Feature Sets (1)

Description
A major monastic site in the Romanesque period, but now not a stone is to be seen. Remains are in hands of museums and in 'a garden adjoining the site' (Lockett, 1971, 57, 58). Much stone is said to have been taken in the 16thc. to build the nearby 'New Hall', N of the Ferrybridge Road, but this has itself been demolished, see Bellamy (1965, xiii) and Pevsner (1967, 396, 644).

The site is now a large grassed area to the E of the castle. One level area through the middle of the site once included the cloister; a hummocky area to the N was the site of the church. The medieval builders probably terraced the site. In recent years the grass has been mown in order to pick out the areas covered by the church and main buildings. The site was over 8 acres (3.2 hectares) and is approximately bounded by Mill Dam Lane, Ferrybridge Road, Box Lane and Bondgate. The church was over 230 feet (70m) long.

Records for the Priory in the Heritage Environment Records for West Yorkshire (www.heritagegateway.org.uk) give further details on the Priory (monument no. 2088), and New Hall (monument no. 7743).

For the excavations c.1957-1961, see Bellamy (1965), which illustrates some chevron voussoirs with schematic drawings (fig. 23). Sculpture from the excavations was eventually taken to Pontefract Museum in Salter Row and its store (see separate reports).

History
Pontefract was a Cluniac Priory founded by Robert de Lacy, c.1090, as a dependency of La Charité-sur-Loire, which nominated the prior. Robert initially gave the churches of Ledsham; All Saints, Kirkby (Pontefract); Kippax and Darrington to the Priory; others gave the churches of Silkstone and St Clement's chapel at Cawthorne.

The Priory may have displaced a scattered Anglo-Saxon population (Roberts and Whittick, 2013, 72-3, 76; fig. 4).

Archbishop Thurstan, d. 1146, was buried before the high altar (VCH Yorkshire III, 184).

A family feud, c.1141-1151, partially destroyed the Priory. Gilbert de Gant compensated the monks c.1151-1152. 'About 1153, during the rebuilding of the priory, the monks received a temporary residence at Broughton from Alice de Rumelli, and in 1159 this new house was consecrated by Archbishop Roger' (VCH Yorkshire III, 185).

In 1159 Archbishop Roger de Pont l'Eveque (re)consecrated the repaired and enlarged church.

Complete demolition followed the Dissolution.

Features

Comments/Opinions
Bellamy's plans (1965, figs. 16, 24) show that most of the monastic complex, including the church, was laid out in an early 12thc. phase. The earliest church had apsed chapels in two grades N and S of the main east end, also apsed; these were found to have been demolished and replaced by later work. To a later 12thc. phase, presumably following the mid-century disturbances, belong the west doorway, buttresses to the N wall of the nave, N and S chapels beyond the choir aisles, and an eastward extension of the choir, although the E wall is not dateable; these E ends are all square.
The position of the west door is marked by a massive stone platform some twenty feet long, and projecting 4ft 6ins [1.37m] from the face of the main wall. It is at sill height only, and has an offset on the outside, level with the flooring already noted. Some residual mortar and rubble on the surface of the sill shows where the door opening has been, and bears impressions of the next course of masonry. It is possible to detect traces of five orders of mouldings narrowing to a door opening six feet wide... [there are suggestions of] four steps down to the floor of the nave. Excavation around the large stone platform shows that this was not included in the original planning of the west end of the church. The platform is butted on to the main walling, and is later.' (Bellamy, 1962-4, 25-6; plans and sections given).

The extensive new work at the W end of the church suggests a major doorway, the first work of one strand of the Yorkshire School doorways. After the Priory at Pontefract, it seems that churches belonging to the Cluniacs of Lewes (Fishlake and Conisbrough) received attention (Wood, 2000, 2001, 2004).

A few reused fragments found at the castle, during excavations in the 1980s are said to be from the Priory, but these have not been seen (Roberts 2002).

Lockett (1971, 57) says 'two varieties of beakhead voussoirs' were seen in a garden, but no beakheads have been identified in the Museum's collections: it is quite possible that they were not 'true' beakheads that he described, as the term is used loosely by some writers.

Considering how much carving there would have been from both phases of the church, perhaps coeval with Selby Abbey and Fishlake, and perhaps on other buildings of the complex, extremely little has been found.

**Bibliography**


Model of castle and priory area in Later Middle Ages (Pontefract Museum).
Priory, view looking towards Castle and SW
Priory, view looking towards All Saints and Castle in trees
Location

Site Location

Pontefract Priory
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Grid Reference</th>
<th>SE 466 226</th>
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| Boundaries              | pre-1974 traditional (England and Wales): Yorkshire, West Riding 
now: West Yorkshire |
| Diocese                 | formerly: York |
| Dedication              | medieval: St John, Evangelist and Apostle 
now. |
| Type of building/monument | Priory |
| Report authors          | Rita Wood |
| Visit Date              | 20 Jun 2000 |