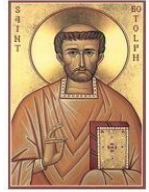




# The Botolphian

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.

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1st November 2018

## Highlights this month

- **St Botolph's church, Helpston.**
- It gives me great pleasure to welcome Jan Clarke (Folkestone); Jeff Gough; Natasha Kerrigan (Folkestone).
- Correspondence from Peter Horsefield from Trunch in Norfolk.
- The date for the **1919** Annual Luncheon at Cambridge is **WEDNESDAY 23rd OCTOBER** - please put it in your diaries now.

## Editorial

I am pleased to report that the sixth Annual Luncheon of the society was a great success and probably the best yet in terms of the food and services offered by the Hilton Hotel. It is the fifth time that the luncheon has been held there and we were greeted like old friends and given a very personal caring service.

As usual the amicable warmth of the meeting was palpable. As one of my old school friends Geoff remarked afterwards - "Thanks so much for the very enjoyable luncheon - pity about the speaker." I took this as a compliment on the basis that he had obviously remained alert long enough to realise that it was I who was speaking. We had a good crowd of faithfuls at the meeting and welcomed a couple of people who had not been before - one of whom was our president Father Tim L'Estrange's delightful 4-year-old daughter Catherine.

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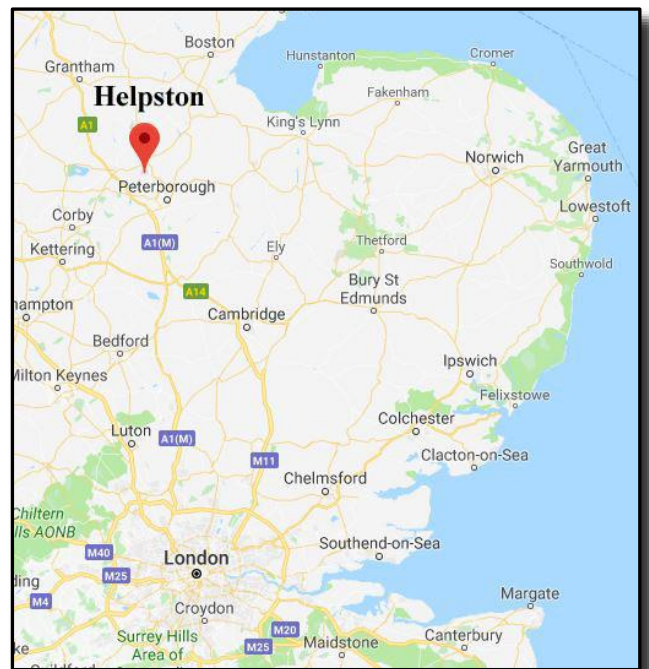
I must also report that publication of Volume III of the Botolph Trilogy *Abbot Botolph of Icanho* is a little behind schedule. The book is finished. The first proof-reading copy has been printed and is at present undergoing initial editing before the main proof-reading copies are printed and sent out to the readers. Their reports will, I hope, be back by the beginning of December and if this deadline

can be kept publication will be towards the end of January.

## Church Feature

## Helpston, Cambridgeshire.

This village has 'been about a bit' whilst remaining in the same place. Formerly it was in the *Soke of Peterborough* - geographically in *Northants* - subsequently (1965-1974) in *Huntingdon and Peterborough* - and now in *Cambridgeshire* administered by the *City of Peterborough unitary authority*. I hope that is clear to all.



**Approach:** When travelling along the A1(M) from the south, after passing through Water

Newton and crossing the River Nene, turn left on the A47 towards Peterborough/Leicester. At the roundabout take the first exit onto the A47 and after 1 mile turn left onto Sutton Heath Road and after 0.4 miles turn right onto Langley Bush Road. Follow this for 4 miles - the final straight section is the Roman road. After these 4 miles turn right onto West Street B1143 and half a mile or so later turn left into Church Road and park outside the church.

**Location:** Church Lane, Helpston, Peterborough, PE6 7DT; Lat/Long: 52.6359, -0.3434; NGR: TF122055.

**Village Website:** Webmaster: Roy Hinchliff at [webmaster@helpston.net](mailto:webmaster@helpston.net).

**Key:** The church is often open but at irregular hours so if you wish to visit it is recommended that you make contact by telephone or email first.

**Church Website:**  
<http://helpston.net/locations/st-botolphs-church-4/>.

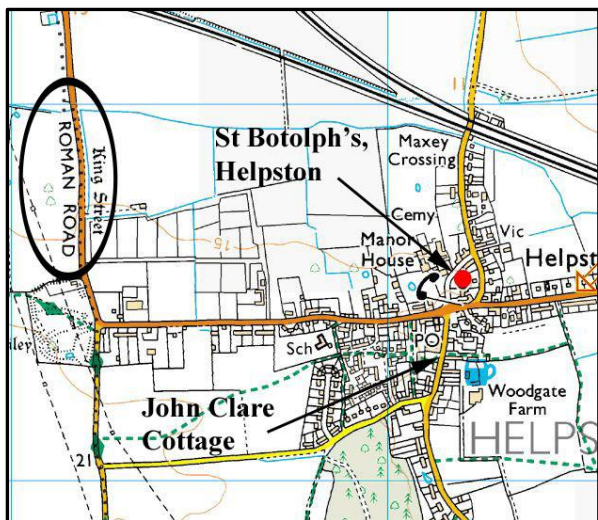
**Churchwarden;** Clive Pearce.

