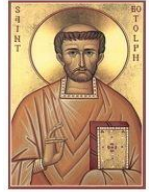




# The Botolphian

Newsletter of  
The Society of Saint Botolph

[www.botolph.info](http://www.botolph.info)



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

Issue Number: 58

1st February 2018

## Highlights this month

- **The Abbey Church of St Mary and St Botolph, Thorney, Cambridgeshire.**
- It gives me great pleasure to welcome John Bartlett from Thorney and David Noble from Folkestone as new members.
- Correspondence from Patricia Croxton-Smith, Marcia Barton, Phillip Buttolph, Arch Horst, Emma Rose Barber and Joan Blows.

## Editorial

First of all, many congratulations to **Roy Tricker** (our speaker at the last St Botolph's Luncheon) who was awarded the British Empire Medal in the New Year's Honours List. Well done Roy - richly deserved I am sure.


On Sunday 18th February, Zina and I propose to visit St Botolph's Church, Swyncombe, near Oxford at 2 p.m. with a view to enjoying their Snowdrop Tea and attending the 4.30 p.m. Choral Evensong.



How about coming to join us? It would give me great pleasure to meet some of you there and, weather permitting, it should make for a very enjoyable start to Spring. If any of the Folkestone contingent would like a lift please let me know.



This pretty church was featured in the January 2014 *Botolphian*. If you are proposing to visit and would like me to send you another copy please send me a request by email and I will forward one.



**SNOWDROP  
TEAS**  
2 – 4pm  
in FEBRUARY  
10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>  
17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>,  
24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>  
St. BOTOLPH'S  
Swyncombe  
on 18<sup>th</sup> February 4.30pm Choral EVENSONG!

Local Homemade Cakes and Teas  
Preserves & Pickles, Chutneys - Shelagh's Snowdrop  
Stall, Church goodies and more....  
All to support the funds of the friendly ancient Church  
open for you – all year round  
between Watlington and Nettlebed  
follow the walking Monk

**Swyncombe Approach:** Leave the M40 at Junction 6 and head along the B4009 to Watlington and turn left here on the B480 to Cookley Green. When just through the village turn right and then immediately left and follow Church Lane for three quarters of a mile. Turn left past The Rectory and park opposite the church.

**Location:** Rectory Hill, Swyncombe, Oxfordshire  
51.60644, -1.01601. RG9 6EA.

Zina and I went to visit St Mary and St Botolph's Abbey at Thorney in Cambridgeshire in January. We had been there before but when I started to write the feature I found that I had insufficient photographs and information so another visit was called for.

The abbey is vastly different to other St Botolph Churches we have seen because so many alterations have been made to it over the years that it is difficult to envisage where one part ended and another began.

### Abbot Botolph of Icanho

Between these visits and other writing I have been continuing to make good progress with my final work in the Botolph Trilogy. I am now up to 104,000 words and I am on page 342 . . . so the end is in sight. It continues to be tricky however. My latest challenge has been to research into the logistics of why and how, at an advanced age, Botolph should suddenly have started to make long regular journeys from Icanho in Suffolk to the abbey of Much Wenlock in Shropshire - a place with which, history tells us, he had a strong connection. Having recently discovered the answer I can now move on to word number 104,001.

### Church Feature

# T

## horney Abbey, Cambs.



**Approach:** *If travelling north on the A1(M), take Exit 17 onto Fletton Parkway A1139. After 7 miles at the roundabout take the second exit still following the A1139. After half a mile at the roundabout take the second exit and follow the A47 along The Causeway to the next roundabout. Take the second exit and follow B1167 another half a mile to Thorney (4 miles). As you enter the village turn right at the crossroads and the abbey is on your left. Park outside.*

**Location:** *Abbey Place, Whittlesea Road (B1040), Thorney, Cambridgeshire, PE6 0QA; 52.620487, -0.107249; NGR TF 282042.*

**Key:** *To obtain access, telephone Revd Colin Hurst on 01733 222-334, or John Bartlett on 01733 270-419.*

**Church Website:** [www.thorneyabbey.co.uk](http://www.thorneyabbey.co.uk), where all other contacts' details are available.

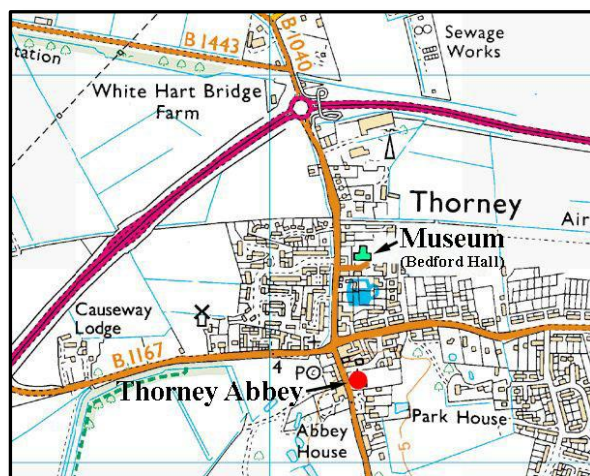
**Village Website:** [www.thorney.org](http://www.thorney.org). This site carries some useful information.

