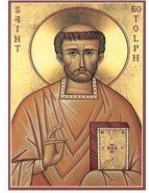




The Botolphian

Newsletter of
The Society of Saint Botolph

www.botolph.info



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President: Revd Timothy L'Estrange, Vicar of St.Gabriel's Church, North Acton.

Issue Number: 25

1st May 2015

Highlights this month

- St Botolph's Church, Slapton.
- I am delighted to welcome as new members, Tony Wood (of the British Sundial Society) and John MacIntosh from Slapton.
- Emails from Peter van Demark, Derek Cummings and Guy Hartfall
- DATE FOR ANNUAL LUNCHEON IN CAMBRIDGE: **TUESDAY 13 OCTOBER 2015.**

Editorial

As I mentioned in the April *Botolphian*, Zina and I spent a short while in Worcester at the end of March and took the opportunity to visit seven Botolph Churches. This is quite a number to cover in three days but I had planned some of it reasonably efficiently and the part that was less well planned seemed to benefit from Divine intervention.

We called in at **Slapton** on Sunday whilst on our way to Worcester and were kindly met by Caroline Coke and her daughter. As Caroline started to show us around the church an increasing number of villagers began to arrive and gave us a wonderfully friendly welcome. We concluded our visit with a magnificent tea-party at Caroline's house.



This rather set the tone for the rest of our break. On Monday, at **Burton Hastings** Ann Dickinson met us and, after our church visit, her husband Brian (an artist in stained glass at www.dolittleglass.co.uk) showed us some of his attractive work and I tried my hand at cutting some stained glass.



We had made no appointment at **Sibson** but, following the instructions on the church door, I telephoned Joan Moreton and she was there in a trice and, in common with most St Botolph Churchwardens that I have met, gave of her time most generously.

On then to **Shepshed** where I thought we had drawn a blank since all contact telephones were answered by Voice Mail. We were about to give up when Zina spotted a man entering the church. It proved to be the curate - a delightful young chap called Ed' Brampton who, once again, looked after us well. The fourth trip of the day was to **Ratcliffe on the Wreake** - a pre-planned visit where the lively and affable Beryl Preston showed us round.

On Tuesday (31 March) we headed for home but not before visiting **Newbold-on-Avon**. I had made no appointment here either and once again Voice Mail prevailed. We sheltered in the porch from a

sudden hail-shower and - Lo and Behold at the end of the church drive there was the figure of Revd Paul Wilkinson hurrying towards us, full of apologies for not answering the phone due to the fact that when it rang he was just about to go out.



Chapel with Church Brampton proved a Grand Finale to our tour. Once again there was a marvellous turn out - many of whom were friends that I had met previously.



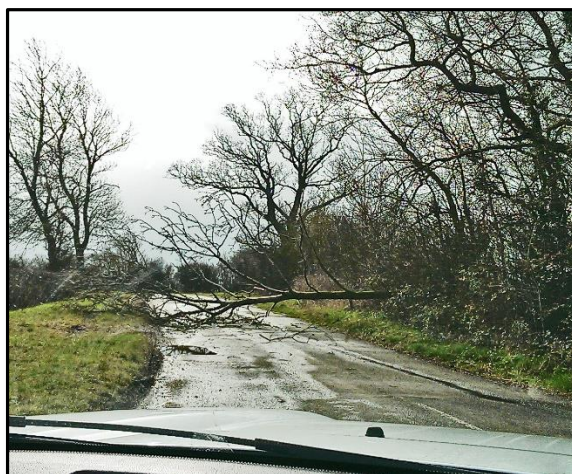
Many thanks to all of you for your kindness. I now of course have seven monthsworth of Botolph Churches 'in the barrel' so, even without distractions, it is going to take quite a while to cover all of them and write about the many exciting features we found. Here is a start however:

Church Feature

Slapton (Northants).

Approach: Coming from the M1, we took the A43 southwards and crossed the A5 Roman road (Watling Street) north of Towcester before turning off at the next roundabout and heading towards Abthorpe. Here we turned right and crossed the

River Tove intending to take the next turning on the left. Half a gale was blowing and we were a little late so the sight of a fallen tree completely blocking the road was not a welcome one.



In the event the quickest solution was provided by a long rope from the Frelander's emergency kit. Do not panic however because I am assured that this is not an obligatory exercise when visiting Slapton. Turn right at the end of this road and Chapel Lane is the second on the right.

