

South-east view after FR Wilson, 1870, before 1883 alterations to the chancel

THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL, FELTON NORTHUMBERLAND

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The Parish Church of St Michael, Felton

Felton parish church stands on a ridge a little to the west of the village, on the north bank of the River Coquet. It consists of a nave with a four-bay south and a five-bay north aisle with a former vestry now used as a kitchen/toilet at the east end of its north side, a south porch, and a chancel with an organ chamber vestry to the north-west.

The church is generally constructed of coursed squared or roughly-squared stone; the nave and aisles have a flat leaded roof, the south porch one of stone flags, and the chancel a steeply-pitched roof of graduated green Westmorland slate.

The Exterior



In the centre of the west end of the **Nave** (above) is a broad buttress-like projection carrying the bell-cote, but which also contains a newel stair, lit by a vertical pair of small upright loops; above these is oversailing chamfered course below the bell-cote/belfry itself, which has a pair of square-headed openings under a rough pyramidal cap, single square-headed opening to north and south, and another pair of openings with semi-shouldered heads on the east; it is within these that the two bells are now hung. The oversailing course is returned along the gable, which is carried up behind the bellcote to a common apex; it is also present on the east face of the bellcote, above the nave roof. Between the bellcote and the buttresses on the line of the arcades are panels of walls with an old chamfered plinth below an 1870 window of two trefoiled lights with a quatrefoil in the spandrel.

The buttress on the line of the south arcade is a substantial stepped one, once one of a pair, the second of which is now incorporated in the west end of the south aisle. In

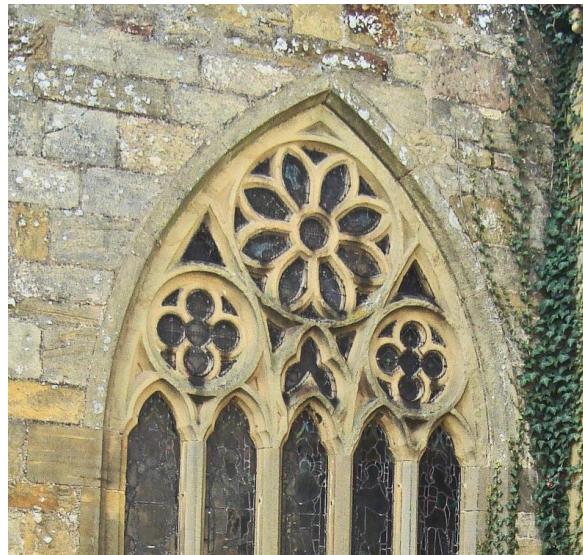
contrast that on the line of the north arcade has clearly been a heavy clasping buttress, with sloping off-sets, at the north-west angle of the original aisleless nave.

In the west wall of the **South Aisle** is a short lancet window, set high up so as to clear the earlier buttress incorporated in the wall, ion the lower parts of which are some very large blocks. There is no plinth to the wall, but there is one to the diagonal stepped buttress at the south-west angle of the aisle.

On the south of the aisle, the bay to the west of the porch shows two distinct fabric types, very yellow stone in the lower parts and better-squared and larger blocks of a greyer coarse sandstone above. There is a 19th century window of two trefoil-headed lancets, with dressings of diagonally-tooled ashlar, with above it the bluntly-pointed monolithic head of a former lancet. This section of wall has a parapet with a slightly-oversailing course c 1 m below, then 0.4 m above that a slight set-back, above which the fabric of well-squared blocks is probably of 19th century date

To the east of the porch the aisle wall has a chamfered plinth; this and the course above are in yellow stone, but the remainder of the wall in grey, except for a few courses of brown stone at the wall-head; the parapet of chamfered blocks steps down slightly on the line of the east wall of the porch, in line with an apparent straight joint in the upper courses of the wall. In the wall below are two acutely-pointed lancet windows with chamfered surrounds, their dressings of horizontally-tooled ashlar suggesting an early to mid-19th century date. The head of each is formed in a very distinctive manner, formed from five blocks with radial joints, but a square extrados. There is some disturbance in the masonry around them but nothing to give any clear indication of the form of earlier windows. East of these is a large stepped buttress (round which the plinth is continued) and then another 19th-century window of two trefoiled lights with a quatrefoil over, under a moulded hood with block terminals double chamfered jambs, all in parallel-tooled ashlar.

At the south-east angle of the aisle is a contemporary stepped diagonal buttress; the chamfered plinth is continued around the buttress and along the east wall of the aisle. The east window of the aisle (right) is a remarkable one. Whilst its jambs, sill and mullions are all of 19th-century parallel-tooled ashlar, its head is a remarkable monolithic one of five narrow trefoiled lights with geometrical tracery above, comprising a big central circle with eight petals around an open roundel, above a pair of smaller circles with quatrefoils, flanking a smaller spheric triangle, all enclosed by a two-centred arch with a hollow-chamfered surround.



The **South Porch** is interesting and unusual from the structural point of view. Its northern part, projecting c 0.40 m from the aisle, is in fact the gable end of an earlier porch pre-dating the present south aisle. This porch had diagonal buttresses, the lower

parts of which remain as projections in the angles between the present porch and aisle walls; on the east a fragment of the top of the buttress survives as well. Its gable is capped with slabs, and rises to the full height of the aisle wall, whilst the ridge of the stone slab roof of the present porch is set somewhat lower.

