

Bordley Township Project:

The fabric of Rylstone church (fieldwork visit 22-3-2010)

Notes by Alison Armstrong

The church is listed grade II. The old church is said to have been “rebuilt” by E G Paley , of a Lancaster firm, in 1852-3. It replaced a church of medieval origin. The remodelling was at a time of a wave of religious revival and a return to reinstating high church values in Anglican churches. There was government money too and the Wadilove family of the nearby Hall (described in Whitaker but now rebuilt) donated a large sum. Of the old church we have Whitakers description and two illustrations (see Glenys’s pics) of the older church that survive in the church; one dated 1798 and the other a 1905 copy of Bury’s sketch of 18-- (1840?) . The “rebuilt” church is so similar in plan and architecture to these contemporary accounts, and so lacking in Victorian-style walling, that it is likely it was more of a make-over retaining the old foundations. The architect’s plans probably survive as a Faculty would have been obtained to allow the 1852 alterations. Only the dressed stonework is unmistakably Victorian eg on the nave arcades, quoins, tower angle buttresses, renewed window and door surrounds. Even some of this might just be dressed-over earlier work but it is impossible to tell.

THE CLUES

Setting and earthworks

The church is known to have been an early chapelry (ie within the ecclesiastical parish of Burnsall and later had private chantry chapels within it) Like many Dales settings, it is adjacent to the former manorial hall of Rylstone. The medieval garden water features remain in the field on the S and Whitaker describes the old hall before modernisation. The village was W of the church around a green but has been truncated by the c 1835 turnpike or current road. The Cliffords inherited the Norton’s demesne lands and hall after the 1569 Rising. Linear earthworks can be seen in the field SW of the church. In the churchyard itself are well-defined earthwork foundations of buildings , north of the church. (S Moorhouse has shown that pre Conquest foundations survive in many Dales churchyards) These right-angled foundations may be part of the Anglo-Saxon church and associated buildings. A-S chapelries were below parish churches, but often had attached side buildings or porticus and other structures. Surveys might tell us more.

The older church

Whitaker tells us (before the mid 19thc restoration)that the Rylstone Chapel of St Peter has a tower, choir and side aisles, a cylindrical font, shields on the pillars, a south chantry chapel belonging to Rylstone hall and a north chantry chapel belonging to Bordley hall. Whitaker suggests dating as 12thC for the east end and part of the side aisles but much of 16thc perpendicular style (tower etc) He says the Rev Canon Boyd made sketches of the old church which showed a tower, nave with clerestory, two aisles, chancel with aisles and a south porch. He says the clerestory (shown in a 1798 drawing in the church) was removed in 1849 and the roof made continuous over the aisles (as shown on Bury’s sketch in the vestry). Whitaker says the rebuilt church has west tower, lofty arch, nave and clerestory, N and S aisles of 4 bays, s porch and chancel. Only two shields now

remain on the pillars. The old church and the new are so alike, based on the two drawings, that it was probably only improved. The drawings give us some idea of architectural features now missing. The main difference is that the chancel no longer has its aisles which contained the chantry chapels. "the chancel was restored in 18 (49?)" says the 1905 drawing caption . The old chancel appears to be there in 1798 although it is called the choir by Whitaker (at a time when chancels had less value) The present chancel has such old –looking stonework that it must have existed in 1798. Possibly the aisle windows have been reset in positions different from those of the drawings

Architectural remains.

The old drawings and surviving fragments give some dating sequence.

1. Romanesque window ;

In the vestry (site of the Bordley chantry chapel) A small round-headed window carved from one piece of sandstone has been reset in the chimney flue of the 19thC fireplace. Solid window heads are typically Anglo Saxon and there was a great rebuilding in the 10thC. Although there is no obvious Saxon tooling, the window head is cut into an earlier piece of carved stonework that also appears A-S. Similar concentric circles are seen around a window head of 10thC at Kirkburton church nr Huddersfield but here they do not fit the opening. The "twisted rope" decoration is also a feature seen on A-S stonework, so stylistically this stone would seem to be A-S, reused from earlier carved work perhaps depicting a halo or from a cross centre. It really needs expert verification.

A-S parishes were often made from A-S estates whose boundaries were sometimes based on R-B ones. Beaumont (in Pointers to the Past) shows the parish of Burnsall (with pre-Conquest sculpture) as having outlying chapelries ; these were the category below a parish church. This is likely to be the origin of the Rylstone chapelry. Other chapelries are small buildings with a simple nave with west door and narrower chancel, often about 16 feet wide internally and 32 or 48 feet long. Perhaps Rylstone was like this. The St Peter dedication also suggests early date. The church yard earthworks may have been for other buildings attached to the chapelry. Horbury and Bardsey have plain church towers, rather like Rylstone . The rough boulder rubble of the chancel might be 14thC but it has small stones in between the larger ones suggesting possible A-S work.

2. Norman shafts

The church may have been improved or rebuilt after the Norman conquest as two fragments of Norman shafts remain, possibly of 12th C date. These were formerly in the porch but we found them thrown down outside the porch and moss-covered.. Both fragments are of sandstone, have rounded shafts, and are topped by a capital with a flat abacus. The decoration below this is plain on one but the other has scalloped decoration, so they are from different structures. Both have a plain moulded ring below the capital. They appear to be from doors (or chancel arch or cluster piers?) and both are cut to go against a wall/ structure. The drawing of 1798 shows the porch to have around-headed doorway so it may have been moved from the old south wall. Conistone chapelry has round columns of Norman work.

