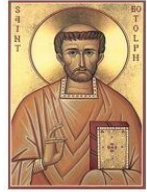




The Botolphian

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: 51

1st July 2017

Highlights this month

- St Botolph's church, Stow Bedon, Norfolk.
- It gives me great pleasure to welcome Martyn Lockwood as a new member.
- Correspondence from John Burnapp, Mhairi Ellis, Jane Davies and Revd Colin Reed.

Please note in your diaries that this year's Annual luncheon in Cambridge (venue to be announced) - will still be at 12.30 for 1 p.m. but a few days earlier than usual on:

Wednesday 4th October 2017

I will be working on this shortly so please anticipate a supplementary email within the next couple of weeks.

Editorial

St Botolph's Day 2017.

I am afraid that, for me, St Botolph's Day was rather a damp squib this year. This was partly because I had sailed from Greece where I had an adequate Internet connection and, on 16th June, had just arrived in Italy where it took 48 hours to negotiate a satisfactory reconnection by which time Saint Botolph's Day was over. I could not therefore issue my usual 'Happy Saint Botolph's Day' message for which I apologise.

The other frustration about my lack of internet was that, several days earlier whilst at sea between Greece and Italy, I received a Coastguard radio message saying that one of my dear friends (and member of this society) who was sailing single-handedly from France to Greece, was a week overdue and all ships were asked to keep a good

lookout for him. He still had not been found by St Botolph's Day and I am sure that you will understand if I say that my thoughts were very much focussed upon mobilising some sort of search package since not a lot seemed to be happening in that respect.

It came as a great relief (both to him and the rest of us) when, on St Botolph's Day plus one, his Emergency Beacon was activated and he was pulled off some rocks in the nick of time. He is a most competent sailor - far better than I - but had been compromised due to a battery malfunction which killed his batteries so that he was unable to use his engine, windlass, GPS or any navigation equipment.

In such circumstances we usually go back to a pencil and ruler and use something known as 'dead reckoning' navigation. This only works properly if you know where you start from but my poor friend had no hope in that direction since he had lost three days as he was constantly poisoned by a gas (possibly Stibene which is highly toxic) emitted from the perfidious batteries. This caused hallucinations and severe drowsiness. I am glad to say that he is now making a full recovery.

Volume III of my Botolph Trilogy.

I am afraid that I may be going to disappoint some of my readers on the time of publication of this volume which will probably be delayed by a couple of months.

This last book starts with Botolph, Luka and Ash leaving France in AD 647 and Botolph starting his missionary work in Britain. Over seven years they have travelled slowly north facing many challenges during the process and have now reached AD 654 when the iconic abbey of Icanho was founded.

The writing thus far had progressed as I had expected in spite of there being regular time-consuming deviations while I followed the lines of obscure research which have always been necessary in order to place Botolph properly in his seventh century culture.

Having reached the foundation of Icanho however, I had something of a 'Road to Damascus' experience when it suddenly became apparent to me just how important this part of the trilogy is and that the section needs to be handled in a particularly painstakingly way.

It is not the abbey which is the problem. It is Botolph's personality. It clearly changes and grows during this period. He develops (as the story of one of the abbey's visitors, St Ceolfrid, tells us) into the one of the holiest and wisest men in the land. Such a remarkable metamorphosis could only happen through the abbot's deep thought and prayer and I believe that, to do the event justice, I must endeavour to show how he came to sculpt the pioneering community of Icanho out of new clay.

At Icanho he changed the pattern of the ethos of the monastery culture with which he had grown up in France and which he had implemented in other minor communities which he founded soon after his return to Britain (yes I believe there were others).

His change was an important and pivotal step which influenced British monastery life for years to come. The change, though dramatic, was also subtle and one of its basic ingredients was humility.

I believe that this is why St Botolph did not become a St Felix or a St Wilfrid or become trumpeted by the Venerable Bede or make his mark at the Synod of Whitby. He and his brethren did God's work and lived their lives according to a pattern, then unique in Britain, which, with God's help, he developed through study, thought and prayer.