The side walls of the present porch are built of large and well-squared blocks, but the gable end is a more ramshackle affair, with a badly-formed archway of rough two-centred form that has a continuous hollow chamfer and a moulded hood that seems to be made up of re-used pieces. On either side are two low and irregular buttresses; above the western is a clear line in the external wall face following the curve of the internal vault; the appearance given is that the porch has in fact been truncated, and the present buttresses formed from the stubs of the removed sections of its side walls. The outer gable is capped by a stone-block sundial, set obliquely, which looks of late 18th or early 19th century character.

The west wall of the **North Aisle** has a chamfered plinth emerging as the ground surface drops, and continued part way along the low raking buttress that projects to the north at the outer angle of the aisle to this part. There has been a window in the wall, the south jamb and part of the square head of which remain, showing an external rebate; the remainder of the opening has been destroyed by patching or re-facing.

The north wall of the aisle falls into three parts; a western section in which medieval masonry survives, a central part rebuilt at the beginning of the 20th century to replace an early-19th century extension, the eastern third of which survives as a quasi-transept (now the kitchen/toilet).

The western part is built of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, without any plinth. It has a narrow 19th-century lancet window identical to those in the south aisle, and then a fairly slender stepped buttress that seems of some age, before a second more substantial stepped buttress; this is built in the centre of the blocked north door, the western jamb and springing of the head of which are visible on its west side; the door arch seems to have been of flat four-centred form, suggesting a late medieval date. East of the buttress another 19th century window – this time a lancet enclosing a trefoiled light with a trefoil above – has destroyed the west end of the door head, but the jamb is just traceable below. Immediately to the east is a ragged joint with the rebuilt wall beyond. The western section of this wall, as far as the larger buttress, has a square band at the base of the parapet, which has a square-edged coping. East of the buttress there is a short section that has a second similar band c 0.20 m below the first, then at the break both bands return into the wall face. The central rebuilt section of wall is of roughly-coursed stone with a rough pecked tooling, and has three windows, each of two cinquefoil-headed lights with an open quatrefoil in the spandrel, within a chamfered frame and under a casement-moulded hood with turned-back ends. This section has a square band at the base of the parapet, which is constructed of well-squared blocks.

The early 19th-century quasi-transept has east and north walls of close-jointed bluish sandstone and a later west wall of smaller blocks, in a variety of colours. It has a chamfered plinth, and the north wall is topped by a shallow-pitched gable with a low-pitched coping. On the north are a pair of windows with segmental-pointed heads and

double-chamfered surrounds, containing later Y-tracery with a quatrefoil in the spandrel between the two lights; there is a small lancet vent in the gable above.

The south wall of the **Chancel** is of roughly-coursed and roughly squared stone with heavy ribbon pointing; there is no plinth. Close to the west end of the wall is a chamfered lancet window; its head and sill are in 19th-century ashlar but the jambs look older. Then comes a priest's door, all in 19th-century ashlar. It has a two-centred arch of two chamfered orders the inner continued down to the ground, the outer carried on attached shafts with moulded caps and bases; there is a hoodmould chamfered below and rounded above, with block stops. Directly above is a rectangular tablet inscribed:

ALEX^R DAVISON ESQ^R
IMPROPRIATOR
REPAIRED THIS CHANCEL
1823

Wilson (1870, 145) shows what he describes as a 'square cottage door' here, which may have been coeval with the tablet.

Further east are two more lancet windows, the first with a 19th-century sill, but which otherwise look fairly convincingly ancient. Below and slightly to the east of the first of these is what looks at first glance like the head of a blocked doorway with a pointed arch, but on closer inspection the 'arch' is a natural stratigraphic line within a single block of sandstone¹.

At the south-east corner of the chancel is a massive clasping buttress that is clearly ancient, of irregular trapezoidal plan; its upper parts have various set-backs, shaping it in effect into a pair of buttresses. The east wall of the chancel, and the pair of stepped buttresses at its north-east corner, was largely rebuilt in 1884 except perhaps for the steeply-chamfered plinth(a second lower off-set appearing with the falling ground at the north end of the wall) and the masonry up to c 2 m, where there is a thinner course which would seem to mark the top of either medieval or possibly re-used fabric. In the 19th-century fabric above there is a moulded string, with an integral panel below it inscribed:

EMERSON MUSCHAMP BAINBRIDGE
OF F(ELTON HALL)
1884

Above is a stepped triplet of lancet windows; the central one has a moulded hood which is returned as a horizontal string to link to the gable coping, which is chamfered on its lower angle; the gable has a ring cross finial.

