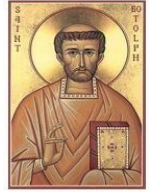




The Botolphian

Newsletter of
The Society of Saint Botolph

www.botolph.info



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Admin: Denis Pepper, 17, Cliffe House, Radnor Cliff, Folkestone, Kent, CT20 2TY. Tel: +44 (0)1303 221-777 botolph@virginmedia.com
President: Revd Timothy L'Estrange, Vicar of St.Gabriel's Church, North Acton.

Issue Number: 75

1st August 2019

Highlights this month

- **Much Wenlock Abbey, Shropshire.**
- It gives me great pleasure to welcome the following new members: Mara Collura from Licata, Sicily, Richard Anderson-Dungar from Banningham Norfolk.
- Correspondence from: Christine Hayes, Anne Dickinson, Revd Paula Griffiths, David Gallimore, John Sennett, Dorothy Halfhide, Richard Anderson-Dungar and Father Pachomius.
- Can I **recommend** that when reading *The Botolphian* directly from your computer, you click the VIEW tag and, under Zoom, select the largest magnification your screen will take (i.e. somewhere between 175% and 200%?). This makes the pictures look *so much* better.
- **The Annual Luncheon** will be held at the Hilton Cambridge City Centre Hotel on **Weds 23 October at 12.30 for 1 p.m.** **The cost will be £30 per head which includes a 'welcoming Prosecco.'** **The menu is as follows:**

Starters

Roasted tomato soup, fine herb oil (v)
Brussels pate, balsamic onion, brioche toast
Red onion goats cheese tart, balsamic syrup,
with baby salad

Main Courses

Roasted pork loin, crackling, apple sauce, smoked
bacon rosemary jus,
Roasted cod loin, creamed spinach, chargrilled
courgettes,
Four cheese ravioli, sundried tomato & pine nuts (v)

Desserts

Chocolate fudge cake, mint crème Anglaise (v)
Eaton mess tart, seasonal fruit coulis (v)
Exotic fruit salad (v)

Please send me your menu choices by email to either of these email addresses: denpeps@gmail.com botolph@virginmedia.com or if you are paying by cheque include your menu choice in the same envelope.

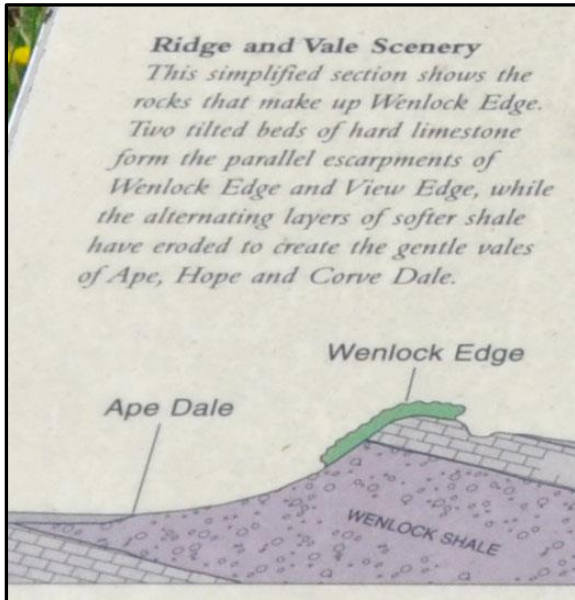
To confirm your booking please send cheques payable to D.S. Pepper to 17 Cliffe House, Radnor Cliff, Folkestone CT20 2TY or (preferably) pay by Bank Transfer to Nationwide Bank: Sort code 07-02-46, Account Number: 45570161. Dr D S Pepper.

