

St James the Less. Tatham- a short history

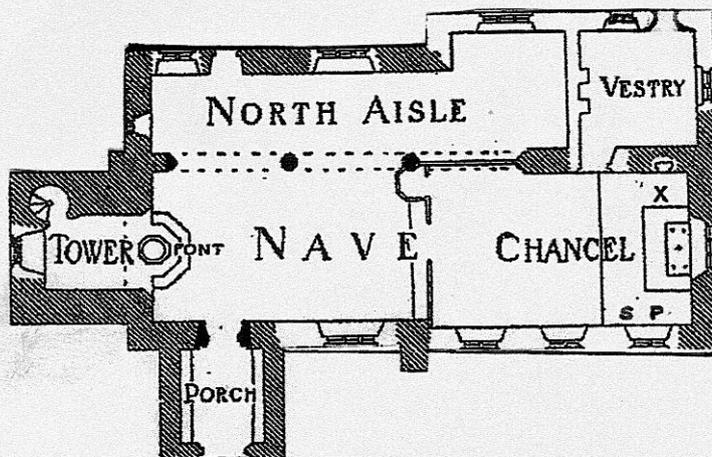
The church of St James the Less stands on the first high ground above the flood plain of the River Wenning, a major tributary of the River Lune. The views from the churchyard are pleasing and extensive; those to the south and west look towards the Lune valley and, eventually, Morecambe Bay, whilst those to the east are dominated by Ingleborough hill.

There is evidence that there was a stone built church on the site before the eleventh century with an extension in the twelfth, although most of the present building dates to the fifteenth century and was much restored in the nineteenth. The twelfth century building used the same floor plan as the original Anglian one for the tower, nave and chancel, whilst extending northwards to provide a side aisle and adding a south west door; later work essentially kept to this site plan.

Plan of the Church Building

Scale 1:250

(one inch on the plan represents about 20 feet in the building)



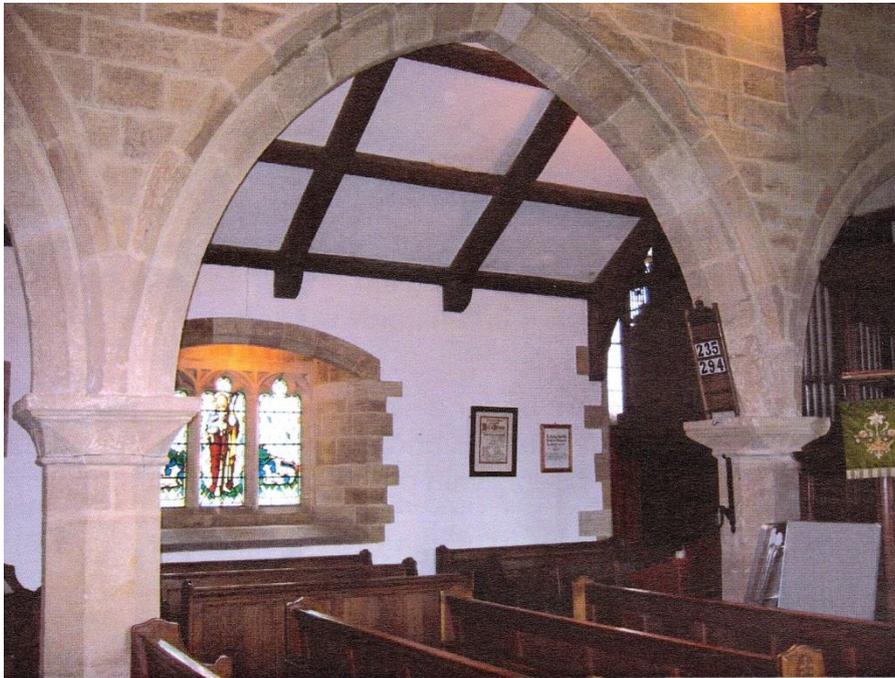
Key

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|---|--------------------|---|-----------------------|
| ■ | Twelfth century | X | Crusader's tomb cover |
| ▨ | Fifteenth century | S | Sedilia |
| □ | Nineteenth century | P | Piscina |