**Contacts:** *Churchwardens: Mr John Bartlett and Mrs. Pam Downing.*

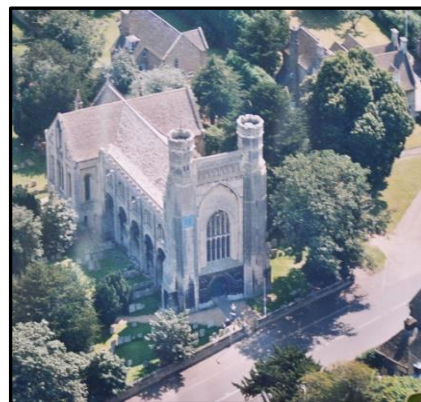
**Priest:** *Revd Colin Hurst, 7 Thorney Road, Eye, PE6 7UN.*

**Church Services:** *Each Sunday at 11 a.m. Said communion, second Sunday in each month at 8 a.m. Family Service, second Sunday in each month at 10 a.m.*

**Listed Grade:** **I**



So this month we are moving a little upmarket - to an *abbey* rather than a humble church. Not only is this *an* abbey but it is *the* abbey for it was here that some of Saint Botolph's bones rested between C10 and Henry VIII's vandalism when he saw fit to dissolve the monasteries.



It is also the place where, in C11, Abbot Folcard (originally of St Omer) wrote our saint's biography, *Vita Botolphi*.





Sadly the only remains of this once-glorious monastery foundation is the abbey church.



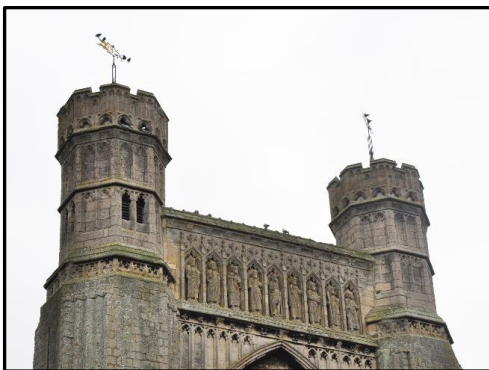
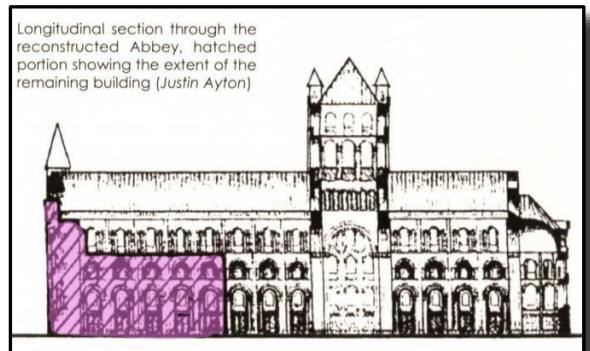
Many alterations have been made to this building. In the picture above I have drawn some lines which illustrate how the west window space would have been occupied in AD 1310.



This model, which is to be found in the Heritage Museum (more of this later) was wonderfully constructed by Ernest Clayton (1927-1996) and it gives us a good idea of how the monastery might have looked in AD 1310. As we are reminded in the guide book "A Benedictine abbey was, in effect, a small town shut off from the secular world." In the Middle Ages, the fens boasted five great abbeys: Peterborough, Ely, Crowland, Ramsey and Thorney.

We are told that the Abbot of Thorney was a 'mitred abbot' entitled to a seat in the House of Lords. As such he had certain powers and ruled the abbey as an absolute monarch.

The necessity for the insertion of the smaller west window that we see today is seen from the black lines which show how the original clerestory would have supported the edge of a higher pitched roof. The white lines mark the location of the north aisle which was removed, together with its partner on the south side.