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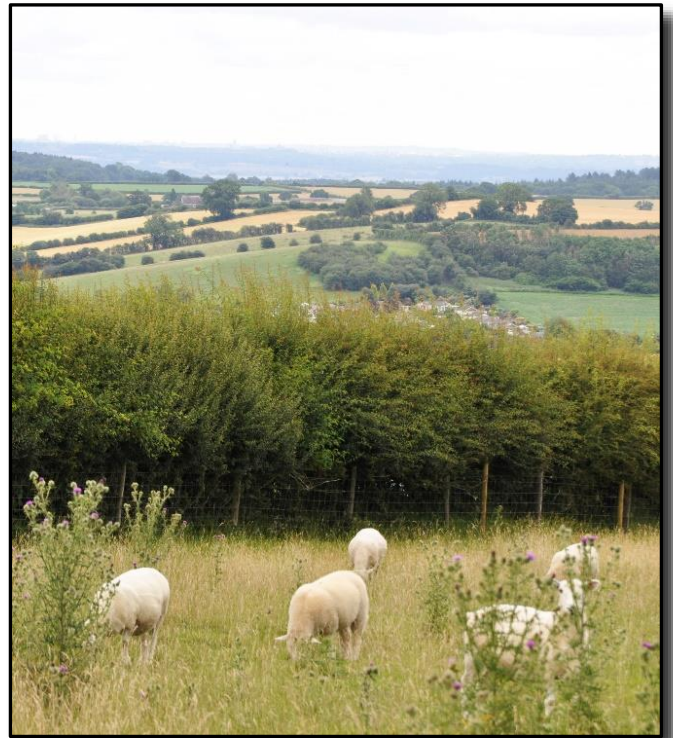
Editorial

I finished Volume III of my Botolph Trilogy without ever having visited Much Wenlock - the home of Wininicas (aka Winnicas) over which Abbot Botolph's Icanho had much influence in its early days. In the book, Botolph and his entourage have trekked westwards from Icanho and, due to the problems of crossing the River Severn at its deeper point, head upstream and approach Wenlock from the north. Their first sight of the settlement is from Wenlock Edge - a spectacular ridge of oolitic limestone. *'Nestling in a basin at the bottom of the hill was a pretty little village facing to the northeast. They could make out the newly-built stone church . . . and some wooden huts set apart from the village itself.'*

The arrival of the group of forty or so robed and singing figures at Wininicas would, I guess, have been spectacular and I wanted, retrospectively, to view for myself the landscape they would have found. I was not disappointed.



We drove to the Wenlock Edge car park at the bottom of the escarpment where we found this board explaining the site's geology.



Having reached the top we turned and looked back over the glorious panorama and there was the town, as expected, just the other side of the hedge. (A ladder or a hedge-trimmer would have been beneficial at this stage). I was gratified to discover that the area looked exactly as I had imagined.



As we made our way up the hill the going was very firm right from the start and we walked the rocky pathway somewhat rueing the fact that it was devoid of our more usual Kentish mud.

One serendipitous discovery that I had made whilst researching Wenlock Abbey, was that it was the home of the actress Gabrielle Drake and her husband Louis de Wet. I have been a fan of Gabrielle's since the days of *Crossroads* and I was hoping that when I eventually visited Much Wenlock I would be able to meet her and I wrote to her to that effect. I received a kind reply containing the sad news that her husband had died the previous year and that she would be otherwise engaged on the day of our visit. However as some compensation to me she did offer the information that the Saxon church of St Giles at nearby Barrow was worth a visit as it was thought to have been built on the site of St Mildburg's oratory. What? you may ask, has St Mildburg to do with St Botolph? Well, sadly nothing it would seem from this part of Shropshire's point of view.

I was shocked to discover that both St Botolph and Liobsynde, the first abbess of Wenlock, seem (with a few brief exceptions) to have been written out of local history. The guides generally acknowledge St Mildburg as the *second* abbess but are very reticent about who was the first.

St Mildburg (c. 662-727) - or *St Milburge* as they call her locally - was the eldest daughter of the four children of King Merewalh of the local Magonsaete tribe, and his wife Domne Eafe of Kent. Mildburg had a younger sister St Mildred (c. 663-732) who was abbess of the Kentish monastery of Minster-in-Thanel. It is a complex tale in which St Botolph's abbey of Icanho in Suffolk plays an integral part. I will return to the story later but for the moment let us look at . . .

