

**INSPECTION OF CHURCHES MEASURE**

**DURHAM DIOCESAN CHURCH SCHEME**

**CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST  
LOW DINSDALE, DARLINGTON, COUNTY DURHAM**

**Archdeaconry of Auckland**

**QUINQUENNIAL INSPECTION 2017**

**DATE OF INSPECTION : 25 April 2017**  
**DATE OF REPORT : 5 May 2017**

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LOW DINSDALE, DARLINGTON, COUNTY DURHAM**

**QUINQUENNIAL INSPECTION REPORT 2017**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Church is situated in a semi-isolated location to the South of the village of Low Dinsdale within a walled churchyard.. The latter is consecrated for burials, and contains a number of substantial trees. The large neighbouring property on the Southern boundary was formally the Vicarage. It is now in private ownership.
- 1.2 A Church was first established on this site in 638. A number of stone artefacts from earlier buildings are incorporated into the interior walls of the entrance porch. Restoration work was carried out in 1196 as recorded by a stone on the South West corner, alongside an Ordnance Survey bench mark. The Southern side aisle was added in 1200 and repairs to this and the chancel were completed in 1379 as recorded on a stone at the South East corner.
- 1.3 In 1876 a full restoration was undertaken and the tower and north vestry were added, including pews, pulpit, font, lectern and stained glass windows. This work is recorded in a stone on the South West corner of the tower. The tower clock was installed in 1901.
- 1.4 The building now consists of a nave, chancel, south aisle and tower, organ chamber and vestry wing, and basement boiler room accessible by an external flight of steps. The tower levels are served by an externally accessible spiral staircase. An Accessible Toilet extension was added in 2015 abutting the East face of the South Porch (See 2.1) together with creation of a Kitchenette at the West end of the South aisle plus removal of pews from the latter and relocation of the font.
- 1.5 External walls are principally red sandstone with different phases of construction evident in the form and dressing of the masonry. Window dressings are in buff sandstone as are the carved pinnacles and copings to the top of the tower and water tabling to roof verges. Major repairs to the stonework are recorded as being undertaken in 1987, together with repairs to the boundary walls.
- 1.6 The roof is covered in graded Cumberland slates. All generally in sound/well maintained condition.
- 1.7 Entrance to the Churchyard is via an oak lych gate with a plain clay tiled roof located in the South corner adjacent to the former Vicarage.
- 1.8 The internal floor level of the South and West sides of the Church building in particular, are set at a lower level than the external ground and are protected by abutting brick drainage channels.

## **2.0 WORK COMPLETED SINCE THE OCTOBER 2011 QUINQUENNIAL INSPECTION**

- 2.1 In June 2015 work was completed to add an Accessible Toilet extension to the East side of the South Porch together with creation of an internal Kitchenette, removal of pews to the South Aisle, relocation of the pulpit and the laying of encaustic floor tiling to the remodelled interior zones. These works also required the laying of a new water supply fed from the neighbouring private water main and a new below ground drainage system outletting into a cess pool unit located beneath the forecourt adjacent the Lych Gate entrance. Excavation work also involved oversight by Tees Archaeology, the recording of and subsequent re-internment of disturbed burials, and restoration of a number of headstones.
- 2.2 In April 2015 concerns were raised with respect to the stability of the outer skins of stonework on the South elevation of the Tower at the third and fourth lift levels in particular. This also included the stability of the stone framing to the related window opening as viewed from the interior. Following detailed appraisal by Blakett-Ord Conservation Engineering in collaboration with David France : Stonemason remedial measures involving stainless steel stitching, cementies, void grouting and some stone replacement including stabilisation of string courses was completed to the South face in January 2016. A watching brief is meanwhile being maintained on the West and North faces of the Tower where there are some more minor concerns re stonework stability.
- 2.3 Construction of the Accessible Toilet also necessitated the careful recording by Peter Ryder prior to the removal of a number of stone artifacts incorporated into the internal face of the East wall of the Porch. These are currently stored within the Nave and Chancel pending a decision on their future formal display format and location.
- 2.4 Items 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 have been undertaken under my oversight as Project/Inspecting Architect.
- 2.5 A programme of ongoing maintenance of the Churchyard, clearance of drainage channels etc., regular testing of fire protection, security installations etc. as recommended by the previous inspection remain in place.
- 2.6 Some interim measures have also been undertaken to address areas of internal decoration efflorescence. This I have identified as an action item to be more substantially addressed.

### **3.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY AND REPORT**

- 3.1 This report is based on observations made from ground, climbing the various levels of the Tower and from its roof. Unless otherwise stated the inspection has been purely visual and no enclosed spaces, inaccessible parts such as roof spaces, or hidden timbers etc. have been opened up for inspection.
- 3.2 Particular items not inspected or covered by this report are:-
- a) Floor or roof voids
  - b) Full testing of drainage
  - c) Parts hidden by fixed furniture
  - d) Testing of the heating installation
  - e) Testing of the electrical installation including audio system
  - f) Testing of fire alarms and fire fighting equipment
  - g) Testing of the organ
- 3.3 Items b, d, e, f and g are assumed to be subject to programmed cycles of regular inspection and testing by relevant specialists. Arrangements should be regularly reviewed to match inspection schedules to the age and condition of particular installations.
- 3.4 It should be noted that nothing in the Diocesan Scheme modifies the need to apply for Archdeacon's certificates or faculties where such authorities are necessary, before repair work may be undertaken.
- 3.5 The repair of churches in many aspects is a highly specialised subject. There is then a need to obtain specialist advice with the drawing up of a detailed specification for any work to ensure a technically satisfactory and aesthetically acceptable solution. Economy and permanence of repairs are important considerations.
- 3.6 This report indicates the condition of the buildings at a time of the inspection. It does not purport to be wholly comprehensive or to give definitive solutions for remedial work. It is a report only and should not be utilised as a specification for the execution of repairs and must never be used for such purposes, neither should it be used for obtaining quotations from builders. Professional advice should be obtained to avoid inappropriate solutions which may result in the potential aggravation of defects. Repairs should also maintain the architectural character of details, finishes etc
- 3.7 This Report is copyright and no copies can be made of the text or photographs without the written permission of the Architect. Neither should original copies be used by outside agencies e.g. contractors or other construction professionals without similar approval from the Architect..