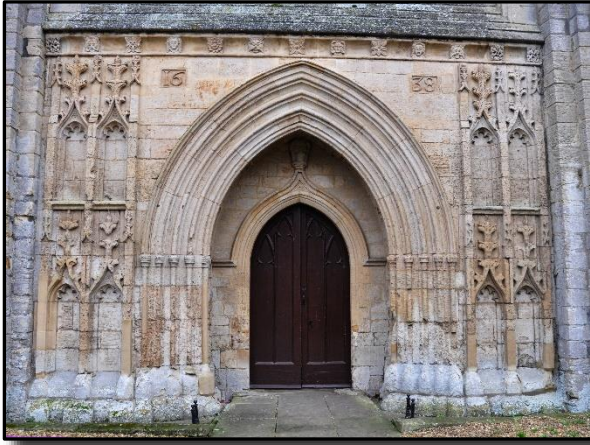


These massive towers are 80 ft high. The tops are not the originals.

The medieval abbey would have been *massive* and one can see from Justin Ayton's drawing above that it would have been incongruous to leave the remnants of the building at its original height. Shown in purple is the section we are left with today.

In 1550, after the Dissolution, the abbey was granted to John Russell, the First Earl of Bedford. It seems however that he saw it merely as a great source of stone and 40 tons were taken to be used to build parts of Trinity College, Cambridge and 146 tons went to the chapel of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. After this the abbey was a pitiful shadow of its former self.



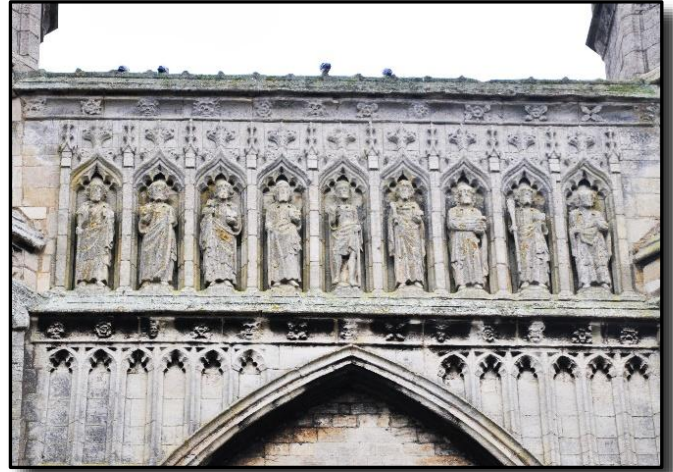


Rescue came in the form of Francis Russell when he became the third Earl of Bedford in 1627. Eleven years later, as proclaimed by the date of 1638 marked on the west façade, building work was well underway and it was not long before the church started a new life as the chapel of the Bedford dynasty.

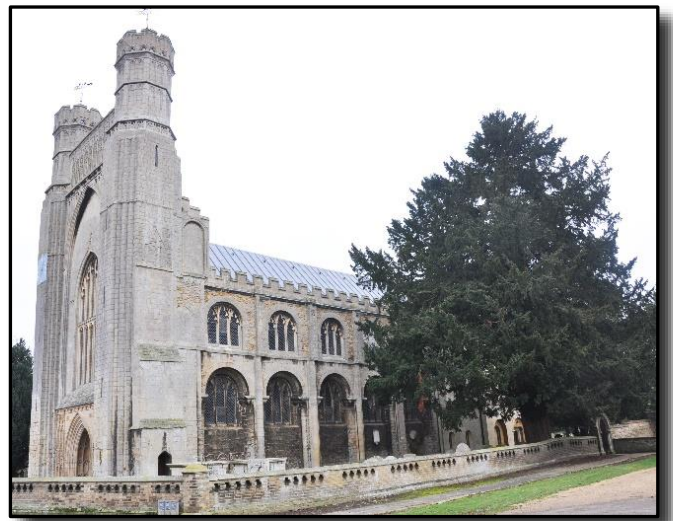


In a wider respect, the earl is particularly remembered for building the square of Covent Garden during which he employed Inigo Jones as his architect. More locally he is renowned for heading the ‘adventurers’ in the drainage of the fens and the ‘Bedford Level’ is consequently named after him.

The ‘adventurers’ work was continued by the Dutch engineer Sir Cornelius Vermuyden whose workers were French-speaking Walloons. Records show that in 1640 the Bishop of Ely granted a licence for sermons to be preached in the church in French or Latin.

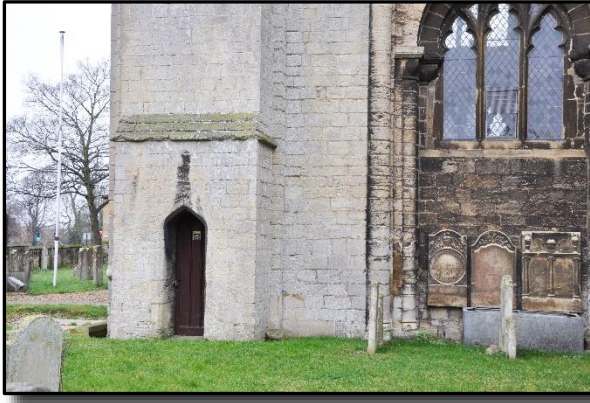


The top part of the C15 west façade is 40 feet above the ground making it too high for the puritans to deface its handsome array of statues of which there are nine. In the middle stands Christ and He is flanked by four saints on each side. I had hoped to find Saint Botolph amongst them but I failed to do so, although I read that the third from the right is Saint Tatwin who was one of Thorney’s first C7 anchorites and who is credited with taking a later local saint, St Guthlac, to Crowland when he founded another abbey there.