Wenlock

Abbey/Priory, Shropshire.



Approach: If heading north, find the A458 Bridgnorth to Shrewsbury road and at the Gaskell Arms Hotel turn right down Much Wenlock High Street. Turn left at the T-junction into Wilmore Street. Pass Holy Trinity Church and turn right into Bull Ring and you will shortly find the car park on your left.

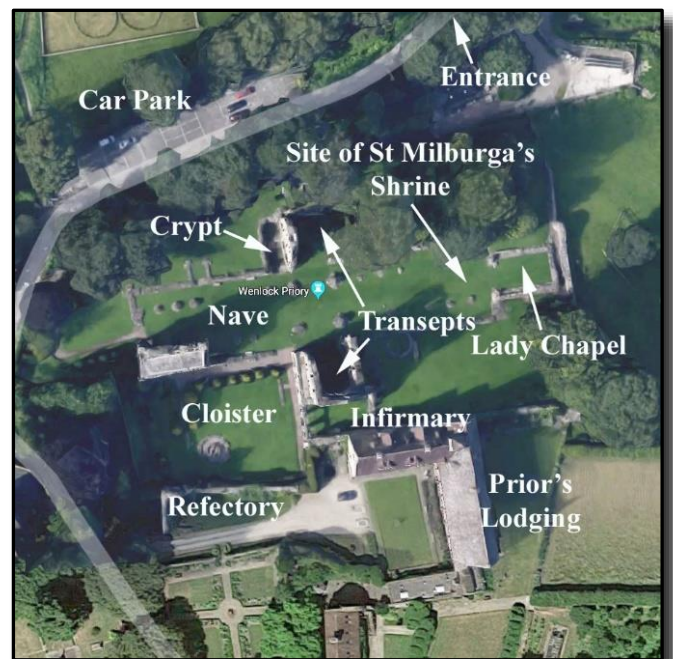
Location: 5 Sheinton Street, TF13 6HS.
 Lat / Long: 52.5977, -2.5557.



We drove through the town, passing the spectacular Guildhall and then Holy Trinity

church on our right before turning right and, after a jiggle found the small Pay and Display car park on our left. Continuing our direction of travel but on foot, we came across the not-very-well advertised entrance to the English Heritage shop which eventually turned out to be the entrance to the priory grounds.

In the shop I spoke with the charming young lady who was running it on that day and a local historian who happened to be there. Both knew plenty about St Mildburg but neither had ever heard of St Botolph or Liobsynde - the *first* abbess of Wenlock, . . . Wherever I looked the same lack of acknowledgement prevailed. It was not until I studied the English Heritage guide book that I eventually found Liobsynde briefly mentioned on page 15.

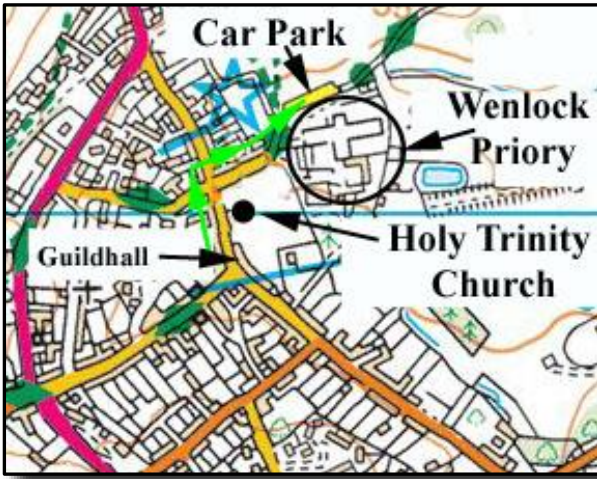


Today the site is known as Wenlock *Priory* although following Botolph tradition I have always known it as Wenlock *Abbey*.

