

ROCK

THE PARISH CHURCH OF SS PHILIP AND JAMES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

JULY 2020



The church from the south east

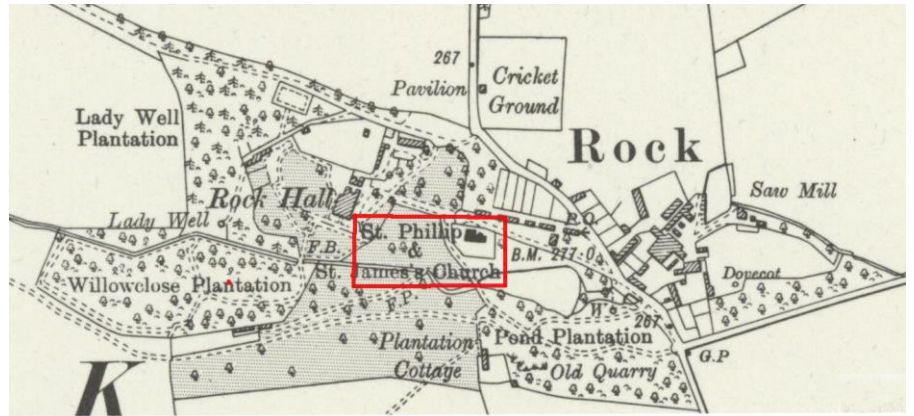
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Rock, SS Philip and James

The small village of Rock is situated c 7 km north of Alnwick in Northumberland; the parish church (NGR NU 2026 2024) stands alone on the south side of the village street, close to the gates of Rock Hall, seat of the Bosanquet family with whose history the building is intimately connected.



Location Map

From Ordnance Survey 6":1 mile survey 1922
Ordnance Survey map licence 100045703

Description

Rock parish church consists of a nave with a 19th century north aisle, and a chancel with an apsidal sanctuary and north vestry. The original 12th-century parts of the building are of coursed almost square blocks of stone, in a variety of colours, often red, and also orange and buff. There is also later squared and coursed stone, and very obvious 19th century grey ashlar in the apse and north aisle. The roofs are of Welsh slate.

The original building has a chamfered plinth, and is articulated by pilaster buttresses, with sunken panels of wall between them, above a chamfered plinth and beneath a corbel table.

The west end of the **Nave** (right) has a central raised panel containing an original round-arched doorway; its continuous inner order is of plain square section whilst; the outer order of chevron is carried on jamb shafts with worn scalloped capitals, and there is an impost band with tegulated ornament which is carried up over the arch as a hoodmould. Above is a horizontal string course with lozenge



ornament, chamfered above and below and now very worn; the corbel table on either side of the central panel it is carried on four masks, now weathered beyond recognition although a very Victorian take on what they may have looked like is provided by the adjacent gable end of the aisle. The upper gable of the nave is a 19th century rebuild, and has a Romanesque window with a moulded arch on jamb shafts, flanked by sunk cross paté panels, and carries an ornate bellcote in the same style, which has twin round-arched openings with similar detail to the window below. The pilasters at the outer angles of both nave and north aisle have angle shafts with cushion capitals.

The south elevation of the nave is of four irregular bays, with a chamfered plinth and arched corbel table flush with the fronts of the pilaster buttresses, meaning each bay is in effect a sunk panel. Original stonework - red sandstone survives in the lower courses of the first two bays but much of the upper wall has been refaced in grey stone; all of the westernmost pilaster is in grey stone. The first bay is blank, and the second has a pair of 19th century lancets, which have chamfered surrounds and a linked moulded hood, with below them, in the fourth course above the plinth, a re-used stone with chevron ornament. The third bay has mostly old stone, and a small round-headed loop set east of centre, and the fourth bay has another pair of 19th-century lancets.



