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# St Edwin, High Coniscliffe Quinquennial Inspection Report

April 2024 - Rev. A after follow-up visit

# Executive Summary

The church and churchyard are well maintained and are generally in good condition.

The tower interiors and the West end of the Nave, and to a smaller degree the North Aisle, continue to suffer from moisture-related problems. In the 1990s, the tower was re-pointed externally and new structural supports were installed below the decayed timber joists. Whilst generally improved, the tower still suffers from dampness at times and the timber decay appears to be ongoing. The issue of failing paint finishes and plaster at the West End of the church was reported to have been recurring for several decades. It is likely that a combination of issues are at play and these should be explored to prevent further damage. Reducing the dampness within the West wall of the Nave would also further improve the conditions in the adjacent tower and the West end of the North Aisle.

A steeplejack should inspect the inaccessible tower stone corbels, parapets and the asphalt roof. If required, provisions should be made for reroofing the narrow flat asphalt roof to the tower within the next 5 years.

The oil-fired boiler is nearing the end of its life and it is recommended that the PCC start to investigate a more economical and sustainable heating system.

Recommendations for smaller repairs and ongoing observation have been made in this report. None of these require immediate action.

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# Scope of Inspection, Limitations & Context

**The inspection was instructed** by the PCC of Coniscliffe. The inspection was carried out on Thursday 15 February 2024. Following heavy rain overnight and in the morning, the day was overcast. At 12$^0$C, the day was considerably warmer than the preceding ones. The survey was undertaken by Maya Polenz ARB AABC in the presence of the PCC's Treasurer. A follow-up visit with the previous PCC Treasurer was undertaken on Thursday 18 April; weather conditions were cold but stable, with 7$^0$C inside and outside the church during the visit.

The survey was undertaken from ground level. The tower was inspected including a brief foray onto its E roof. The Nave and Chancel roof were seen from there but not accessed.

**A copy of the last QIR, dated 2015** by Lucy Steward RIBA RIAS AABC was seen. The church was inspected in 2020 by a different architect but no formal report was produced.

This report follows the general guidelines set out by the Care of Churches Measure 2018; it is not a specification and must not be used for the execution of the work.

# Description of the Church

*Contains OS Data © Ordnance Survey*

| | |
|---|---|
| Name: | High Coniscliffe St Edwin |
| Church Code: | 613225 |
| Diocese: | Durham |
| Archdeaconry: | Auckland |
| Parish: | Coniscliffe |
| Conservation Area: | High Coniscliffe |
| Listed Building : | Grade II*, List Entry Number 1115562 |
| Date: | Medieval |

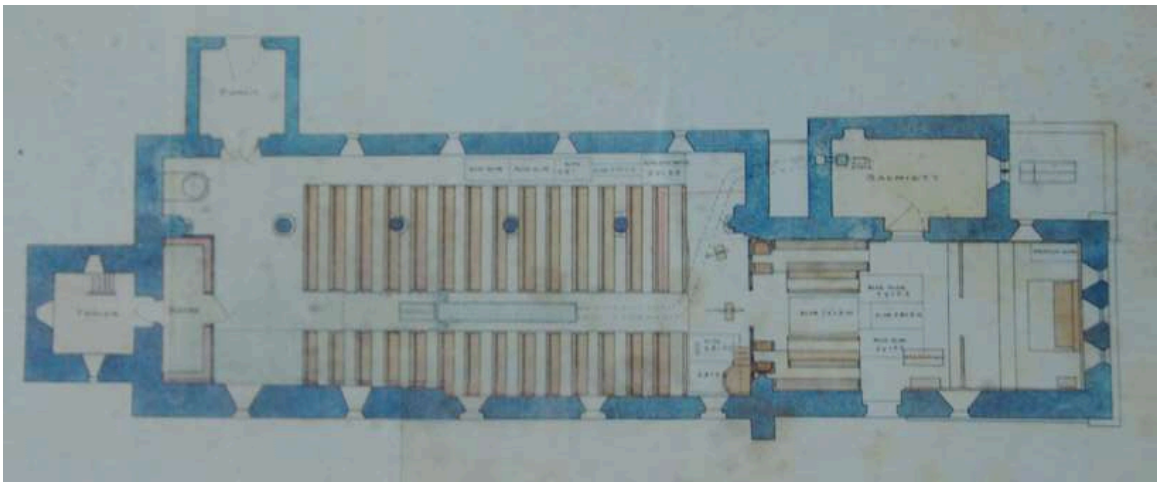
The building is oriented east-west, essentially.

Approached on the flat from the Village Green via a churchyard with many mature trees, the church actually sits high on a cliff above the river valley (S & W) and a former quarry (E).

Church with circa 1170 W end of nave and W part of S nave wall; early-mid C13 nave, chancel and tower; c14 tower parapet and spire; C15 vestry; c.1860 porch rebuilt in 1964. Much rebuilding and re-fenestration in 1844 and during later C19. Walls of coursed rubble with some rebuilt sections in snecked sandstone. Parapets conceal a low-pitched 1990s stainless steel roof

to Nave & Chancel. Porch roof in green slate. 4-stage tower with loops, 2-light pointed bell openings, embattled parapet on corbel table with corner pinnacles. Thin octagonal stone spire.

All interiors plastered. Nave & N Aisle: 5-bays, largely-rebuilt. Mid C19 openings except where stated. Aisle has 4 lancets and gabled porch at west. 4 restored square clerestory windows with trefoiled heads under hood moulds. 2-order round-arched door within porch (moved from south side c.1870) has beakhead and moulded capitals, shafts missing; carved relief of Agnus Dei above. South wall: narrow original window at W; 4 lancets to E; E section of wall breaks forward, possibly indicating an earlier aisle. N arcade of 5 pointed, double-chamfered arches on squat circular piers and keeled responds with moulded octagonal capitals and bases; hood mould with broach stops. Vestry furniture removed from W end of Nave. Kitchen added to W end of N Aisle. Organ added to E end of N Aisle.



*Church plan post 1870, a copy hangs in the Porch. Font & tower vestry since moved, kitchen & organ added.*

Chancel: original lancet on N wall; lancets and Priest's door on S; chamfered plinth, sill band and 3 stepped lancets on E end. Pointed chancel arch, with 2 chamfered and moulded orders and nailhead hood mould, on keeled responds with foliage capitals. Round-arched chamfered doorway to vestry with chamfered fireplace and aumbry.

Vestry: 2-storey; 2-light mullioned window and loop on E; projecting embattled parapet.

Tower: Shouldered doorway; mediaeval ladder stair. Grave slab used as lintel on third stage.