John Bartlett, the churchwarden, kindly met us and showed us round. When I mentioned the sundial on the southwest corner of the turret (see below) he explained the difficult logistics involved in arranging its repair. The low wall (seen above) around the church makes it virtually impossible for ‘cherry-pickers’ and similar machinery to gain access.





At the base of each tower is a small doorway which gives onto a spiral staircase.



Adjacent to the sundial is a blocked up Norman-arched doorway. There is a similar one below it.



The clock on the northwest tower dates from C17. In C19 a bell was installed in this same turret replacing an earlier bell of 1720.



The same features occur on the northwest tower. I must admit that, although I can understand that the lower doorway would have given access to the now-demolished gallery over the aisle, I have difficulty in understanding where the upper arch led to.



On the day we visited there was no sun for the sundial to show its prowess.





The Heritage Museum's model illustrates the appearance of the building in 1310.



Here you see the south wall of the C19 transept where it is clear that the stonework is vastly different.



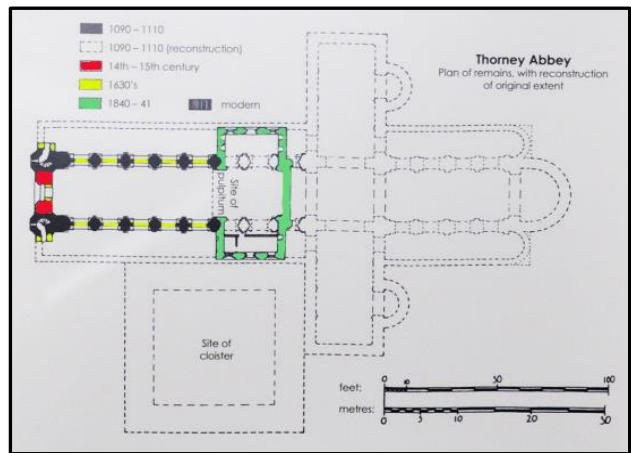
Each tower is topped by a weather vane - might these birds have come from Crowland (4 miles to the north) perhaps?



The churchyard is full of character and stretches away to the east hiding some of the mysteries of the remains of the foundations of an earlier nave.

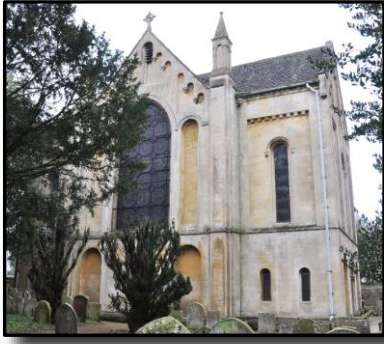


This picture shows the transition of the stone type from the rough C12 ashlars of the wall of the nave to the smoother ashlars of the C19 wall of the transept.



In the picture above, the black and dotted areas identify structures that were built between 1090 and 1110. Red indicates C14-C15; yellow is C17 and green is C19.





This shows the C19 east window and the north transept.



The C12 north wall mirrors the south. Before the removal of the aisles, this was an *inner* wall. The oolitic limestone of which much of the original part of the church is built, came from quarries at Barnack which were owned by Peterborough Cathedral. This is discussed a little further in *Correspondence* at the end of this newsletter.



Inside, the church is homely, well-organised and efficient. The nave and the chancel are contiguous.



Note the massive Norman pillars and rounded arches. There were of course originally spaces between the pillars which led into a lateral aisle but in C17 the aisles were removed, the lower part of the spaces filled in and windows inserted in the upper parts.



Note also the carved Norman capitals.



The Victorian font is just to the left of the door as you enter. John Bartlett tells me that there are plans to move it to the south side of the church to give more space around it.





The proximity of the apex of the C15 west window to the ceiling is due to the lowering of the original roof. The two standards shown are those of the men and women of the Thorney Branch of the British Legion.



The altar is constructed from the church's original C17 Holy Table. The foundation of the sanctuary itself was laid on 24 June 1839 and the building work was carried out at the sole expense of the Duke of Bedford. The Dukes of Bedford were benevolent landowners who provided a lot of money and worked hard for the improvement of the church and the estate. In 1910 however they sold both to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. At the east end of the nave, on each side, there are three window panels which are made of C15 glass from the Rhineland.