The north wall of the chancel is of roughly-coursed and roughly-shaped stone (many blocks showing a crude diagonal tooling) but seems featureless. Projecting from the

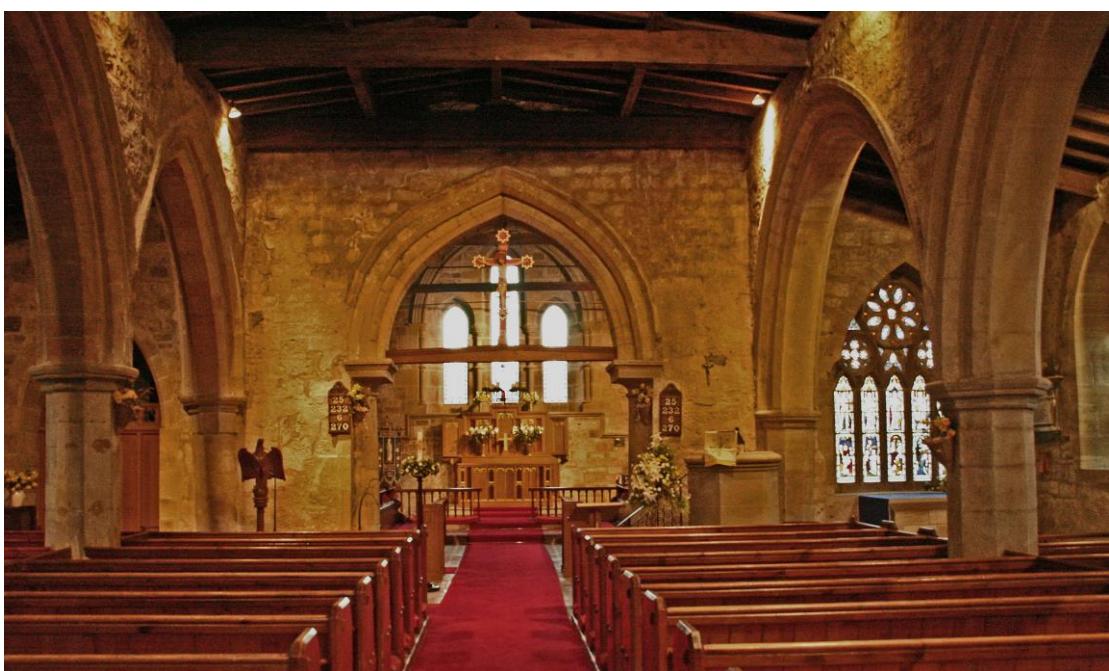
¹ This seems to have misled some of the earlier writers; Wilson's drawing of the church from the south-east shows this as a blocked doorway, and a blocked arched doorway here is mentioned in Tomlinson's **Guide to Northumberland**.

west end of the wall is the 19th-century **Organ Chamber**, built of roughly-shaped stone with ashlar quoins,. It has a window on the north with an odd shouldered head, and a hipped slate roof; on the east, in the angle between it and the chancel wall, is a small outbuilding with a square-headed door on the north and a series of vents at the top of the north wall, formed by the gaps between a series of block of timber.

The Interior

There are two steps down into the **South Porch** within which the floor slopes down towards the south door; ion either side are irregular old stone benches with their top slabs chamfered on their lower angle; at the head of the side walls is a set-back, below the vault of large irregular slabs which is carried on two chamfered ribs. The inner doorway is quite acutely two-centred and of two orders, with narrow chamfers that may have been cut later; the inner chamfer is continuous and the outer ends on broach stops c 0.30 m above the floor; there is a simple moulded hood with stops, the r. badly worn, the l. in the form of a crude human head.

In the interior of the nave and aisles, the internal wall faces have remains of plaster and the fabric is not always clearly discernible.



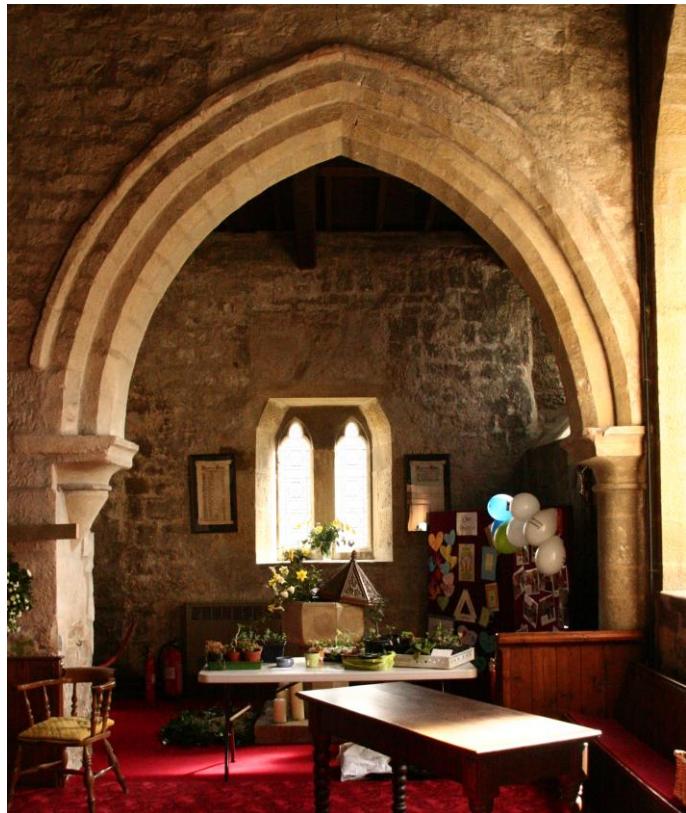
Interior looking East

In the centre of the west wall of the nave is a doorway to the belfry stair; this has a small two-centred arch with a continuous chamfer, in parallel-tooled ashlar that is all of 19th-century date. The large windows on either side are of 1870²; their internal surrounds are of squared blocks with distinctive chiselled finish. There is a slight set-back at a level c 0.6 m below the tops of the arches of the two windows.