#### **4.0 INSPECTION CONTEXT**

- 4.1 This inspection was principally carried out on 25 April when I met the Church Property Warden and PCC Secretary and was able to discuss various matters with them. Weather conditions were sunny and bright following recent showery periods.
- 4.2 The Church and contents continue to be the subject to a responsible watching brief by it's Wardens and has been carefully maintained with defects, remodelling and refurbishment work addressed in an appropriate manner.
- 4.3 The addition of the Accessible toilet and Kitchenette have already provided enhanced facilities for worship, weddings etc. and wider community usage.
- 4.4 In the Conclusions and Summary Section 8 defects, where identified, are categorised for action under the following headings. These refer back to itemised paragraphs in the Inspection Sections 5, 6 and 7.

A : Urgent Repairs

B : Repairs essential within the next 18 months.

C : Repairs essential before the next Quinquennial Inspection.

D : Desirable improvements or items to be regularly monitored.

## **5.0 INSPECTION OF THE EXTERNAL FABRIC**

5.1 A substantial programme of external repairs was completed prior to the 1996 Inspection followed by roof and gutter repairs post the 2002 Inspection. The external fabric remains the subject of regular monitoring and localised remedial action where appropriate.

### **5.2 Tower: South Face**

a) Pinnacles and copings remain in relatively sound condition but with localised vertical cracks which have been the subject of remedial pointing in the South parapet. (See close inspection from Tower roof and related photograph). This needs to be regularly monitored.

b) Stonework to this face have been the subject of significant remedial action (See item 2.2). This remains in sound condition.

### **5.3 Tower: West Face**

a) Stonework and string courses are noted as the subject of ongoing monitoring as noted under 2.2.

b) Localised minor pointing defect to right hand buttress.

### **5.4 Tower: North Face**

a) All stonework and pointing in sound condition.

b) Some minor defects to pointing above arched head window.

c) Stonework and window framing plus stone tile roofing to stair shaft all in sound condition.

### **5.5 Tower: East Face**

a) All stonework and pointing in sound condition.

### **5.6 Nave: North Face**

a) All stonework and pointing in sound condition, including window framing.

b) Polycarbonate protective sheeting to two windows clean and securely fixed.

c) Rainwater pipes and gutter in sound condition, but some vegetation growth in gutters subject to regular cleaning regime.

d) Evidence of historic repairs to roof slating, but in sound condition.

e) Eaves string course and water tabling in sound condition.

f) Stepped lead flashing to tower abutment in sound condition.

g) Some residual moss growth on surface of roof slating.

#### **5.7 Vestry/Organ Chamber Offshot**

a) All stonework, roof slating and water tabling in sound condition.

b) Note proximity of holly bush and some ivy growth on West face. Being kept under review.

c) Abutment of corrugated steel roof to basement access stair and Vestry window cill formed in "Flashband". Need to be kept under review.

d) Polycarbonate sheet protection to window sound and secure.

e) Ivy bush growth in stairwell access to basement boiler room. Being carefully monitored.

f) Some localised spalling of stonework below water tabling to East gable end and to chimney.

#### **5.8 Chancel: North Face**

a) Stonework, pointing, water tabling and stepped flashing to Nave abutment sound.

b) Roof slating generally sound with some minor localised damage.

c) Stone framing to window sound.

d) Steel mesh grilles to window sound and securely fixed.

#### **5.9 East Gable to Chancel**

a) Some localised deterioration to face of individual stones and pointing but otherwise sound, including framing to window. Note date 1379 on corner quoin stone.

b) Mesh grilles to 3 main lights to window sound, but no protection to trefoil windows.

#### **5.10 South Face to Chancel**

a) All stonework, pointing, roof slating, water tabling and string courses in sound condition

b) Mesh grilles to 2 windows sound and secure.



c) Rainwater goods sound and in good order. Vegetation growth in guttering carefully monitored..

d) Wooden boarded door in sound condition.

#### 5.11 **East Face of Side Chapel**

a) Stonework and pointing all in sound condition.

b) Mesh grille protection to main window sound and secure, but no protection to high level oval shaped window.

c) Abutting drainage channel remains predominantly clear of vegetation and is evidently subject to regular clearance/maintenance.

#### 5.12 **South Face of Side Chapel**

a) All stonework and pointing sound.

b) Mesh grille to two light window sound and secure.

c) Rainwater goods sound and apparently clear of vegetation.

#### 5.13 **Entrance Porch**

a) Slated roof, water tabling, abutment flashings and cloaking all sound.

b) Remaining stone artefacts built into inner face of walls to Porch in sound condition.

c) Wooden panelled entrance door and ironmongery. Former steel grille removed.