North side of north aisle, originally north wall of nave rebuilt in new position in 1866

The **North Aisle** is an addition of 1866, and follows (and to some extent elaborates upon) the Romanesque style of the nave; it has a separate gabled roof, and its west end is copied from that of the nave, except that its central panel has a big two-light window rather than a doorway. There is an even more elaborate two-light window in the east end, with a stilted

arch and big circular light in the head, with a toothed surround, very characteristic of the work of the architect, F.R. Wilson of Alnwick. The north elevation is much more sober, as Wilson appears to have replicated the old north wall of the nave, removed when the aisle was added 'I must record that every sound stone in the ancient wall... was marked and re-used in the new one; the Norman windows in the north wall, especially, are identical'¹. The wall has two broad bays, each with fourteen arches of corbel table. The east bay has a 19th-century lancet set east-of-centre and the west bay a 12th-century round-headed loop, without a chamfer, its sill restored. To the west of the central pilaster buttress is what appears to be a small blocked opening; this probably relates to the pipe that linked the former gas house (on the north side of the village street) to the organ in the north aisle (see notes on organ).

The two-bay south elevation of the **Chancel** has feature like that of the nave, but in the first bay the 12th-century corbel table has been replaced by an oversailing chamfered course. There is a 19th-century triple lancet, with similar detail to the double ones in the nave, but old masonry in the lower courses. The second bay has a single 19th-century lancet, set a little lower in the wall, with old walling beneath its sill.

Only the western part of the chancel north wall is fully exposed, to the west of the vestry. It has a length of old corbel table (four arches) and a narrow round-arched loop with a chamfered surround; beneath it is the line of the gabled roof of a former outbuilding; to the east, above the vestry, is the roof-line of a taller predecessor.

The **Apse** is entirely of 19th-century ashlar, the blocks deliberately pock-marked to give an impression of antiquity. Its three-bay curved elevation broadly follows that of the original parts further west, with plinth, pilasters and arched corbel table, but there is also a bold string course, hollow-chamfered beneath, below a single round-arched Romanesque light in each bay, which have moulded heads, grooved impostes and jamb shafts with scalloped capitals and moulded bases.



¹ Wilson (1870) 131.

The **Vestry** is of 19th century ashlar, with a chamfered plinth, and a pent roof. It has small chamfered lancets in the east wall and east-of-centre in the north wall, and further west a stack projection, now truncated and topped by slates. At the north end of the west wall is a doorway with a two-centred arch.

Interior.

The interior of the church now has walls of bare stone (displaying a variety of fabric types), with ashlar dressings.

The west wall of the **Nave** is largely of typical squared 12th century stone, with a ragged vertical break very close to the south end – the western bay of the south wall has been rebuilt, and this may indicate the line of its original inner face. Close to the north end and c 2 m above the floor is a larger ragged infilled socket. The west door has a semicircular rear arch, of plain square section, set on jambs with attached shaft that have fluted capitals, perhaps re-cut. The arch cuts across a horizontal series of upright sockets, clearly for the floor of a western gallery; there are indications that one joist was set against a voussoir of the rear arch, suggesting that the doorway (which might conceivably have been re-set from elsewhere) pre-dates the gallery, so the best explanation to get round this awkward relationship of rear arch and gallery is that the doorway was blocked when the gallery was created. Higher up there are some discrepancies in the coursing – the northern part of the wall has rather more elongate blocks, and may have been rebuilt, and in the gable, where the window has a plain round-headed rear arch, smaller and more roughly-coursed stone is used.

The western part of the south wall of the nave looks to have been rebuilt in coursed squared stone, except for its lowest two or three courses of 12th century cubicular blocks; in this lower section there is an infilled hole low down against the west wall. There is a vertical ragged break c 0.50 m short of the first window, which has a broad splay, all of 19th century ashlar, and a segmental rear arch with a chamfer to its head only. Underneath its west jamb, and just inside the line of its east jamb, are further breaks, which may indicate a former door position. Beyond this 12th century squared stop survives to the full height of the wall, and the small round-arched window has an intact semicircular rear arch. The third window is another Victorian one like the first, and in the 12th century masonry below its sill is an infilled feature, possibly originally a piscina.

On the north side of the nave is Wilson's three-bay arcade of 1870, with round arches of two chamfered orders on circular shafts and semicircular responds which have scalloped

capitals, impostes grooved and chamfered beneath, and 'holdwater' bases. All this is in smooth ashlar; the wall above is of roughly coursed and roughly-shaped stone.

In the **North Aisle** the walls are all of 19th century ashlar. The large windows in the end walls have round rear arches of plain square section; beneath the eastern is a broad but shallow round-arched recess with a similar arch. On the north the small; central window has a plain round rear arch, and the others segmental rear arches, chamfered to their heads only.