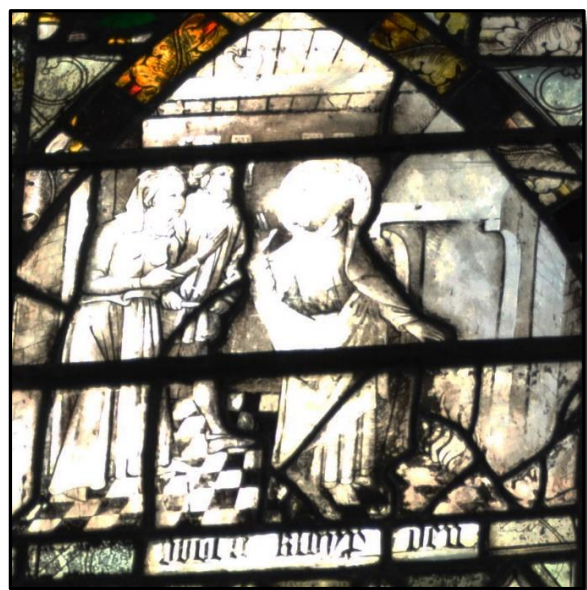
Jesus being mocked by soldiers just before his crucifixion.



The three Marys (- yes, there *are* three if you look closely) on their way to the tomb.



Christ rescuing Adam by trampling down the gates of Hell.



St Peter, while warming himself by the fire, denies Jesus.





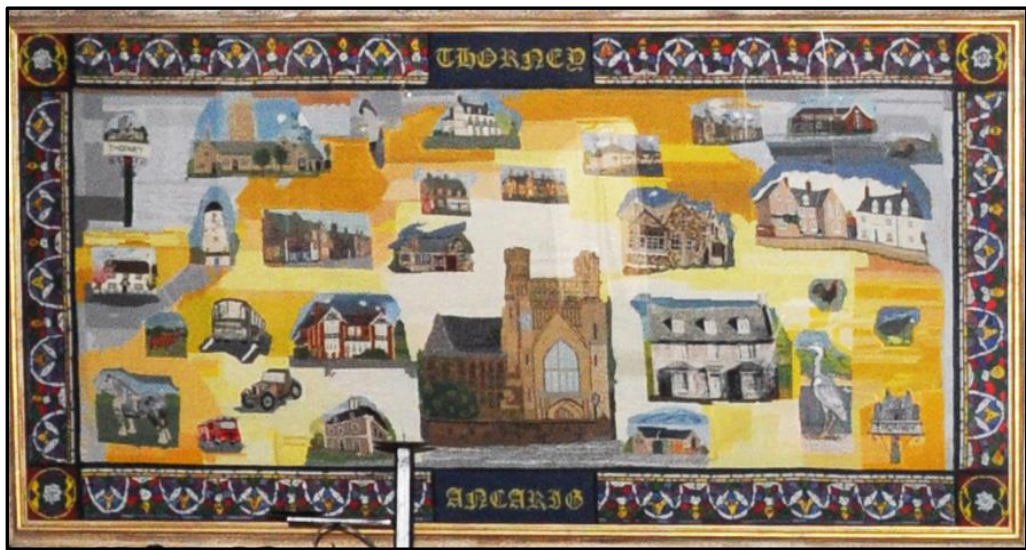
The Risen Jesus at the supper at Emmaus sitting between two unsuspecting disciples.



The Pietà. Mary lamenting over the body of her dead son.



The 1840 east window is a copy of one to be found in Canterbury Cathedral. With one exception it depicts the miracles of St Thomas a Becket.



Above is a picture of Thorney's Millenium Tapestry which, after a decade of needlework was finally unveiled by the Bishop of Ely in October 2009. It comprises 32 features of the village including the Abbey, the Duke of Bedford Cottages and School and the Crown Public House.





The floor of the aisle comprises inscribed flagstones which date mainly from C17.

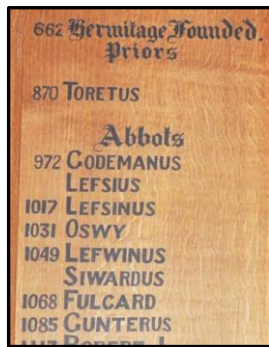


*Thorney Heritage Museum* is located just 400 metres north of the abbey, in the Tankyard at Bedford Hall in Station Road (PE6 0QE). Its location is marked in green on the map at the beginning of this article.