Being a far lesser mortal, I have to appeal for 'extra time' to fathom my way through the exciting research and crafting that this calls for and I hope that you will bear with me on the basis that the quality of the final result can only be reflected by the time and diligence that I am able to devote to it.

Stow Bedon, Norfolk.

Approach: *Heading northeast along the A11, after the Thetford By-Pass take the first exit on to the Thetford Road A1075. After 5.5 miles pass through Great Hockham keeping on the A1075 for another 1.5 miles. At the 5-way junction turn right (not sharp right). Drive for three quarters of a mile whereupon this becomes Stowlay Lane and less than a quarter of a mile later turn right into Gravelpit Hill. After 200 yards you will find the church on your right with adequate parking for a couple of cars on the left.*

Location: *Gravelpit Hill, Stow Bedon, Norfolk, NR17 1BX. Lat/Long: 52.5227, 0.8898. NGR: TL9614695574.*

Key: *The church is open 24/7 except for special occasions such as between now and 7th July as it is being used for storage in preparation for the parish's BLOSSOM and YARN weekend.*

Priest in Charge: *Revd Adrian Bell Tel: 01760-627039. (Please try to avoid telephoning on a Monday since Adrian tries to have a day off then).*

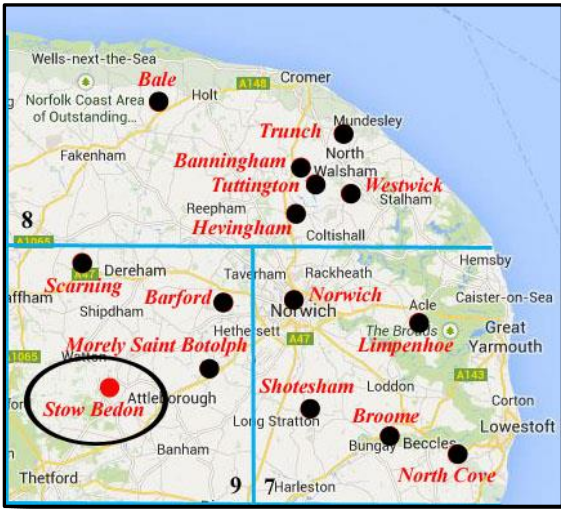
Benefice: *The Wayland Benefice comprising: Holy Trinity Great Hockham, St Margarets Breckles, Holy Cross Caston, Ss Peter & Paul Griston, St Peter Merton, and St Martin, Thompson. www.wgp.church/rectorspage.asp.*

Services: *Holy Communion is held at 10.30 a.m. every six weeks and between those times the congregation travel to the other churches in the benefice.*

Listed Grade: II*



We are still featuring Norfolk this month where we are celebrating yet another Phoenix-like rise from the ashes of the little St Botolph's church at Stow Bedon.



Although Stow Bedon's church did not suffer an *actual* fire, it has been close to ruin several times. Like a creaking gate, it has persistently survived its predicted demise and, following 12 months closure for refurbishment, it had a triumphant re-opening on 10th December 2016.

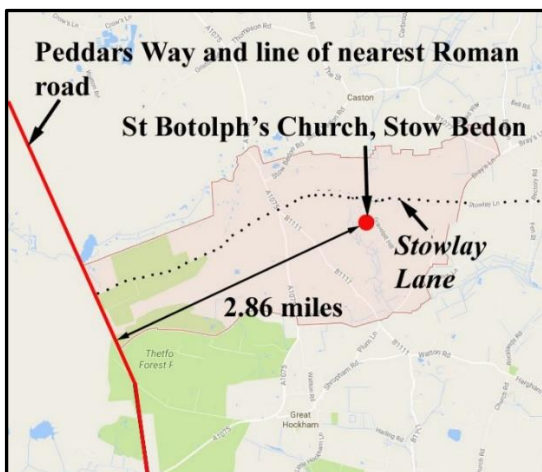
In this particular case the road is Peddars Way which starts just a few miles to the south at Knettishall Heath and runs north to the coast at Holme-next-the-Sea.



