

THE CHURCHES
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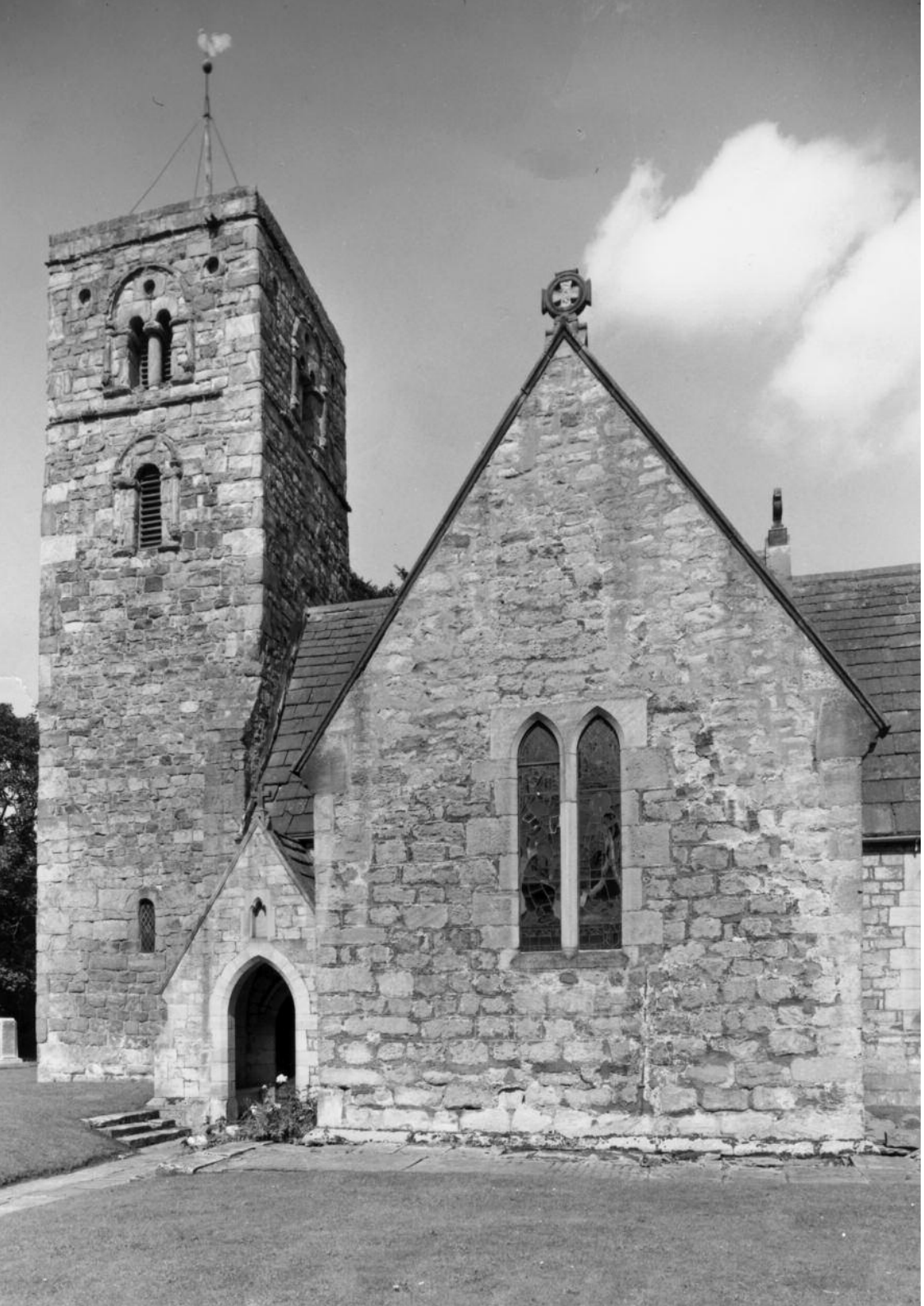
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ST ANDREW'S CHURCH

Bywell, Northumberland





Front cover: Exterior from the south (Paul Barker)

Left: Tower and south transept (Hallam Ashley)