The small doorway opens on a newel stair, lit by two loops in its west wall. There is no sign of any earlier doorway into the foot of the stair, suggesting that the present one must have replaced an even smaller opening. The side walls of the stair are of

² In the head tracery of the southern are the initials ‘TI’ and the northern the date ‘1870’.

bluish sandstone with a distinctive diagonal tooling (very much of 12th century character) up to c 3 m, whereupon there is a clear change to less regular stone. The stair rises to a shoulder-arched doorway, the lower part of which is now boarded over, below a hatch allowing rather awkward egress onto the nave roof. The stair appears to have continued upwards, with an upper section now filled in³.



The south arcade of the nave is of four irregular bays, with a short length of wall on either side of the second arch from the west. The westernmost arch (left) is a two-centred one of two chamfered orders with a chamfered hood towards nave that ends well above the imposts. The semicircular western respond has a moulded ‘holdwater’ base and a simple moulded capital round at the neck square at abacus, and a grooved and chamfered impost. The eastern has a similar capital but is carried by a conical corbel sprung from square block of walling, which in the south face (towards the aisle) has an offset of c 0.20 m at c 1.5 m above the floor. The individual voussoirs all seem

to have too sharp a curve for the present form of the arch, suggesting that they have been re-used from a smaller opening.

The second arch is in fact the earlier south door. The tall round-headed opening towards the nave is thus the original rear arch; towards the aisle is a lower two-centred chamfered opening (with a broach stop on the east) carried on renewed jamb shafts with simple capitals and bases that both seem to have been renewed, with a hoodmould chamfered below and rounded above that links to the chamfered and grooved imposts; the roughly-chamfered inner jambs show that an inner order has been cut away to enlarge the opening. On this side the arch is set in a raised gabled panel of walling, in effect a cross-section of the earlier porch; the very short length of wall immediately to the east of the arch, before the wall face is cut back again, has a fragment of chamfered plinth. On the north face of the wall, immediately to the east of the opening there is a small arched recess for what was presumably a stoup, now with a 19th-century ashlar sill. The shallow two-centred arch, which has a raised border with leaf-like decoration on its extrados and a triple leaf at the apex., is all cut in a single block of sandstone.

³ Although this is sometimes just a device used to ensure structural stability and does not necessarily prove that the stair ever extended to a higher level.

On the internal face of the nave wall the outline of a narrow blocked opening, apparently square-headed, is visible directly above the arch, and a little further east the less distinct outline of a larger opening. On the opposite (aisle) side of the wall there is no sign of the opening directly above the arch, but that to the east is more clearly visible; it has a depressed semicircular head, but seems too large to be an early window; the position of its sill is not clear.

Nave wall above and to east of south door faint outline of blocked opening with depressed semicircular head, quite heavily plastered. Head c 0.3 m below top of wall; sill not clear. On opposite (internal) face even less clear, looks wider. On this side there seems a narrow opening directly above south door, probably square headed. Not seen on south face.

The two eastern arches of the arcade are broad and of segmental-pointed form, each being of two chamfered orders under a hood (towards the nave) chamfered on its lower angle. The octagonal pier and semi-octagonal responds octagonal have simple moulded capitals; their bases are below the present floor. On the south side of the eastern respond is a chamfered offset 1.5 m above floor, the same level as that between the first and second bays. The wall above these arches is of well-coursed squared stone and seems contemporary with them.

The north arcade, by contrast, is of five regular two-centred arches, each of two chamfered orders, with a hood chamfered on its lower angle and octagonal piers with moulded capitals and their bases below the floor. The lower part of the eastern respond – a semicircular shaft rising from a rectangular base with a damaged chamfered offset – seems older; at its head is a single semi-octagonal block and a moulded capital like those of the arcade. The western respond is semi-octagonal with a moulded capital; all the capitals look as if they may have been re-cut or re-tooled. The fabric of the wall above the arches is difficult to inspect closely, through the remains of plaster; it seems possible that the arcade was inserted into an earlier wall.

The nave roof is of eight bays with heavy straight tie-beam that have narrow chamfers on their lower angles; the heavy square-set ridge is carried on a big rectangular king block with concave curves to its upper corners, and the single large purlin on each roof slope simply rests directly on the tie.

In the **South Aisle** the west end clearly shows the outline of earlier buttress incorporated in it, with a chamfered offset quite high up; the west window has an internal lintel formed by a big tapering slab, with a stepped or moulded edge that projects from the wall-face; is this a re-used medieval grave slab?. Lower in the wall there has been some recent patching in new stone.