**Other contacts:** Kate Hinchliff, 30 West Street, Helpston PE6 7DX.

**Rector:** Revd David Maylor Tel: 01780 740-234.

**Church Services:** There is a service (generally with Holy Communion) in this church each Sunday at 10.45 a.m. There are also two 'All age' services every month, one with Communion, the other an 'All Age Praise.'

**Listed Grade:** I



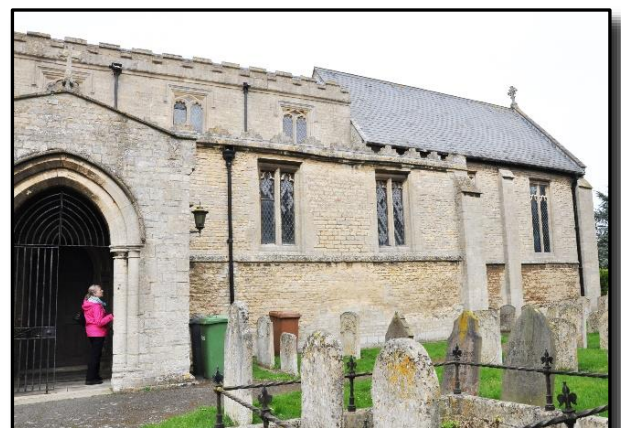
The church lies less than a mile from the Roman road and just a short way from the cottage where the celebrated poet John Clare was born.



This map shows the Roman roads in the area together with the two closest St Botolph churches of Thorney and Longthorpe and the nearby site of Barnack's important stone quarries.



No lych-gate here - entry to the churchyard is via a Tudor-style doorway - a doorway without a door.

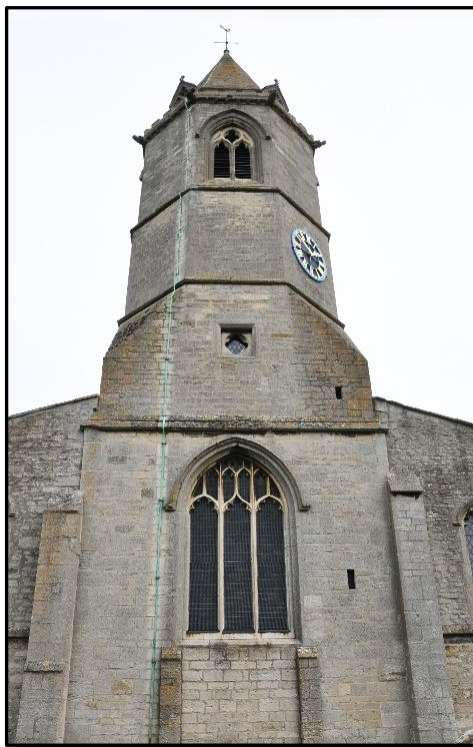


A quick first glance might suggest to the casual observer that this church dates from Tudor times but the casual observer would be wrong. This is a C13 or earlier church in C15 or later clothing.

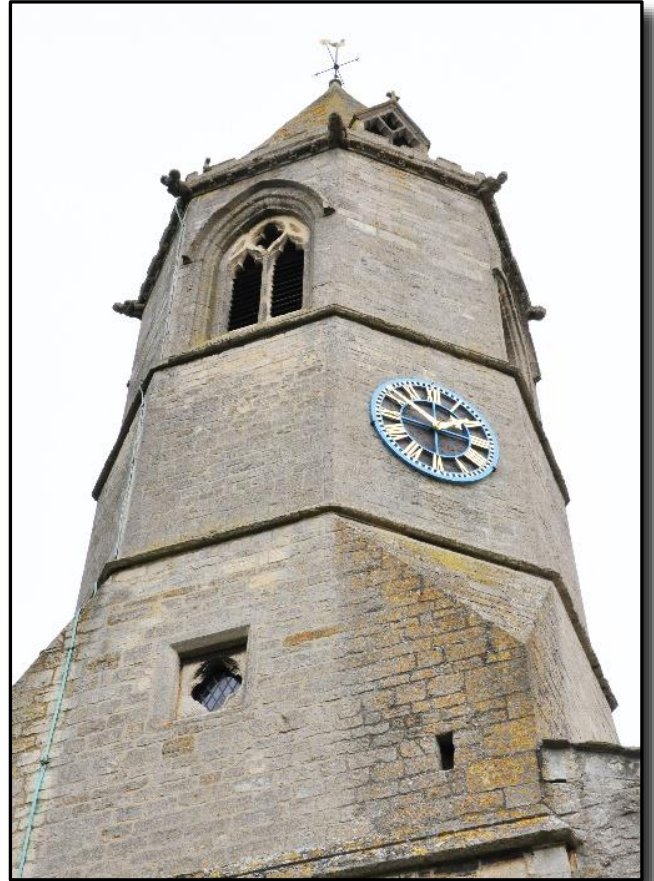




The tower is at the church's west end. I have no idea who wrote the excellent St Botolph's Helpston Church Guide from which I have drawn heavily in my research but I must compliment them on their modesty (not even initials were to be found) and their professionalism and knowledge. The guide tells us that the church was rebuilt in 1865 but records indicate that the original structure derived mainly from C13 although records of the presence of some long-and-short stonework suggests an even earlier Saxon heritage.