Tatham (pronounced Taytam) has had various spellings over the years. It is given as Tatham in the Domesday Book, as Tateham in 1202, As both Thatham and Thatham in 1212, and finally as Tatham from 1241

The only remaining fragment of the original Anglian building is a small blocked window which was built into the entrance porch when this was renewed in Victorian times. There is evidence of a door in the south wall which may well have dated back to the original building. This was later blocked and finally lost with the Victorian rebuilding of the south wall. There is also a description from 1822 of a 'very plain and massy arch of narrow dimensions', typically Anglo Saxon in shape, 'between the tower and the nave'. This too was lost during the Victorian rebuilding. There is the further possibility that some parts of the tower date back to the original building, particularly as the lower section is constructed in rubble masonry, where blocks of stone are roughly shaped and fitted together randomly.

There is rather more evidence of the twelfth century work. The three columns which separate the nave from the north aisle are typically Norman (Romanesque) whilst the arches they support are Gothic in shape – pointed rather than rounded. The south west doorway also dates back to the twelfth century, with a typical rounded arch and geometrical carving. On the left side of the doorway deep gouges can be seen in the stone. It has been suggested that these were made by archers sharpening their arrowheads before practising their skills in the churchyard.

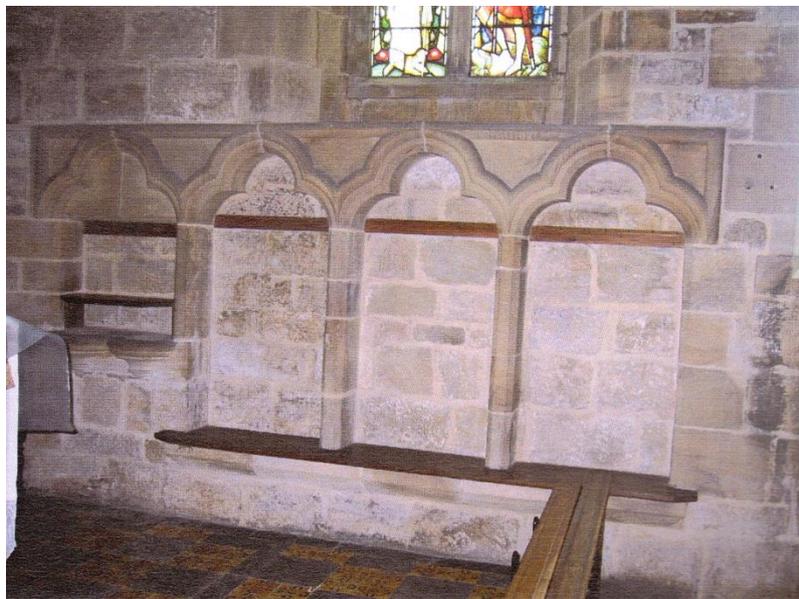


A major rebuild took place in the fifteenth century, still keeping to the original site plan and keeping parts of the Anglian and Norman structure, but essentially giving the church an English Gothic style, with pointed arches and windows. There were changes during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to give a much plainer interior with box pews and a gallery; the tower was also increased in height at this time.

By the 1880's the building had become dilapidated. The foundations had given way in places and the walls had suffered subsidence. The subsequent major restoration was led by Revd Arthur Foster and the cost was met largely by the Foster family. All the original stone was used in the rebuilding but, in contrast to the rubble masonry of the tower, the south and east walls show ashlar masonry with square cut stone blocks laid in regular courses.



Inside the building the box pews were replaced by the present ones, and the organ, font and pulpit were installed. Some of the features which had been removed in the seventeenth century were found and restored. As well as reusing the Anglian window in the porch, the remains of what was possibly the Norman altar were placed under the present altar, the stone coffin lid of an unknown crusader was placed in the chancel, and the fifteenth century sedilia and piscina were built into the south wall by the altar.



Since that time there have been only minor changes to the building.