Key: If the church is closed, telephone Caroline Coke (who is one of the two Churchwardens) on 01327 860155.

Vicar: Revd Paul McLeod, St Michael's Vicarage, High Street, Silverstone, Towcester NN12 8US. Tel: (01327) 858101.

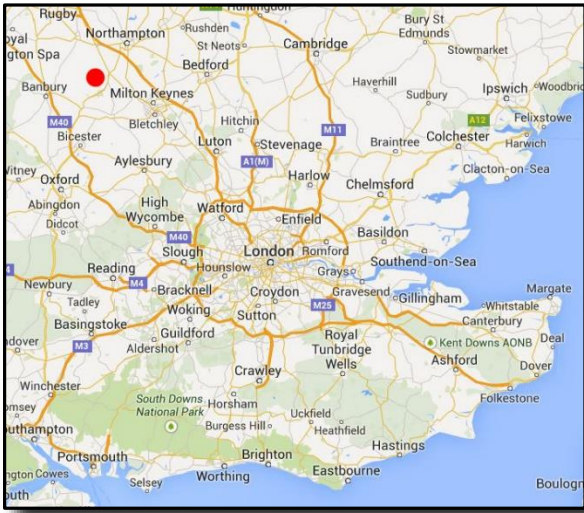
Church services: First Sunday in the month: 5 p.m. Evensong. Fourth Sunday in the month: 11 a.m. Holy Eucharist.

Location: 4 Chapel Lane NN12 8PF;
Lat/Long: 52.1166, -1.0666.;
NGR: SP6401246885.

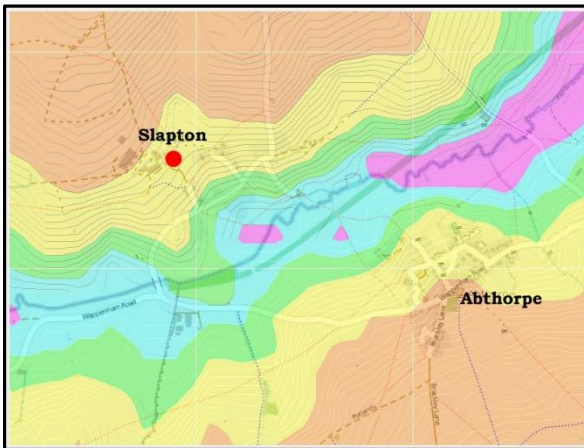
Listed Grade: I



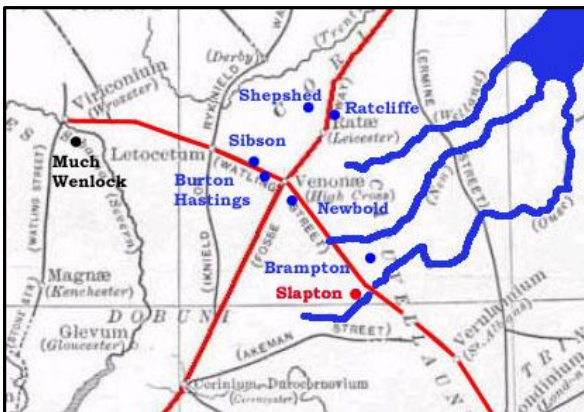
Slapton is the smallest village of the Whittlewood benefice which comprises a total of five churches.



As you will see from the map above, the village lies deep in the heart of England and seems far from the sea. In spite of today's appearance, the settlement in C7 would have looked vastly different with a wider River Tove cutting through the valley and separating Slapton from Abthorpe as indicated in the picture below.



This would have provided the traveller with his favourite method of transport. The Tove joins the Great Ouse and after a few dozen twists and turns reaches the North Sea. Today, at Slapton, the Tove is little more than an insignificant stream but this belies its former importance.



Also in the map above we see what I now call the 'High Cross Cluster' of Botolph Churches and their relationship to the crossing of those two great highways Watling Street and the Fosse Way. One would have expected a great *oppidum* at these crossroads but High Cross (*Roman: Venonis*) seems not to have flourished as a town. Each church in the cluster is not located *on* the highway but up to 3 miles to one side of it. This is only following the same pattern as the bigger cities however. The Bronze Age settlements of Northampton and Coventry, and the Anglo-Saxon cities of Dudley, Birmingham and Rugby all lie *to one side* of Watling Street as does the ancient Leicester (although this does lie right on the Fosse Way). Time and time again we find that our churches are rarely lying directly *on* the main highway. They may be 'Travellers' churches but they do not seem to rely on 'passing trade'.