In the north transept (which is used as a vestry) I found a triptych cleverly illustrating St Botolph by the use of a collage of pictures of the church.

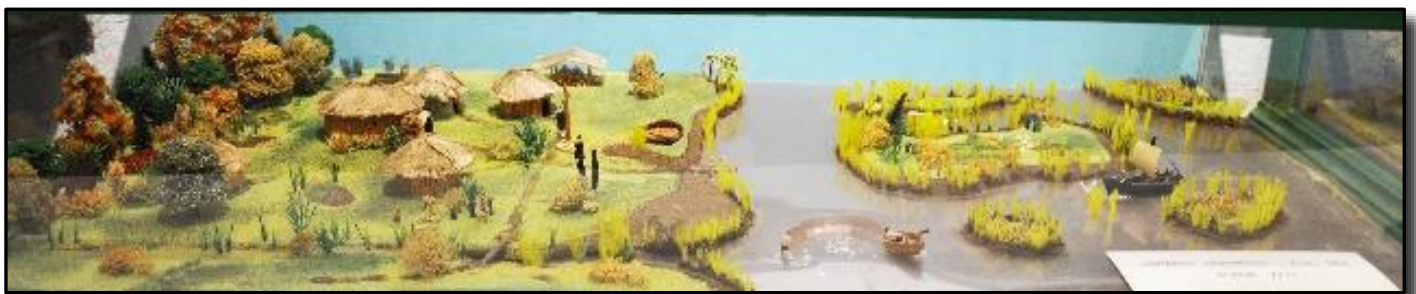
We were not planning to visit the museum but, in spite of the fact that John Bartlett had told us it was only open on Sundays, we decided to at least acquaint ourselves with its location and I was very glad that we did so because the magnificent displays in this little museum put Thorney Abbey and the Fens into perspective.



The Rectors Board goes back a long way and records 'Fulcard' as being abbot in 1068.

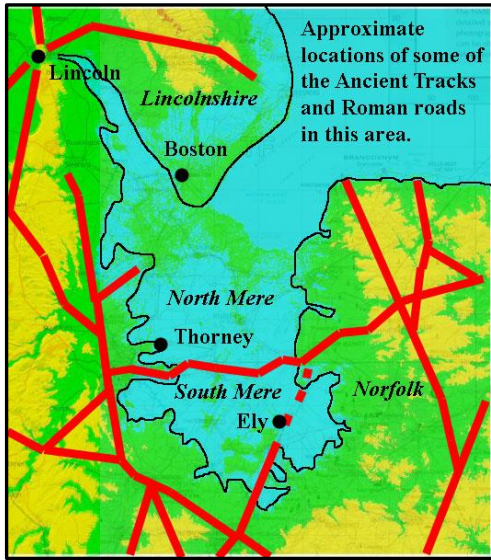


Having read the notice on the door, I tried my luck and called the above telephone number - more in hope than expectation of success - and within a few minutes Steve Halfhide kindly arrived and showed us around.

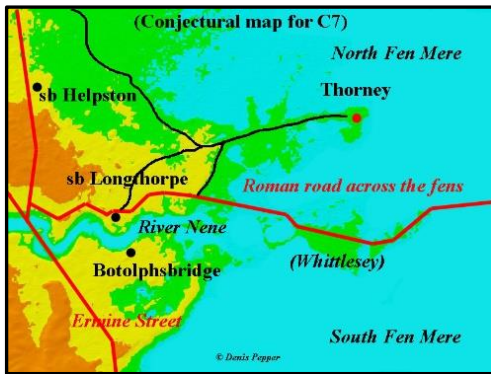


The waterways of the fens are beautifully illustrated by Ernest Clayton (1927-1996) in his model in Thorney Museum.

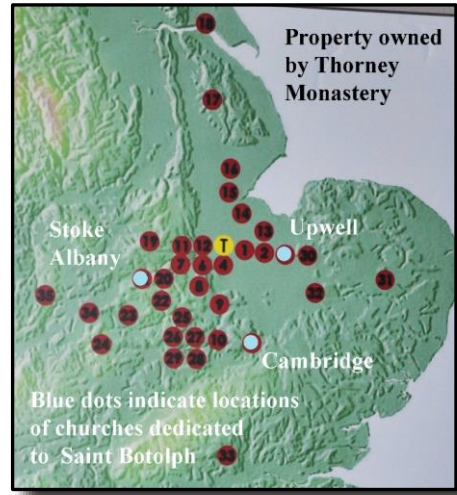




As you will see from the map above a Roman road crossed the shallow Fen waters dividing them into two halves. The building of this road must have been an engineering feat in itself as the road hopped from islet to islet using them like stepping stones across a pond. The hard sections of road on each islet would have been connected by a series of wooden bridges.