Fitting and monuments: C13 font - now located in 2nd bay of N arcade; aedicular wall monument to Sir Francis Bowes and family 1684 on N chancel wall; some C17 choir stalls with poppyheads and similar reading desk; 1973 S window by L.C. Evetts. Several C16 and C17 memorial floor slabs, one with brass.

Descriptions from *'Rev. J.F. Hodgson, "Coniscliffe Church", Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland, Volume I, 1868-70';* added description of recent changes.

# Quinquennial Inspection Report

## 1. Roof Coverings & Rainwater Disposal

**Summary**

**The narrow flat asphalt roof to the tower would benefit from re-roofing in 5-10 years.**

**The low-pitched stainless steel roof over Nave & Chancel appears to be in good condition. The twice-annual clearance of the narrow gutters by a contractor should continue in a timely fashion as leaves have accumulated, particularly in the N Aisle gutter.**

**The rainwater disposal systems are in working order although a number of rainwater pipes appear to be full of leaves. As part of the next regular gutter cleaning:**

**(a) the pipes should be flushed carefully to remove all leaves;**
**(b) The detailing of the gutters and roof outlets of the Nave roof should be checked for defects or misalignments due to damages to walls noted under Church Interiors.**

**The gully grilles, although protected by slate covers, were blocked with leaf debris and other vegetation; they should be cleaned regularly. The gullies were in working order.**

**Tower**

A small wooden hatch leads onto the flat roof at the base of the spire, which is very narrow and without a parapet. It is unsafe to access and only the S and E side, closest to the hatch, were inspected. The asphalt is in fair condition but is cracking at the abutments, letting in water. Re-roofing should be considered within the quinquennium. As part of those works, a cost-benefit analysis should be undertaken for the installation of a man-safe system for future inspections versus rope access or drone inspections.

QIR 2015 noted the potential of water being blown onto the W elevation from the two tower spitters. Having inspected after a heavy downpour, I saw no indication for this. If this became an issue in the future, due to increasing intensity and frequency of rain, extending the tower spitters or replacing them with downpipes could be considered.

**Nave, Chancel & N Aisle**

Low-pitched stainless steel roofs reported to have been installed in 1993/93 over insulation remain in good condition. Gutters have a tendency to block as they are very narrow and there are many deciduous trees in the vicinity; clearance must be kept a high priority.

**Vestry**

The pitched felt roof is concealed behind tall parapets but appears to be in fair condition. Due to

the inaccessible roof void, issues might not become obvious; an inspection is recommended.

**Boiler Room**

The later inserted pitched roof is in fair condition but starting to crack at the abutments. When viewed internally, this presents as a corrugated sheet and may contain asbestos. The material should be tested for asbestos to inform a re-roofing within the next 5-10 years. The PCC might wish to consider reroofing at the same time as changing the heating system.

**Outlets, Downpipes & Gullies**

Cast iron hoppers and downpipes discharge rainwater from the roof outlets into ground gullies. The system appears adequately sized and in working order. All outlets have overflow facilities. The downpipes require regular clearing of leaves.

The areas of peeling paint on the S wall and the W end of the N wall between Nave and N Aisle align with the positions of roof outlets and downpipes. As the latter appear to be in good repair, the detailing of the box gutters and roof outlets should be checked for defects or misalignments.

The signs of rising damp in the N and E walls of the Chancel could be exacerbated by the risen ground level in the area or by blocked drains. The churchyard falls, and most likely drains, from N to S thus naturally leading water against the N wall. The situation should be monitored. Consideration should be given to lowering the ground levels and investigating the drainage.

**General Note**

The absence of protected species has not been confirmed. An ecologist should be consulted before roofing repairs are undertaken.

## 2. External Stonework

**Summary**

**The condition of the sandstone and pointing is reasonably good. Cementitious mortars are present, which can lead to stone erosion and damp problems. Consideration should be given to re-pointing within the next 10-15 years - earlier in areas where damp issues persist.**

**The internal walls to the W end of the Nave suffer from dampness, likely due to a combination of factors which are explored under Church Interiors. As a first step, the W returns of the Nave should be repointed and the exposed wall heads addressed.**

**The inaccessible tower corbels and parapets should be inspected by a steeplejack.**

**Tower**

The stonework of the spire appears to be in good condition. Consideration should be given to obtaining a steeplejack inspection of the spire and weather vane ahead of the next QIR.

Corbels and parapets are weathered but appear to be in good condition. Their ongoing structural stability could not be ascertained due to lack of safe access. A steeplejack should be engaged to inspect.

The sandstone walls and ashlar window surrounds are weathered but in good condition. The tower was repointed in the 1990s and the pointing is in good condition.

**Nave, N Aisle, Chancel & Vestry**

Sandstone walling and pointing are generally in reasonable condition. Most pointing is cementitious and has shrunk away from the stonework in areas. There are also numerous areas of poorly matching mortars. Consideration should be given to repointing with an appropriate lime mortar in the future.

Please note that the standing archaeology of the Nave walling is complex. Detailed historic information is available in the Vestry and should be understood before undertaking any works.

The top ½ of the Nave's SW abutment to the tower is visibly darker and affected by water ingress. The same is the case for the top ⅓ of the Nave NW abutment. Both wall ends were left exposed when the Nave parapets were built. Later introduced lead soakers do not appear to have fully rectified the issue, which is likely to contribute to the dampness affecting the W end of the Nave internally. Both abutments should be repointed to their full height. Water ingress to the exposed wall heads must be stopped; solutions could be re-pointing, lead capping or exten= ding the stone parapets. A balance will need to be struck between effectiveness, visual impact, cost and likelihood of obtaining statutory consents. Options for grant-funding can be explored.

One stone within the string course above the W window in the Nave S elevation has weathered. Its water-shedding function needs to be reinstated by replacing the stone or introducing a thin lead or stainless steel ledge over the length of the stone.

The very light pointing repairs at the E abutment of Vestry and Chancel are unsightly. Funds permitting, the PCC should consider replacing those with matching mortar. The base of the Chancel and Vestry walls in the area would benefit from repointing within the next 5-10 years.

**Porch**

The porch was reportedly rebuilt in 1964. The stonework and pointing is in good condition.

## 3. Doors & Windows

**Summary**

**All windows and doors appear to be in good condition.**

**Unventilated external perspex has been fitted to all window openings within the church. The condition of the sealed historic leaded lights should be monitored.**

**Condensation due to lack of ventilation could be a contributing factor to the damp issues in the tower and at the W end of the Nave. At least two of the clerestory windows should be re-opened and refurbished to allow for controlled ventilation of the church.**

**Tower**

Windows to the tower stages 1-3 are diamond-glazed leaded lights and are in good condition. The timber louvres to the openings in the bell chamber are in good condition. The meshes behind them are fitted well but there was evidence of birds accessing the bell chamber at some point although none was present during the inspection. It is essential to ensure birds cannot access the tower.