Also shown on the map is the town of Much Wenlock because, as we will discuss in another issue, it has important associations with Saint Botolph even though it possesses no church dedicated to him.

Reverting to the specifics of the Slapton area, the picture below shows the River Tove a little closer to Towcester. Just look at the width of the flood plain as indicated by the arrows which show the river's potential magnitude in C7; a river which would have provided a safer and more efficacious highway than the alternative trackways.



As one might imagine from the similarity of their names, Tove and Towcester are related, the latter meaning 'Fortress on the Tove'. The name of the river itself is said to derive from the name of the god 'Thor' so we might imagine that today's names are Viking in origin. The Roman name for Towcester was *Lactodurum*.

Whilst on the subject of toponymy, Slapton means 'Slippery Slope' and the wet slope on which St Botolph's Church is built shows clearly in the picture below. Between the building and the camera the grass is quite boggy and it seems amazing that, built on such an unfavourable base, the church has stood the test of 800 years so well. The dampness has necessitated special measures to be taken to preserve the invaluable wall paintings.



Mass Dials

Slapton sports *two* of these at the South Porch.



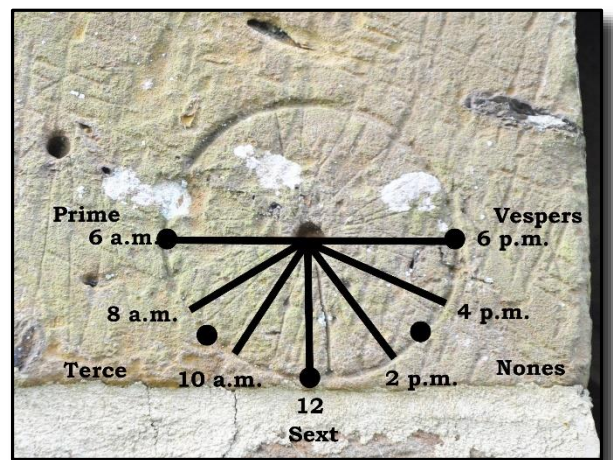
The eastern one (shown immediately below) is an unusual 'hole dial' with outer holes into which the priest would place wooden pegs to indicate the times of the church services between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.



In the church guide it is suggested that both dials have been defaced by the addition of extra radii

and holes that have no meaning. The argument for this is that, since the sun always shines *downwards*, radii in the semicircle *above* the gnomon hole are superfluous.

I would argue that, as far as the radii are concerned, if defaced they be, the defacers have been astonishingly neat and tidy in their art. In support of this observation, we have seen similar examples of dials with full 360° radii in previous issues of *The Botolphian* so this would either suggest a global compulsion of Mass Dial Defacers to 'complete the circle' or unwillingness on the part of the original stonemasons to leave the circle incomplete. Since writing this I see that the internet broadly agrees so we will await the opinions of the experts.

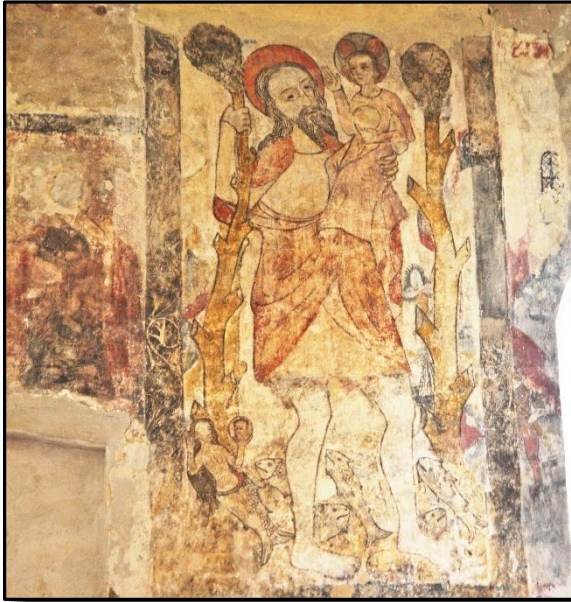


Above is a picture of Slapton's western Mass Dial with annotations to show how it could be used. As, irrespective of the season, the period of daylight in ancient days was divided into twelve parts, an hour would become longer in the summer and shorter in the winter. A wooden peg was tapped horizontally into the (central) gnomon hole and this would create a line shadow which rotated in accordance with the sun's position.