The road set off from the Peterborough area and headed east to Whittlesea. The Thorney peninsula was just to the north of this.



A useful map shows the property owned by Thorney Monastery.

Property owned by Thorney Monastery	
1	Thorney Monastery
2	Bin
3	Upwell
4	Wimborne
5	Cambridge
6	Farcel
7	Spaun
8	Stibbington
9	Folksworth
10	Huntingdon
11	Atbotheigh
12	Stamford
13	Adwell Deeping
14	Reet
15	Holbeach
16	Wigton
17	Swineshead
18	Market Kasen
19	Barlon
20	Northam
21	Lowick
22	Stoke Albany
23	Stip
24	Round
25	Northampton
26	Chawellton
27	Keyloe
28	Weldon
29	Sturleigh
30	Wilsen
31	Camworth
32	Soton Socon
33	Sandy
34	Bedford
35	Compleham
36	Tasburgh
37	Norfolk
38	Lakemead
39	Embsay
40	Midx
41	Redknoe
42	Ryton
43	Chewng
44	Dawdler
45	Southome
46	Southon
47	Capthorne

I was excited to find this map because it suggests that under each of those markers lies a potential St Botolph's church - working on the basis that a church built on Thorney Abbey property is more likely to have shared the same dedication as its mother church. Upwell, Stoke Albany and Cambridge followed this pattern and the list gives us a valuable lead on 30 or so other places where we might expect to find historical records of other long-lost Botolph Churches. Scope for more research!



Driving along the Roman road as it steps across the now-reclaimed fens we can envisage the shallow water lapping at the edges of the road in earlier times.



## Thanks

My grateful thanks to John Bartlett for showing us around Thorney Abbey, and to Steve Halfhide for opening the Heritage Museum at such short notice.

## Classification

This is one of the few Botolph Churches where classification is relatively easy. There is no doubt that Botolph had no hand in building the abbey and that it can be classified as B(ii) - that is to say founded between AD 800 and 1066 (actually 972 as discussed below). The abbey is a special case and, in spite of the fact that it would have been frequented by many wayfarers during their journeys, its prime function was never as a 'Travellers' Church.'

## Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester (AD 904-984)

was the hero of the day. The name of *Aethelwold* (with all its various spellings) features frequently in Botolph's life. We have King Ethelwald of West Kent (fl.616-650), King Ethelwold of East Anglia (fl.654-664) and King Aethelwald of Sussex (fl.660-685) - all of whom Botolph probably met.

Bishop Aethelwold was however one that he never met. *He* was born 300 years after Botolph and he was a passionate man with a mission. He had been appointed Bishop of Winchester by King Edgar the Peaceful in 963; this was four years after the fifteen year old Edgar (to whom the bishop had been tutor) had been crowned king of England.

Botolph had died in 680. Two hundred years or so later, in 869, the Danes desecrated Icanho Abbey as they did Thorney, Ely, Peterborough and many other monasteries and churches. A hundred years after that, there had been a long enough lull in Viking incursions for King Edgar and Bishop Aethelwold to conclude that it was safe to start rebuilding. In 966 the latter re-founded Peterborough Abbey. Ely and Thorney abbeys followed in 972.

Abbeys of the day earned their money from travellers and sponsors and an attraction was needed. To this end Bishop Aethelwold set about acquiring some relics of saints and one of his first projects concerned Saint Botolph whose body still lay buried at Icanho - where, in spite of the Vikings' destruction of the abbey, it was probably still being used for intercession. Its removal cannot have been popular with the locals - particularly if someone was in the process of venerating it when the first spade went into the soil.

Protests apart, our saint was duly disinterred (not without some difficulty by all accounts) and his skull was sent to Aethelwold's enterprise at Ely

Abbey. The rest of his bones were divided into three. The king retained one section, one section went to Thorney and one section (somewhat later) went to Bury St Edmunds.

I think we will leave it there - the full story is rather more complicated but suffice it to say that over the next few years there developed a great industry both in grave plundering and the theft of relics by monks from other monasteries. The heavy hand of Henry VIII finally put an end to this in C16.

## Back to Thorney Abbey

Interestingly, the Christian site at Thorney Abbey was founded only a few years after our saint constructed Icanho in AD 654 and the man responsible for its founding bore the unusually similar name of *Seaxulph*. The '-ulph' ending was so uncommon in those days that one is bound to wonder if Seaxulph and Botolph were related.

The former was a great friend of King Peada of Mercia who was the son of the somewhat anti-Christian King Penda who was killed in 655. Peada had Christian views and in 656 started to build an abbey at Peterborough in which he installed Seaxulph as its first abbot.