Its transition from the original C7 Benedictine Abbey to the later C11 Cluniac Priory came as a result of Duke William in 1066 awarding the area to one of his knights - Roger de Montgomery.

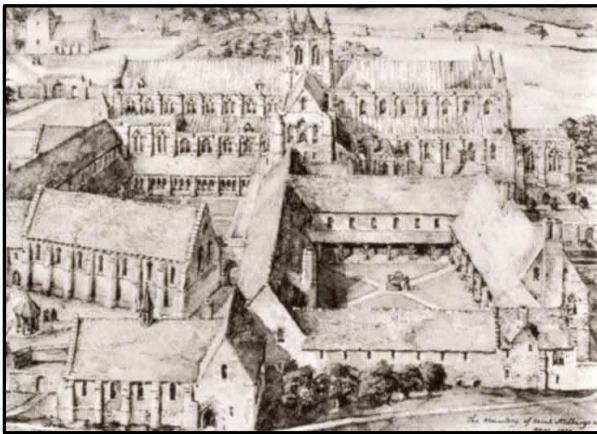
De Montgomery imported monks from La Charité sur Loire which was a daughter church of Cluny Abbey in France and thus the ethos of the foundation shifted sideways - but only a little because life under the Benedictine Rule did not differ much from that of life as a Cluniac.

Really, although it is the former abbey in which we are mainly interested, we have to take what is available - so let us look at the remains of the priory as they appear today.



The guide book starts off by saying “As in all monastic houses, the main building at Wenlock was the church.”

This is certainly true in Wenlock’s case since the church was clearly massive with a length of 107 metres (350 feet). It dates from c. 1240 when it was completely rebuilt by Prior Humbert who was in charge at the time.



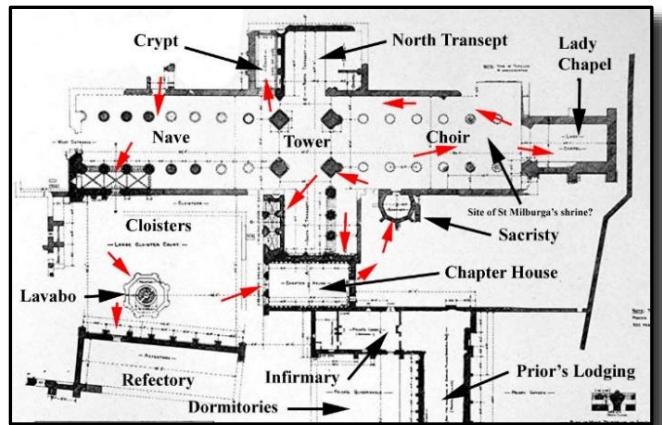
This sketch shows the dominance of the church in its heyday as compared with the rest of the monastery. It also happens to be quite reminiscent of St Botolph’s Abbey at Thorney.



The church was cruciform in design with a long nave, two short transepts and a tower at the crossing.



The tower was supported by four enormous pillars, the bases of which can be seen here.



Let us take a brief anti-clockwise tour around the ruins of the church, spotting various features on the way.



We enter the church through the foundations of its north doorway and cross the nave towards the

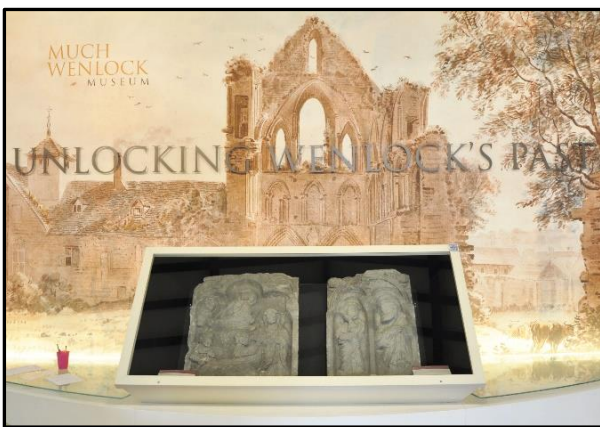
small south doorway above which is St Michael's Chapel (this is not open to the public).