The replaced west window is of C15 perpendicular style set into the square tower base of the first stage. The second stage, dating from 1330, also stands on a square base but has been cleverly designed to provide support for the top two *octagonally*-based stages.



The top stage has four window-like bell openings and a short squat spire with lucarnes (the structures that resemble attic windows).

The 4 ft diameter cast iron clock, with its gilded hands, strikes the hours on the tenor bell. It was installed 134 years ago by John Smith of Derby and is still maintained by the same company.



On the south-west buttress are the well-worn remains of a larger-than-usual Mass Dial

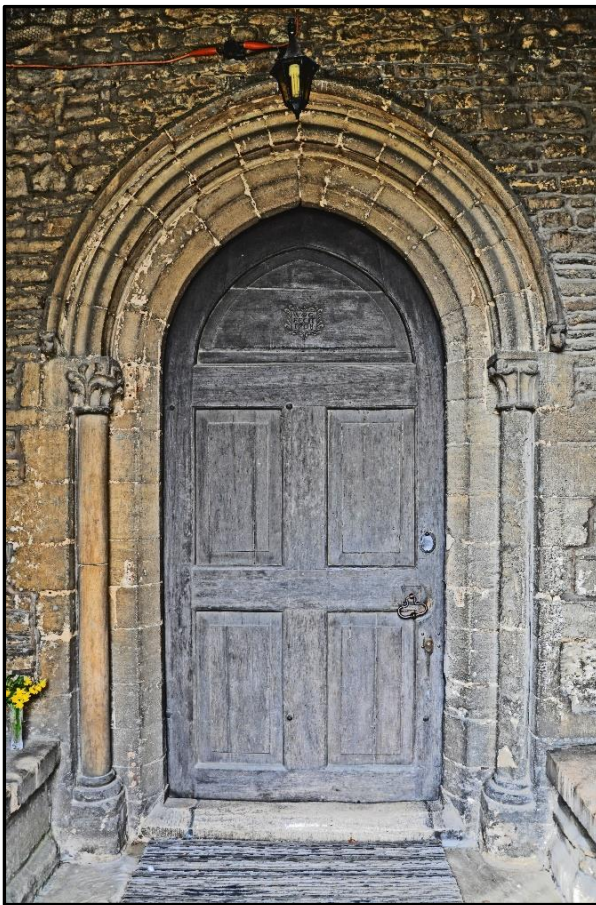




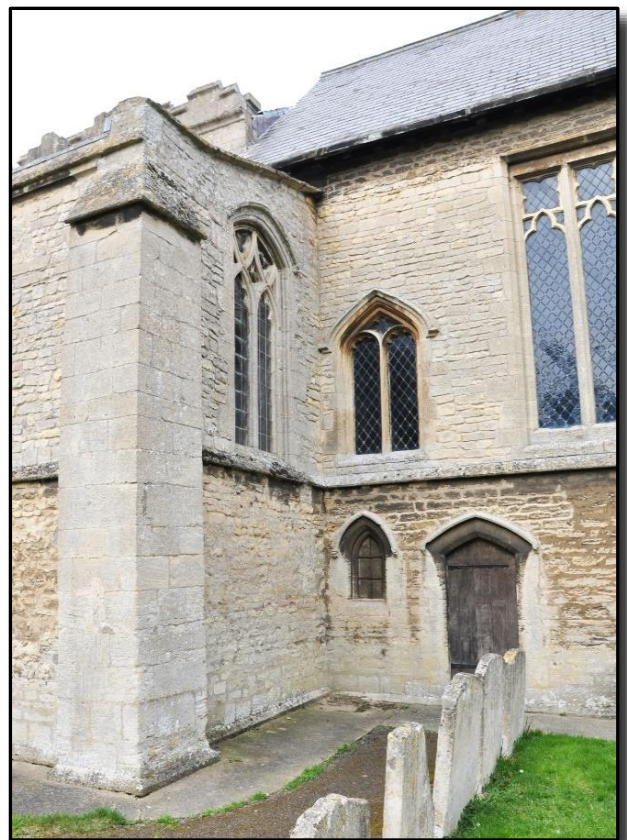
The south porch dates from C14 although . . .



As also seen in an earlier picture, the windows of the south aisle are flat-topped C16.

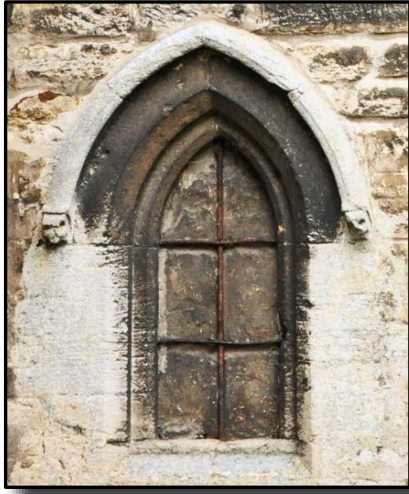


. . . the south doorway hails from a century earlier. One might wonder why the builder should choose to have the capital on the north colonette bear 'droopy' waterleaves while those on the south side of the doorway are erect. The truth is that those on the south side are C12 whereas the others are a later replacement.