## **6.0 INSPECTION OF THE INTERIOR**

- 6.1 The major refurbishment and redecoration works completed in May 2004 remain predominantly sound but with some localised damage as a consequence of subsequent and some historic points of rainwater ingress. These are principally in the South East corner of the Chancel, the East gable of the South Aisle and above the entrance Porch. These are the subject of ongoing monitoring and remedial action by Property Wardens but would benefit from a more substantial/long term remedial solution..
- 6.2 All roof timbers remain in a clean condition with no apparent recurrence of the mildew evident prior to the refurbishment works.
- 6.3 All exposed stonework to arches etc. remain in a sound condition.
- 6.4 There is some minor cracking in floor tiles to the Porch.
- 6.5 The stone spiral staircase to the tower is in sound condition, as are the upper wooden floors and rough sparged walls to the upper chambers. Access to the upper levels and out onto the Tower Roof is via ladders and bell framing and a lead covered hatch. These are generally sound but require some agility to access. The lead roof covering is sound and the 4 corner stone pinnacles secure. View from the Tower roof also facilitation sight of the main roofs and channel gutters all of which appeared sound and clear of debris.
- 6.6 Internal mesh grilles to the Tower louvre openings were in fair condition but with some nest debris. This should be subject to regular cleaning.
- 6.7 The clock was the subject of major refurbishment prior to my earlier inspections with subsequent ongoing care and attention including the bright quality of the 3 clock faces. It is in a well maintained operating condition, as is the bell.
- 6.8 Timber floors below the fixed pews in the Nave are in good order with no signs of distress.
- 6.9 The patterned layout of quarry tiles to the Nave and Chancel floors remain in very good condition noting the new matching tiling to the South Aisle and Kitchenette area associated with the Toilet and internal refurbishment works completed in June 2015.
- 6.10 Carpeting throughout is in well maintained condition.
- 6.11 Window glazing is in sound/well maintained order. The stained glass in the East window to the South Aisle is noted as a particularly fine example. It remains important then to ensure that external protective grilles are regularly inspected and maintained.
- 6.12 The lighting system and intruder alarm installation completed prior to the 1996

Inspection remain in effective operation, the lighting system providing enhancing options to the ambience of the interior.

- 6.13 Fire extinguishers are subject to annual inspection and testing. They consist of a 9.5 litre FFL type located adjacent the entrance porch, and a dry powder type adjacent the organ
- 6.14 Window glazing is generally in sound/well maintained order. The stained glass in the East window to the South Aisle is noted as a particularly fine example. It is important to ensure then that external protective grilles are regularly inspected and maintained.
- 6.15 A new lighting system was installed shortly prior to the 2007 inspection, together with an intruder alarm system. The lighting system in particular is effective in enhancing the appearance of the interior particularly through its dimming facility. The intruder alarm system apparently operates effectively.
- 6.16 Heating is via an oil fired boiler located in an external housing abutting the vestry and feeding a system of cast iron heating pipes and radiators serving all parts of the Church. This is apparently maintained in effective working order with replacement of the external oil storage tank in 1999. The theft of oil has prompted consideration of an alternative fuel. This remains under review.
- 6.17 Fire extinguishers are inspected annually and consist of a 9.5 litre FFL type located adjacent to the entrance porch and a dry powder type adjacent to the organ.
- 6.18 Furnishing, including pews, are generally in sound condition together with the following particularly noted items:-
- Carved stone reredos screen (over-painted).
  - Brass communion rail.
  - Medieval font located on East end of South aisle.
  - Carved stone pulpit dated 1876 (over-painted).
  - Wrought iron gate and balustrade between choir and nave.
  - Brass memorial plate over centre column capital.
  - Brass lectern.
  - Font with carved timber cover.
  - Various memorials and plaques fixed to walls.

## **7.0 INSPECTION OF EXTERNAL WORKS**

- 7.1 The Churchyard continues to be maintained in a tidy and respectful manner.
- 7.2 More roof tiles to the Lych Gate have damaged by falling branches from overhanging tree since the last Inspection.
- 7.3 The condition of trees around and within the site need to be carefully assessed and monitored.
- 7.4 The vulnerability of the oil storage tank which is the ongoing subject of review with options for replacement.
- 7.5 The continued need to ensure regular examination and clearing out of debris, leaves etc. from channel gullies, abutting South-West elements of Church in particular.

## **8.0 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY**

The premises remain the subject of responsible care and maintenance together with recent investment in enhancement and remedial works. The following items are however identified as requiring attention with scheduling categorisation per paragraph 4.3.