Once through the south door we are in the Cloister courtyard and can look back and see the windows of St Michael's Chapel. On our right is the lavabo.



This unusual structure is where the monks washed in ritual fashion before heading for the refectory.



In the museum in the centre of the town there is an exhibition entitled *Unlocking Wenlock's Past* where two of the lavabo's sculpted panels (which were carved c.1185) are the central attraction.

The circular lavabo was originally inside an octagonal housing.



Behind the lavabo is a doorway through which the monks used to access the refectory but this building fell into ruins many years ago and now constitutes the gardens of Gabrielle Drake's residence.



Peeping between the bars of the gate we can see some fine topiary work which, I was told, exemplifies Gabrielle's passion for cats. After this we turn east towards the Chapter House which, together with the dormitory and infirmary is 100 years older than most of the rest of the ruins.



The entry is through the Norman west doorway. I always understood that the Chapter House was the place where monks gathered each morning to be issued with their orders for work to be done during the day. At Much Wenlock I discovered that the etymology of the name stems from the Rule of St Benedict itself which requires that one chapter of the Rule be read each day.

The southern wall is now part of the private dwelling. We leave the Chapter House through the space where the replacement C14 east window would have been and turn left towards the Sacristy. . .



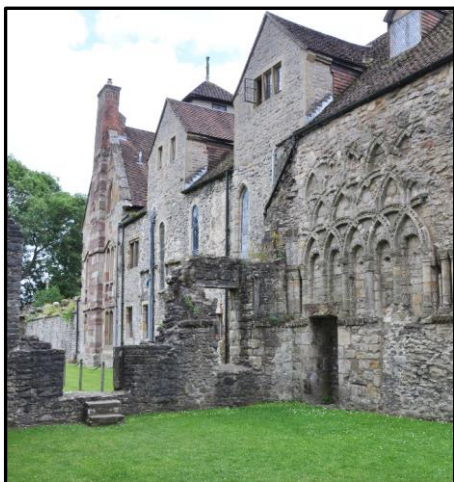
. . . which is the structure seen here on your right. It is either hexagonal or octagonal depending upon how you view its attachment to the main wall. It too was a C14 addition and was used for the storage of vestments and sacred vessels. On the far side of this picture is a remaining wall of the north transept, - in the centre-ground are two of the massive tower pillar bases - and on the left is the south transept - which we are now going to view.



The elegantly sculptured walls would, in earlier times, have been brightly painted.



On the left here you catch a glimpse once again of the private dwelling. The aumbry - for so it seems to be since there is no sign of the drainage bowl that would turn it into a piscina - is set into a wall that has clearly been extended from the original Chapter House wall which lies to the right. The newer part of the wall is c. 1240 and looks as if it has been scorched by fire.





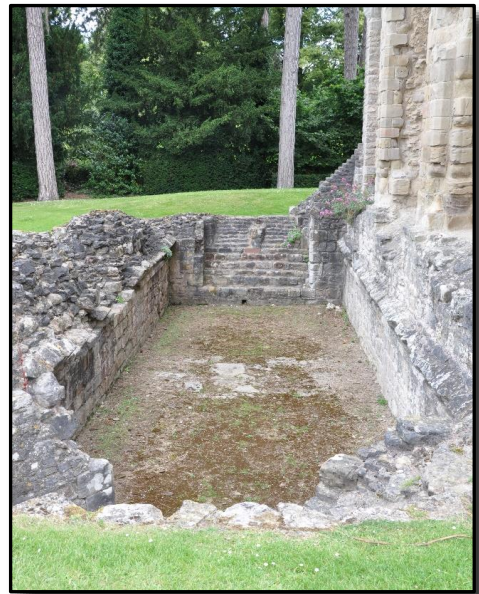
Another view of the blackened wall shows, through the arch, the edge of the laver - another unusual feature which is thought to have been used for the symbolic washing of the monks' feet by the prior. Out of sight behind the wall are the remains of the library.