At the west end of the south wall, the internal dressings of the two-light window are probably of c1870 as they show a chiselled finish very similar to that of the two windows in the west wall of the nave. The rear arch of the window is of a quasi-shouldered form, the upper block of each jamb inclining inwards. Above is a blocked square-headed opening, continuing the line of the main sections of the jambs of the lower window: one stone of the infill bearing the incised date ‘1870’ incised. The rear arch of the present south door is a tall two-centred one formed by the southernmost rib of the vault of the earlier porch, which springs from simple imposts;

in the fabric on either side of it the first porch is effectively seen in cross-section. Immediately to the east of the rear arch is a crude cut-out c 0.6 m high and 0.5 m wide and 0.1 m deep at the foot of the wall, possibly caused by the cutting-away of a stoup. Then come the two lancets and, two-light window, all of 19th century date, which have rear arches in diagonally-tooled ashlar. The east window of the aisle has shouldered rear arch, but only the head is old.

The roof of the aisle is of ten bays, with simple heavy square-section principals that have mortices for butt purlins; the present single purlin rests on top of the principals.

The western part of the **North Aisle** has a late-20th century timber vestry built within it, within which the walls are plastered and ceiling underdrawn. Above the top of this the earlier walls retain a lot of plaster. The south internal jamb of the former west window of the aisle can be made out, with above it two irregular projecting blocks immediately below the roof. The westernmost window in the north wall has 19th-century tooled ashlar in its west jamb and head, but older stonework in its internal east jamb. Nothing is visible internally of the blocked north door. Beyond the vestry, the second single-light window has old stonework in its west jamb, although the remainder of its internal surround is clearly of 19th-century date; the remainder of the wall is all a rebuild of 1902. The three two-light windows in this section have segmental-pointed rear arches with chamfers only to their heads, and beyond them is a doorway to the kitchen/toilet that has an acute two-centred arch with a continuous chamfer.

The walls of the kitchen/toilet, set two steps below the level of the aisle floor, are plastered and the ceiling underdrawn. There are various modern partitions and fittings; the only older feature is the rear arch of the doorway at the north end of the east wall, which has a segmental-pointed rear arch with a chamfer only to its head, and splayed jambs, all in exposed ashlar of 1902.

At the east end of the aisle there is a steeply-pointed arch into the organ chamber, with square jambs and a chamfered head; this again is of 1902.

The north aisle roof is of eight bays, but otherwise very similar to that of the south.

The arch into the **Chancel** is of segmental-pointed form, now somewhat distorted, and is of two chamfered orders with a damaged hood, chamfered on lower angle, only towards the nave, now retaining a fragment of a terminal c 0.3 m above the south respond but broken away at a higher level on the north. The responds are semicircular shafts with bases that have bold mouldings of 'holdwater' type; the capitals, which may have been re-cut, have grooved and hollow-chamfered square abaci but are round at the neck, with a ring below. Towards the chancel there is evidence of patches of disturbed or replaced fabric adjacent to both jambs of the arch; this seems more likely to relate to patching or repair rather than being a survival of a wall face pre-dating the present chancel; the remainder of the wall is of good squared masonry, with a horizontal set-back just above the crown of the arch, and above that the clear line of the two lower-pitched roofs that preceded the present Victorian one.



The chancel looking west; Note patched masonry in jambs of arch, and evidence of two earlier roof-lines

The fabric of the internal faces of the chancel walls is much more clearly exposed than in the nave and aisles, and is of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, apart from the east wall which is of snecked 19th-century masonry. On the south the priest's door has alternating-block jambs of tooled-and-margined ashlar and a segmental-pointed arch with a roll mould to its head, all in typical late-19th century stone. The three lancet windows have shouldered semicircular rear arches, and only their sills are of 19th century date. There is no indication of any of the ritual arrangements – piscinae, aumbries or sedilia – which one would normally expect in a medieval chancel. The north wall is quite featureless except for an arch at its west end opening into the organ chamber; this is of 1902, and has square jambs and a chamfered two-centred arch now hidden by the organ pipes.

Much of the lower part of the east wall is concealed by fittings, but as on the exterior there seems to be earlier fabric in the lower wall. Above this a moulded string course steps up behind the altar to form the sill of the east window, which internally has its triplet of lancets given shafted jambs with moulded capitals, mid-height rings and bases and enclosed within a larger four-centred moulded arch.

The late-19th century chancel roof is of three bays and of crown-post form with scissor bracing ashlarling to the eaves and a moulded wall plate

Structural History

Felton church presents, as Pevsner puts it, ‘a happy puzzle for the antiquarian and an impressive, if a little incongruous, sight for the layman’; this is one of the most interesting examples of the development of a medieval church in the county, with some unusual features, notably the manner in which elements of an earlier porch were integrated into the structure of an added aisle.

I The Original Church, c.1200

Phase I appears to be a broad aisleless nave with a small tower set centrally on the west gable, probably a north-eastern chapel or transept, and perhaps a chancel of the present dimensions. Assuming that the south door (which remarkably survives *in situ* as part of the south arcade), chancel arch and north-east chapel arch are contemporary with this structure, then the date would be c.1200. The south doorway seems now to be set in a raised panel of walling; the survival of a fragment of plinth to the east suggests that the thinner section of wall to either side has been either cut back or rebuilt. The nave had big buttresses at its western angles, a pair at the south-west corner and an irregular clasping buttress (rather like that at the south-east corner of the chancel) at the north-west. The chancel has lancet windows which are stylistically of c1200, but there is a possibility that these could have been reset in rebuilt walls (see discussion of 19th-century changes, below); it is also somewhat unusual for a chancel to be as wide as a nave, and hints at the possibility that, if the chancel is indeed of c1200, than the nave may stand on still-earlier foundations.