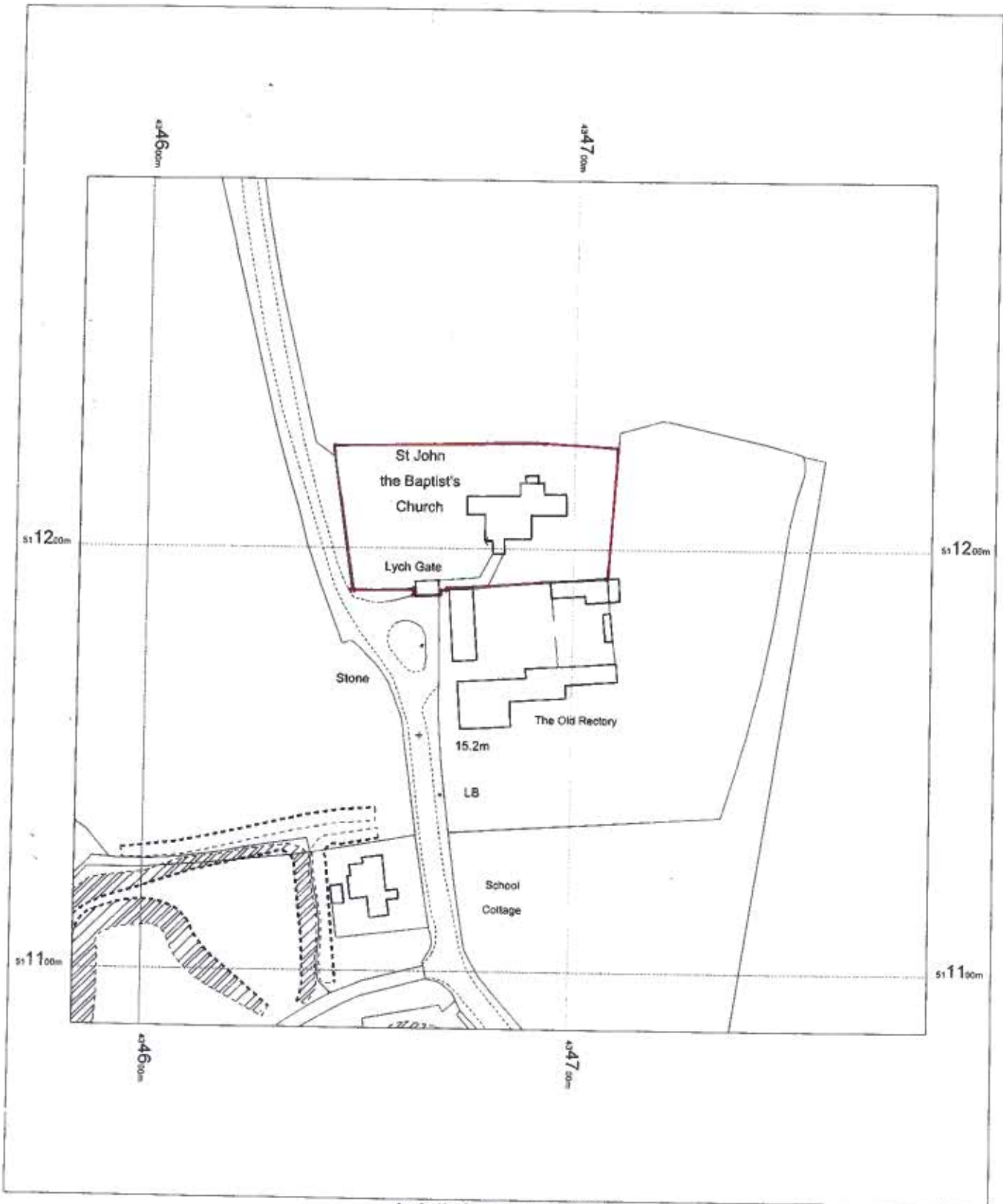
- 8.1 Resolve proposals for change of fuel to central heating installation per item 6.16 (D) (Option quotations)
- 8.2 Maintain watching brief on condition of stonework, in particular minor areas of degradation of faces noted including in particular the West face of the Tower per item 3.5a. (B) (In house)
- 8.3 Replacement of broken tiles to Lych Gate roof per item 7.2 (B) (£450)
- 8.4 Regular clearance of channel gutters per item 5.11c. (D) (In house).
- 8.5 Maintain regular monitoring of vegetation growth and debris blockage of rainwater goods and channel gutter to Nave/South Aisle abutment per items 5.10c and 5.12c. (D) (In house)
- 8.6 Consider completion of protection of all elements of stained glass windows by external security grilles per item 6.14 (C) (£700)
- 8.7 Maintain regular monitoring of historic points of rainwater ingress and remedial works to internal plaster/decoration. This should involve careful scraping off of areas of efflorescence, brush cleaning of the surface, application of an anti-fungicidal wash and subsequent remedial lime wash decoration of the dried surface.. This is likely to be an ongoing process until residual fungal spores are neutralised. See item 6.1(B) (£850)

## **9.0 DRAWINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS**

### Floor Plan

1. Lych Gate from Forecourt. Note damaged roof tiles
2. Lych Gate from Churchyard. Note damaged roof tiles.
3. View from South West
4. Tower from South West
5. Tower from South following stonework remedials
6. Accessible Toilet extension to South Porch
7. South face of Chancel
8. East Gable to South Aisle
9. View from North East : Vestry plus access stair to basement Boiler Room
10. North face of Vestry plus corrugated steel roof to basement Boiler Room.
11. South Porch with door to Accessible Toilet.
12. Accessible Toilet
13. Window to South face of Tower following remedial stabilisation
14. Parapet to South face of Tower plus pinnacle. Note vertical crack
15. South East corner pinnacle to Tower
- 16 North West pinnacle to Tower. Note leadwork
17. Roofs to Nave, Chancel, South Aisle and Vestry from Tower
18. North west pinnacle and access trap from belfry.
- 19 View from South Porch across South Aisle to Nave and Organ.