The jury is still out as to whether Peddars Way started life as a Roman road or whether it is a far more ancient trackway. There are three other St Botolph churches which line this road but Stow Bedon is the closest.

Like many St Botolph churches, it lies in an isolated position on high ground close to a stream and within 3 miles of a Roman road.

The village is an ancient site and artefacts have been found dating back to the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods; it was well established by the time of the Norman Conquest. The Domesday Book records that it had a 'quite large' population but does not mention a church - but this does not necessarily mean that it did not have one. The one church that *is* mentioned in the area is at Caston - a short way to the north. In 1086 the tenant-in-chief was King William.



Zina and I first visited the church in August 2016 when the grass was uncut, the church was locked and it was evident that the builders had taken over.



While Zina studied the notices in the porch I telephoned the builders and, through their helpful cooperation, we gained access.



I felt rather privileged to see the church stripped to its basics.



The building consists of a simple nave and chancel: no side aisles and no tower – although

Blomefield tells us in the *1848 Topographical Dictionary of England* that there was once a square tower but it fell down in 1797 and was never rebuilt. As we have previously discovered, there are 124 round tower churches in Norfolk - in fact there is a late Saxon or early Norman round tower less than a mile away at Stow Breckles - which again suggests that the builders of round tower churches knew what they were doing. Having said that, Stow Bedon has a sister church (All Saints) in the neighbouring village of Rookland, and *that* has a square tower - so perhaps Stow Bedon was just unlucky.

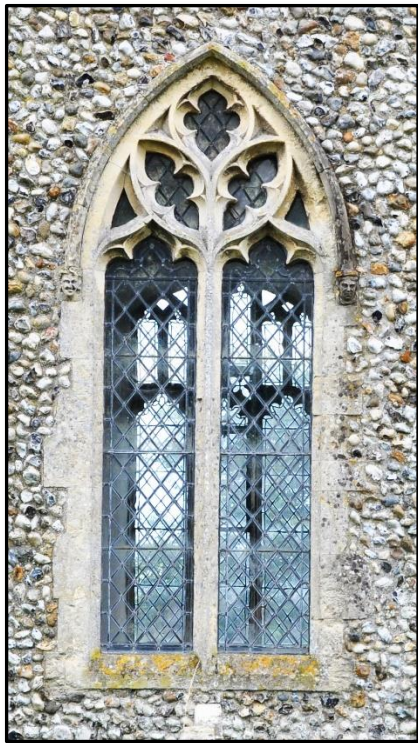


There are two St Botolph's Churches which have their name pre-fixed by the word 'Stow.' The other is Stow Longa which is 55 miles further to the west in Huntingdon. It is said that the word was simply Anglo-Saxon for 'place' but there are suggestions that it acquired a variety of meanings in Old English including 'inhabited place; holy place; hermitage; and monastery.

The 'Bedon' suffix stems from the name of the lord of the manor, John de Bidun who, although he was based at Lavendon in Buckinghamshire, owned extensive lands elsewhere including those at Stow Bedon. John was the son of Halenald de Bidun (from Bidon in the Dol region of Brittany) who was, from the 1120s, effectively the feudal baron of Lavendon. He later became a monk. He endowed the Stow Bedon church to his local abbey of St Mary and St John the Baptist at Lavendon but in the law-suited games of cat and mouse and fine and counter fine which constantly occurred during that period, the church's ownership moved on and in 1292 Edward I gave the advowson to Marham Abbey (near King's Lynn).

