

NAHS North Tyne Steeplechase

St John Lee

31st August 2024 Please read with visit notes previously provided by Christopher Downs and Hugh Dixon



Church of St John of Beverley, St John Lee

We met in the car park at St John Lee. A tranquil setting. Hugh Dixon (HD) gave an introduction to the church, ref. visit notes pp1-2 and then quoted from Bede, who had observed that St John: “Whenever opportunity offered, and especially during Lent, this man of God used to retire with a few companions to read and pray quietly in an isolated house surrounded by open woodland and a dyke. It stood about a mile and a half from the church of Hexham, across the River Tyne.” It is fortunate to have such good Anglo-Saxon sources, as compared to later, mediaeval times. (HD)



St John Lee interior, L-R: Revd. Oliver Dempsey, Hugh, Diane, Stuart, Les, Susan, Stuart and Sue. A fine example of a medieval church which has undergone many alterations: An ancient Christian site; a 7C Hermitage followed by a medieval church until 1818, when John Dobson removed the ancient fabric and created a ‘preaching box’ with a west tower. This reflected the pattern of worship introduced after the Reformation. The pulpit/lectern became central for preaching from the Bible. But, Queen Victoria preferred to highlight processions and taking communion. This led to significant architectural change. Enter the Gothic revival. Cometh the hour, cometh the man: in 1885-6 William Searle Hicks, sensitively remodelled the interior, adding the chancel and returning the rood screen. The pulpit was moved back to one side, providing a clear view of the altar.



Crucifixion dated 1983-4, by Leonard C Evetts, mounted on Rood Screen. The Rood Screen was reintroduced as part of the work by William Searle Hicks in 1885/6. This divided the nave from the chancel/choir stalls.

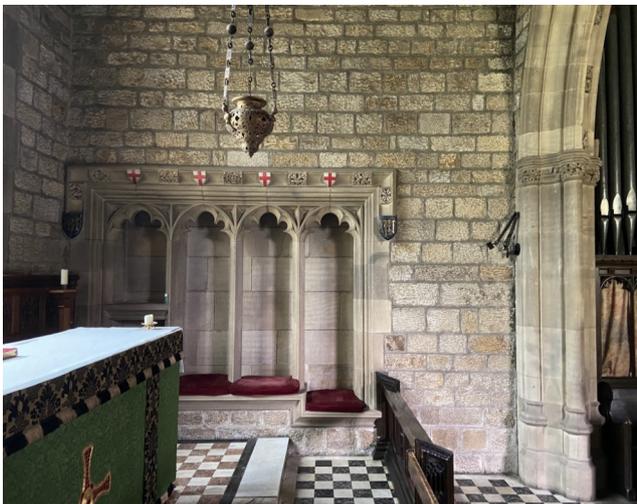
Overleaf, there are images of Frosterley marble. Paul Frodsham, Archaeological Consultant, from Frosterley, lectured to the NAHS 14 March 2023 (unrecorded), [website flyer]. It is only quarried near Frosterley, Weardale. Comprising black limestone, it contains fossil corals, formed c325 million years ago, in the Carboniferous era. The ornate stone was much sought after, especially in the Middle Ages. The marble appears in churches and buildings from Britain to Bombay and Brisbane. It was found on our steeple chase at St John Lee and, possibly, at Simonburn, p17.



*Frosterley Marble Font in **St Thomas's Church, Stanhope, nr Frosterley.***



St John Lee: Frosterley Marble in Sanctuary/chancel (photo Hugh Dixon)



St John-Lee Frosterley marble leading from chancel into Sanctuary (Photo: Hugh Dixon)

Image Right: Mediaeval Frosterley marble grave slab. SE wall of St John Lee's nave, with Lombardic script (Peter Ryder).
Photo: Hugh Dixon.





Memorial window L-R St Benedict; St John of Beverley and Venerable Bede. Bu Moore.