The semicircular arch into the **Chancel** (above) is probably the best original feature of the church. It is of two orders, the inner having a pair of rolls with a fillet between and the outer having bold chevrom to the nave, but is left square to the chancel. Towards the nave there is a hoodmould with a relief zig-zag pattern. A course above the top of the arch is a string with lozenge ornament, forming a slight set back.

The jambs have half shafts carrying the inner order, and, towards the nave, the outer as well. The southern capital has scalloping with three horizontal grooves above, and an impost grooved and chamfered below; the northern (which has more the look of having been re-cut) is rather different, with varieties of zig zag both directly above the scalloping and to the vertical face of the impost as well.(towards the nave). There are no real bases.

Adjacent to the south jamb of the chancel arch is an infilled recess, that appears to have a rough trefoiled (and possibly ogee) top; at first sight this looks to be asquint, but there is no sign of it on the opposite face of the wall, so it is probably a niche, perhaps for a reredos for the nave altar suggested by the possible piscina position nearby.

The central part of the west face of the gable wall above chancel arch is of good quality squared stone, of 12th century character, with smaller and presumably secondary fabric to either side. The squared stonework of the east face has more the look of having been rebuilt.

The south wall of the chancel is quite complex. About 0.20 m from its west end and 3 m up there is an infilled socket c 0.25 m square, with below it a ragged vertical joint before the 19th century masonry of the western splay of the three-light window. Above the internal jamb of this window there is what looks to be a blocked opening c 0.90 m high and 0.50 m wide immediately below the 19th century oversailing ashlar course which tops the wall. Returning to the three-light window, its sill is 19th century work (with 12th century fabric below) but parts of the eastern splay are older, as is the broad segmental rear arch, which has a broad chamfer and an internal label with a round stop to the east and an acute turned-back end to the west. The soffit of its rear arch retains old plaster, with remains of medieval wall painting (below) .



Beyond the window is a pilaster-like panel carrying a wall monument of 1705 to Colonel John Salkeld. Above this towards the top of the wall are two straight joints c 0.60 m apart (the western with some big squared blocks to the west) which may mark the position of a removed cross wall; beyond the character of the walling changes abruptly to roughly-coursed rubble. The broad internal splay and shallow segmental-pointed rear arch of the single-light

window look all 19th century work, but below it disturbed fabric might just, as in the corresponding position in the nave, possibly indicate the position of a piscina.

The western part of the north wall of the chancel is largely undisturbed 12th century fabric; at the west end of the wall, at around 1.8 m above the floor is a rough socket c 0.40 m high and 0.35 m wide; east of this is an undisturbed 12th century window, with at the level of the

top of its rear arch and to either side a stone shield, with three boards. Above and slightly east of the window is an apparent blocked opening, just beneath the oversailing eaves course, within the blocking of which there is a corbel for a roof truss, of 19th century ashlar but with an older stone shield (again with three boards) at its base.

East of the window is the 19th century vestry door, which has a sharp two-centred arch, the hollow-moulded inner order continuous to the floor, and the moulded outer on jamb shafts with scalloped capitals. Above it is a marble wall tablet, and above it a length of straight joint. East again the wall changes to rubble, as on the south, although much of it is hidden by a big wall monument to Charles Bosanquet (d1850) which partly conceals a blocked window that has a four-centred rear arch, apparently cut in a single block (right). The fabric changes abruptly again, in the topmost courses of this wall, to large squared blocks, rather more elongate than in the 12th century work further west.



The interior of the **Apse** is of smooth ashlar; the three windows have roll-moulded rear arches carried on shafted jambs with scalloped capitals and moulded bases. At either side of the apse, which is slightly narrower than the chancel, is a tall attached shaft with a scalloped capital.

The interior of the **Vestry** is again rather puzzling. Its walls are of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone, with the dressings to the two windows (which have segmental-pointed rear arches, with chamfers to their heads only) are very poorly finished. About 15cm from the south end of both side walls is a straight joint, which seems to mark the line of the original outer face of the chancel north wall, implying that the section between them has been cut back to expose rubble core, like the side walls of the eastern bay of the chancel. The two doorways, into the chancel and at the north end of the west wall, have segmental rear arches; near the west end of the north wall is a plain stone fireplace, now infilled, with disturbed walling above it.