The parish possesses a continuous record of incumbents from 1303, the first recorded vicar being a Walter de Banham. Such lists contain valuable information for the visiting historian and it will no doubt eventually be on permanent display. For the moment however, the parishioners have quite enough to do as they

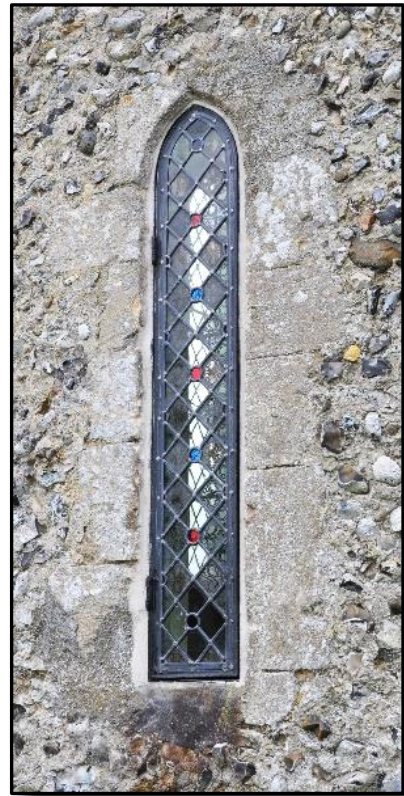
concentrate on raising funds for more mundane things like getting a water supply into the church and installing a toilet and kitchenette so that once again it can become a hub of the community.



There have been several major renovations over the years and the C14 Decorated-style windows of the nave's north wall (the tracery of this one has been restored but its western partner is original) .



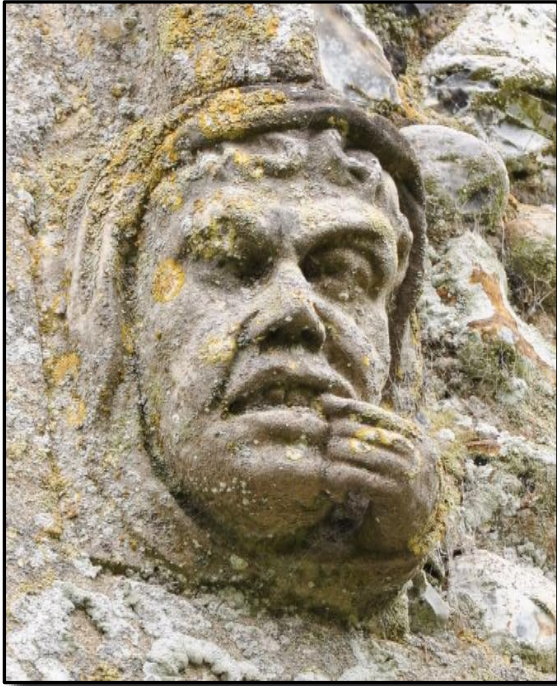
. . . and the C15 Perpendicular-style windows of the nave's south wall – give us clues as to when the different sections of the church were restored.



The C13 Early English lancet windows in the north wall of the chancel are the ones that point most accurately towards the date of the building's foundation.



It seems that the mason who restored the north wall of the nave in C14 must have had a great sense of humour and pride in his work since he has left us with a series of head-mouldings of great character. One day I shall perhaps research this subject and I shall be truly disappointed if I find that the artisans simply ordered a bulk purchase of faces from the equivalent of their local masonry superstore. I live in the hope that some of the faces we see on the church at Stow Bedon are from characters who lived in the village. Here they are: - working from right to left (west to east) on the above picture:



A man with a tooth problem? Look at that swelling over his left eye - was he a fighter who had recently had a tooth knocked out?



And who is this on the left hand side of the first window? Rather a dapper young man - quite the opposite to his fighter-companion. Perhaps he was the land-owner who had given the fighter a thrashing for insubordination and ordered the mason to carve the event into perpetuity '*pour encourager les autres*'?



Now this would seem to be a lady who has had to put up with a lot but has endured it stoically . . .



. . . and if this is her husband who shares the window with her one can begin to understand her problem?



We find two more characters on the hood moulding of the east window of the chancel which suggests that all three windows were installed by the same craftsman at a similar date.