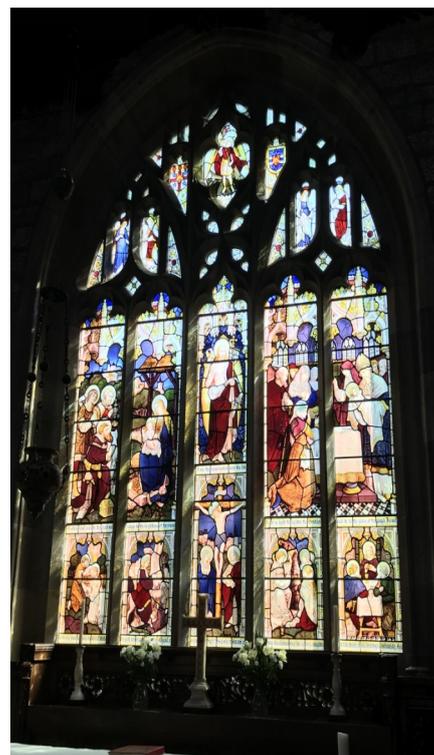


Memorial window by Chas E Moore. 194(3) signature bottom right



Late Gothic, Perpendicular Tracery Northumbrian Saints L-R: Saints Oswald, Oswin and Edwin. Lower centre panel: "St Aiden gives his horse to a beggar"

The windows are late 19th/early 20th century. Probably by artists recommended by William Searle Hicks. (p1 visit notes).



East Window

St John Lee cont...

This fine sculpture by Thomas Clapperton, RA FRBS (1876-1962), dated 1923, should really be more prominently displayed.



Inscription: Simon William Richmond Mewburn, of Acomb House. Last male. Born 9th September 1884. Gazetted 2nd Lieut 14th (King's) Hussars 3rd Nov 1903. Promoted Captain 6th August 1910. Killed in action 21st May 1916. A brave soldier a loyal friend and a loving son and brother”.



Magnificent craftsmanship (eg see buckles on saddle bags). Clapperton was from Galashiels and trained in the Mechanics Inst., in Glasgow. He then went to London. In 1904-5, he was in the Royal Academy Schools, where he was a student assistant to Sir Goscombe John.

Goscombe John designed 'The Response' an enormous Great War Memorial, at Newcastle Civic Centre.

St Giles, Chollerton



St Giles, Chollerton a picturesque church with Roman fabric

We met inside the **Hearse House and Stable**, to the left of the gate. A useful building with stone slate roof. We read interpretation boards and stood in the stalls where quadrupeds once rested. [On a prompt from Mr Gradgrind, Bitzer would give an accurate description of the latter. Dickens, *Hard Times*] Pevsner dates this to early 19th century, but suggests that the small lancets framing the nail-riddled door, could be reused medieval pieces. Rare to have accommodation for the horse as well as a hearse.

The exterior interpretation panel alludes to a church being on this site for over a thousand years. **St Giles** is on the Old Corn/Ale road, which was opened in 1753. Goods were transported from Hexham through Rothbury to Alnmouth, then shipped by sea for sale in London.

In the grave yard, John Saint, owner of Cocklaw Fulling Mill, has one of the finest Grade II Listed headstones. Commemorating his death in 1837, the top is beautifully carved with a mill and accoutrements.

The **church** is Grade I Listed and externally, dated mid-18th century. Pevsner dates the west tower pre-1769. As stated in the visit notes, p3, it probably started as a defensive structure, especially given its location.

St Giles cont...



Richard, Stuart and Christopher looking towards the east window.

Roman columns were incorporated into the four-bay 12th century south arcade (left). Pevsner suggests the columns came from nearby Chesters.

S



Coloured and stained glass fragments



Fragments, ? medieval

Stained glass in the nave. Possibly by William Wailes, who may have used medieval fragments to achieve the design. Similar style can be seen at the Farne Islands.

St Giles cont..

Stained glass windows in the Chancel. Possibly by William Wailes



Inscriptions dated 1822 (L) and 1814 (R)



East Window, Chancel. Author unknown, but possibly William Wailes.



Serpent latch: Arts-and-Crafts detail on door between nave and tower. (Notes p3) The serpent is still resident, but its mouth now sealed so that thumbs cannot enter. It might have served as a reminder to Clergy et al to mind their step! At St Giles, Vicars can be traced back to the 13th century. (Interpretation panel)

Church of St Peter, Humshaugh

“... Built in 1818 by the Governors of Greenwich Hospital, as part of the division of ‘the Great Parish’ of Simondburn (*sic*). Originally the parish extended as far as Carter Bar, covering over 260 square miles, being the largest in England” (visit notes p5). St Peter’s, designed by Henry Hake Seward was built as a Chapel of Ease, making it easier to attend church. Seward (1778-1848) was Clerk of Works to Greenwich. He trained under John Soane (visit notes p5).