II The First South Porch

Phase II would seem to be the addition of the first south porch (secondary as its west wall, now removed, must have simply butted up against the surviving good-quality masonry of the nave south wall); its diagonal buttresses (the bases of which survive, projecting into the angles between the external walls of the present porch and aisle) would seem to imply a 14th-century date. It was rib-vaulted; its double-chamfered outer arch now forms the inner doorway of the present porch, and one rib of the adjacent vault survives.

III The Addition of Aisles

Phase III must be the addition of the north aisle, replacing the old chapel, and the western bay of the south aisle. The old arch to the north-eastern chapel (or most of it) was re-used in the western bay of the south aisle, added to the west of the porch. It was probably widened; its voussoirs have too sharp a curve for their present position. The lower part of the semicircular eastern respond of the said chapel arch remained *in situ*, heightened by an incongruous semi-octagonal upper section to form the respond for the new aisle arcade.

In the western bay of the south aisle there is a clear contrast between the yellow sandstone (re-used from the nave walls?) in the lower parts of the walls and the grey above.

IV The Eastern Part of the South Aisle

The next extension would seem to be the eastern two bays of the south aisle. This is perhaps of 1331, when Roger Mauduit founded a chantry; the east window of the aisle with its remarkable megalithic Geometrical tracery, would tally with this^{4*}). The new arcade has broad four-centred arches, although these seem to show the same phenomenon of over-curved voussoirs and may have been reconstructed. When? In this section of the aisle there is a single course of the yellow sandstone, just above the plinth.

V The Present South Porch

The construction of the present south porch could have occurred at the same time as IV, but probably did not; the argument for this would be that, if the side walls of the first porch had been removed when the eastern section of the aisle was built, it would have seemed logical to extend the new arcade to run its full length. So for a while there must have been three separate divisions, the chantry chapel to the east, the original porch, and the separate chamber (baptistery?) west of the porch. Also, the porch is very badly laid out and built, much poorer workmanship than the Phase III and IV parts.

VI Later Medieval and Post-Medieval Changes

There are several pieces of work that must be classed as late medieval or post-medieval, and it is difficult to date them more specifically. The blocked north door, now nearly hidden by added buttresses; it seems to have had a low-pitched head, perhaps of four-centred form, suggesting a 15th or 16th century date. In the west wall of the aisle are remains of a window, set quite high, with what looks like an external rebate on the surviving south jamb. Another late piece may be the rebuilding of the south wall of the south porch (so badly built that rebuilding is hardly a surprise), which is a very rustic piece of work; the porch might have been shortened, as the buttresses on either side of the crude outer archway have the appearance of being ragged wall-stubs.

The chancel arch itself may have been reconstructed in the 15th or 16th century - this is suggested by its rather off four-centred shape. The actual voussoirs of the arch, and its section of two chamfered orders, is very close to that of every other arch in the church, probably simply reflecting that these are 'standard elements' in use over a long period, but the arch shape reminds one of the 12th-century chancel arch at Bedlington, reconstructed from a presumably semicircular to a four-centred form.

There are also a number of buttresses. The massive clasping one at the south-east angle of the chancel was presumably built in response to structural movements, and has a medieval feel to it; that built in front of the north door must be of the 16th or 17th century.

⁴ although there is a tradition that this was brought from Brinkburn Priory. Only the head is ancient; everything below is apparently restoration of 1870

One major change was the lowering of the roofs. Presumably the original nave roof was of around 45° pitch. When this was lowered (in the 17th or early 18th century?), the original tower was cut down and its top replaced by the present bell-cote (The newel stair certainly seems to have continued higher, and in the internal face of the west all there is a doorway bisected by the present roof-line). There has been more than one change in level of the chancel roof (see the evidence visible inside on the west wall), before it was returned to its present pitch, presumably in 1870..

VII The 18th century

In 1759 Thomas Heron of East Thirston gave money for a gallery; it was presumably at the west end, and the slight set-back there almost certainly marks its floor-line. The blocked opening above and to the east of the original south doorway may be associated with this gallery. It is thought that the eastern section of the north aisle was rebuilt, rather wider, at around this time, perhaps destroying evidence of the original north-east chapel (although a section of its east wall may still survive).

A 1777 plan of the church⁵ shows the western bay of the south aisle as walled off and termed ‘dead house’; it also shows that there was no vestry at this time.

VIII The 19th Century: Repair and Restoration.

In 1823 the chancel was ‘repaired’ by Alexander Davidson (inscribed slab above priest’s door). What did this involve? The wall fabric is considerably less regular than that of the nave, which might suggest a complete rebuilding, except for the huge buttress at the south-east corner that must be earlier. There is nothing about it to suggest 19th century work – but then again, there is no sign of the ritual arrangements – piscinae, sedilia etc – that one might expect with a medieval chancel. Are the three lancets on the south re-set? ; it is difficult to see their trefoiled rear arches as early-19th century work. A print of the chancel as Davidson left it is reproduced by Wilson (Churches of the Archdeaconry of Lindisfarne) ; this shows a plain square-headed priest’s door, and what looks to be an early-19th century sash (with intersecting Gothic glazing bars) in the east wall.