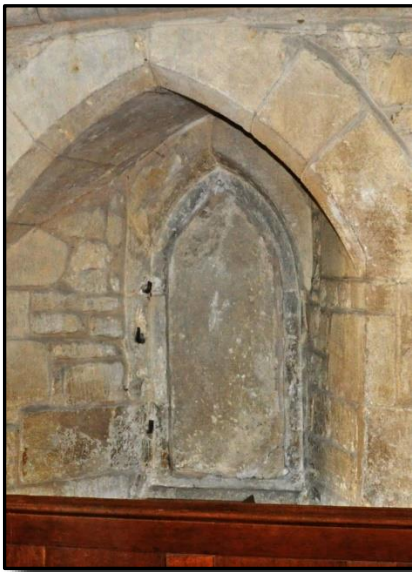


The east window of the south aisle, seen in the angle here, is in C14 Decorated style. There are some interesting features to be found in this corner between the south aisle and the chancel. We have a Lowside Window conveniently positioned at head height for anybody outside to look in. There is a priest's door and there is a late C15 two-light window set at a lower level than the other upper windows.





First - the Lowside Window: This oft-found feature has, of late, become a source of great interest to me. Helpston's guide book (like most others) refuses to commit itself and writes "*the use of such windows remains obscure.*" This window - unusually - still bears its slightly off-centre (this might or might not be relevant) early iron stanchion.



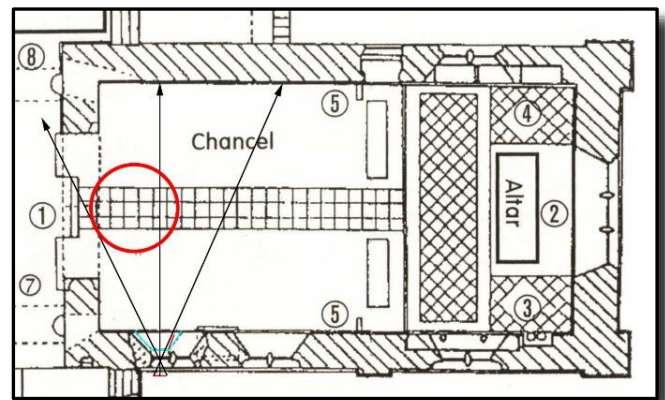
Inside the now-blocked-up opening, an upper and lower hinge can be seen on the east jamb. This is telling because it shows that when the shutter was slightly open, the view from outside would be more to the north or north west - rather than to the north east where the present altar lies.

When in August I asked Dr Woodman at Cambridge if he would discuss Lowside Windows he too declined reasoning that nobody understands what they were for.

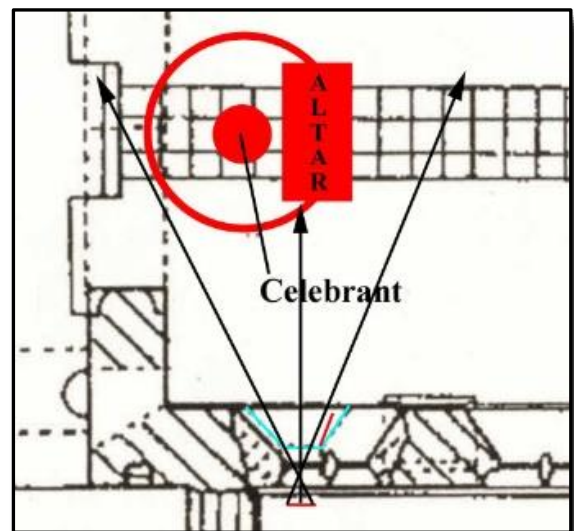
I have taken to calling them *Lowside* Windows rather than *Low Side* Windows because the latter sounds more like an everyday expression about something you might find in a modern bungalow whereas, in my view, the former gives the clue that the name refers to something more specialised.

Various writers have struggled with the LSW problem to little effect but their exercises have had the benefit of ruling out the possibilities that these openings were used as Leper Windows, Confessionals, or Ventilators. Gill, in 1910, studied 200 of them and identified the fact that all were built into churches which were constructed within the time frame of 1225 - 1350. His favoured theory was that the sacring bell was rung through the opening to alert those outside the church to the fact that the host was being elevated. With certain provisos this seems to me a plausible idea but I believe there is more to it than that.

My concept is that the feature is related to the fact that, for various reasons which I shall propound elsewhere, for those 100 or so years, the altar was situated further forwards - i.e. adjacent to the LSW.



This is demonstrated very well at Helpston where, using the surveyor's plan of the chancel we can plot the visibility prospects for a person viewing from outside the opening.