St Peter’s is a later-Georgian church. It is interesting to see the ceiling coving carrying on into the east/west walls of the nave. There is no tower for campanologists, but two belcotte-turrets, the eastern one is blind. The very shallow chancel and large, aisleless nave, reflects the ‘Preaching Box’ design, introduced after the Reformation. The central block of box pews is another indicator of how the Bible would be prominent on a central pulpit or lectern. Indeed, it has “nothing of the popery character of 19th century Gothic!” (HD, pers. comm.)



West view of St Peter’s. L-R: Stuart, Richard and Hugh. Note the box pews. *Below:* Some no-nonsense heating pipes similar to those at Cragside, by Dinning & Cooke, Engineers, Newcastle upon Tyne, at west end of the church.



St Peters cont ...

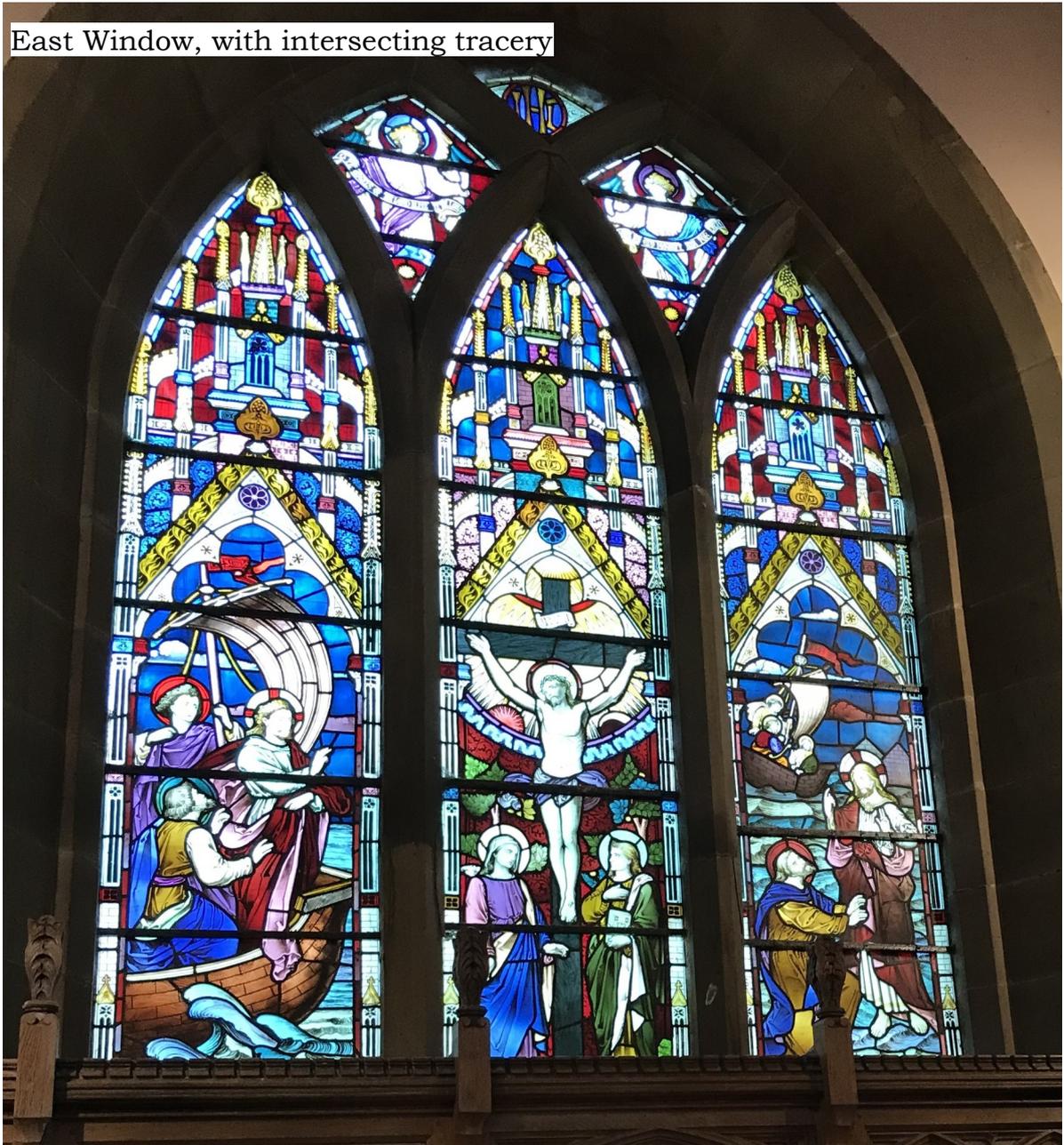


Y-tracery in South nave window.
Stained glass by Charles Eamer Kempe, 1901

Kempe's wheatsheaf signature, mid-left of photo.



East Window, with intersecting tracery



Brice Memorial Window, Royal Navy (RN). Colourways and quality would suggest this was also by Kempe. Inscriptions below dated 1873 and 1869. (see p14 re RN).



Village of Wark



Following a sunny, convivial picnic in St Peter's churchyard, we headed for Wark.

Wark was one of the first villages in the North East to have solar powered street lights. (April 2003, Northumberland Community web)