Wall paintings

The church is famous for its important wall paintings which are rightfully Slapton's pride and joy. They presumably date from C14 but were covered by whitewash in C16 in order to satisfy the requirements of Henry VIII and his Reformers. They were 'liberated' in mid C19 when they were re-discovered by the then vicar, Revd Edman. His wife expertly cleaned them and they were professionally restored in 1990.

St Botolph's Church Hardham in West Sussex also has a fine set of wall paintings. They date from C12 but mainly consist of biblical scenes.



St Christopher is shown here carrying the infant Jesus across a river. Christ's left hand holds an Order of the Universe and his right hand is raised in blessing. The saint's staff is miraculously bursting into leaf. Near his right leg is depicted a mermaid with a mirror.



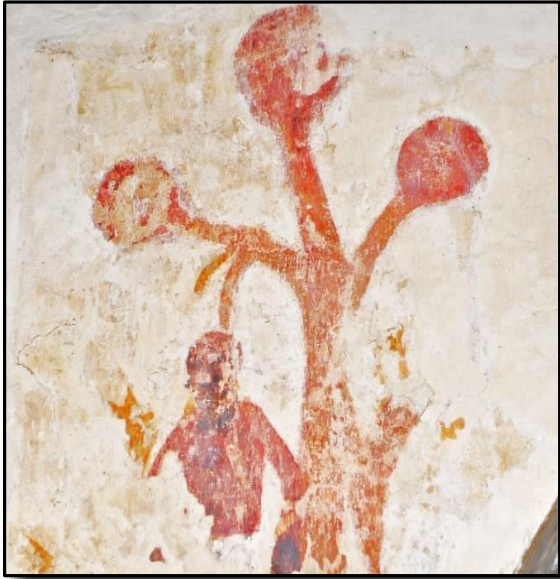
St Francis is here depicted on Mount Alverna where, whilst kneeling and praying, he saw a vision of the crucified Christ. As he watched, the marks of Christ's wounds appeared on the saint's own body and rays of light passed between him and Christ.



St Michael and The Virgin is the subject of the first part of a palimpsest over which a painting of St George has been partly superimposed. In the original painting St Michael (the upper part of whom has been lost) is shown holding some scales and weighing a soul who is pleading to The Virgin Mary for mercy.



The Devil and Two Gossips. This picture is reputed to represent the Devil banging together the heads of two women as a punishment for gossip. One wonders however, why the Devil would wish to punish them. Surely he would be pleased about it? It seems more likely to me that he would be acting as a puppeteer and pointing each head at the other as a form of encouragement. The message that would be conveyed to the congregation would therefore be a warning that "gossiping is the work of the Devil".



Judas. Here we see Judas hanging from a tree. The yellow ochre to the left of the picture is said to have depicted a demon sitting on Judas' shoulder.

... NOW TO MY TWO FAVOURITES ...

When I first arrived in the church I misunderstood this next picture to refer to the Old Testament priest Eli of Shiloh. It was not until I read the Church Guide later that I realised to my joy that this was **St Eloi** (also known as St Eligius). Eligius was contemporaneous to Saint Botolph and I have long been convinced that they would have met. With this in mind Eligius (a talented goldsmith and right-hand-man to King Dagobert of Paris) became one of the principle characters in Volume I of my *Botolph Trilogy* (Historical Fiction ISBN 9780956750808). I spent a lot of time researching him and his sudden appearance at Slapton gave me the same sort of pleasure as would an unexpected meeting with an old friend. I was delighted to find Botolph and Eloi reunited in this church.

Eloi also features in one of the most famous of French nursery songs (which consists of twenty or more verses of which this is the first):

*Le bon roi Dagobert
A mis sa culotte à l'envers ;
Le grand Saint Eloi
Lui dit : Oh mon roi
Votre Majesté
Est mal culotté.
C'est vrai, lui dit le roi,
Je vais la remettre à l'endroit.*