The character of these figures is somewhat different however - they look more like noblemen. A site on the sunrise-facing east window would perhaps be more prestigious than a site on the cold north wall. In the pecking order I would guess that the heads on the right side when facing the window might be superior to those on the left - but we have already conjectured that at least one of those on the right is a wife so . . . ah - enough said I think. Moving on, if my theory is correct the man above might be the father of the man shown below whose face resides on the window's left hand side.



And he is not lacking confidence either.

But then we face a conundrum. When we move around to the west wall, we find *another* couple of figures:

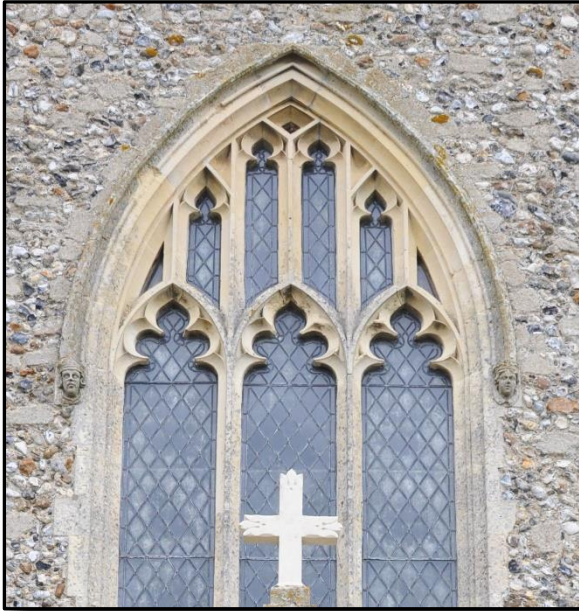


On the right - a rather perky wife perhaps? Like those on the east wall she is wearing a crown - so is clearly not a villager.



And . . . "Hello! What have we here?" (as my 10-year-old grandson Hayden might say) - is this a king, a prince - or a bishop with an eye impediment?

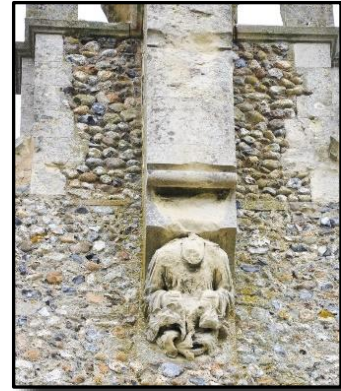
Whoever he might be, his sculpture surely cannot logically date from C14 because until C18 this wall was occupied by the square tower.



The sharply-cut, un-weathered and different colour of the west window's upper tracery certainly seems to suggest that the top part of the window dates from C19. But both the hood moulding and lower mullions have more of a C14 look about them. Might this window have been recycled from another part of the church? Might it perhaps have originally been sited in the west wall of the tower? If this were the case, the weakness such a large window would have caused could have been partly responsible for the tower's collapse. Evidence has been discovered during building work that the church once had a south porch and that the nave was once considerably longer than it is now. A longer nave would have needed more windows so an alternative solution might be that the lower part of this window has been reconstituted from the masonry of a third window in the south wall which was taken out when the south porch was inserted.

In 1850 the newly-ordained Revd Charles Darby Reade became the church's incumbent and he quickly set to work and appointed the highly-renowned architect John Brown (1805-1876) to carry out restoration work. Brown raised the heights of both nave and chancel, restructured the floors, roofs and north wall and built the bell-cote with its octagonal spire. It must have also have been he who restored or replaced the west window together with the other nave windows which show evidence of restoration work. Brown must either, within the church grounds, have found a treasury of masonry which he could re-use, - or he had access to recyclable items through Norwich Cathedral. If not then where could the heads on the western window have come from - unless he commissioned new ones?

I favour the former theory because there is another figure who would gaze down on us if only he could and that is the man who sits under the buttress of the bell-cote that we know Brown constructed.