A neat village with 18th/19th century terraced cottages surrounding the green.



To the south of the village lies the Town Hall, formerly the Mechanics Institute. Similar to the Mechanics Institute in Glasgow, with sophisticated square quoins. The pilasters don't seem to support a great deal. But, scaled down, the ornate baroque clock above them would sit nicely on a mantle. The building is now used as a community centre.

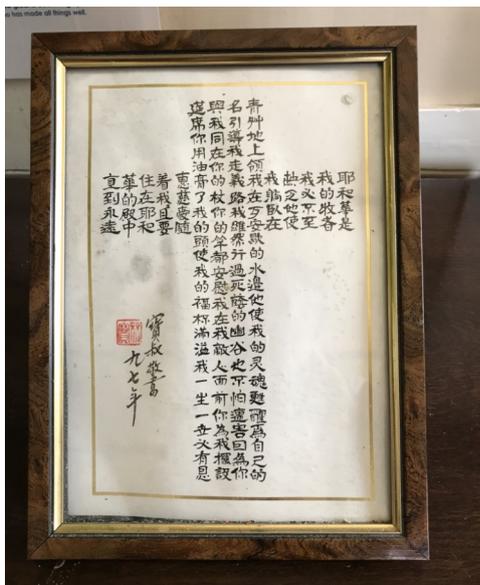
Church of St Michael, Wark (c. 1 Mile to N)

Again, built in 1818 by the Governors of Greenwich Hospital, and designed by Henry Seward. “Wark had been part of Simonburn parish, which belonged to Greenwich since the break-up of the Derwentwater estates after the 1715 Rebellion. They built Wark (and Greystead) Humshaugh and Thorneyburn) to provide livings for the navy (RN) chaplains” (Pevsner, Northumberland, p611) See also Brice memorial window above, re RN p12.

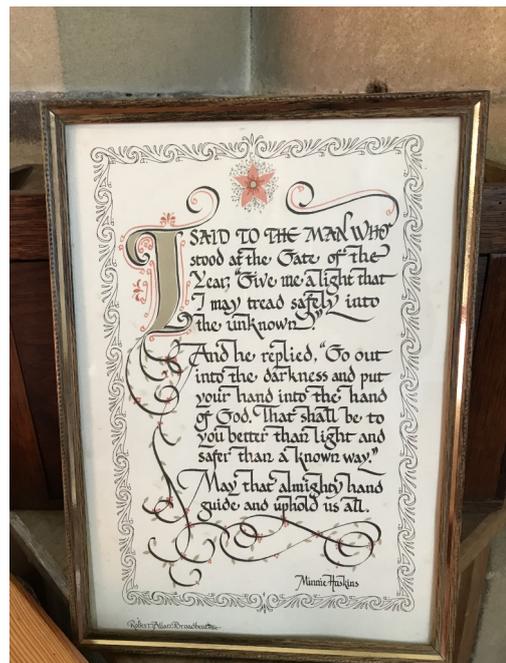
Similar to St Peter’s at Humshaugh (HD visit notes, p6). Another ‘preaching house’ but a slightly more upmarket restoration to St Peter’s, with the introduction of a central aisle and pews in the gothic revival style. It also has a modest tower, and the addition to two bell-cotes. However, here, both belfries are blind.