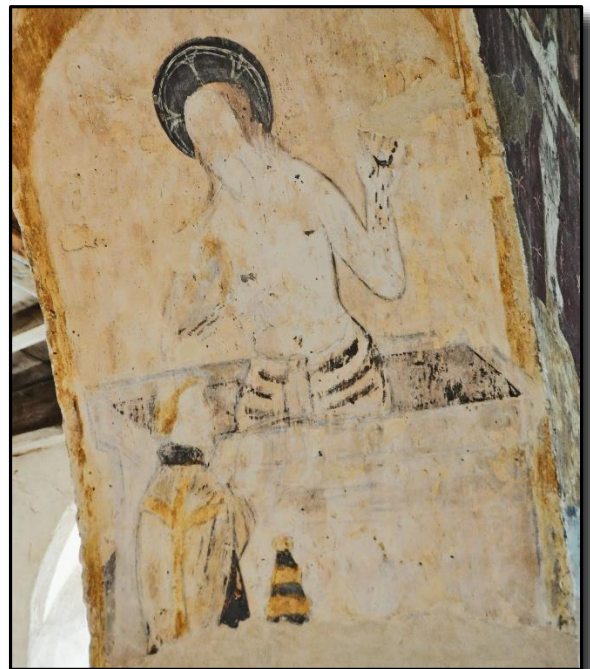
(This is better when sung by a group of French schoolchildren).



St Eloi is here depicted dressed as Bishop of Noyon. He stands before an anvil holding the leg of a horse that was possessed by the devil. In order to stop the horse kicking whilst it was being re-shoed, the ever-practical saint removed the leg and replaced it after the job was done.

... AND THE FINAL TRIUMPH ...

Well this next picture purports to show a resurrection scene with Christ standing upright in the open sarcophagus, his left hand raised in blessing the character at his feet.



The character in question is tonsured (i.e. he has been professed as a monk). He is dressed more like a bishop however and his mitre lays to one side. What could be the reason for such a scenario? Could the character depicted be our very own Abbot Botolph to whom this church is

dedicated? Abbots are frequently shown as bishops, often even carrying an Abbatial crozier. Botolph was one of the earliest of the home-grown British saints - starting his career soon after the arrival of St Augustine in AD 597 brought Christianity back to our shores.

Is this picture intended to convey a paean of praise to the saint who was one of Britain's earliest abbots after Christ left his tomb? It would be nice to think so. This picture may represent one of the earliest depictions of St Botolph.

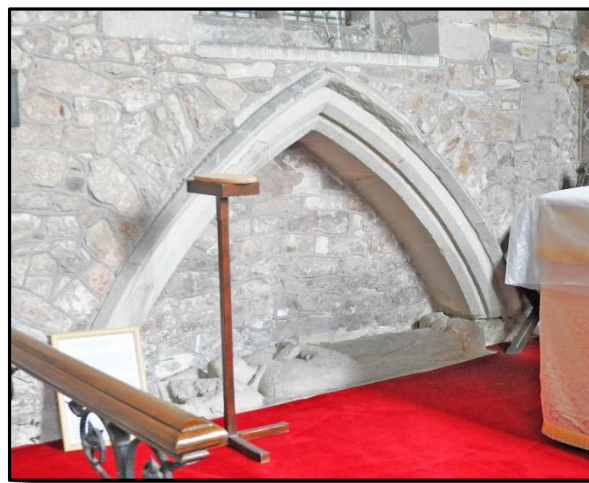
And now on to the rest of the church ...

which is constructed in coursed squared limestone and ironstone and lies firmly in Northamptonshire and not in Yorkshire as written in the sections of Wikipedia and the Catholic Encyclopaedia that feature St Eloi. Most of the building dates from c. 1260 and is believed to have been built by the Lucy family who were granted the land by William the Conqueror. In the east window of the chancel there is a small mediaeval C14 stained glass shield bearing the Lucy arms. This includes three silver fish on a red background. The fish are pike. The Latin, Italian and Spanish names for 'pike' are Luce, Luccio and Lucio respectively and it seems that the play on words appealed to the Lucy family who adopted the pike as its family emblem

Alterations and additions were made to the church in C14 and in late C19 new tracery was added to a few of the windows and part of the tower was rebuilt. A C16 screen (apparently from another church) was added to the Lady Chapel at some stage. Apart from the wall paintings the church contains two interesting C14 tomb-recesses in the chancel.



I could not recall seeing this type of recess in any Botolph Church that I had visited previously but - as luck would have it - just a couple of churches down the line at **Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake** I found another tomb-recess - although this time it contained a stone effigy.



And then at **Sibson**, tucked away into a corner of the chancel I discovered an effigy *without* a tomb-recess! I began to wonder if this effigy had originally had a home in the empty tomb-recess at Slapton!