20. South Aisle looking East. Note new floor tiling and relocated font
21. Nave looking East to Chancel
22. Chancel
23. South East corner of South Aisle with relocated font.
24. Nave looking West toward Tower base. Note new Kitchennete
25. South East corner of Chancel. Note historic efflorescence
26. High level plaster efflorescence to South Aisle wall above South Porch
27. Plaster efflorescence to Nave/Chancel arch

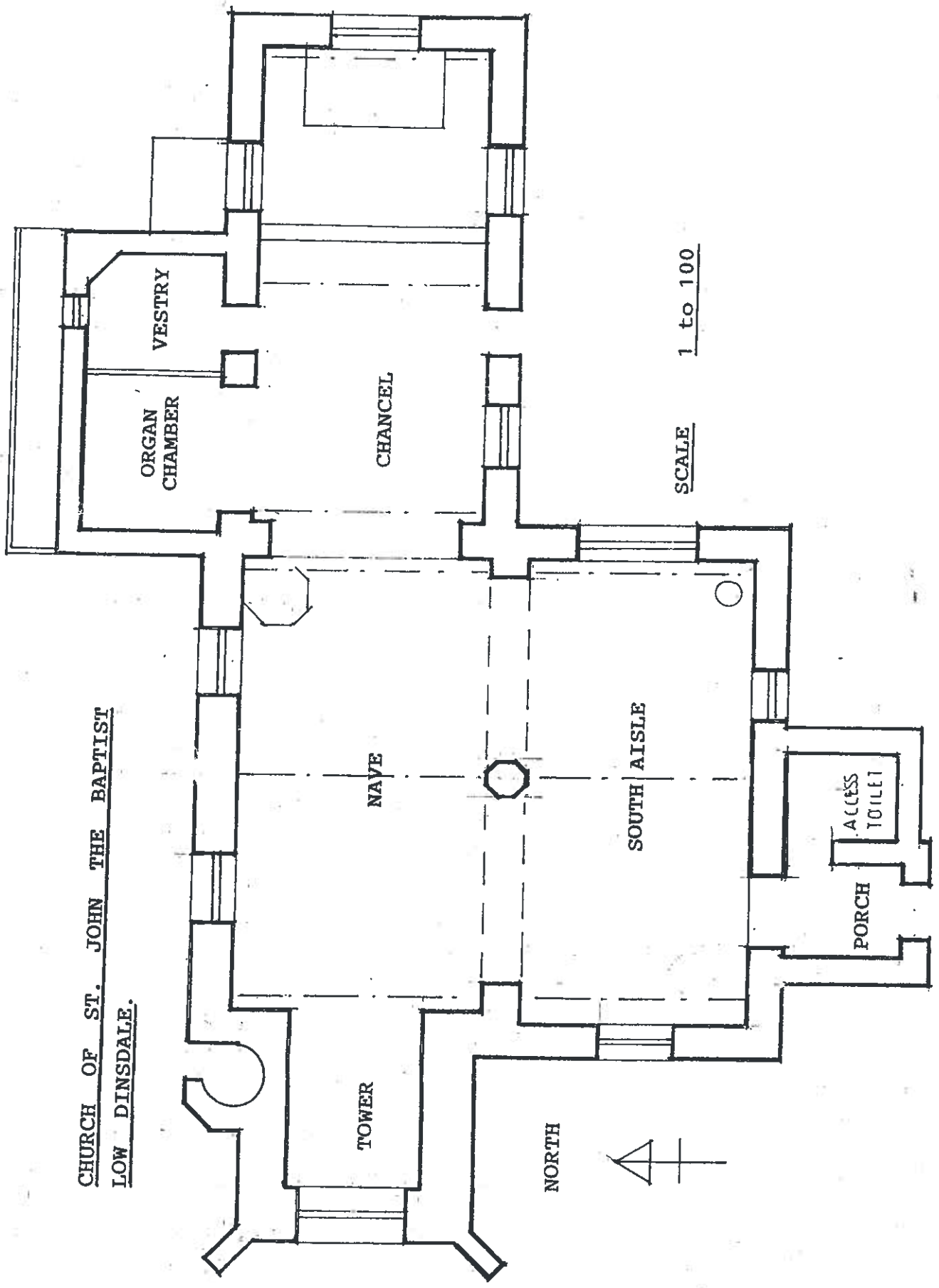


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CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST  
LOW DINSDALE.