Below right: “The Gate of the Year” by Minnie Louise Haskins, signed Robert Allan Broadbent MBE.



The diminutive size of this cross was unexpected. It is a translation of Psalm 23, in Chinese master calligraphy (Visit notes p6)



Church of St Michael, Wark cont...



East Window, intersected tracery. The other windows have Y-tracery. One window by the pulpit is by Kempe and dated 1900. (Pevsner, p611)



Right: Neat, space-saving access to the tower via this stair-cum-ladder. Just visible on left of photo is the simple blue border, framing the lancet on the west wall. This reflects the design of windows in the nave.

Church of St Mungo, Simonburn

See introduction above for St Michael's, page 14, and the visit notes, p7: re 'The Great Parish'. St Mungo's was the mother church of the Great Parish, ie Simondburn Parish, and had possibly been a monastic site.



Simonburn village green. Surrounded by late 18th/early 19century cottages. St Mungo's church is to right of photo.



St Mungo's Church – definitely present by 13th Century, and of the same significant proportions. It was possibly a monastic building prior to that.



Hugh and James about to step into Robert Johnson's fine lychgate in 13C style. Above the entrance there is a memorial to Lancelot Allgood. This was Johnson's last addition, completed in 1885.



In the churchyard, Hugh drew our attention to the Old Rectory, dated 1725. The arc-headed windows and rusticated decoration suggest the influence of Wren/Vanburgh. Here the bays and edges are decorated, rather than the whole facade. The projecting quoins, jambs and voussoirs are limited to corners and openings.

St Mungo's Church, Simonburn, cont...



On entering the church, most of the fabric we saw [apart from the arcades of the 13th century] was rebuilt by Robert and William Newton (north and south aisles, 1763) and detailed on site by Dr Richard Pears; Anthony Salvin (chancel 1863-4) and Robert Johnson (west end, chancel arch and porch (1875-7)). (Ref visit notes p7)

Photo left, by Hugh Dixon, of chancel, which Anthony Salvin re-worked, 1863-4. The eye is drawn to the beautifully crafted stone 'carpet' of marble sections, which leads the congregation from the chancel to the sanctuary. This could include Frosterley pieces. (Frosterley ref p5 above). East window by Kempe, (Pevsner, p571)



Left: Eastern facing window in north aisle. Exquisite silver-stained roundels at base of lancets.

Right: The dragon, bottom right lancet, "having a bad day"! (visit notes p 6)



St Mungo's' church, Simonburn, cont...



Pevsner (p571) states that the East; and several aisle windows are by Kempe. Dated 1877, 1878 and 1904. This window, dedicated to John Hilton Ridley, could be one of them.



Left: Thrilling to see this memorial window. Not least because it bears a wheatsheaf signature, bottom left of lancet. On Kempe's death in 1907, the firm was left to his cousin, Walter Tower, and it became 'CE Kempe & Co Ltd'. Tower added a small tower/chess piece to the centre of the emblem used by Kempe. (Right)



After delicious cake and welcome hot drinks in the village garden tea rooms, we set out for Gunnerton.

Church of St Christopher, Gunnerton



St Christopher's looking east



Interior, looking west

This was a delightful surprise. St Christopher's is dated 1899 and was built by the curate at that time, Revd. J. C. Hawes. Pevsner (p293) states that Hawes, having converted to Roman Catholicism, built churches in Australia. His final resting place was on the island of Cat in the Bahamas. The highest point in the area is on Cat Island and known as Mount Alvernia. Wikipedia states that Hawes, then referred to as "Franciscan Brother Jerome", built a monastery on the island called The Hermitage, where he died.

The fine Arts and crafts carved panels, referred to on p8 of the visit notes, were formerly part of the West Gallery. Vincente Stienlet, who lead a restoration project in 2004-6, had the latter removed. But, thankfully, the carvings were incorporated in the new design. As part of the renovations, William Tillyer, painter and stained glass artist, created a large vibrant circular west window. The bold colours complement the carefully researched colour scheme inside the church.

The church is worthy of a much more detailed entry, time may permit this at a later date. Meanwhile, with the west gallery replaced by facilities, perhaps this is the answer to modern-day worship. Coffee and comfort can be achieved in a beautiful spiritual setting with minimum disruption. Well worth the visit.