**Nave**

The stained glass in the tall lancet windows in the S elevation is in good condition but the following requires repair:

- 2nd window from E: Carefully replace missing top ferramenta and re-tie glazing.

The smaller clerestory windows in the N wall appear to be in good condition but their hoppers do not close fully; as the cords to the pulley system are lost, it is unclear whether they were left ajar or whether the catches require repair. To enable controlled ventilation of the church, the external perspex should be removed from at least two of the hopper windows, and their frames, catches, pulleys and cords refurbished to ensure they are in good working order.

The boarded and framed oak door to the tower is in good condition. A draft curtain is installed in front of the door.

**Chancel**

The stained glass to the three tall lancet windows in the E elevation is in good condition. All other glazing is also in good condition but the following require monitoring or small repairs:

- N lancet window: Refix loose or broken copper ties;
- SE lancet window: Monitor the bowing which is larger than elsewhere;
- SW lancet window: Refix loose or broken copper ties.

The grained decoration to the S and Vestry doors appears primitive but is in good condition.

Externally, the S door and its security grille would benefit from redecoration.

**North Aisle & Porch**

The stained glass in the small tall lancet windows is in good condition.

The boarded and framed arched double door leading to the porch is painted white and in reasonable condition. The external boarded and framed pointed oak door of c1964 was varnished at some point pre-2015.

**Vestry**

The diamond-glazed leaded lights in the 2-light window are in good condition. They offer no controlled ventilation but this does not appear to be a problem here. A historic wrought iron grille remains in the window opening in the inaccessible attic and a perforated metal sheet has been fitted behind the grille to prevent access. Both appear to be in good condition.

**Boiler House**

The utilitarian C20 door with a light, and a side panel with a light over a louvred bottom, is in reasonable condition. It would benefit from redecoration within the quinquennium.

## 4. Church Interiors

**Summary**

**The church is well presented but suffers from moisture-related problems as indicated by:**

- **Ongoing periodic dampness and decaying timbers in the tower;**
- **Failing plaster throughout the W end of the Nave incl. the S and N returns at high level;**
- **Localised areas of blistering plaster at mid-level in the S wall of the Nave.**

**It is likely that a combination of issues are at play. These should be explored, as should be the extent to which the timbers in the tower are affected. The plaster abutment of all windows to the N Aisle are cracking, which might be moisture-related.**

**The localised rising damp to the N and E walls of the Chancel is unchanged to 2015.**

**Tower**

The tower consists of four levels.

The **ground level** sits one step above that of the Nave and is used for storage. Walls are of painted rough stone, with a timber ceiling and carpeted floor. Small leaded lights to S, W & N. Ellacombe chime system for the three bells. A historic and very very steep quarter trunk timber staircase leads to the first floor.  The musty smell noted in QIR 2015 is not prevalent.

The **first floor** has a newer timber floor laid over the historic beams. Walls & leaded lights as before. Timber ladder to the next stage in the SE corner. The old bell headstocks are stored here. Also stored is old paperwork and other items; this storage should be reduced to maintain access and decrease the fire load. The wobbly handrail noted in QIR 2015 needs stiffening. The greening of the walls remains as noted in QIR 2015. A new steel beam supports the five existing timber ceiling beams.

The **second floor** is dominated by the wooden clock compartment on the N side. The clock is regularly serviced and is in good condition. There is graffiti inside the doors of the clock box. Access is good, but again the handrail is very slender with some loose fixings as noted in 2015. The stonework to the walls is in good condition. The internal cementitious pointing was not replaced as part of the 1990s repointing; it is in fair condition. Leaded lights as before. An old gravestone forms the lintel of the W light as mentioned in the listing description. A new steel beam supports the three historic timber beams. The timber decay to the beams appears to be ongoing. Whilst there is no risk of immediate structural failure as they are supported by the new steel beam, the situation should be assessed. The timber beams were wet to the touch during the first visit but not the second, in more stable weather. The environmental conditions should be monitored to understand how frequently condensation occurs.

The **top level** is the bell chamber with louvred openings, all netted. The three bells are hung on new steelwork and the redundant timber bell frame remains in situ. The historic headstock closest to the S wall was wet to the touch during the first visit. Its supporting beam and its base are affected by decay and the headstock appears to have dropped and is leaning onto the S bell; it should be carefully propped and stabilised to prevent undue stress on the bell. As before, the environmental conditions should be assessed and improved.

Short ladders allow access up onto the top of the bell frame, from where the inside of the stone spire can be inspected and the tower roof can be accessed via a small timber hatch.

**Nave & North Aisle**

The nave is a light and inviting space dominated by plastered walls with dark Victorian timber ceilings - trusses decorated with shields in the Nave and a pitched ceiling over the N Aisle. The lower walls feature dark Victorian timber wall panelling. Very large floor slabs to the N Aisle and Nave central aisle with level timber flooring under the pews. An organ is housed at the E end of the N Aisle, with a small altar in front of it. A recent reordering added a kitchen to its W end and moved the font under the 2nd bay of the 5-bay stone arcade dividing Nave and N Aisle.

The floor, wall panelling and pews are in good condition but the wall paint is blistering at:

- Localised at mid-level between the windows to the S wall;
- At high level to the W end of the S wall;

- Throughout the W wall which abuts the tower;
- At high level to the W end of the stone arcade to the N.

Where possible to observe closely, the underlying plaster is cracking and displaying salt efflorescence. QIR 2015 noted minor salting to the bases of the columns and the photos kindly made available by Lucy Stewart show no cracking paint. That said, the retired PCC Treasurer confirmed that the water ingress issues at the W wall have re-appeared periodically over several decades; QIR 2015 mentions recent redecoration and this might have hidden the defect at the time. I recommend investigating and improving this situation. It is possible that a combination of issues are at play - water ingress through the external fabric and condensation due to lack of ventilation and/or heating. Preliminary areas for investigation are:

- Take monthly or more frequently moisture readings within the walls of the Nave and tower to establish current conditions and a baseline for monitoring;
- Record daily relative humidity and temperature at the W end of the Nave and within the tower for 12 months together with recording the use of the church over the same period. It is essential to rule out that the cold tower is acting as a ventilation chimney to the heated church (due to the absence of controlled high-level ventilation in the Nave) as this would lead to high levels of condensation on the colder surfaces of the tower;
- Take temperature readings from all radiators and exposed heating pipework when in operation to ascertain if the heating was less effective at the W end, which is furthest away from the boiler. The tower also presents a very large, unheated thermal mass.
- Obtain a condition report on the timbers in the tower;
- Obtain a condition report on the tower roof. Temporarily seal all cracks, see Roofs;
- Closely inspect W wall abutment of stainless steel roof for potential water ingress;
- Improve weathering to W Nave wall abutments, see External Stonework;
- Enable controlled ventilation of the Nave, see Windows;
- Review 1990s tower repointing work (QIR, works specifications, conditions post repair) using PCC records or Diocesan archives at Durham's Palace Green Library.