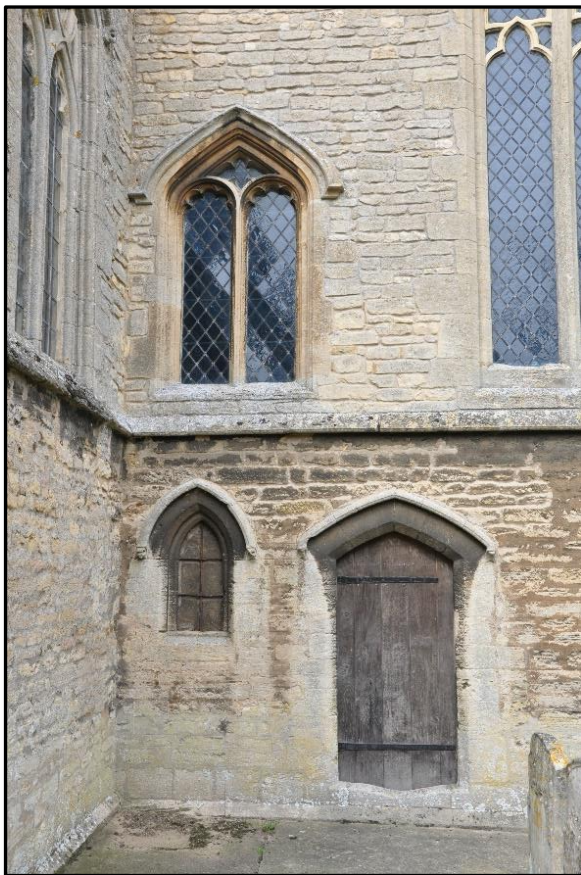


This is rather like plotting the position of the horse to find out where the cart is but, if the theory is correct, then I believe that the most plausible explanation for Lowside Windows is that they offered an outside observer the facility of



watching the host being elevated and hence communicating that fact to the gathered masses. In the Middle Ages churches were often filled to capacity and the overflow would be outside - either to the north of the church or to the south - or both where the topography allowed it. Where crowds could have gathered on both sides of the building we find Lowside windows on both sides of the chancel. Here I rest my case . . . for the moment.

One thing that puzzles me with the Helpston LSW is the fact that the iron latch is on the same side as the hinge pins. Perhaps there was originally another (now-lost) similar hook on the opposite side of the shutter (or maybe just a hole in the brickwork) and a wooden beam which slid between the two to lock the shutter closed.



The shape of the upper part of the LSW is typically gothic but neither the priest's door nor the small upper window conform to the style suggesting that both are later additions.



Just outside the priest's door is the tomb of the poet John Clare (1793-1864) who died in obscurity but whose memory and prestige rose in fame when a complete edition of his poetry was published more recently. He had achieved his greatest fame during his lifetime when his first published poems outsold even those of John Keats.



A memorial tablet lies in the south porch and, when you have finished exploring the church . . .





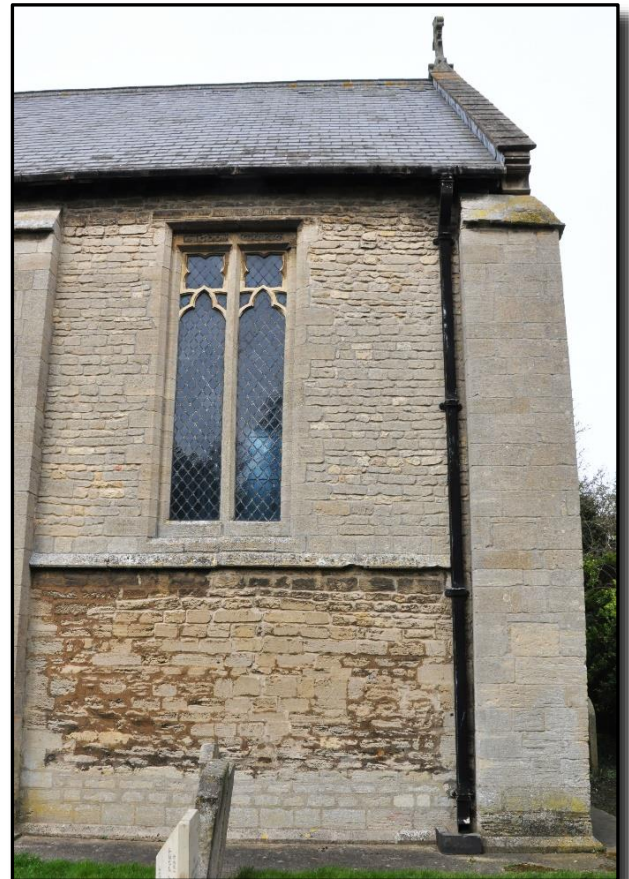
... there are some delightful tearooms just across the road where you can be refreshed and visit his birthplace.



Continuing our exploration outside we see that the sandstone walls are built onto an ashlar plinth in a similar way to those we found at St Botolph's Beauchamp Roding as shown below.



Beauchamp Roding is the only other St Botolph's church which I have (so far) found to be constructed in this way.



Before we turn the corner, the last window in the south chancel wall finally reveals its secrets.

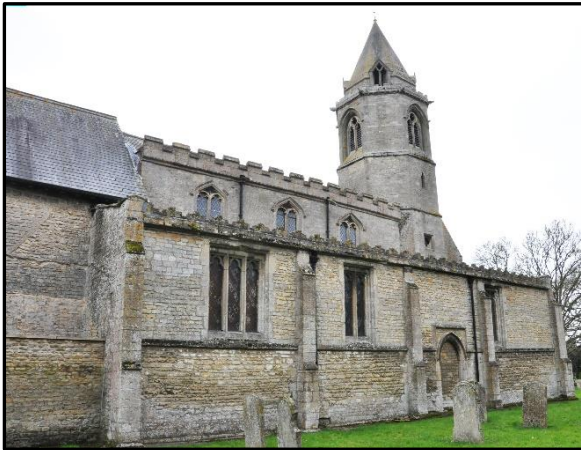


Carved into the lintel is the date 1609 and the initials TG and KG. It seems that it was they who were responsible for removing the pointed heads of the original gothic window frames and replacing them with square lintels. This was done when the roof of the chancel was lowered. It is a sobering thought that this was in the reign of King James. The Authorised Version of the Bible was, at this date, half finished and would be published two years later. They were changing times for the church at Helpston as well as for the rest of the country; Charles I would shortly lose his head and Oliver Cromwell would take over as Lord Protector.

