Cambridge and Briggs 1988, 132) shows a square east end with an apsidal central section at more or less precisely this point³, which corresponds to the east end of the earliest phase of masonry in the external face of the south wall, and a step-down of the plinth. The additional thickness of the Sanctuary walls would be explicable if, as seems quite possible, this section of the building was vaulted.

The Addition of the South Aisle c1180-1200

The next phase in the development of the church seems to have come at the end of the 12th century, c 1180-1200, when the south aisle was added. Although arcades were often pierced through earlier walls (eg Corbridge, Woodhorn etc), in this case the whole south wall of the nave seems to have been rebuilt in neatly-squared and tooled stone; the two blocked clerestory windows seem contemporary with the arcade. Taylor and Taylor (1965, Vol.1, 79) see the string course above the south face of the arcade as 'probably of early date' (ie Saxon), but it is almost certainly simply the tabling for the aisle roof.

The original south aisle was probably relatively narrow; the present south doorway probably dates from this phase, but, as often, was moved outwards when the aisle was rebuilt in the 14th century. Briggs (1982, 136) suggests that the aisle was extended eastwards alongside the choir, soon after its construction; he considers the arch on the south of the choir only a little later than the arcade, but this may be incorrect⁴

The 13th Century: the Sanctuary extended

In the second half of the 13th century the Norman sanctuary was rebuilt, to its present dimensions; the original

² On the north side the western section generally projects 8cm from the wall face, and the eastern c 6 cm; the eastern section is made up of longer more neatly cut blocks.

³This is not to say that this writer is convinced by this method of investigation; the same plan also shows a second apse beyond the present east end, which would seem very unlikely

⁴Apart from its semicircular form, the plan of its responds and sections of its capitals and bases all look late medieval.

wall thickness being retained. Most of its features remain, although the east window has been altered to some extent.

The 14th Century: the South Chapel added and South Aisle rebuilt

Then, at the beginning of the 14th century, came the addition of the South Chapel or Shortflatt aisle; at the same time the south aisle was rebuilt to its present dimensions; their south walls are clearly of a single build. The chapel was presumably built as a chantry for the De Reymes family of Shortflatt, the mid-14th century effigy of Sir Robert still surviving. The rather odd thickening of the south wall of the choir may be some sort of measure to counteract structural instability. The north window of the choir looks of the same period. The re-use of the c1200 south doorway in the 14th-century aisle wall has already been mentioned; the east windows of the chapel, or at least the high-level vesica, also look of 13th-century form, and may have been moved from the east wall of the original aisle.

Later Medieval Changes

There is little evidence of later medieval changes. The humble south porch looks to be of later medieval date, and may be a 14th or 15th century addition. The high-level window at the east end of the south wall of the nave is something of a mystery, set in a corbelled-out projection that seems unnecessarily massive; Briggs (1982, 138) suggests that it may be a post-medieval insertion made to light Pater, Creed and Commandments boards, but it seems more likely to be a medieval feature inserted to light the Rood Loft.

Post-Medieval Works

Documentary assistance assists in dating post-medieval features. The window in the centre of the north wall of the nave looks of later 16th or 17th century date, and may be coeval with the heavy stepped buttresses on either side. A 1762 visitation records: 'The Arch to be opened between the Chancel and Short flat-Choir' and 'the two lowest windows in the Belfry to be opened out and glazed'; the latter probably refers to the creation of the present west and south windows in the base of the tower. The three windows in the south aisle, in their present form, look of this period as well.

The arch between choir and chancel chapel was not fully re-opened, as Wilson's 1870 plan shows the eastern third of it still walled up; it also shows that there was no vestry at this period.; neither was there a window at the east end of the north wall of the nave lighting the pulpit⁵ It was in the mid-19th century that the carved beakheads on the chancel arch were chiselled away; this was done in the earlier days of the incumbency of the Rev S.S.Meggison (1817-1879) who'time and time again ..saw boys imitating the naughty little stone faces - putting out tongues and pulling their ears - until one day in a rage he took hammer and chisel and hacked them all off. In his later days Sir Arthur (Middleton) reproached him sadly for this, and Mr Meggison could only say, in real contrition "I was young and zealous; alas, I was young and zealous" (and in an undertone "and the boys would not learn")⁶.