Peada's reign was only short but his work was continued by his brother and successor King Wulfhere who, when he visited the abbey for the consecration of the new minster, was told by Seaxulph that there were a number of monks in his care who wished to live a reclusive life as anchorites on Thorney. Wulfhere gave his permission and the place became known as 'Ancarig.'

## Abbot Folcard

Folcard was abbot of Thorney from c.1069 to 1085 during which time he wrote the *Life of Saint Botolph* upon which we rely heavily for information. Significantly he dedicated this work to Walkelin, bishop of Winchester, rather than to his immediate superior Bishop Remigius with whom he is reputed to have had several quarrels. Folcard also wrote four other important *Vitae*.

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## Correspondence

1. **Patricia Croxton-Smith** (who has done a great deal of research on Botolph Churches) wrote from St Botolph's Hadstock: *I found, when I mapped out all the Botolph dedications, that all were within easy reach of some transport facility - Roman road or older trackway, river or port. Botolf Botolfson found the same in Denmark and Scandinavia.*

2. **Marcia Barton** wrote from St Botolph's Chevening saying how much she enjoyed the last



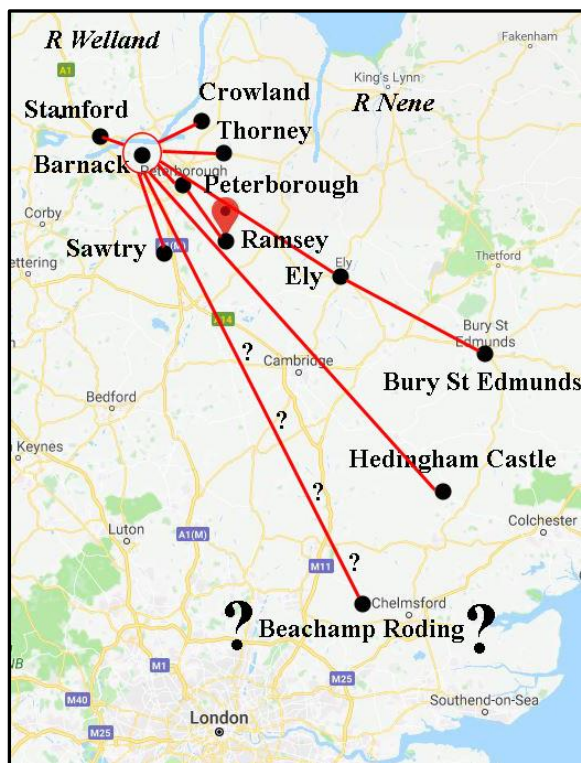
*Botolphian* - due particularly to the fact that the church lies in an area where she grew up.

3. **Phillip Buttolph** wrote from Oregon USA asking if there was any connection between *Beowulf* and *Botwulf* (one of the many alternative spellings of Botulph). I replied at some length. One hopes that the poet who wrote *Beowulf* might have gained some inspiration both from Botolph's name and his actions. There are several sections of the poem which 'ring Botolph bells.'

4. **Arch Horst** wrote from Boston USA saying that he would be visiting Portsmouth shortly and asking if there were any Botolph Churches that he could visit in the vicinity. I was happy to oblige with details. Enjoy your visit Horst.

5. **Emma Rose Barber** wrote asking me if I had written about St Botolph's Northfleet Kent and requesting that I email her a copy - which I was pleased to do - particularly as she said some nice things about *The Botolphian* - thank you Emma Rose.

6. **Joan Blows**, a petrologist whom I consulted about the ashlar at Beauchamp Roding, wrote to say that the ashlar of Hedingham Castle, which I mentioned in the last issue, are of Barnack Stone. I expect it is too much to hope that those at Beauchamp Roding are the same but Barnack Stone also features at Thorney, Peterborough and several other places within our field of interest as shown below:



As mentioned previously, the Barnack quarry was owned by Peterborough Cathedral which was paid annually by the foundations shown above for access to the site. In the case of Ramsey Abbey

the tribute was 4,000 eels per annum. One hopes that the wriggling mass did not all arrive at once.

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Please do not hesitate to write to me or send an email to [botolph@virginmedia.com](mailto: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 END-NOTES**

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](mailto: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.
  - (i) Founded by radiation from Botolph centres.
  - (ii) Founded along the course of Botolph's journeys.
- B: **Travellers' churches.**
  - (i) Founded before AD 800
  - (ii) Founded between 800 and 1066
  - (iii) Founded after the Norman Conquest.
- C: **Hanseatic churches** founded as a result of commercial enterprise.
- D: None of the above.

#### **Typical Characteristics of Early St Botolph Churches.**

1. Nearly 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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