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THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. OSWALD, FILEY

The Filey Parish Church of St. Oswald is erected on land given by Walter de Gant to the Prior of Bridlington. Building of the church commenced about the year of 1180 and the work was finally completed in 1230. It is Norman and Early English in style with a low broad tower rising from the intersection of the transepts and is dedicated to St. Oswald. The sunken chancel, which was completed after the main part of the church, still retains some of the original Norman work, and the window at the west end of the north aisle is also Norman. The window at the west end of the nave, the windows in the chancel and transepts, together with the sedila (a set of three stone seats) are all Early English. They are fine specimens and with the piscina (a shallow basin set in niche near the altar in which sacred vessels were washed) in the east wall of the transept indicate that there was, at that time, an altar here. There is an exact replica of the sedilia in the south wall of the chancel for the Deacon, Clerk and Verger, which would seem to indicate that the chapel was completed last. These points help to fix the dates of the building.

If you examine the west end of the church you will clearly see that there are pillars built to carry a western tower. This scheme was evidently abandoned after the pillars had been completed and a new and more ambitious plan was started by which the great arches and pillars under the tower were built, and the central tower placed upon them. It seems to have been the intention to enlarge the nave as well, for the nave arch is wider than the present nave and the junction between the two is clearly only a compromise. Possibly it was considered that the pillars at the west end should not support a tower. The pillar by the font is leaning at quite a considerable angle towards the Ravine. Maybe some wealthy donor offered to make the church a still larger one in Early English style, but if so his plan was never completed. The real reasons will never be known, but the mystery is there in stone for all to see.

On the south wall of the nave there is a carved figure of a Boy Bishop who died in his year of office. The date of this carving is between 1250 and 1300. Boy Bishops were elected by the boys of the parish from their own number to act as their leader and perform the office of a miniature Bishop, from St. Nicholas Day, 6th December, to Christmas Eve.

The inside of the church was partly restored in 1839, but it was in a poor state when Canon A. Cooper became Vicar of Filey in 1880, and mainly through his efforts it was thoroughly restored in 1885. The organ and choir stalls used to be at the west end of the church, and in one of the letters to her sister Emily, Charlotte Bronte commented on the congregation with their backs to the organ and choir.

In 1908, the organ was completely burned out and it was only providence that the church was saved by a willing band of workers. In 1974, the organ was completely overhauled; the console was condensed and moved away from the sanctuary rails to make more room for the increased number of communicants.

Canon Cooper, who was known to many as 'the Walking Parson', wrote many books on his walks abroad. He retired from the Vicarage in 1935 after being Vicar of Filey for 55 years, the longest on record, and died on 20th August 1943. His successor stayed 18 months – the shortest on record.