The 1882 Restoration

The church underwent a restoration in 1882, F.R.Wilson being the architect; the faculty for this survives (Durham Archives and Special Collections, ref DDR/EJ/FAC/1/4, pp 501-3); the works detailed include the construction of the vestry, the renewal of most of the roofs, opening out 'blocked ancient windows' in the tower, and, rather confusingly, breaking out and forming new windows 'at the North East end of the North side of the nave and the West and East ends of the south aisle, the West side of the porch and South and West

⁵Briggs (1982, 138) is in error stating that this was inserted before 1870..

⁶From 'Notes on Reverend Septimus Meggison' supplied by Mr R Carmichael, churchwarden.

sides of the Tower' and 'to break out and raise the South windows of the Aisle'. Only the first of these windows seems to have been made; all the south aisle windows remain in their pre-1882 form, and the porch never received any window at all.

The restoration did not meet with antiquarian approval; the Durham and Northumberland Archaeological and Architectural Society, visiting in 1886, found 'many changes and losses to deplore'⁷ although the only one that they specified was the destruction of a piece of an elaborate medieval grave cover that had been built into the upper step in the chancel.

20th-century changes have been less conspicuous. During World War II the church was hit by a German bomb which broke through the south wall of the south chapel, but fortunately did not explode.

Archaeological Assessment

Despite the antiquarian interest that has been engendered by the church, and in particular its west tower, there does not appear to be any recent detailed record of the structure; Briggs 1982 article provided a measured plan of the east end, but was forced to rely on Wilson's rudimentary survey of 1870 for the remainder. Salter's recent phased plan (1997, 21) is also very simple, and is at variance with the structural history here proposed. A church of this importance merits a proper structural record in the form of a detailed ground plan (preferably made with an EDM survey) and some form of record of the wall surfaces, through rectified photography or annotated photogrammetry.

Whilst Bolam Church is a building of considerable architectural importance, it cannot be rated as highly as regards its potential for concealed archaeological features. Its wall plaster was all lost in the 1882 restoration, and its underfloor deposits have probably been fairly heavily disturbed, in as far as their condition can be assessed. There are a number of vaults beneath the church, as is apparent in the sanctuary where many floor slabs have iron lifting-rings; the concrete floors put down in 1882 conceal others; the faculty of that year makes reference to the 'Gallowhill Vault' in the south aisle which was to be arched over. These vaults, the majority of which are probably of post-medieval date are of course of considerable interest in themselves, but their excavation will have removed earlier evidence, both in the form of burials and of structural features. There has also been disturbance from underfloor heating systems; the faculty details the excavation of chambers 'in the passage way at the West end' and another 'in the centre aisle of the nave' to carry flues. The present heating chamber beneath the west end of the south aisle, reached through a trapdoor outside the west wall, seems more recent.

All this does not mean, of course, that archaeological material - either relating to the structure of the church or the many generations of burials which must lie within it - does not survive beneath the floors. Any disturbance of floor levels will require monitoring and archaeological recording.

Outside the building there is a concrete perimeter drain around most of the south wall, which will have damaged, to some extent, archaeological deposits adjacent to the building. The situation on the north and west is not so clear, although there are a number of soakaways there as well.

Peter F Ryder September 2000/revised December 2015

⁷Transactions of Durham & Northumberland Architectural & Archaeological Soc, III (1890) lxxxiii

ST ANDREW. BOLAM
PROVISIONAL PHASED PLAN



Plan by N and H D Briggs, revised and annotated PFR

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