3. 14thC window heads

In the porch a series of cusped window heads have been reset to make stone benches. (Porches were traditionally where parish business was conducted) There is also a window quatrefoil reset in the porch windows. These appear to be work of the 1300s. The window heads may have been from the west walls or chapels rebuilt in 1852. The 1798 drawing shows the east wall to have two flat buttresses and long thin Gothic windows to the chancel and their side aisles and are possibly of 1300s date or 12th as Whitaker thought. Narrow aisles and rebuilt or lengthened chancel are often of this date and may have happened here. The lack of any buttresses depicted for tower or aisles may be artistic licence or indicate that these are early work. Since the tower was wrapped around by later aisles, the tower was not a new 16thc addition. The tower also lacks perpendicular Gothic work such as crenelated top, string course or corner buttresses so this makes it look an early tower perhaps Norman. The belfry may be added as stone colour changes. Slit windows suggest an internal stair, now replaced. Measuring might reveal its date.

4. The Perpendicular work of c 1500

The two drawings indicate much rebuilding at a time of prosperity in late 15th to early 16thc, in line with many local and monastic churches.

This appears to include the unusual flat-headed windows of the belfry and new nave clerestory, the crenelated porch, the widened aisles wrapping around the tower and with aisle chantry chapels around the chancel. Chancel aisles are common in Craven often with Lady chapels. The chunky roof finials seen in early 19thc, but not 1798, may be Georgian restorations although in a perpendicular style. The aisles seem to have been built under an extended chancel roof, making it a very low pitched wide roof. At this time the two chantry chapels, including Bordley Hall's or Proctor's Chapel of Our Lady were well established. The shields may also date from this refurbishment. By 1539 the church began parish registers.

5 Chancel arch and chancel rooflines (See illustration below)

The chancel arch and chancel are the only parts of the interior now clear of plaster. the chancel arch was still painted with a design in the late 19thc. The walls now reveal rough stonework of roughly coursed boulders which is certainly not 19thc work. The dressed stonework of the east window appears to be added onto the outside of an earlier wall in an enlarged opening and the 19thc dressed work is not carried through the wall opening to the interior in the normal way. The chancel arch shows two earlier roof lines. The first is very steep and tall and may have belonged to a narrow Saxo-Norman chancel arch or east end without aisles, or with very narrow aisles. Above this is a higher flatter roofline reaching down to the base of the clerestory. This might be the wide and shallow roof shown in 1798 designed to cover the wider medieval aisles.

6. By 1798

In the early 18thc Georgian values meant opening up the medieval church to a squarish "preaching box" with a shallow sanctuary rather than a chancel separate from the nave. Whitaker calls this east end "the choir" as chancels were out of favour. The painted wooden Royal crest would have hung in the 18thc church. In the 18thc the nave was used for preaching and with lots of box pew

seating as shown on the 1798 seating plan. The small sketch of the church has a prominent tower and the caption proclaims "The Steeple with three bells". Towers and bellringing were popular. The plan shows a 4-bay nave and a choir/chancel which is walled off from the chancel aisles. The SE chancel aisle is, significantly, labelled "hall quire repaired by the Duke of Devonshire." (This former chantry chapel site was inherited by the Devonshires from marriage to the Cliffords and by purchase from the Nortons of Rylstone Hall) The NE aisle area has the seating pew for Bordley Hall but is near the former chantry site. The seating plan is for box pews that no longer exist. The drawing shows a round-headed perhaps Norman porch door. There are stone crosses on the roof (perhaps including one now inside the church). The clerestory is depicted narrower than the tower and only of two bays which seems curious, but might be artistic licence. Perhaps the old, narrow and short, Saxon or Norman nave remained?. A great crack drawn down the SW corner of the aisle suggests need of repair. The abundant 18thC gravestones now used as paving around the exterior 19thC walls and in the church floor show the popularity of the 18thC church by Bordley residents.

7. The 19thC church

A drawing of the church by C W Lowe, in pencil, dated 1905 and annotated that it is a copy of a drawing by Rev W Bury, Rector of Burnsall, "just before the chancel was restored in 18??" shows a church very similar to the church today, including the unusual flat-headed windows in the tower and Gothic aisle windows. The curious clerestory has gone and the whole roof raised up to one level.

The drawings present a puzzle;. The chancel must be the east end with aisles attached as shown in 1798 and described by Whitaker. Today there are three windows in the nave and one in the chancel aisle. This makes four windows along the length, not three. The windows may therefore have been spaced differently in the rebuild of 1852. Perhaps the old windows are those used for the porch seats. Since the chancel is of old stone it seems that the chantry chapels, perhaps added about 1500, were demolished in 1852 and the chancel restored to a single structure. Angle buttresses were added to the tower and an external stair to the belfry. We did not go into the belfry where often reused stone and timber is found.

The curious plinth around the outside, at ground level, looks hollow behind, suggesting an encasing of older stonework. The very rough sandstone rubble of the walls does not look like 19thC work, unless "antiquarianism" or cost, inspired a re-use of rubble walling like the older work. Exterior walling is rough peck-dressing and perhaps it was designed to be plastered. The windows on the north side are very poorly executed. The north aisle and clerestory appear to have older walling remaining in the lower courses .

Although plans for the building work probably exist in the parish archives, it looks as if the work may well have been more a make-over and retained the substantial foundations of medieval building as an easy option rather than trying to demolish them.

Recent work has included plaster removal in the chancel to reveal rough stonework and old rooflines.. A photo of the nave in the later 19thC shows the chancel arch painted with a banner decoration (18thC/) bearing words.

S T R Y

THE STEEPLE



RILSTON CHAPEL
1798

Containing Three Bells



RYLSTONE CHURCH

March 2010.

Red lines show earlier rooflines of chancel/nave.

ACA.



Interpretation ?

End.