So has the chancel been rebuilt? Documentary evidence only confuses the picture further. Sir Stephen Glynne, writing in 1846⁶ describes the southern lancets and their rear arches, and adds ‘those on the N. of the chancel are closed’; today the fabric of the north wall is fully exposed, but there is no trace of any blocked window. The Coquetdale Almanac of 1880⁷ confuses things further by stating that ‘the chancel itself is a modern and incongruous addition to the church’. It goes on to refer to the present chancel as being about six feet narrower than the original (in fact it is virtually the same width as the nave), and that ‘in the older building the south front of the chancel had run in line with that of the church itself, as graves dug upon that line go into the old foundations’.

⁵ NRO 1255-1-38 1777 church plan, available on website
http://communities.northumberland.gov.uk/Felton_C15.htm

⁶ Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, Third series III (1907-8) 264
⁷ In the 1990s there was a copy displayed in the church

But for these references, one would be happy to accept the fabric of the chancel side walls (and the lower courses of the east end) as genuine early 13th century work. Familiarity with his other church accounts shows that Glynne quite often made mistakes - but then the Coquetdale Almanac must be complete fantasy. The phased plan prepared for this assessment shows the chancel fabric as of c1200, but an element of doubt must remain.

The eastern part of the north aisle was probably extended in the 1840s⁸ and the former vestry (now organ chamber) may be an addition of the same period. Other mid-19th-century changes must be the odd lancet windows in both nave aisles, with the dressings around their heads having radial joints within a square extrados.

There was a general ‘restoration’ in 1870, when the present pair of west windows were inserted after the gallery was removed. The east end was rebuilt in 1883, by Emerson Muschamp Bainbridge (inscribed tablet), with three 13th-century style lancets replacing the earlier sash.. All the wall (except perhaps for the plinth) and the paired buttresses at the north-east angle are of this date.

IX The 1902 Restoration

A further restoration came in 1902 , when Kelly’s 1910 Directory states that ‘the church was restored ...at a cost of £1000 when the nave roof was renewed and the north wall rebuilt on the original foundation, besides several internal improvements’. The reference to the rebuilding of the north wall relates to the removal of the western part of the 1840s extension, and the partitioning off of the surviving part to become a vestry (now the kitchen/toilet); this was ‘improved’ by the insertion of simple tracery in its windows. At the same time it would appear that the old vestry was converted into an organ chamber, with large arches being created in the east end of the north aisle and north wall of the chancel.

Archaeological Assessment

As has hopefully been made clear, this is a church of considerable interest and is some archaeological importance. The complexity of its structural history means that evidence of earlier building phases almost certainly survives beneath the present floors, although as usual sub-surface deposits and structural remains will have been disturbed by the usual centuries of burial, and also the creation of an under-floor heating system, as shown by a series of gratings; there is an underground boiler chamber outside the west end of the south aisle.

The present nave floor has areas of concrete wooden, and boarded platforms beneath the pews; there is an extensive carpeted area at the west end.

⁸ Glynne in 1846 mentions ‘the north aisle has been widened’ but the 1847 Tithe Map (website http://communities.northumberland.gov.uk/Felton_C15.htm) does not seem to show the extension, which does appear on the c1860 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25”:1 mile map. A Davison print of 1823 shows neither extension nor vestry.

Any works that entail disturbance of underfloor deposits will require at the least archaeological monitoring; this also goes for works in the churchyard. It should be borne in mind that, especially in the immediate vicinity of a church building around which accumulated ground levels may have been reduced (to reduce damp problems), articulated burials may be encountered at relatively shallow depth.

Whilst the church does not have extensive remains of old plaster, the internal wall faces of nave and aisles are not completely clear; if these surfaces become the subject of any works, a detailed inspection will be necessary to ascertain whether remains of early plaster or pigment survive.