In the N Aisle, the plaster is cracking at the abutment of all window reveals. This defect was not present in 2015. It may relate to condensation and lack of ventilation and should be monitored.

**Chancel**

Architecturally similar to the Nave but with a concrete floor inlaid with ledger stones. There is one step at the altar rail and a further two steps to the altar; all covered with red carpet. There is a large wall monument to the north. Choir stalls have fine poppyhead carvings. The tall pointed chancel arch is of stone.

There is efflorescence from rising damp at low level on the N and E walls. This was already mentioned in QIR 2015 and is not unusual in unheated sections of wall. It should be monitored.

Consideration should be given to the actions described under sub-heading ‘Gullies’ in Roofs.

There is blistering paintwork to the ceiling abutment at the S and N. These were reportedly due to defects in the roof gutters, now fixed. Funds allowing, consideration should be given to redecoration.

**Vestry**

A simple rectangular room with painted plastered walls, carpeted floor over what appears to be timber boarding and flat plastered ceiling. Dark timber wall panelling to the E half of the room. The vestry houses the safe.

The vestry was rebuilt in the 15th century. The upper floor, the home of the chantry priest, was likely added then. The small access hatch to the upper floor now has pipes running through it. Consideration should be given to improving the access to allow inspection of the underside of the roof, which reportedly was last repaired in 1937.

**Porch**

Exposed stonework walls, stained boarded ceiling and stone floor from 1964. To the S, the original round-arched north door with beakhead carvings, moulded capitals and a Saxon stone with a carved relief of Agnus Dei set into the wall above. Other historic stones are housed within the porch, along with plans of the Victorian renovations for the church.

There is salt efflorescence on the historic stonework above the north door. Comparing photos, the condition is similar to that reported in QIR 2015.

**Boiler House**

A small modern infill, accessed externally. The exposed masonry is in fair condition with some open joints and staining from flue gases to the E wall.

## 5. Fittings & Furniture

**Summary**

**All fittings and fixtures are in good condition.**

**Liturgical fittings & furniture**

As part of the recent re-ordering, the font was moved. Its decorative oak cover is standing behind the organ in the N Aisle. Consideration should be given to reinstating the cover; or seeking Faculty for its disposal.  Altar and altar rails are in good condition, as is the oak pulpit, which is reported to be by ‘Mouseman’ Robert Thompson of Kilburn.

**Pews**

All in good condition.

**Organ**

The organ is a modern instrument and appears to be in good condition.

**Bells**

The three bells are chimed regularly and are in good condition.The leaning timber on the S bell should be stabilised before it might fully lean onto the bell, see 'Tower' under Church Interiors.

**War Memorials**

The war memorial halfway along the N aisle is in good condition.

## 6. Installations & Fire Safety

**Summary**

**All existing installations appear to be in working order.**

**Electrical Distribution**

The distribution board (DB) is located at the SE corner of the Vestry. It is being tested 5-yearly and a record of the 2022 test was made available.

**Lighting**

All lighting is operational. New LED spotlighting was installed in the Nave and Chancel in 2019. Ceiling lights with conduit wiring exist in the N Aisle; a fluorescent light in the Vestry; single light bulbs in the tower. There is no emergency lighting.

**Lightning Conductor**

The lightning conductor is in good condition and tested periodically.

**Oil**

The oil tank is located outside the S end of the Church Hall, NE of the Chancel. The oil-fired boiler is located in the boiler house. The heating system is reported as functional but the boiler is old and will likely need replacement. It takes several hours to warm up the church and is only used ahead of Sunday services. The PCC are considering replacement with a more environmentally friendly system in the future.

### Water

Water is available within the boiler room, from an internal tab in the Vestry as well as the kitchenette in the North Aisle. Mains supply runs in the main path leading to the North Porch.

### Water Drainage

Below-ground drainage from the kitchen runs in the main path. The location of the drainage from the gullies is not known. The partly overgrown gravel edges to the S, E & N side of the church are assumed to contain a French drain.

### Fire Safety

Fire extinguishers located near the kitchen and in the Vestry, were serviced recently.

### Asbestos

The asbestos register was not made available for inspection. Given the age of the building, it should be expected that asbestos is present in the building and a register should be kept. It is a legal requirement to manage any asbestos-containing materials (ACM) present in the building.

## 7. Environmental Sustainability & Vulnerability

### Summary

**The emissions from the oil-fired heating will be large compared to the frequency of use and the size of the congregation; the PCC should start to investigate alternative heating systems. The building offers opportunities for the installation of renewable technologies.**

**The building is at risk from increasing frequency and intensity of rainfall due to its exposed location, its history of water ingress and its narrow roof gutters paired with the presence of many deciduous trees. The building needs to be kept well maintained including its rainwater drainage system. Consideration should be given to the removal of cementitious mortars, which can trap moisture. If indicated in future, resize the rainwater disposal system and replace the tower spitters with downpipes.**

**With the potential for increased rainfall saturating the ground, it would seem prudent to establish who is liable to keep the base of the tall S & E retaining walls in good repair.**

### Observations

The church is well built and natural light levels are good throughout. The introduction of secondary glazing to the windows will have lessened drafts, which is good. However, it is essential that some form of controlled ventilation is restored and actively used. This would prevent the unheated tower acting as a ventilation chimney to the church, which I suspect it is

doing at present, leading to the condensation problems experienced during the inspection. The existing water penetration into the W end of the Nave would need to be rectified and the walls dried out; wet stonewalls are much more difficult to heat with any system.

The church is not within the top 20% emitters within the diocese but the PCC is encouraged to calculate their energy footprint using guidance available from CofE. The change to LED lighting in 2019 will have reduced energy consumption.

The orientation of the building, the unobstructed southern aspect and large but concealed roof could, in principle, support solar panels. The load-bearing capacity of the historic roof and the insulated roof built-up would need to be established. As the building is in a Conservation Area and Grade II* listed, any such plans should be discussed not only with the DAC but also the local conservation officer and Historic England at an early stage.