The **Roofs** of the church are all of mid-19th century date. The four-bay roof of the nave and the three-bay one of the chancel have simple trusses with heavy square-section ties, collars with arch braces, two levels of purlins and a ridge. Simple rectangular block corbels, round which the eaves course steps out, carry the nave trusses; in the chancel these corbels have

earlier shields, each with three boards, beneath them. Wilson could not resist something a little more exotic over his north aisle; the roof here is of three bays, with collar-beam, trusses that have long arch braces coming down onto wall posts carried by elaborate pseudo-Romanesque ashlar corbels, with ashlaring to the eaves, carrying one level of purlins and a ridge.

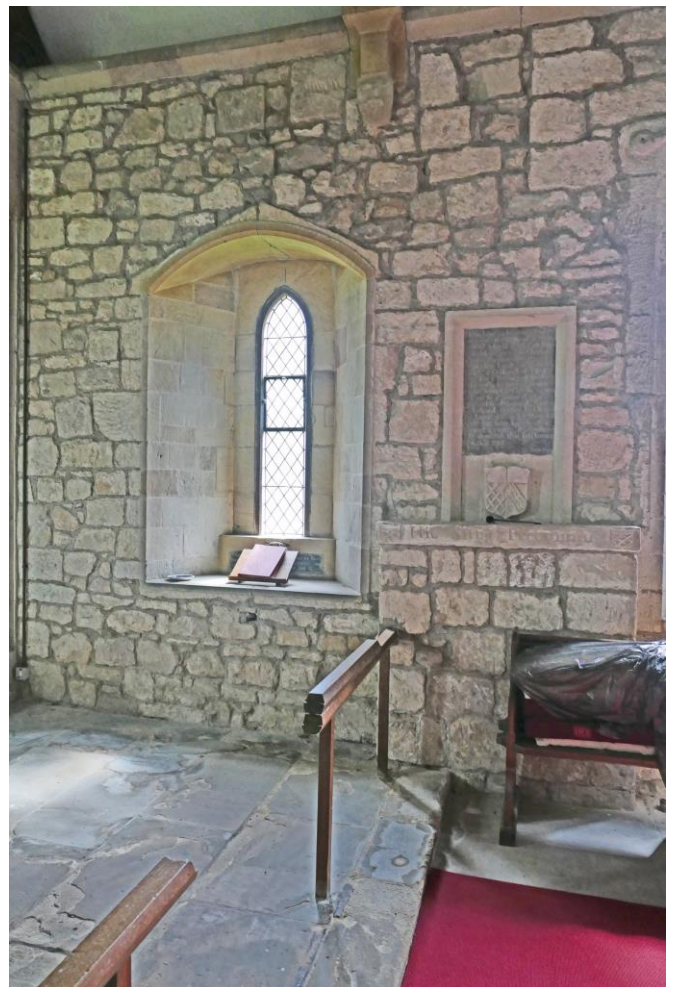
Structural Development.

This is an interesting fabric that provides quite a few knotty problems, especially in the internal elevations. It has been suggested that the original building was constructed, as a chapel of ease to Embleton, c 1176, which would tally with the quite sophisticated Romanesque architecture. Little remains of later medieval evidence other than two windows in the chancel, a blocked one on the north and the internal head and one jamb of a larger one on the south, which looks as if it could be of 15th or early 16th century date.

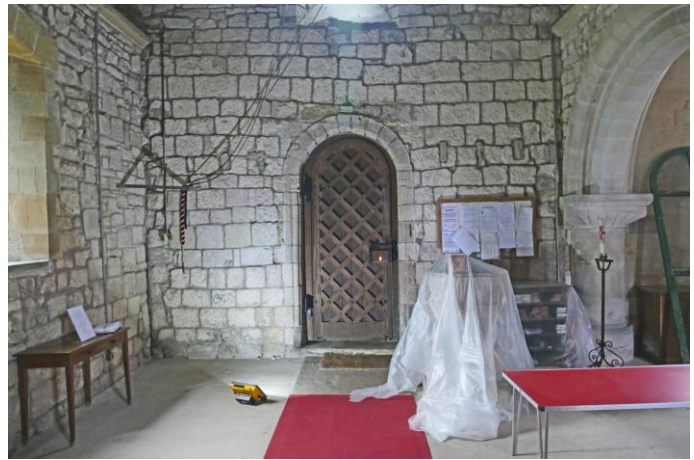
The northern window is set in rough rubble walling, which, on both sides of the eastern bay of the chancel, is in total contrast to the neatly-squared stone of the 12th century church. The obvious interpretation would be that the chancel was extended by a bay, in poorer-quality stone, but on the south the external wall of this bay is in exactly the same stonework, with pilaster and corbel table, as the original parts of the church. What has happened?