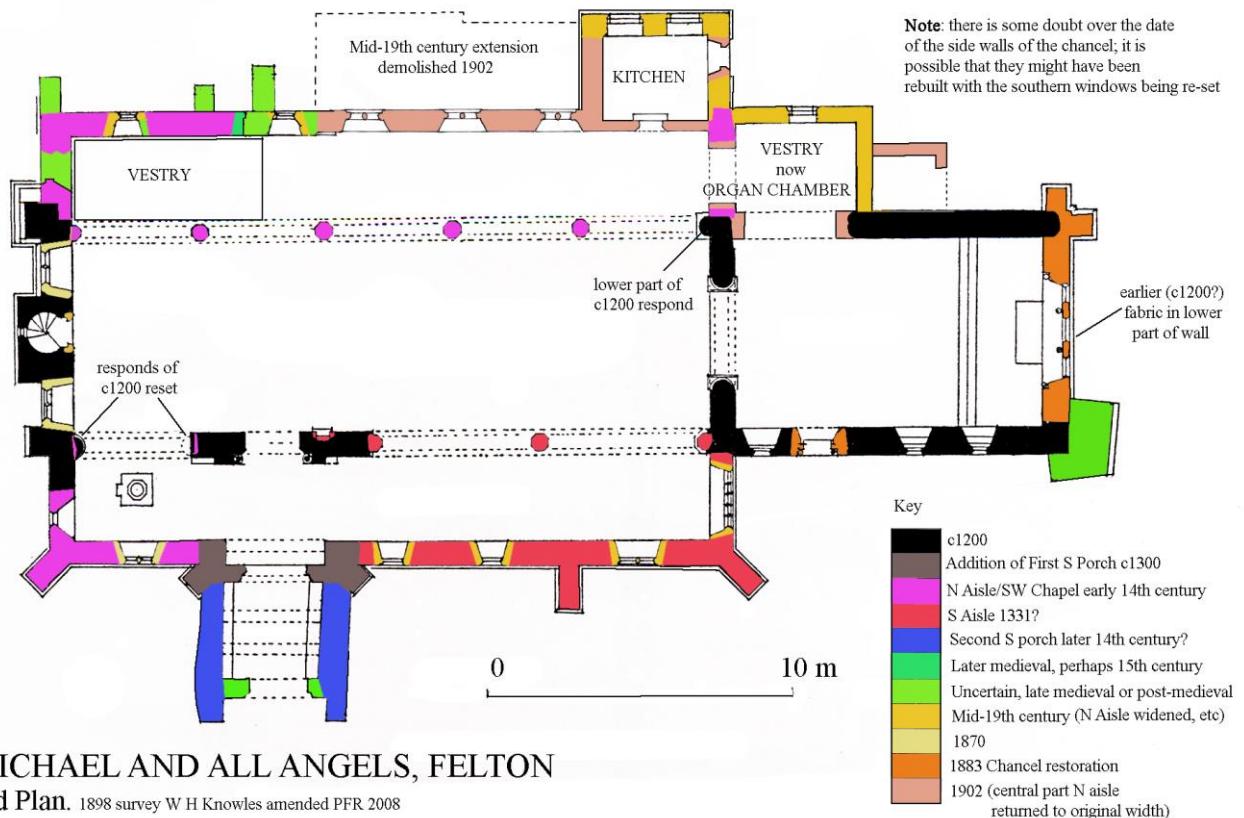
Peter F Ryder April 2008

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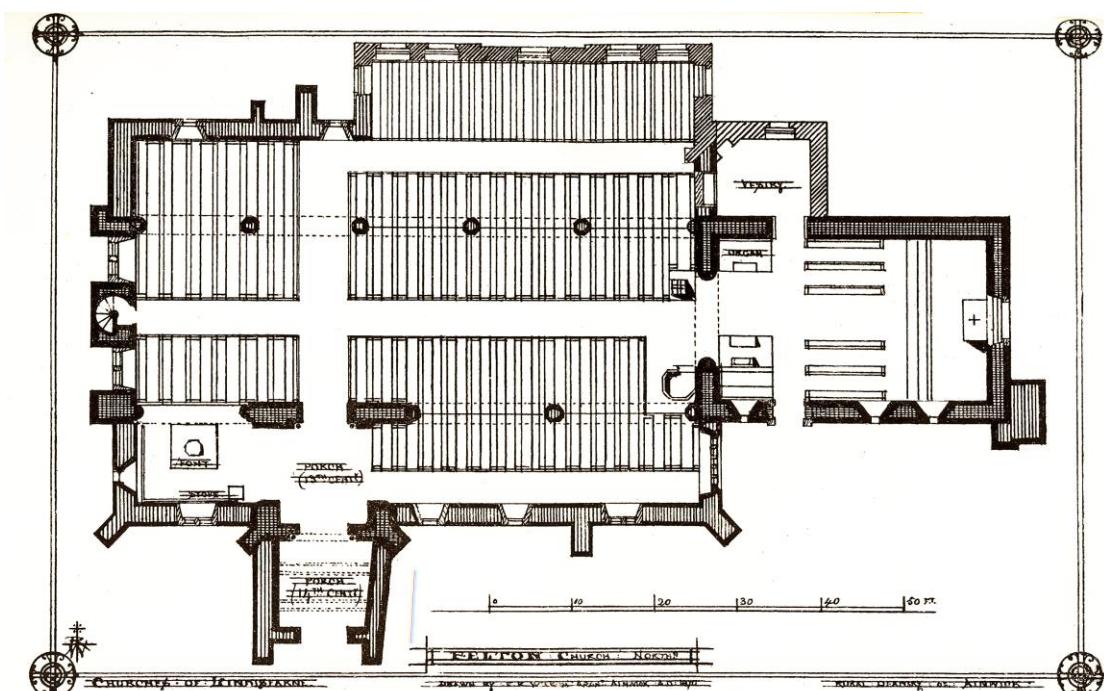


The east side of the south porch, showing the gabled Front of the phase II porch behind its phase V successor. In the angle between porch and aisle wall is the base of the diagonal south-eastern buttress of the phase II porch. On the right is a mid-19th century lancet window in the phase IV aisle wall.



ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS, FELTON

Phased Plan. 1898 survey W H Knowles amended PFR 2008



Plan after Wilson (1870) showing chancel before 1883 alterations, and also the mid-19th century extension of north aisle before partial removal in 1902 restoration.