Surely this figure is older than C19? For one thing he has lost his head - suggesting the desecrations of C16 and C17 - and for another the foliage in front of him is somewhat reminiscent of the medieval theme of 'The Green Man.'



What an interesting chap he is though, - sitting up there with his fists clenched as if he has just emerged after being bricked up for a thousand years. My guess is that he was probably another resident of the west face of the doomed tower and that he actually lost his head during its collapse. I can imagine John Brown's joy when he perhaps found the sculpture abandoned in the churchyard and his resolve to provide it with a more suitable resting place. Looking at the sculpture closely, he almost seems to be wearing a jester's collar - but I think this must just be the way the stone has weathered.



To the left of this picture we see the still much-loved war memorial which was unveiled in 1920 and carries the names of the ten local men who fell and the twenty-seven who returned from the first World War, together with the name of the one man who fell in the second conflict.



Above the porch the inscribed date of 1887 leaves no doubt that this was constructed as part of the C19 restorations.

On 15 November 1940 the church suffered another disaster when a landmine dropped by a German plane 'blew out all the windows and a large portion of the roof and wood ceiling.' Poor old Stow Bedon was in trouble again and it was not until 1949 that the repairs were properly completed.

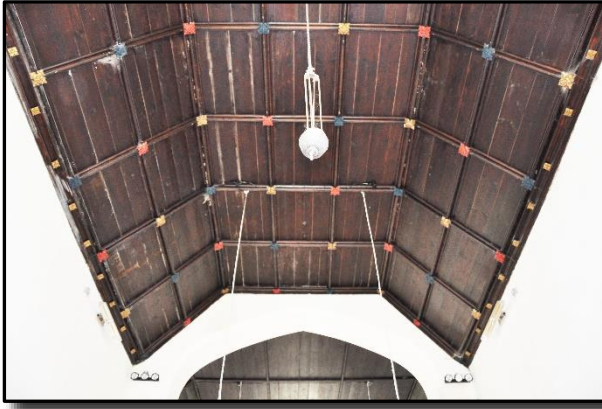
To summarise therefore, the building was constructed in C12 and heavily modified in C14 and C15. It somehow survived the Reformation; the tower fell down in C18 and further restoration work was carried out in mid-C19, the porch added in late-C19 and the latest work of course is C21.



As I explored most of the building while the nave was being subjected to 'work in progress' this of course meant that what remained of the church furniture had to be stored in the chancel.



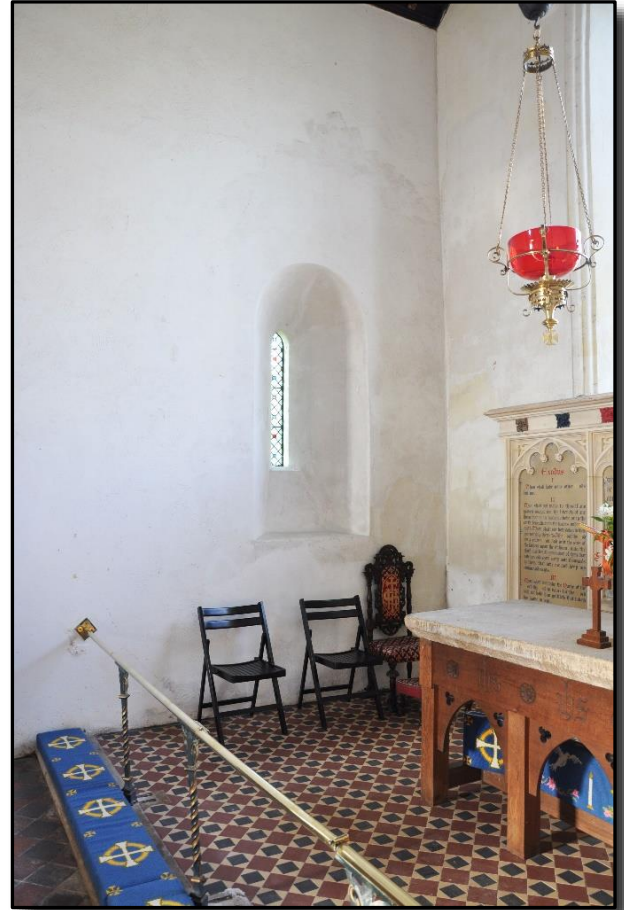
There is a pretty C12 piscina which has a double drain and sports three dog-tooth mouldings.