The large roof would support rainwater harvesting, for use by the church or adjacent church hall. The installation of an air-source heat pump would seem feasible. A ground source heat pump would interfere with burials unless the cliff-top location would enable an alternative installation method. A specialist would need to be consulted, who should also advise on the suitability of the ground conditions. When choosing a new heating system, the PCC should take into account the infrequency of use of the building and the small size of the congregation.

Eliminating water ingress and finding a more sustainable heating system should be the priority. Subject to detailed review and consultation with the architect, the local conservation officer and the DAC, the following opportunities for future fabric improvements might exist:

- Walls. The potential for externally insulating the walls is low. Internally, the unevenness of the walls, the abutment to the ceiling, the wall panelling and the few memorials would need to be considered and a cost-benefit analysis carried out.
- Roof & Ceilings. Increasing (Nave & Chancel) or introducing insulation (Vestry, N Aisle) should be considered as part of any future re-roofing project.
- Floors. A level of ground disturbance is likely to have occurred when the Victorian floors were introduced. The potential for excavating and insulating the existing floors could be explored and a cost-benefit analysis carried out.

**Climate Change Vulnerability**

The church is exposed to the prevailing weather, it has a history of water ingress and the Nave roof's narrow gutters are prone to blockage from leaves. The building is therefore at particular risk from increasing frequency and intensity of rainfall. It needs to be kept well maintained. Consideration should be given to removing cementitious mortars, which can trap moisture. As is best practice, the sizing of gutters and downpipes and the adequacy of the existing drainage system should be considered as part of future re-roofing works; or early should there be any indication that they are inadequate.

The tall retaining walls towards the S & E could be at risk of collapse if the ground became heavily saturated and bedding layers were washed out. The PCC should establish who is liable for the repair of the base of these walls and ensure they are kept in good repair. It was reported that the property to the S is the former Vicarage, sold some 40 years ago. The area to the E belongs to a former manor house and was subsequently quarried for stone.

The building is not in a flood risk zone.

## 8. Access, Churchyard & Boundary

**Summary**

**The grounds, lychgate and path are generally in good condition. The recently replaced decorative timber board to the lychgate needs adjusting. Ivy should be regularly cut back from the low N boundary wall, the movement in the wall should be monitored and repairs facilitated as and when required.**

**The monuments in the churchyard should be checked periodically.**

**Accessibility**

Step-free site access exists from the road through the lychgate to the porch and into the Nave.

**Boundary Walls**

The **N boundary wall** is a low stonework wall with a lychgate over the central path, and a metal pedestrian gate flanked by two large stone gate posts at its E end, next to the church hall. The coping stones sport rusting stubs of simple round metal railings and posts. There is movement within the boundary wall at its W abutment and also near the pedestrian gate due to nearby trees. Ivy is growing along the wall and is starting to lift coping stones. All ivy should be cut back and left to die as removal would likely disturb the wall further. All loose coping stones should be rebedded, the broken coping stone near the trees pinned, and all open joints repointed. The movement near the trees will be ongoing and open joints should be attended to periodically.

The **pedestrian gate** is in reasonable repair. Risen ground levels prevent it from closing and consideration should be given to carefully reduce these. The previously repointed crack in the W gatepost has re-opened. It should be repointed - or, ideally, the gate hinge should be carefully removed, the rusting causing the cracking removed, a rust inhibitor applied to the metalwork, the hinge reinstated and the crack repointed.

The **Victorian lychgate** is an attractive timber structure on low ashlar walls topped by a wide pitched clay tile roof with cast iron gutters. It is in good repair although one of the oak gates is currently leaning against the porch but is reported to be reinstated shortly. The replacement tiles to the west slope mentioned in QIR 2015 have blended in well. The decorative timber

boarding to the front gable has been recently replaced. Whilst well crafted, the top of the replacement boards is too long, resulting in a visually jarring appearance. This should be rectified by carefully removing the boards, cutting to the correct height and refixing. QIR 2015 contains a good photo of the correct size and placement of the boards and this has been included in the photo appendix.

The W boundary wall has been rebuilt by the neighbour and is in good condition.

The S & E boundary walls appear in reasonable condition when seen from the churchyard site. They extend considerably below the level of the churchyard on the other side, which was not inspected as the adjacent properties are private. It is essential that these walls are kept structurally sound and in good condition.

**Trees & Vegetation**

The churchyard is laid to grass and hosts many mature tall trees. These are surveyed periodically, with the most recent survey undertaken a few weeks after this QIR inspection. The PCC should consider undertaking any works advisable to keep the trees in good health and prevent risk of injury to the public or the memorials in the graveyard. As the church lies within a Conservation Area, permission from the local authority will be required for most tree works.

**Memorials**

The churchyard is open to burials. There is a considerable number of tall historic headstones in the churchyard. A spot-check found that the gravemarker for Mary Rivers, near the N boundary wall, was moving slightly and is likely to be broken below ground. This should be made safe. The PCC should inspect the condition and ongoing stability of the tall headstones annually. The wardens at Piercebridge St Mary have been inspecting their headstones and will be willing to share their expertise.

## 9. Maintenance

**Summary**

**The church and churchyard are well maintained.**

**Observation & Guidance**

The PCC are commended for keeping the building and grounds well maintained. If needed, advice on maintenance is available from the SPAB Faith in Maintenance calendar.

No site-specific additional maintenance recommendations arise from this inspection.