The Lady Chapel gives the appearance of having been tacked onto the end of the already enormous church. From the plan view one might have suspected that it was an extended chancel - but I am used to looking at parish churches not cathedrals and this building seems to me to have been of cathedral-like proportions. In fairness the Lady Chapel was not part of Prior Humbert's original plans but was added in C14.



The south transept is said to be the most impressive part of the priory rising as it does to 21 metres (70 feet) - although for my money I preferred the Chapter House with its Norman doorway and sculptured wall.



Our final structure is the crypt - located in an unusual position just west of the north transept. The suggestion has been made that it, and the chapel that would have been above, might have been associated with an unrecorded shrine.

Holy Trinity Church, Much Wenlock

This church lies in the centre of the town, just 150 yards south west of the priory. It dates from 1150 and was built by the Cluniac monks on the site formerly occupied by a Saxon church



In *A History of the County of Shropshire (formerly Victoria County History 1973)* it is suggested that it was here in C12, when the church was being repaired, that some bones purporting to be those of Saint Mildburg were discovered. The authenticity of these bones has been treated with scepticism by many subsequent historians.

St Giles Church, Barrow.

On Gabrielle Drake's advice we also visited this pretty little Saxon church which lies 2 miles due east of Wenlock Priory.



The church was well worth the visit and I photographed it thoroughly hoping that I might find some Botolphian connections but sadly did not.

It is said to have been built on the site of St Mildburg's Oratory and, from looking at its position on the contour map this seems very likely.

Interestingly Folkestone's St Eanswythe (a contemporary of St Mildburg) is also credited with having a secondary chapel which is 2.3 miles from her nunnery foundation. This brief analysis seems to suggest that our saints liked their oratories to be located within an hour's walk!

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How does Wenlock fit into the St Botolph scene?

In order to understand the story it is important to bear in mind that two saintly sisters were involved - **Mildburg of Wenlock** and **Mildred of Kent** - and that their father was King **Merewalh** of the Magonaete tribe of Herefordshire and Shropshire, and their mother was **Domne Eafe** of Kent.

Each of the girls had an ancient *Vita* written about them: *St Mildburg's Testament* (written by Goscelin in C11) and *The Mildred Legend (aka The Kentish Royal Legend aka Thar Halgan)* - also written by Goscelin. Both were based on C8 manuscripts.

In St Mildburg's testament she herself writes:

"First of all, I acquired this place called Winnicas . . . by the joint consent of the two parties to whom authority over the place belonged. That is to say, I gave to the worshipful abbot Edelheg and to the religious abbess Liobsynde, in exchange for the aforesaid place an estate of sixty hides at the place called Hampton; and the abbot, for confirmation of this exchange, caused a charter to be written for me which reads as follows:

In the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, I Edelheg, abbot of the monastery called Icheanog, with the consent of the whole household of the Abbot Botulf of holy memory, give to the consecrated virgin Mildburg an estate of ninety-seven hides in the place called Winnicas, and . . . she may have full power living or dying, to bestow the land on anyone she may choose, but on condition that the aforesaid place shall by the grace of God remain unalterably under the tutelage of the church of the worshipful Abbot Botulf, not under compulsion but of its own accord, since it is with the money of that same church that the land is being purchased from the king named Merewald . . ."

This raises several questions:

Q1. Who was Edelheg?

A1. Botolph's successor as abbot of Icanho.

Q2. When was Winnicas 'sold' to Mildburg?

A2. Probably early in C8.

Q3. Why was Botolph involved with Winnicas?