Bywell, Northumberland

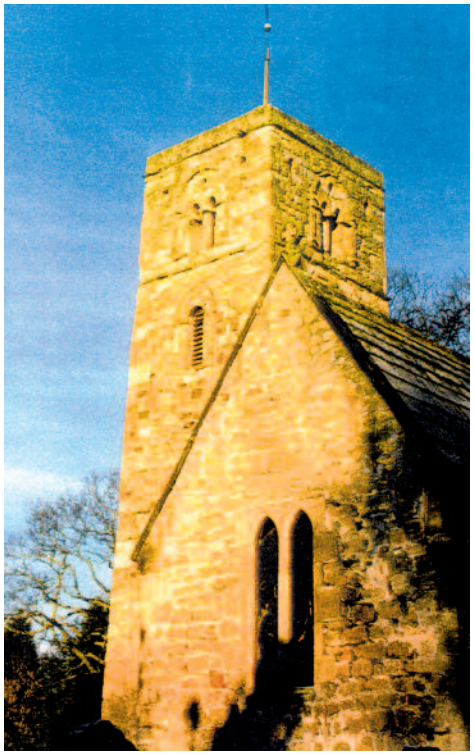
ST ANDREW'S CHURCH

by Bryan Lilley

HISTORY

Today, little may be seen of the once flourishing and industrious town of Bywell, which brought great activity to the north bank of the River Tyne, five miles (8km) south-east of Corbridge. Apart from a scattering of houses, only its castle, a mediaeval market cross, the Hall and two churches remain. This ancient place adopted an Old English name, *byge-wella*, meaning 'a spring in the bend', due to its position at a turn in the river.

Bywell's two churches stand at the meeting point of two Norman baronies, the boundaries of which may have reflected a pre-Norman division of lands. Both churches pre-date the Conquest. St Andrew's, in a quiet and lovely setting, shows evidence in the lower stages of the tower and its roughly circular graveyard of a considerably older foundation, certainly earlier than AD 850. It is known that Egbert was consecrated bishop here in 803, after the Danes had sacked Lindisfarne; and the first church, from which one carved stone is known to remain, was possibly founded by Wilfrid of Hexham in the 7th century.



The Romans may have had a river crossing at Bywell and even pioneered the first bridge; certainly there was a mediaeval bridge here resulting in the place growing in importance. The south porch of St Andrew's was the principal entrance in the Middle Ages when Bywell's town centre lay between the two churches and the river. At that time there was a population of about 500, a thriving iron industry and other local trades. Nearby St Peter's and Bywell itself were granted in 1093 by William II to Guy de Baliol; while Styford, including St Andrew's, went by decree of Henry I to Walter de Bolbec. He in turn gave the right to nominate the vicar to the 'White Canons' at Blanchland Abbey, which he founded. Since the Baliols gave the same advowson rights at St Peter's to black-robed Benedictines, the closely adjacent churches became known locally as the 'white church' and the 'black church'.

EXTERIOR

The tower of St Andrew appears to be built partly of reused Roman stones. It is perhaps the finest Saxon tower in Northumbria: there are characteristic belfry and window openings and quoins. The lower stages are earlier than 850 with the upper stages dating from the 10th and early 11th centuries. Coarse-grained sandstone is the principal building material of the tower and walls of the church, varying in colour from predominant cream to yellow and brown with some red blocks also. The steeply sloping roofs of the nave and transepts are covered with slates and some heavy slabs of lower carboniferous grit-stone similar to that found in the tower walls. The tower houses two bells, the smaller cast about 1400 and the larger about 1550.