# Recommendations

Please refer to the linked spreadsheet

| No | Description | When | Contractor | Budget |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Recommendations for Repairs to Roofing & Rainwater Goods** | | | |
| 1.01 | Ensure downpipes are emptied of leaves as part of the regular gutter cleaning. | **M** | Contractor | **£0** |
| 1.02 | Nave. The abutments of the box gutter outlets and aprons should be carefully checked for defects or signs of periodic overflowing - see damages to Nave walls noted under Chapter 4 of the QIR. | **O** | Roofer | **£200** |
| 1.03 | Nave. Inspect W wall abutment of stainless steel roof for potential water ingress. | **O** | Roofer | *incl. above* |
| 1.04 | Vestry. A closer inspection of the condition of this roof is recommended. | **O** | Roofer | *incl. above* |
| 1.05 | Tower asphalt roof. Inspect. If necessary, temporarily seal any cracking to prevent further water ingress. | **B** | Steeplejack | **£500** |
| 1.06 | Boiler. The roofing material should be sampled for asbestos to inform a re-roofing within the next 5-10 years. The PCC might wish to consider re-roofing at the same time as changing the heating system. | **C** | Specialist | **£100** |
| 1.07 | Chancel. The signs of rising damp in the N and E walls could be partially caused by the risen ground level in the area or by blocked drains. The churchyard falls, and most likely drains, from N to S thus naturally leading water against the N wall. The situation should be monitored. | **O** | PCC | **£0** |
| 1.08 | Chancel. If problems worsen, lower the ground levels and investigate the drainage. | **O** | Builder | **£1,000** |
| **2** | **External Stonework** | | | |
| 2.01 | Tower. Obtain a steeplejack inspection of the tower corbels, parapets, spire and weather vane ahead of the next QIR. | **C** | Steeplejack | **£500** |
| 2.02 | Nave. The W wall suffers from dampness. The SW & NW returns of the Nave should be repointed and lead soakers installed to the exposed wall heads. | **B** | Architect/ Builder | **£25,000** |
| 2.03 | Nave. The string course above the W most window of the S elevation has weathered away. Its water-shedding function needs to be reinstated by replacing the stone or introducing a thin lead or stainless steel ledge over the length of the existing stone. | **C** | Architect/ Builder | **£2,000** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3** | **Doors & Windows** | | | |
| 3.01 | Unventilated external perspex has been fitted to all window openings within the church. This carries a risk for:<br>(a) Metal decay due to condensation, particularly to the frames of opening lights;<br>(b) Buckling of lead cames due to increased temperatures behind perspex on S side.<br>The condition of the windows should be monitored. | **O** | PCC | **£0** |
| 3.02 | To allow for controlled ventilation of the church, remove perspex to at least two of the clerestory windows. Overhaul the windows and reinstate cords. | **B** | Builder | **£1,000** |
| 3.03 | Carry out the following small in-situ repairs to the existing glazing:<br>1. Chancel: N lancet window: Refix loose or broken copper ties;<br>2. Chancel: SW lancet window: Refix loose or broken copper ties;<br>3. Nave: 2nd window from E: Replace missing top ferramenta and re-tie glazing. | **C** | Glazier | **£400** |
| 3.04 | Chancel: SE lancet window: Monitor the bowing which is larger than elsewhere. | **O** | PCC | **£0** |
| 3.05 | Chancel. Clean & redecorate the external side of the S door and the security grille. | **C** | Builder | **£100** |
| 3.06 | North Porch. Re-saturate the external oak door. | **C** | Builder | **£100** |
| 3.07 | Boiler House. Redecorate the C20 doorset incl. side panel. | **C** | Builder | **£100** |
| **4** | **Church Interiors** | | | |
| 4.01 | Tower Stage 2. Reduce the amount of storage, in particular flammable items. | **M** | PCC | **£0** |
| 4.02 | Tower Stage 2. Stiffen the wobbly handrail to maintain safe access. | **M** | PCC | **£0** |
| 4.03 | Tower. Obtain specialist condition survey on the decaying timber beams. | **O** | Specialist | **£500** |
| 4.04 | Tower & Nave West End. Undertake environmental monitoring for 12 months (**Priority A - start immediately**). Then assess the environmental conditions in the tower and W wall of the Nave. Prepare recommendations for improvements. Undertake essential improvements. *Scope tbc - costs estimated conservatively* | **B** | Architect/ Builder/ TBC | **£5,000** |
| 4.05 | Tower Bellchamber. Carefully prop or fix the decaying remains of the historic timber bellframe, which are currently leaning onto the S-most bell. | **A** | Builder | **£50** |
| 4.06 | Tower. Check grilles and roof latch periodically to ensure birds cannot enter. | **M** | PCC | **£0** |
| 4.07 | Tower Bellchamber. Remove existing bird droppings; this requires suitable PPE. | **C** | Builder | **£200** |
| 4.08 | North Aisle. Monitor the cracking plaster at the abutment of all window reveals. This defect was not present in 2015. | **O** | PCC | **£0** |
| 4.09 | Chancel. Consider localised redecorations to the ceiling abutment to the S and N to make good after past water ingress. | **C** | Decorator | **£1,200** |
| **5** | **Fittings & Fixtures** | | | |
| 5.01 | Font cover. Consider reinstating the decorative oak cover, which is standing behind the organ in the N Aisle. Alternatively, seek Faculty permission for its disposal. | **C** | PCC | **£0** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6** | **Installations & Fire Safety** | | | |
| 6.01 | Consider replacing the existing oil boiler with a more economical and environmentally friendly system. *The costs will depend on the chosen system and may vary greatly.* | **C** | Architect/ Specialist | **£25,000** |
| 6.02 | Commission a management asbestos survey; and annual reinspections if required. | **C** | Specialist | **£400** |
| **7** | **Environmental Sustainability & Vulnerability** | | | |
| 7.01 | Establish who is liable to keep the external base of the tall retaining walls to the east, south and west in good repair. Ensure repairs & maintenance are carried out periodically. *Cost to be added if the PCC was liable or partly liable.* | **O** | PCC | **£0** |
| **8** | **Access, Churchyard and Boundaries** | | | |
| 8.01 | Boundary walls. Cut back all ivy from the base of walls and leave to die (removal whilst 'fresh' is very likely to dislodge stonework). | **M** | PCC | **£0** |
| 8.02 | N boundary wall. Re-bed loose coping stones to W end, pin broken coping stone near the trees, re-point all open joints. The movement near the trees will be ongoing and open joints should be attended to periodically | **B** | Builder | **£1,500** |
| 8.03 | N boundary wall. Consider reducing ground levels at the metal gate. Re-point the crack in the W gatepost periodically - alternatively, remove the gate hinge, treat the rust causing the cracking and reinstate all. | **C** | PCC/ Builder | **£100** |
| 8.04 | Lychgate. Reinstate the timber gate, which is currently leaning against the side of the North Porch. | **M** | PCC | **£0** |
| 8.05 | Lychgate. Remove the recently replaced decorative timber board, cut to the correct size and re-fix in its correct position. If within 12 months of completion, this would typically fall under a warranty. | **C** | Builder | **£0** |
| 8.06 | Memorials. Check the condition and structural integrity of tall headstones and memorials annually. | **M** | PCC | **£0** |
| | | | | |
| | A - Immediate Action | A | | **£50** |
| | B - Within 12 Months | B | | **£33,000** |
| | C - Within 2-3 Years | C | | **£30,200** |
| | O - Observations & Investigations | O | | **£1,700** |
| | M - Maintenance | M | | **£0** |
| | | | | |
| | | | **Total:** | **£64,950** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Major Works beyond the Quinquennium** | | | |
| 9.01 | Repairs may arise from the inspection of the tower stonework & Vestry Roof. | **C+** | Builder | |
| 9.02 | Chancel & Vestry abutment. The base of the walls would benefit from repointing within the next 5-10 years. | **C+** | Builder | |
| 9.03 | Nave, North Aisle & Chancel. Re-point within 10-15 years, earlier where damp problems persist | **C+** | Builder | |