The chancel ceiling has been quite attractively boxed in.



I found the parish chest!



Rather than a splay, the easternmost lancet window has what is known as a 'rere arch.'



A picture showing the C19 chancel screen and the splay of the westernmost lancet window.



The magnificent mensa slab bears five consecration crosses - symbols of the five wounds of Christ. The rules of the Reformation proscribed the use of these stone slabs as altars but in 1923 this one was recovered and set on a table base donated by the vicar's parents.



The origin of the truly magnificent and massive font has caused some conjecture. There are suggestions that it is medieval and has been reworked but the general consensus of opinion is that it is C19. This would tie in with the (also quite large) font at All Saints, Rockland which is made of similar stone and confirmed as dating from C19.



The arms of King George III (1738-1820). This particular coat of arms was in use between 1760 and 1801 while George III ruled as King of Great Britain before the union with Ireland turned us into the United Kingdom. Henry VIII had

ordered that all churches must display the coat of arms of the reigning monarch. This order was confirmed in 1660 at the Restoration but I presume it has now either been rescinded or allowed to lapse.



And this is how the church looks today although this picture does not really do justice to all the work and devotion that have gone in to making such a wonderful facility for the community.



Outside, the grass has been cut and, when we made our second visit, the daisies were growing.



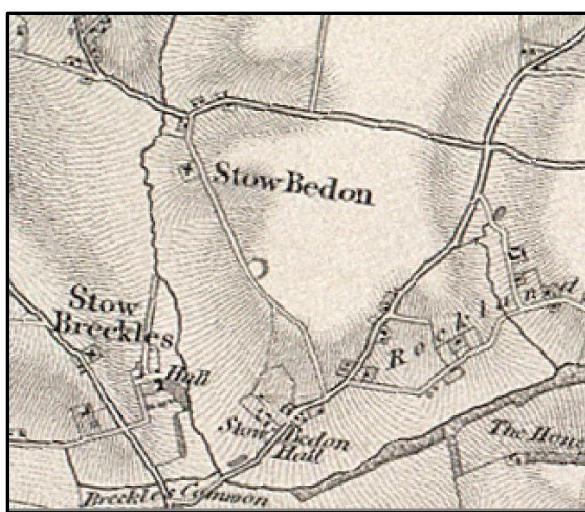
This picture was taken by Gillian Machorton when the church re-opened on 10 December 2016.

Classification:

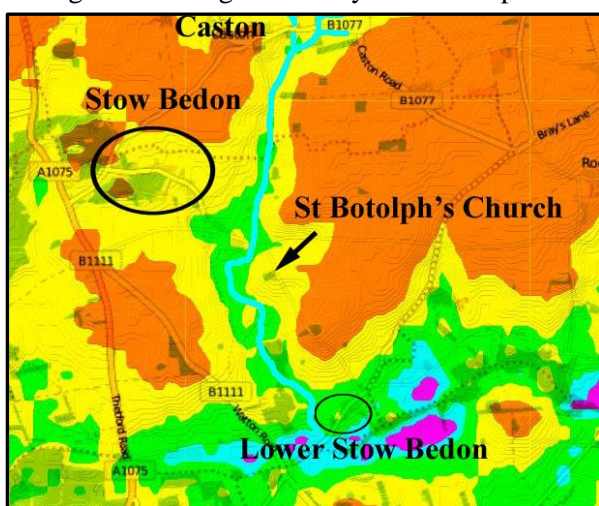
And now down to the nitty-gritty of speculation on the subject of how this church came to be founded.