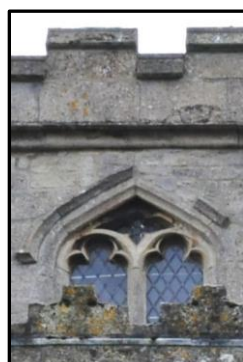




There have been many alterations to the north wall of the chancel as evidenced by the scars of where a variety of outhouses have been constructed and deconstructed over the years and by the absence of an east window in the north aisle. The low wall that is presently in place screens the machinery of the church's sophisticated 'environmentally sensitive' heating system.



The lower wall of the north aisle mirrors that of the south but the upper windows of the clerestory differ on the two sides of the church.



On the south side (on the left in the picture above) the clerestory windows have updated flat-topped windows whereas on the north side the windows are still of the older style. It is said that both sets of windows were installed in C15 and if this is the

case the northern ones must have been built first and in the few years it took for the southern ones to be inserted the fashions had changed.

### Inside the church



As we enter we are greeted by a mass of colourful kneelers which were the inspiration of the late Miss Daisy Beal who encouraged members of the congregation and her friends and relatives to produce them.



Looking obliquely across the nave into the north aisle we see that advantage has been taken of the lack of an east window by positioning the organ there.



The c.1350 octagonal font stands at the head of the central aisle and bears marks which show where an earlier cover was wrenched away. Its style lends evidence to the maxim that 'the plainer it is the older it is.'





Nearby is one of the four massive supports to the tower arch which was rebuilt in 1865. The columns and capitals date from C12 however.



These are massive pieces of beautiful craftsmanship.



The kneelers continue to lend colour as we approach the chancel arch, above which is the inscription *The Earth is the Lord's and the Fulness thereof* - the first few words of Psalm XXIV.



At the top of the columns the chancel arch shows damage left by the removal of the rood screen.





The churches of Roman Catholicism were not built in a day. There were many periods during the building of a church when there were lulls while the sponsors waited for finance to become available. Here, on the right, we see the c.1220 round columns of the south aisle and the change in fashion to the octagonal columns of the south aisle which were built only 30 years later. You will note the yellow ochre which is all that remains of pre-Reformation paintings.



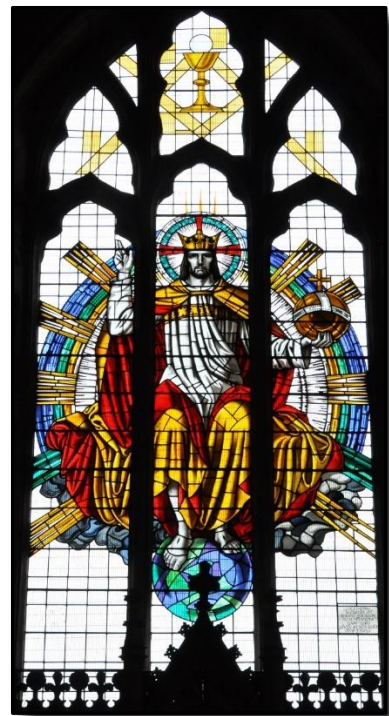
The well-preserved Royal Arms in the north aisle are those of James II (1633-1688).



On each side of the altar is a stone bracket (shown ringed above) which probably supported a statue of the Virgin Mary on the left and either St Botolph or St John the Evangelist on the right. The mutilation was part of the iconoclasms of the reign of young Edward VI.



The beautifully-carved pulpit was installed in 1913.



The magnificent east window which shows Christ in Majesty was dedicated on 22nd May 1981 in memory of Ralph Jackson Whitehead.





In customary position to the right of the altar there is a mid C13 piscina and a three-seat sedilia.



We can date these items to mid C13 because they are matching units and the fact that the double piscina went out of fashion in c. 1275. The piscina on the left was used for the washing of the chalice and that on the right was used for the priest to wash his fingers - not dissimilar to the rules for restaurant kitchens today.



Unusually, in this church there is *another* triple sedilia built into the *north* wall of the sanctuary. Whether this was done as a matter of creating balanced artistic style or whether the seats were really needed is unknown. Rebates in their jambs and cills suggest that these were used as locked cupboard aumbries.



In front of the altar rail there are two sets of C13 tile paving.

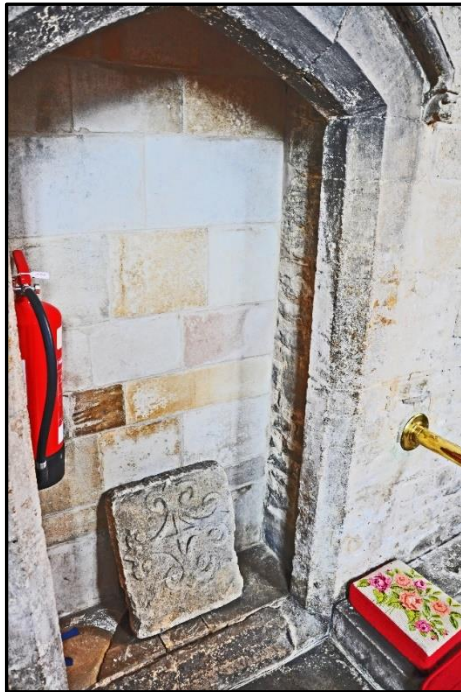




I am certainly no expert on these matters but these seem rather different in design to other C13 tiles that I have seen.