This report was prepared by Maya Polenz ARB AABC in April 2024.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# Appendix A - Annotated Site Photographs

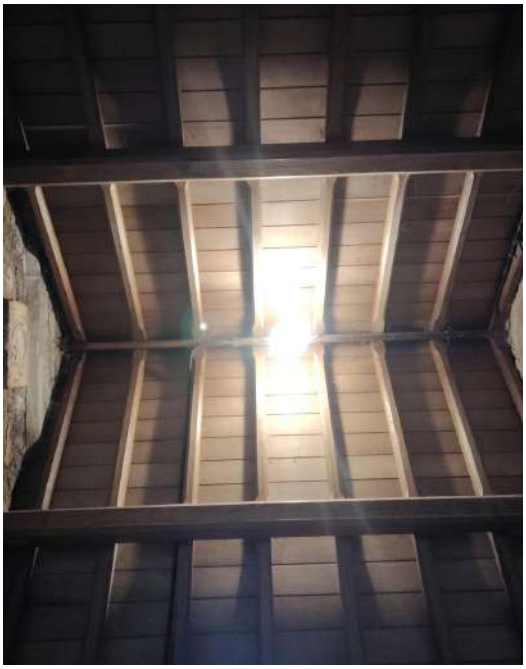

1. Approach from the North via the lychgate

2. Main path leading to North Porch, the main entrance to the church

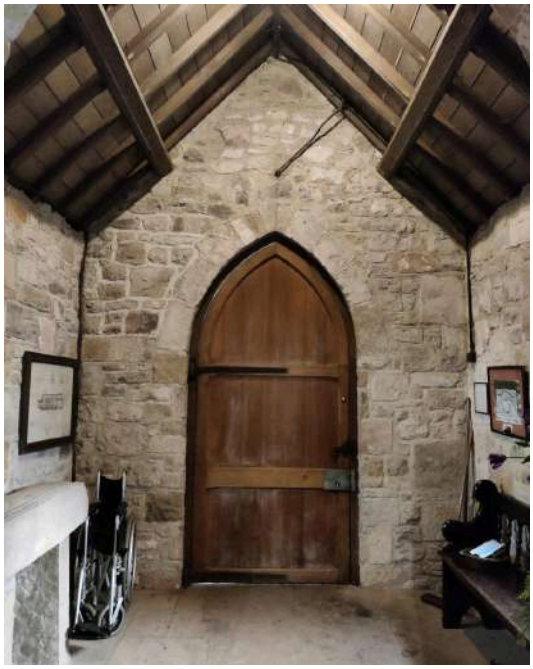
The oak door would benefit from re-saturation during the quinquennium.

3. Inside North Porch, looking towards the Nave

4. The salt efflorescence above the north door is similar to that reported in QIR 2015.



5. View into porch roof



6. Inside North Porch, looking north

7. Main entrance to North Aisle, looking towards the North Porch

8. West end of N Aisle with kitchen installed within last four years

9. Looking towards East end of North Aisle

10. Wide-spread racking plaster at window abutments in North Aisle (arrows)

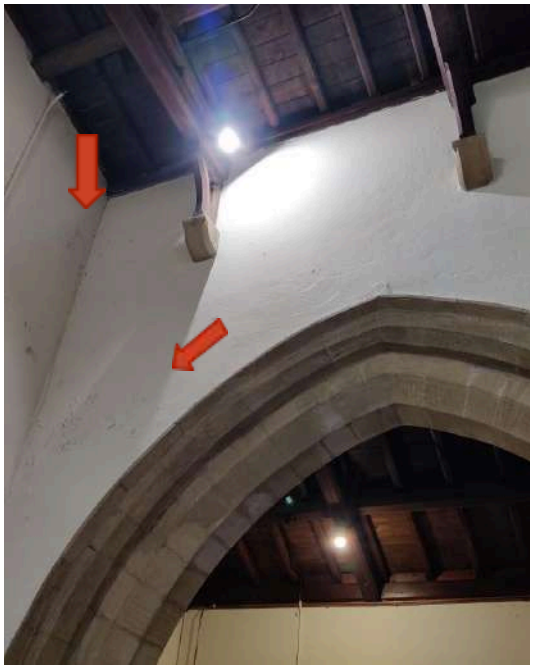
11. Large area of failing plaster at Southwest abutment of North Aisle to Nave (arrows)

12. Failing plaster at base of arch between North Aisle and Nave (arrow)

13. Nave looking East

14. Nave looking West

15. Wide-spread failing plaster at high-level at the West end of the Nave (arrows)



16. Failing plaster at the Northwest abutment of the Nave to the North Aisle (arrows)

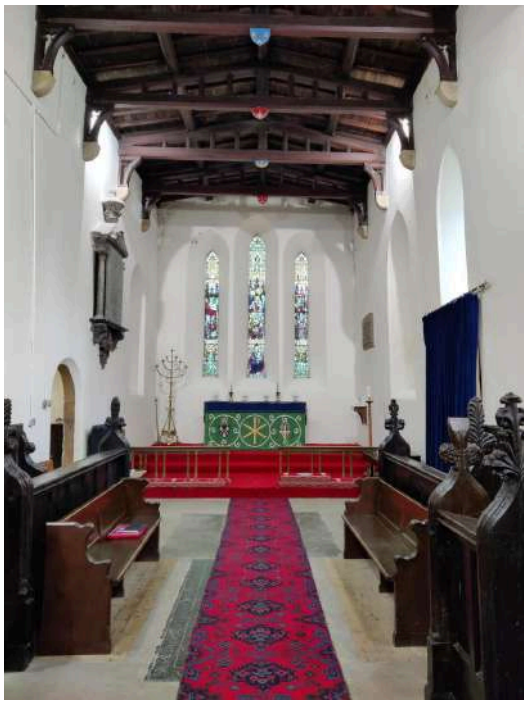
17. Localised blistering plaster at low level at the West end of the Nave