A4. Probably for several reasons:

1. Because, as we know, Icanho was at that time a monastery of high repute and possibly regarded as the epitome of all that a monastery should be.
2. Because Abbot Botolph himself had been acclaimed as the ‘Holist and Wisest man in the land.’
3. Because of his acquaintance with Domne Eafe - either through the East Anglian or the Kentish royal family or both.
4. Botolph is credited with having brought the Benedictine Rule to Britain. He was the first one to have operated the rule in a British monastery and it is likely that Domne Eafe would have wanted her monastery to be Benedictine . . . as indeed Wininicas became.
5. It might well have been Botolph, through his connections with the French monasteries where he was professed, who sponsored Liobsynde (who was previously a nun at Chelles) as the first abbess of Wininicas.

Q4. Why was Icanho abbey buying land from King Merewalh to give to his daughter?

A4. I cannot understand this either! In case anybody wishes to offer an alternative translation of the Latin, the original reads: *ita tamen ut sub jurisdictionibus ecclesie venerabilis Botulfi abbatis idem locus non coacte sed spontanee secundum Deum immobiliter perduret, quia eiusdem ecclesie pecunia emitur a rege qui cognominatur Merwaldus.*

As I have set out in *Botolph the Travelling Saint* my reading of the situation is that Domne Eafe originally intended to become the first abbess of Wininicas herself but was called back to Kent when her two brothers were murdered. It was with the *weregild* paid by the Kentish King for the foul deed that she was able to found the abbey of Minster-in-Thanel and later install her younger daughter Mildred as abbess.

Meanwhile, back in Shropshire . . .

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the abbey of St Botolph was deeply involved in Wenlock Abbey’s foundation which is likely to have occurred in the first half of the 670s. The abbey functioned well for 200 years before being sacked by the Vikings in c. 874.

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Classification:

As it was never dedicated to St Botolph the abbey does not qualify for a ‘St Botolph’s Church Classification’ but if it had been so dedicated it would have merited ‘A(i)’.

Thanks:

My thanks to Gabrielle Drake for giving me the lead to St Giles church at Barrow.

Correspondence

Many thanks to Christine Hayes for this report:

St Botolph’s Stow Longa’s Pilgrimage to Iken, Suffolk

On Friday 14th June 11 members of the congregation (plus two very well-behaved dogs) set off for Iken, near Snape, in Suffolk (driving, not walking!). We arrived at “Iken Barns” to find our accommodation was to be two beautifully converted farm buildings equipped with everything you could want! One had a dining table which could seat all 11 of us and also an amazing view of the Estuary of the River Alde, the sandy beach of which was a three-minute walk down the cliff. The most stunning sunset greeted our arrival together with the sounds of curlews and oyster catchers.

St Botolph’s, Iken is an ancient and partly thatched church set on a promontory (Oxen Hill or “Icanhoh” in Anglo-Saxon) overlooking the River Alde. It was probably built on the site of St Botolph’s 654AD Minster and displays inside a Saxon cross shaft (c 870) which was found in the tower wall.

On Sunday morning we attended a Holy Communion service and were made very welcome by the congregation. The Revd David Murdoch gave a memorable sermon bringing together St Botolph, Father’s Day and Creation! We held our own Evensong in the church later in the day, a very special service: just us, two dogs and hymns with no organ. Our text was the Road to Emmaus and the sermon was, naturally St Botolph and pilgrimages.

The rest of our weekend was spent walking along the estuary; spotting marsh harriers above reed beds and seals on mud banks, looking for foxgloves in nearby Tunstall and enjoying excellent food, drink and company.

Our journey home took us via two more churches dedicated to St Botolph, both ancient and beautiful in different ways. The first was at Culpho where Guy and Rosemary gave us homemade biscuits and guided us round, pointing out fascinating details like a scratch sun dial accurate to 5 minutes(!) and secondly to Whitton, just outside Ipswich, where Revd Mary Sokanovic met us and showed us round her St Botolph’s which was filled with light and looked so well cared for.