At first sight it would appear to be a Norman foundation constructed by the Lord of the Manor or local landowner to cater for the spiritual and community needs of the villagers who worked his lands.

As we look at the topography today we can see St Botolph's church out in the wilds - neither in Stow Bedon nor in Lower Stow Bedon but halfway between the two with other churches of similar date and provenance at Stow Breckles, Caston and Rockland also in close proximity.



Rightly or wrongly this 1838 map labels the centre of Stow Bedon as being close to the church in spite of the fact that no habitations are shown locally - they are all to the northwest and Lower Stow Bedon is not marked at all. On the face of it this would suggest that in 1838 Stow Bedon was simply regarded as a 'zone' and the scattered houses were incidental extras - but, like text messages such things can easily be misinterpreted.



Looking at the relief map we can see that the habitations of what is now known as the village of Stow Bedon are sensibly on high ground - and this would also have been the case in Norman times. The site of today's Lower Stow Bedon is considerably lower however and I doubt that a community would have existed there until the land dried out several hundred years later. My point is that the church was not originally intended to serve a community there. But why was it not built where the village is now?

There seem to me to be three possible answers to this. The first is that a now-lost community might previously have existed at the church site; the second is that the location of the church may have been chosen by the feudal lord as a rendez-vous point for those working on his fields; the third might be that the foundation is of much earlier Saxon origin and was sited independently of the Lord of the Manor's influence.

If the latter were the case then the location satisfies many of the requirements of an early St Botolph's church:

1. It lies within 3 miles of a Roman road.
2. It is situated close to the bottom of an escarpment but well clear of water levels.
3. It is strategically placed close to the beginning of the Peddars Way trail.

It is true that we are missing Saxon foundations and the only way to investigate whether or not these exist is by an archaeological dig. We have a further pointer however in that the church is only 37 miles from Icanho where in C7 an abbot with a reputation for travel had a burning urge to spread the word of Christ throughout Britain. I would venture an 'A Classification' for the foundation of this site - i.e. directly relevant to St Botolph's life.

Thanks

My thanks particularly to Gillian Machorton for keeping me in touch with the church's progress and for sending me the wonderful Church Guide book. Also to the other members of the 2016 Stow Bedon Heritage Group who, with Gillian, have done such sterling work, namely Evelyn Batts, Jane Brodie, Karen Fitch and Beryl Warren.

Readers' letters and emails.

1. **John Burnapp** - Many thanks for your greetings John. They were much appreciated.
2. **Mhairi Ellis** - I was so sorry to have missed Mhairi's notice of Bishopsgate's Patronal Festival out of the June issue. The supplementary email might however have brought the event closer to people's attention since I received several emails showing interest. I hope it was a

great success and that some of you were able to support it.

3. **Jane Davies** - was one of those who expressed interest and she sent me a mobile telephone video showing her enjoying the gardens of Bishopsgate and saying that renewing her acquaintance with the place was entirely due to her connection with SOSB. That gave me a glow of pleasure so thank you Jane.

4. **Revd Colin Reed** - wrote from Morely St Botolph where he is a school governor of two church schools - one at Morely St Botolph and one at All Saints Tacolneston. He is looking for a new name for the federation that covers both schools and is tempted to call it the St Botolph Federation but feels that would favour one area over another. His other alternative was the Wayfarers Federation. He asked if I had any thoughts. Zina and I bounced ideas between us but all that we came up with was a name somehow involving Icanho which I thought might sound more neutral. I am afraid we were not much help . . . but we tried!

---O---

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!

Regular Endnotes

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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: 'Hanseatic' churches.
D: None of the above.

Typical Characteristics of Early St Botolph Churches.

1. All are in the eastern half of England
2. Most have Saxon foundations.
3. Many lie with 3 miles of a Roman road or well-used waterway.
4. Most are situated close to the bottom of an escarpment but well clear of water levels.
5. Many are strategically placed in areas which represent the beginnings, middles and ends of long journeys.

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Folkestone, Kent. 1st May 2013.