SCALE 1 to 100

NORTH





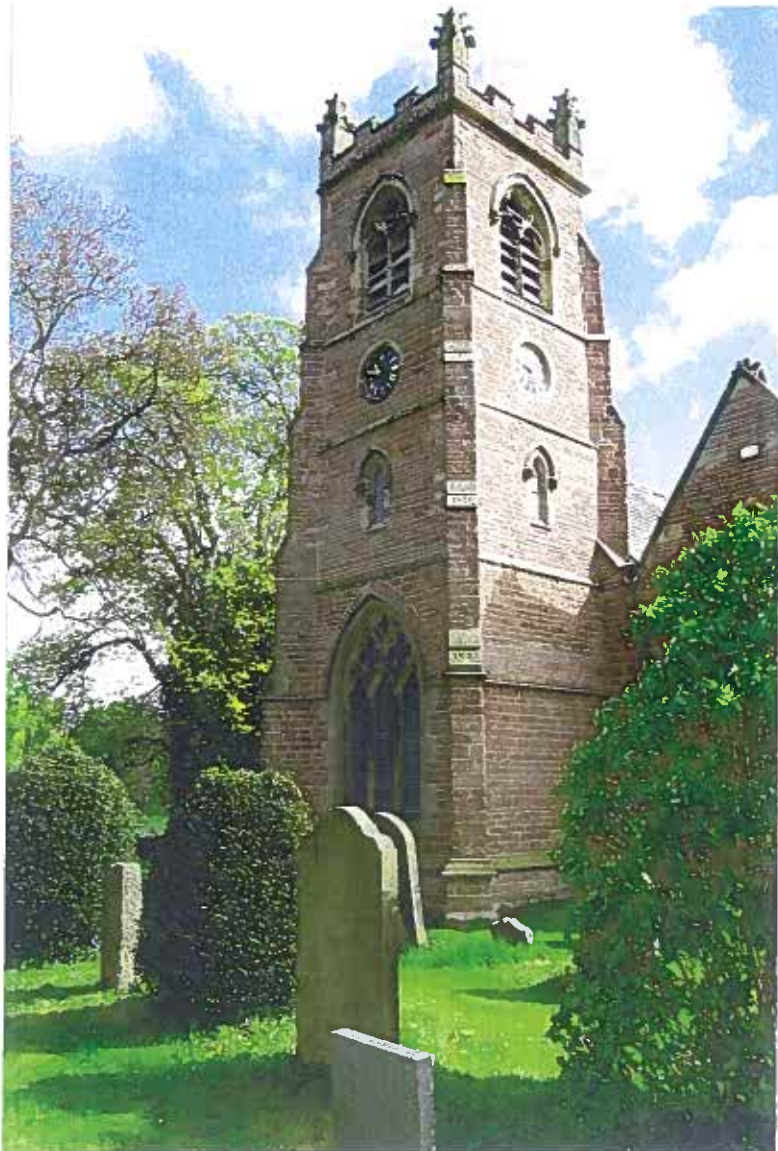
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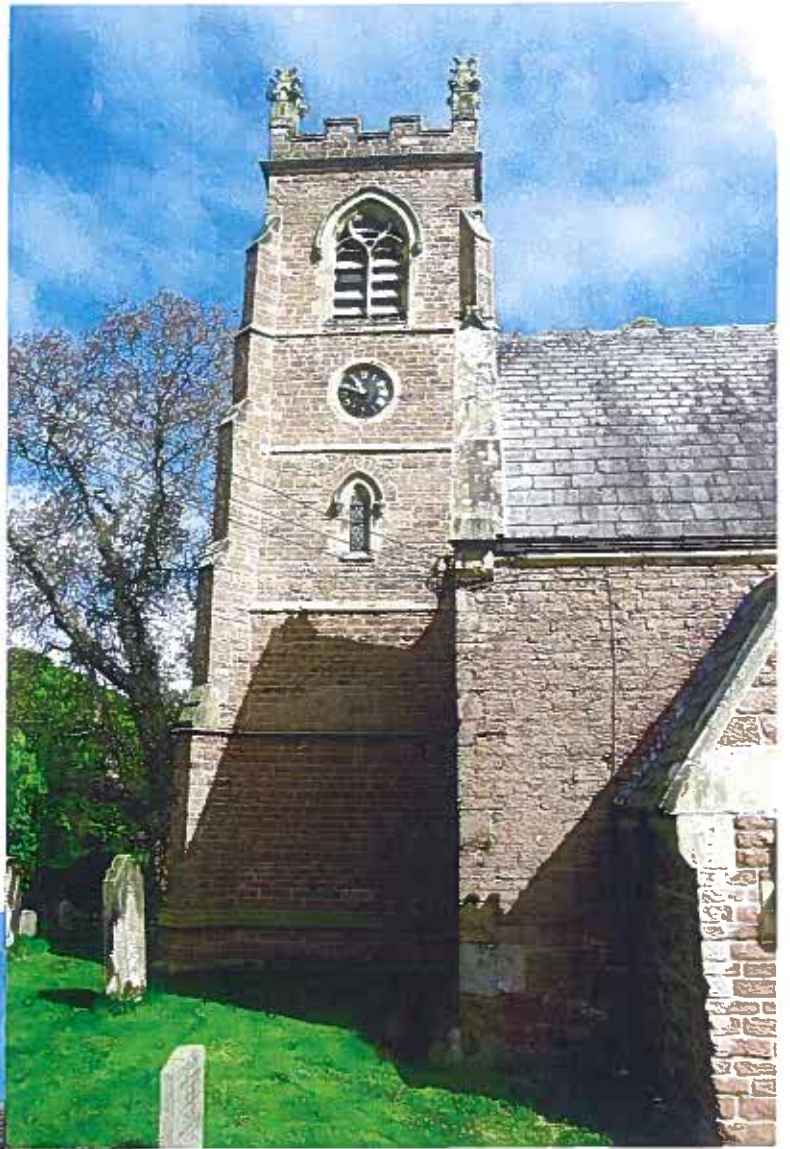
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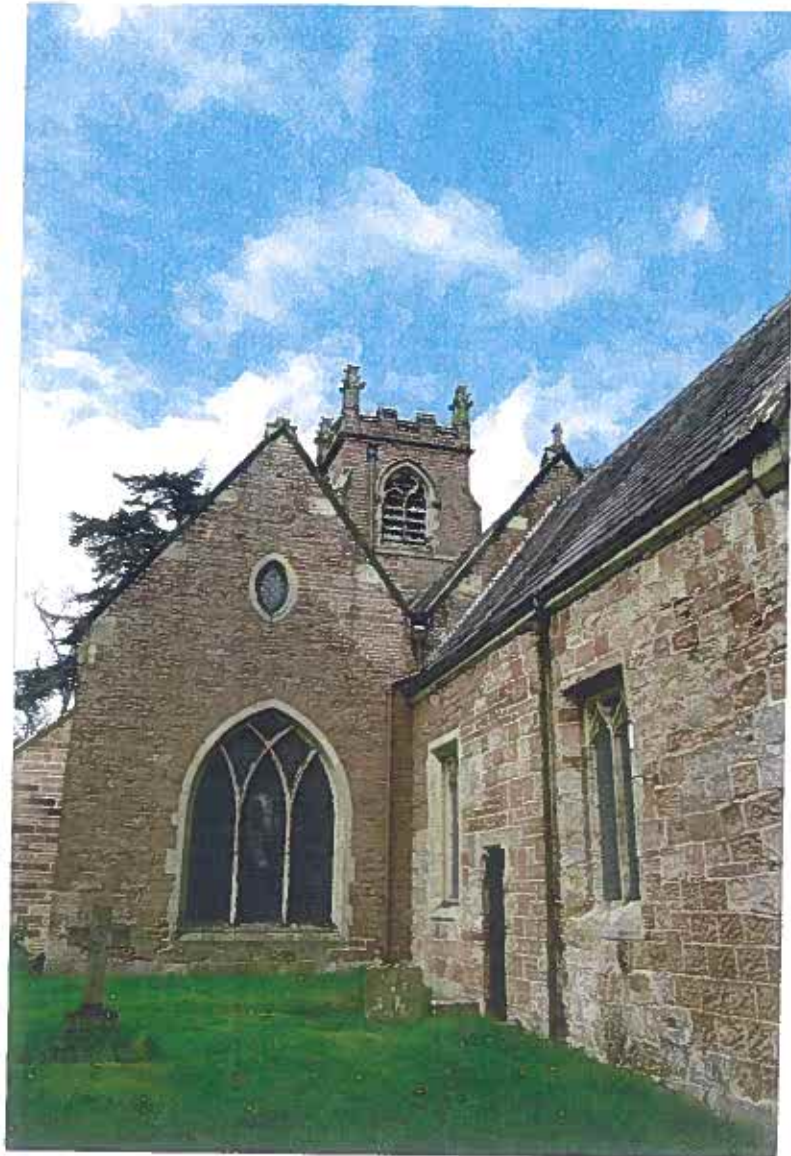