The weekend was made so successful and enjoyable thanks to Elizabeth Whidborne who organised everything.

[Ed: Well done Stow Longa. I cannot tell you how pleased I am that this 'interbotolphing' is getting off the ground. First Stow Longa - then Hadstock and now Thorney - as seen below.]

More correspondence

1. **Anne Dickinson** wrote from Burton Hastings to say that on Saturday 3rd August their St Botolph's is holding an open afternoon in the church which will feature photographs of the village prepared by Wolvey Local History Group. Anne asked me for permission to copy and display some of the relevant past *Botolphian* photographs and notes and I was pleased to comply. Good luck with the event Anne.

2. **Revd Paula Griffiths** wrote from Hadstock correcting a few errors I made last month. I am grateful for this input because it keeps the record correct so thank you Paula:

- I'm actually the Priest at Hadstock, not the Rector - that privilege lies with the Revd Canon David Tomlinson, Rector of St Mary's Saffron Walden and Team Rector of the Saffron Walden and Villages Team Ministry. I have day-to-day responsibility for Hadstock within the Team, as an Associate Priest in the Team Ministry.
- Robin Betser is still, a very committed member of the congregation, but stepped down as Churchwarden in 2017 (we are without a churchwarden at present).
- The best phone number to give is 01799 506024 (the Parish Office in Saffron Walden) - the one you have given is actually the Rector's.
- Services - we actually have services every Sunday (except 5th Sundays): first Sunday Family Service, second Sunday Holy Communion (said, BCP) and third and fourth Sundays Holy Communion, Common Worship with hymns. All are at 9.30 (with a very few exceptions, such as Harvest Festival and Remembrance and Advent Sunday).
- P10 - the column near the altar is actually a base for a flower stand! Of course when you came in March it was Lent and we had no flowers, so I understand your wondering at its function.
- P14-15 - the bells are still in use, and are rung regularly, but the ringing chamber is at a higher level above the tower ceiling.

3. **David Gallimore** wrote from Kalamata in Greece drawing my attention to a very Botolph-like church at Heckingham in Norfolk, which is near his English home at Loddon. Sadly, although David is correct about it having all the right Botolphian properties I can find no connection . . . YET!

4. **John Sennett** wrote from Swyncombe sending some interesting Botolphian snippets and asking "Have you ever considered a tome without the partial fictionalisation of some details of Botolph's life which are truly not known?" I answered: "Yes John - I do have three other books in the pipeline: *Voyages around Saint Botolph Churches*, *Daniel Papebroch and the Saint Botolph Manuscripts*, *The Botolph Biography*.

None of these will have a fictional aspect - although they might well contain a modicum of speculation."

5. **Dorothy Halfhide** wrote from Thorney saying that they had paid a visit to St Botolph's at Botolphs in Sussex. "What an atmospheric place, and seeming so far away from modern life (until you see the disused quarry buildings on the other side of the road). You may have started us on a Botolph hunt. . . ." - well of course I am delighted to hear that.

6. **Richard Anderson-Dungar** wrote from Banningham explaining that he has taken over as Church Warden 'as Leslie Keeler who was in the post for over 40 years sadly passed away.'

7. **Father Pachomius** wrote from The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline USA regarding giving the monastery's permission for Banningham to use the copyright icon of St Botolph on their Norfolk Day Display. **This is terribly important** - we have, in the past been very blasé about this. The Monastery is normally very happy to give permission but they *do like to be asked* - it is they who have done all the artwork and it is a sign of their success that this particular icon is the one which seems to be universally favoured. If you are using the icon (the one used in the heading at the top of this newsletter) please email paco@thehtm.org and legalise the situation because there have in the past been two drawn-out legal cases between the monastery and transgressors.

[Ed: The customary 'Regular Endnotes' have been omitted from this issue since it would have meant starting another page just for them. For copyright details and Classification of Botolph Churches please refer to the 'Regular Endnotes' in a previous issue.]