I am not familiar with these 'recumbent crosses' but Victoria County History mentions St Pega's cross at Peakirk and describes its shaft and base as having been copied from the ancient cross at Helpston.



This blocked-up north doorway which once led from the chancel to the vestry contains (as well as the fire-extinguisher) "remnants of Saxon crosses recovered from the churchyard wall in the 1990s." I could find only the one slab.

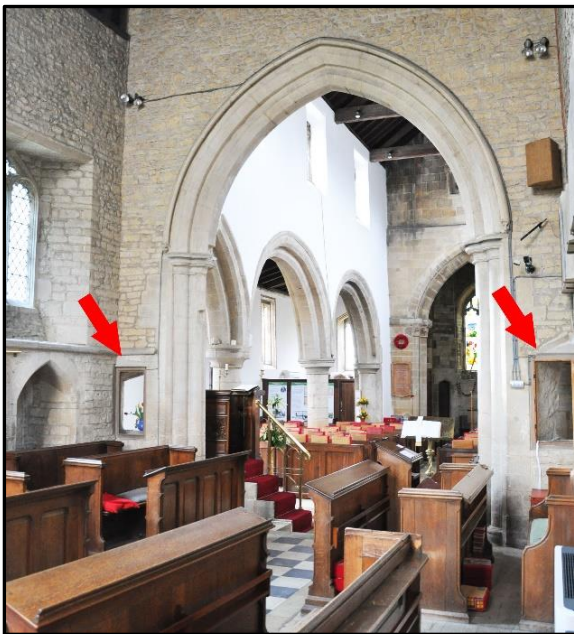


Adjacent to this north doorway is a stone seat end which, with its partner on the opposite side, is all that is left of C13 seats that went along each wall. This one is in the shape of a sculptured monster head with the wings of a bird.



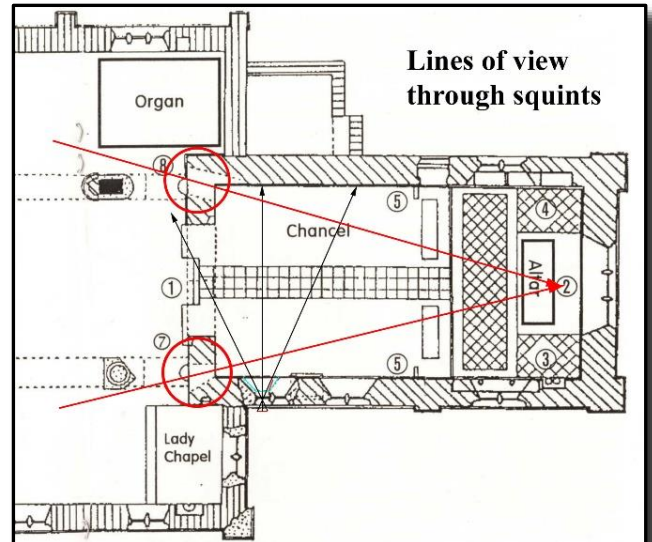


On the south side the sculptured figures are said to be Hound of Heaven death masks.



Looking from the chancel back towards the nave there are two Squints - viewing tunnels through which a sight of the celebrant is possible from each of the side aisles. Clearly the view from each squint would be sufficient for only one observer. As G.H.Cook explains the purpose of these in his book *The English Medieval Parish Church*:

“Frequently . . . a chantry priest would be reciting mass at an altar in the aisle before high mass for the parishioners had commenced . . . The rule was that soul masses should not begin until high mass . . . was well advanced. The chantry priest claimed that, standing before a side altar, he was unable to see into the chancel; so the difficulty was overcome by cutting a squint which afforded him a direct view of the High Altar . . . “



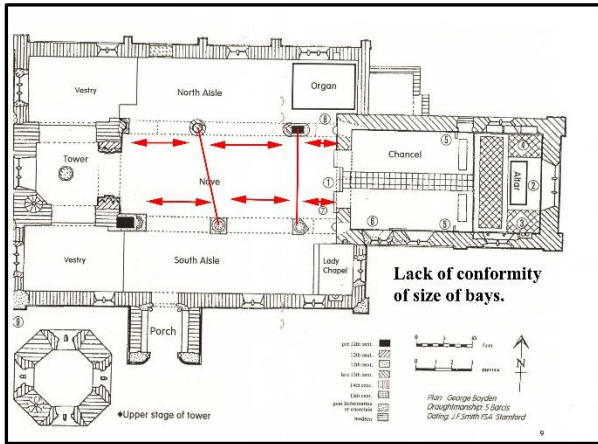
In these circumstances it is clear from the angle of the tunnels that the ‘target’ is the high altar. When the squints were inserted the priest would, during the elevation of the host, have stood *in front* of the altar with his back to the congregation. And ‘inserted’ is what they were rather than being built into the original design. As the guide book says, they are ‘crudely hewn.’

Looking again at the plan above we can see how, if one ignores the side aisles, the chancel is actually *wider* than the nave into which it *protrudes* rather than abuts.