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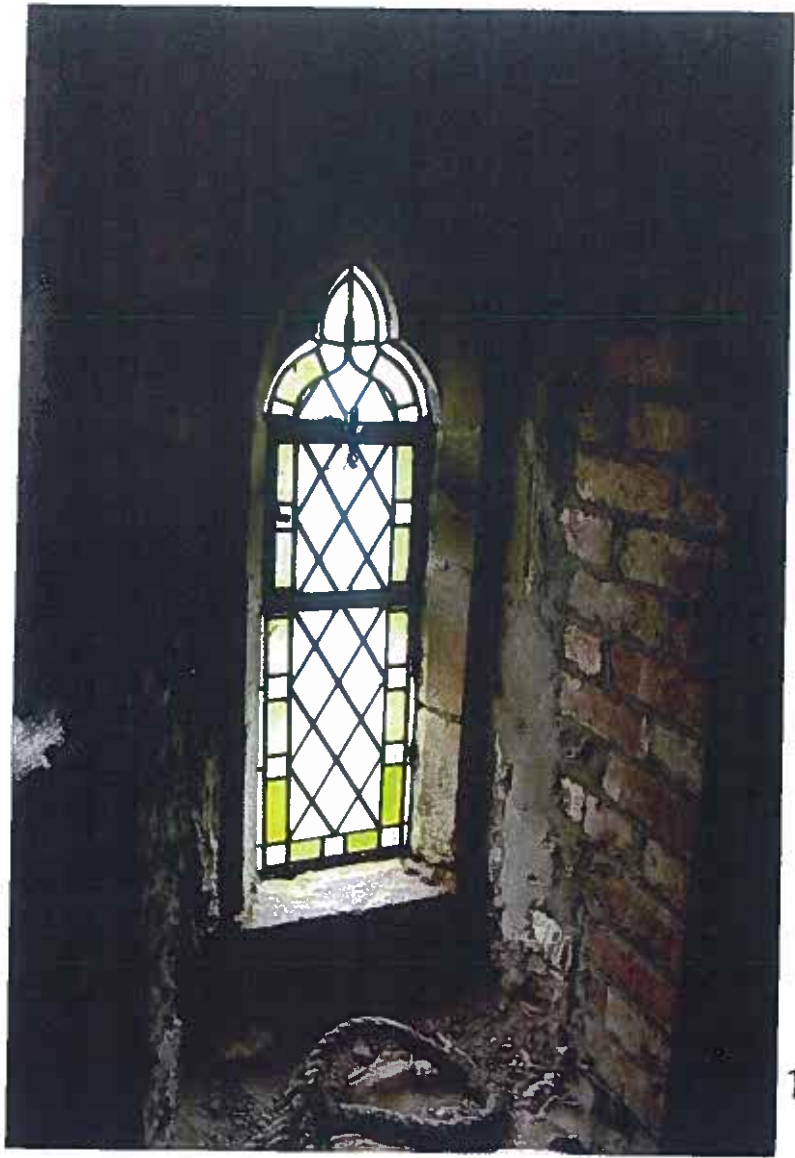
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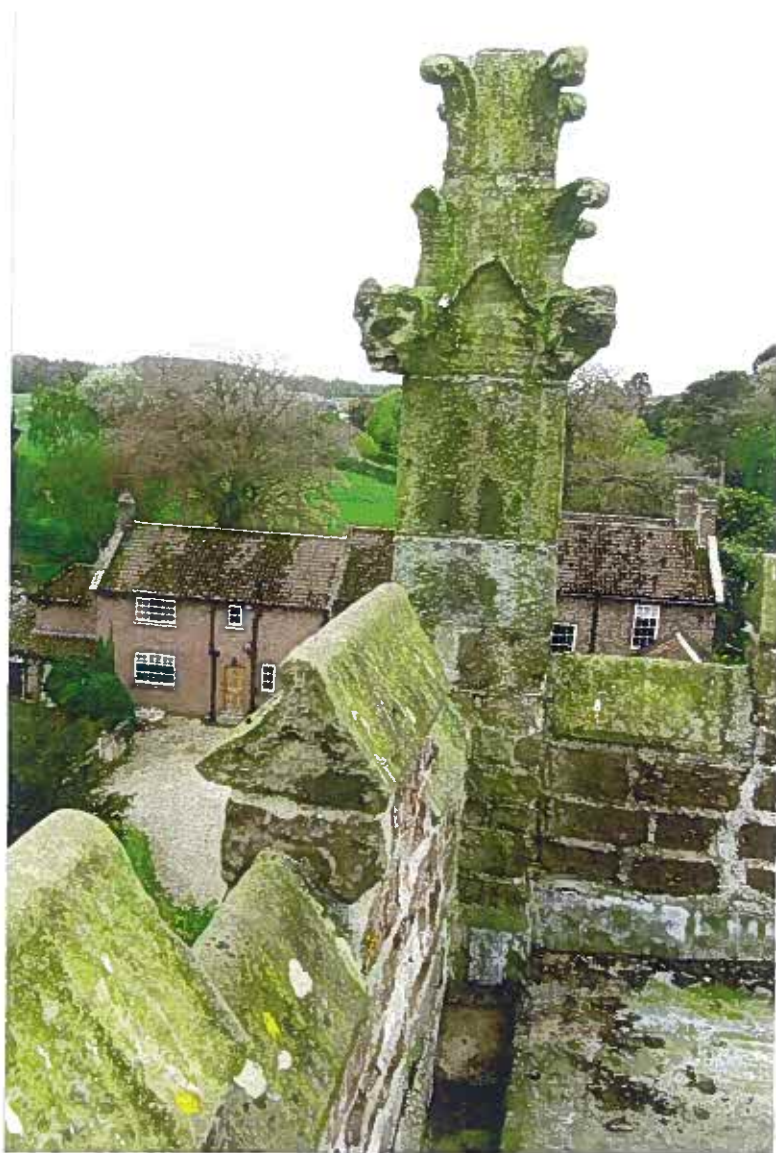