The south door is very old but I am not sure of its actual date ...



... and there is a piscina in the south chapel:



... together with a C13 Priest's Door in the chancel



Summary of items of interest:

1. The wall paintings:
 - St Christopher
 - Unidentified
 - St George
 - St Michael
 - St Francis
 - Resurrection (with St Botolph?)
 - The Devil and Two Gossips
 - Judas
 - Annunciation
 - The Three Living and Three Dead
 - St Eligius
2. The two tomb-recesses.
3. The two Mass Dials at the South Porch.
4. The ancient South Door.

5. The C13 Priest's door in the south wall of the chancel.
6. The piscina in the south chapel but note the interesting lack of a piscina in the chancel.
7. The C16 Lady Chapel screen.

Relevance to Botolph's life.

As usual it is a matter of speculation which came first, - the Lucy church or a wooden Saxon predecessor. And that is a question to which, without archaeological intervention, we can never have a definite answer. I am looking forward to getting to this point when I write Volume III of my *Botolph Trilogy* because if my writing routine follows its usual pattern I shall spend several months intensively 'living Botolph's life' and it will, I hope, gradually become apparent how Botolph was able to carry out his missionary work. We know that he had an extraordinary propensity for travelling. He enjoyed getting out and about. Once his monastery of Icanho was well established it is likely that he would have taken every opportunity to join his missionary monks on their journeys and encourage them to spread the word of God as far afield as possible.

At the moment it seems quite feasible that Botolph himself had a hand in founding a great many of the churches that are dedicated to him and, far as this group is from his Icanho centre, the 'High Cross Cluster' could still have been the object of the saint's direct attentions.

However ... Classification of the Slapton site:

In view of its position on a river and proximity to a major Roman road, I think, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we must for the moment classify Slapton as a B(iii) Travellers' church.

Many thanks

to Caroline for masterminding our visit, and entertaining us to tea. Thanks also to the other villagers for coming along to meet us. Zina and I were warmed by the goodwill and friendship which met us and marvelled at the fact that, although the local population is only about 90, here is a church which is clearly well-loved and still performing an important function in the community. If, like the 'Best kept Villages' there were to be a competition catering for the 'Happiest Villages', I am sure Slapton would rate very highly.

Readers' letters and emails.

1. Peter Van Demark wrote from Boston USA to say that the St Botolph club will have its annual celebration of St Botolph's Day on 17 June. The

jollities are being led this year by Tom Carnicelli. We wish you an enjoyable evening Peter and look forward to hearing all about it.

2. Derek Cummings (Church with Chapel Brampton) has been in contact several times both before and after our visit to their church. More reports about that in a later issue. Thank you for all your help Derek.

3. Guy Hartfall wrote from Culpho, Suffolk with regard to Mass Dials and his discovery of a great deal of information on the internet. As a result of reading this Guy was pleased to discover that the Mass Dial at Culpho seems older than the one at Iken. It is due to Guy's research that I have made contact with Tony Wood (from the British Sundial Society) who has now joined our Society and will, I hope, be providing us with continuing information about Saint Botolph Sundials.

Endnotes

Please do not hesitate to write to me or send an email to botolph@virginmedia.com if you have any alternative views to those expressed in *The Botolphian*. It is good to engender some controversy from time to time!

St Botolph's Day (17th June) is fast approaching. I would be pleased to hear of individual churches' plans to celebrate it.

Regular Endnotes

If this is your first 'Botolphian' and you have acquired it by circuitous means but would like to receive an email copy each month then just send an email to botolph@virginmedia.com saying 'YES PLEASE.'

If you wish to UNsubscribe then send the message
'NO THANKS.'

You will frequently see the 'twin' towns of *Boston* mentioned in these newsletters, - one in Lincolnshire and the other in Massachusetts USA. The relevance to the Society is that the name 'Boston' is said to be a contraction of '*Botolph's Town*.'

Classification of Botolph Church sites:-

A: C7 church sites relevant to Botolph's life.

B: 'Travellers' churches.

Bearing in mind that the Danish invasions started in c.800 and continued for 200 years, it seems logical to sub-divide Type B (and perhaps type C) churches into those which appear to have been founded:-

- (i) before 800
- (ii) between 800 and 1066 and
- (iii) after the Norman Conquest.

C: Neither of the above.

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Folkestone, Kent. 1st May 2013.