The effect of this has been to make the first bay on each side unnaturally narrow compared to the others.





Also the central columns are not opposite one another. It is all rather mysterious and it is made more so by the fact that the two tiny black rectangles in the plan above represent the earliest (i.e. Saxon) parts of the church.

*All these matters highlight the fact that the building has been constantly altered as a matter of expedience to accommodate the many changes in ritual and worship that have occurred during its lifetime.*



A view from the chancel arch westwards through the nave shows the tall elegant tower arch with the font, the bellropes and the west window. Up on high is a trefoil opening which might have served as a squint for an observer in the belltower - or might be for ventilation - or for the sound of the bells to pervade the nave - or all three.



At the end of the south aisle is the Lady Chapel with a C14 east window and a piscina which indicates that the Mass was held here.

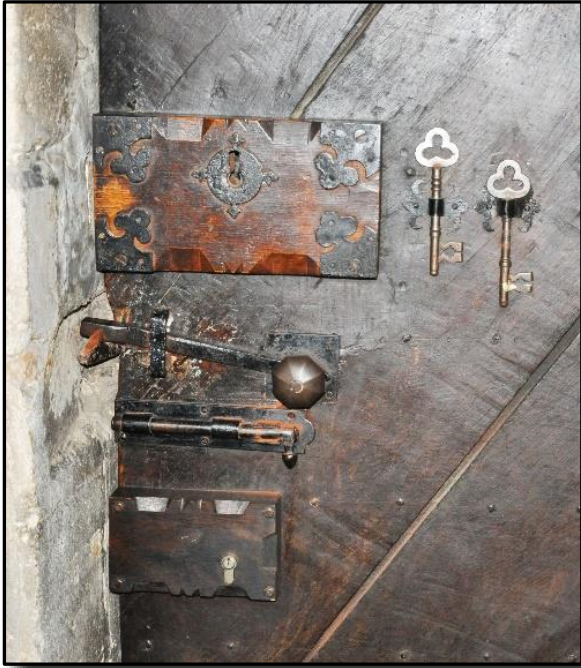


Like the piscina in the chancel this one has also been damaged - probably anciently at the same time that the statuettes were desecrated.



The south door was made by a certain W.G. in 1708. Was this perhaps a member of the same 'G family' as TG and KG whose initials appeared on the 1609 lintel?





The door is a magnificent piece of work as are the locks. The old keys are also on display.



There are many monumental slabs both on the walls and, like this one, on the floor but the one that would probably have been the most interesting lies somewhere partially hidden near the organ - and I missed it.

The Guide Book tells us that legend around the edge reads:

*'Here lies Roger de Hecham on whose soul may God have mercy. Whoever shall pray for his soul shall have forty days of indulgence.'*

Roger de Hecham (or Higham) was patron of the living in 1296 and on 13th June 1300 he was made a 'puisne Baron' of the Exchequer.

Thus he was an important chap with lots of money and it seems likely that his interest in this church was to foster it - perhaps with a view to being buried in the chancel and have future congregations pray for his soul. In the event his grave or memorial slab (or both) only made it as far as the nave but, nevertheless, his name remains one of the first to be associated with the site. There was an earlier one however and that was Galfrid de Helpston who is recorded as being the rector in 1230.

### Classification?

Well now! We have a medieval church built on Saxon foundations like many other St Botolph churches. The question is 'which Saxon?' The Saxon period *before* or the Saxon period *after* the Vikings - i.e. C7-8 or C10-11?



The conjectural C7 map above has modern villages inserted to help the locals to get their bearings. What is to be noted is that The Fens start less than 3 miles away at Peakirk (or even closer depending where you measure from); the Roman road is less than a mile away; the Barnack stone quarry is less than 3 miles away. All these items are relevant to the positioning of the church. The church itself is 10 - 15 metres above what the water level of the Fens would have been in C7 so quite high enough to keep its feet dry. It can therefore be said to satisfy the first four of the usual characteristics of early-foundation St Botolph churches i.e.:

1. It is in eastern England.
2. It has Saxon foundations.
3. It lies close to a Roman road.
4. It lies close to the bottom of an escarpment but well clear of the water.





Does it, however, occupy a site which is at the beginning, middle or end of a long journey? If London to Lincoln is the 120 mile journey in question then Helpston is two-thirds of the way along but in any case the whole journey is well provided for by a whole host of other St Botolph churches which are around the route - the next one up the line being, incidentally, **St Botolph's at Newton** which will be featured in the December issue of *The Botolphian*.

Although St Botolph's Helpston was associated with powerful men and wealthy landowners in the post-Conquest era, its Saxon base puts its starting point well before the days of the wool magnates. Was it founded in C7 by Botolph himself when he passed that way whilst taking a more northerly route between Icanho and Much Wenlock? Or was it founded in C10 in response to Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester's resurrection of the abbey of nearby Peterborough and his encouragement of pilgrimage.

I suspect it was the latter and would therefore classify the church as B(ii) - a Travellers' Church founded between 800 and 1066.

### Correspondence

**Peter Horsefield** wrote from Trunch in Norfolk to say that, to his delight, he recently found a copy of *The Story of Trunch* (published 1939) by an earlier rector Revd Percy Goodrich. Peter is in the process of reprinting copies which also contain the life story of St Botolph - one or two parts of

which take a slightly different slant to normal but the story is well-written.

### 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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