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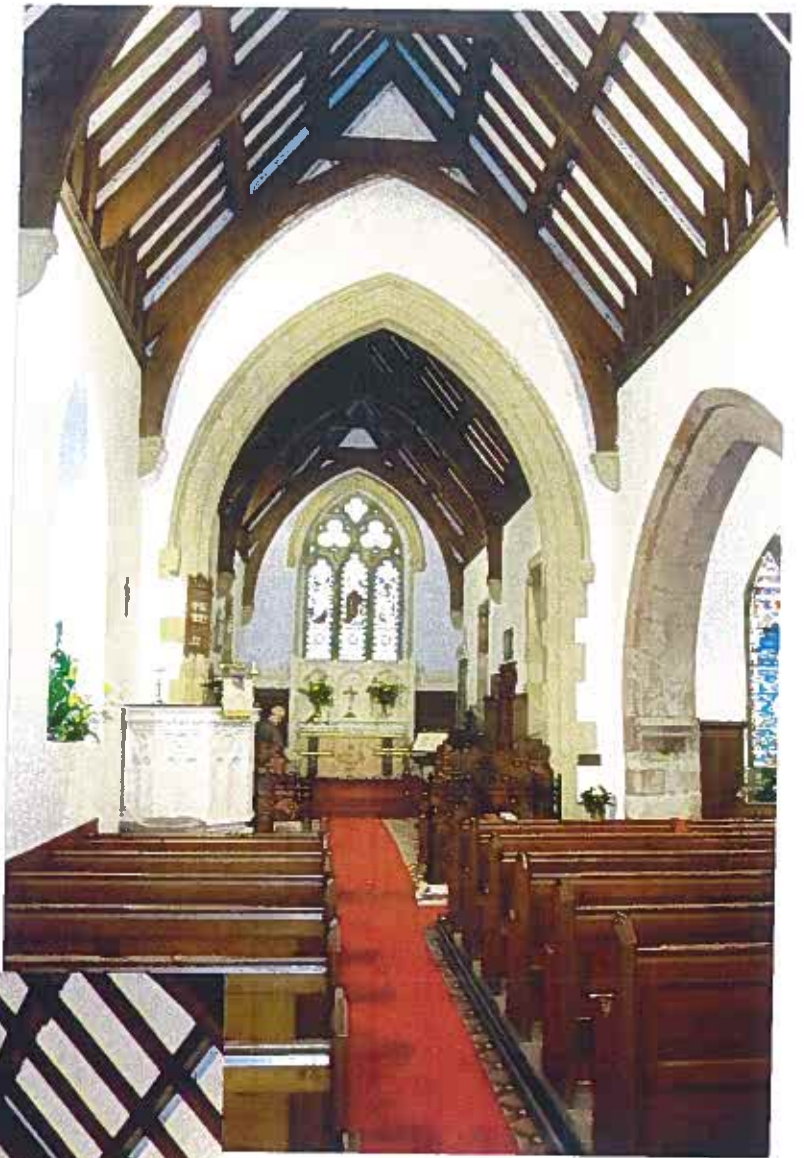


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