Perhaps the best explanation is that the chancel was only one bay long, with a sanctuary beyond (although there was no external division between the two parts); there are indication of a cross wall which could have contained a second large arch (cf Bolam, Seaton Delaval, and perhaps Thockrington) . The sanctuary may well have had thicker walls (as at Seaton Delaval, perhaps because it was vaulted. At some later date this vault may have been removed and the inner faces of the walls cut back, leaving rubble core as at present. The north-eastern window was inserted after this was done.

Chancel looking south-east; note indications of removed cross-wall (top right) and coursed rubble exposed by ? thinning of wall.



This brings us to the 19th century, when things are again complicated. By the end of the 18th century the church was so dilapidated that it could not be used, then it is recorded as being 'rebuilt' at the expense of Charles Bosanquet in 1806². This must have been more a restoration; the lancet windows in nave and chancel might well date to this period of works. Then in 1824 a western gallery was constructed to form a Bosanquet family pew; the evidence suggests that the west door was blocked at this time, so access to the church was presumably by a doorway of uncertain date (or which traces are visible internally) towards the west end of the south wall of the nave. In 1855 the Rev. R.W. Bosanquet decided on further restoration work, and for his architect went to the top – Anthony Salvin, then supervising the Duke of Northumberland's alterations to Alnwick Castle, was employed. He was responsible for the bellcote and the apse; it is not known whether foundations were found of an original apse. He is also said to have built the vestry, but this is in a simple Gothic style unlike the Romanesque of his other parts, and seems more likely to be earlier, perhaps of 1806. He removed the gallery, and re-instated the west door³. Finally in 1866 Alnwick Architect F.R. Wilson added the north aisle, again in a Romanesque style.



West wall of nave, with sockets for gallery timbers

Although it is strictly speaking outside the field of this report, the spectacular organ which occupies most of the north aisle is worth remarking upon. It was constructed in 1881 and was a gift from Holford MacDowall Bosanquet, fellow of St John's College, Oxford, a mathematician and musician, built to his specification by Grey and Davison of London. It was originally blown by an engine powered by petroleum gas working in a special stone building on the opposite side of the road to the church⁴), however, in 1935 an electric motor was substituted and subsequently the gashouse was demolished. It was restored in 2004 by Harrison and Harrison with the aid of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund⁵.

² <http://www.southcroft-rennington.co.uk/rockhist.html>

³ This seems likely, but there are structural puzzles, for instance the win lancet which replaces the former south door must be pre-Salvin work re-used, as he would hardly mix its basic Gothic with the elaborate Romanesque of his bellcote and apse.

⁴ <http://www.harrisonorgans.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/ROCK.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.southcroft-rennington.co.uk/rockhist.html>

Archaeological Assessment

Rock is a significant medieval church, and will doubtless preserve archaeological remains beneath its floors, even though these will have been impacted both by generations of burials and, as often, a 19th century underfloor heating system. In the event of any works disturbing underfloor deposits at least an archaeological watching brief will be necessary. As regards the above-ground fabric, virtually all the wall surfaces, inside and out, are exposed. Remains of plaster with wall paintings do survive on the soffit of the rear arch of the three-light window on the south of the chancel, and these will require monitoring and possible appropriate conservation measures. This is a church where a proper photogrammetric survey of internal wall faces would be valuable, as there are many features which would benefit from proper recording. A good modern ground plan would also be useful; the only plans seen are based on F.R.Wilson's 1870 survey (which was used as the basis for the phased plan presented with this report).

Peter F Ryder July 2020

SS PHILIP AND JAMES, ROCK