Above: Tower and south transept (Archaeological Services University of Durham)

Right: Tower belfry and window openings (Christopher Dalton)

Below: Font in the base of the tower (Boris Baggs)

Right: Nave from the east (Christopher Dalton)

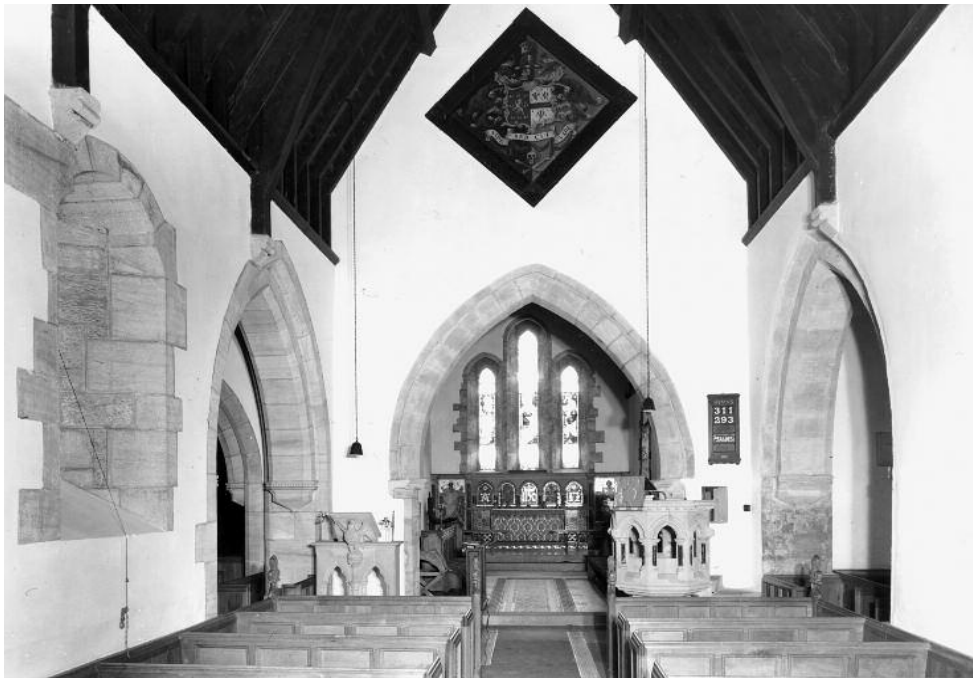
INTERIOR

The mainly 13th-century body of the church was extensively enlarged and repaired in 1871, probably by R J Johnson of Newcastle. The north transept, vestry, sanctuary arcading, communion rails, and the splendid pulpit and lectern, both of stone, date from this time. Slightly earlier are the fine examples of stained glass, the work of William Wailes (1808–81) who is buried at St Peter's, Bywell. The later glass in the chancel and north transept is by James Powell and Sons, of Whitefriars, London.

Although Walter Crane, a noted artist/designer and illustrator, visited Bywell in the spring of 1871, during a sketching tour commissioned through Somerset Beaumont of Bywell Hall, it was not until the early 1880s that a scheme of decoration was begun nearer to Crane's own tastes. As well as the new stained glass of this time which included the dramatic triple-lancet east window, its designer, John W Brown, was also responsible for a new mosaic sanctuary floor and the glittering mosaic, tile and opus







rectile reredos, all executed by James Powell and Sons.

The organ, a two-manual instrument, was built by F C Nicholson of Newcastle.

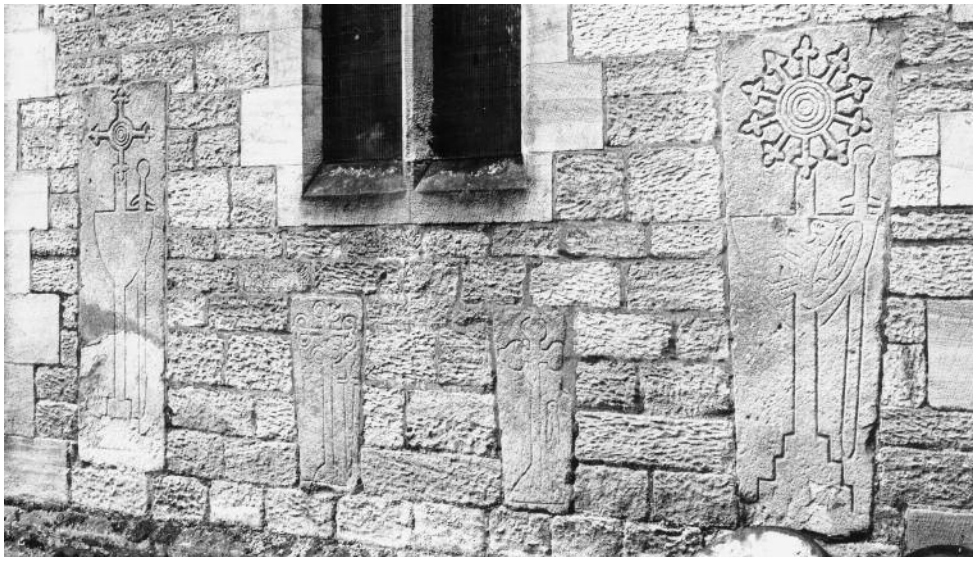
Twenty-five 12th- and 13th-century grave covers were incorporated in the external walls and also as lintels inside the church at the time of the Victorian restoration. Dr Peter Ryder writes of them:

'St Andrew's possesses what is probably the best collection of mediaeval cross slab grave covers in Tynedale; these monuments were used as recumbent gravestones, either forming the lid of a stone coffin, or as a grave-marker set in the church floor, or churchyard. Each slab bears a cross, often accompanied by an emblem denoting the trade or rank of the person buried beneath.'

Of the 25 slabs, 18 were reset by the Victorians in the external face of the north wall, and the others used as lintels over windows and doorways inside. The design of the cross is the best indicator of the date of the stone; most of the Bywell slabs probably date from the period 1150–1250; the latest (the two slabs with shields as their emblems) are probably 14th century.

Of the slabs with emblems, nine have a sword – probably denoting the right to bear arms – always set on the right of the cross shaft. Another nine bear a pair of shears, a female emblem (the mediaeval housewife often wore a pair of shears along with her keys on her girdle). Two slabs have a shield accompanying their swords; one bears a rampant lion, probably the arms of the De L' Isle family, and another a small shield or targe overlying the sword blade and accompanying an emblem that looks like a pair of tongs. Two others show a hunting horn (alongside a sword) and a small rectangular object which may be a book or a lady's work-box.

Between 1991–93, 13 of the mediaeval grave covers were conserved and, for protection from the weather and rapid erosion, ten were transferred from the external walls and set inside the church.



Opposite: Nave from the west end (© Crown copyright. NMR)

Above: Slabs built into north wall and north-west transept (Christopher Dalton)

Below: Grave cover inside the church (Boris Baggs)



Under the tower is the font dating from about 1300 with a 17th-century cover. Robert Surtees, who wrote the Jorrocks books, was baptised here. The hatchments commemorate the Fenwicks, who leased Bywell Hall from the Beaumonts in the 19th century.

Separated by some miles (and other churches) from its parishioners, St Andrew's was declared redundant in 1973 and vested in The Churches Conservation Trust in 1975. Repairs have been carried out under the supervision of Mr Ian Curry of Newcastle and, most recently, Mr Geoffrey Holland of York.

DEDICATION TO BRYAN LILLEY

Bryan Lilley, whose untimely death occurred in May 2005, served The Churches Conservation Trust from 1992–1999 as its Field Officer in North East England, working from his home at Wellingore near Lincoln. He was a talented and knowledgable person who was liked and respected by his colleagues and by the people whom he served in his area. He came to the Trust from the world of journalism, bringing with him many skills in publicity and communication. Bryan was a keen historian and ecclesiologist, the author of several church guides and of a definitive history of Colney Heath, near St Alban's, which he lived to see published. He was a committed practising Anglican and after his retirement from the Trust he worked for the Church in the diocese of Lincoln, where he will be greatly missed.

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that the church is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are over 330 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website www.visitchurches.org.uk.

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF

St Andrew, Shotley
8 miles south-east of Corbridge off A68

Holy Trinity, Sunderland
Off High Street East

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Trust acknowledges the assistance of Mr Nicholas Barrett, Mr Andy Boddington, Dr Peter Ryder, Mr Neil Moat and Mr Christopher Dalton in the compiling of this guide.

Right: Detail of the Victorian reredos (Boris Baggs)
Back cover: Internal detail from the Victorian restoration (Boris Baggs)