18. Localised failing plaster at low level at the West end between Nave and North Aisle

19. Blistering of paint on South wall of Nave

20. Blistering of paint on South wall of Nave, likely connected to external rainwater pipe or outlet

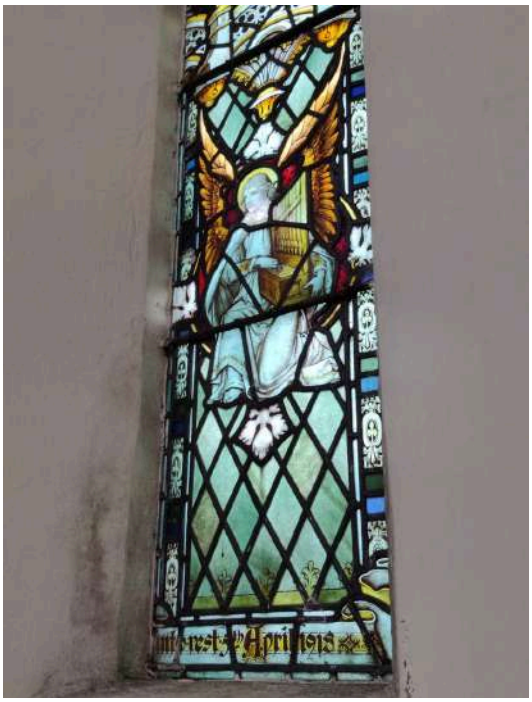
21. Organ under NE Nave arch



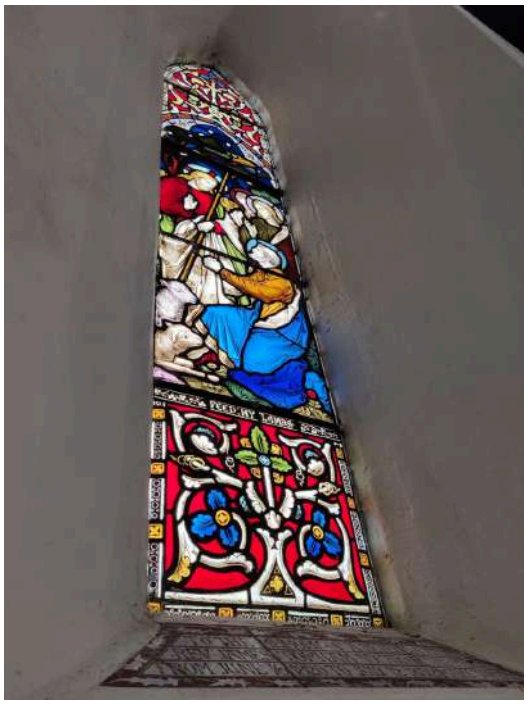
22. Chancel

23. Signs of rising damp to N wall of Chancel, same as mentioned in QIR 2015

24. Past water damage to E ceiling abutment of Chancel, reported as repaired



25. Bowing stained glass should be monitored



26. Stained glass in S wall of Chancel

27. Chancel S door

28. 5$^{0}$C at Chancel N wall compared to 12$^{0}$C external temperature during the inspection, demonstrating the building's large thermal mass

30. Door to Vestry

31. Vestry looking East

32. Vestry looking West and loft hatch

33. Electrical distribution boards located in Vestry

34 (above). View from SW using a wide-angle lens

35 (below). View from SE

36. Lower tower N elevation. Exposed wall head of Nave (red arrow) and water ingress (blue)

37. Upper tower N elevation

38. Upper tower W elevation

39. Tower spire seen from SE

40. Tower S elevation. Exposed wall head at W end of Nave (red arrow) and water ingress (blue)

41. Nave W abutment with exposed wall head (red arrow) and signs of water ingress (blue)

42. S elevation of Nave showing blistering paint internally near location of downpipe. No external defect is visible. Roof outlet should be looked at.

43. Nave/ Chancel S wall. Chancel door and grille would benefit from cleaning & redecorating.

44. Chancel E elevation

45. Consider reducing local ground to below plinth level should damp problems persist

46. Chancel N elevation & Vestry E elevation

47. As above, consider reducing ground should damp problems persist (arrows)

48. Vestry N elevation

49. Boiler House between Vestry and North Aisle

50. North Aisle window. Internal plaster is cracking. The external stonework is generally wet but there is no visible external defect.

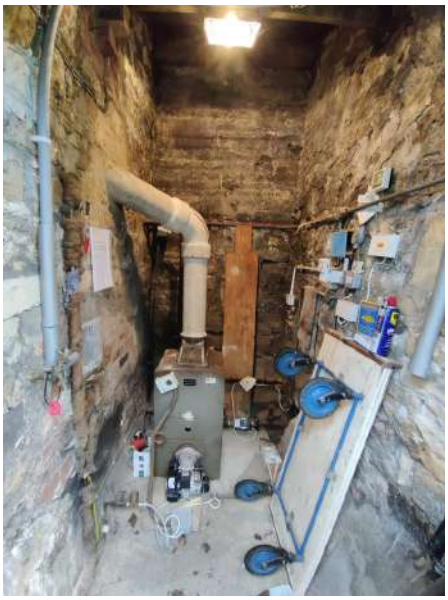
51 (above). View from NE 52 (below). View from N towards Vestry and Boiler House

53. E elevation of North Porch

54. W elevation of North Porch, with temporarily stored gate from the Lychgate

55. Close-up of exposed wall head at NW end of Nave.

56. View onto Nave and Chancel roofs



56b. Boiler House

57. Tower ground floor, stair leading upwards

58. Tower ground floor is used for storage. The mouldy smell reported in QIR 2015 is not prominent.

59. Tower first floor - papers and random storage should be moved to Vestry or disposed of.

60. Tower first floor - new steel beam supporting decayed beam ends

61. Tower top floor, netted louvred openings and redundant timber bell frame, which is wet to the touch and decaying at its base.

62. Redundant headstock dropped due to decayed base and is leaning on bell. The headstock needs to be fixed clear of the bell.

63. Wetness & decay to historic bellframe (arrow)

64. View from SE onto bells

65. Lychgate in 2024
Below close-up shows that the new timber profile is a good match but its straight upper section is too high and needs cutting to suit.

The tiled roof would benefit from careful removal of accumulated leaves every spring.

66. Lychgate in 2015 © Lucy Stewart

67. E end of N boundary wall - Ivy should be cut, let to die and then carefully removed. The wall and coping stones should be repointed.

68. N boundary wall disturbed by tree roots

69. Crack requires repointing or complete treatment of rusting hinge end.

70. W boundary wall seen from main path

71. W boundary wall

72. W boundary wall

73. Corner of W and S boundary wall is overgrown

This is a taller retaining wall on the other side and its condition should be checked, with agreement for access from the adjacent owner.

74. S boundary wall

This is a very tall retaining wall on the other side and its condition should be checked, with agreement for access from the adjacent owner.

75. View over S boundary wall. The crenellated wall at the bottom of the photo is a separate retaining wall beyond the boundary wall.

76. W boundary wall and oil storage, with the Church Hall in the background

This is a very tall retaining wall on the other side and its condition should be checked, with agreement for access from the adjacent owner.

77. View across the churchyard to Church Hall

Note the presence of many mature trees and the large amount of fallen leaves - which also collect in the narrow roof gutters.

78. View from main path across churchyard towards Vestry (behind the tree)