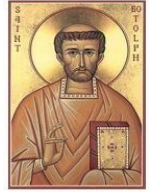




The Botolphian

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: 90 **2020 – the 1400th anniversary (circa) of St Botolph's birth.** 1st November 2020.

Highlights this month

- **Church of St Botolph, Swyncombe, Oxfordshire.**
- It gives me great pleasure to welcome as a new member Mark Fletcher from Islemere in Cambridgeshire.
- Correspondence from Revd Paula Griffiths concerning the millennium celebrations at St Botolph's, Hadstock.

Editorial

I am tempted to mention Covid and lockdown, but I will not be able to tell you anything that you do not know so I will wish everybody good fortune in this respect and move on to happier things.

While confined to their homes many of our members have been putting their time to good use. Emma Rose Barber has published another book in her '111 series' - this one is entitled *111 Churches in London that you shouldn't miss*. ISBN 978-3-7408-0901-0. www.111places.com. It is a lovely little book - precisely cut and well-presented and has many great photographs by Benedict Flett.

David Noy has also published *How one man transformed a town: WINSLOW 1640-1770 and WILLIAM LOWNDES*. This is published by Bucks Archaeological Society at £14.50 including UK postage.

<https://bas1.org.uk/product/winslow-1640-1770-william-lowndes>.

I have not had the pleasure of seeing this one yet - but it is on order and knowing David I am sure that I will not be disappointed.

Church Feature

S

wyncombe, Oxfordshire.

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.

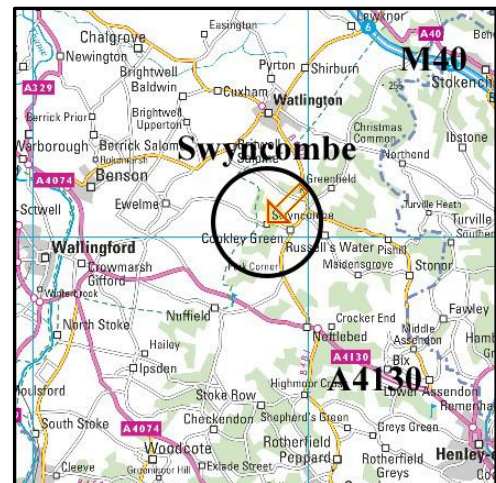


Key: The church is usually permanently open but this might have changed in these times of Covid so it would be better to telephone first or to check the website below.

Contact: Revd Daniel Thompson, Tel: 01491 614-218. The Benefice Office, Watlington Church, Pyrton Lane, Watlington OX49 5LX. info@st-botolphs-swyncombe.info

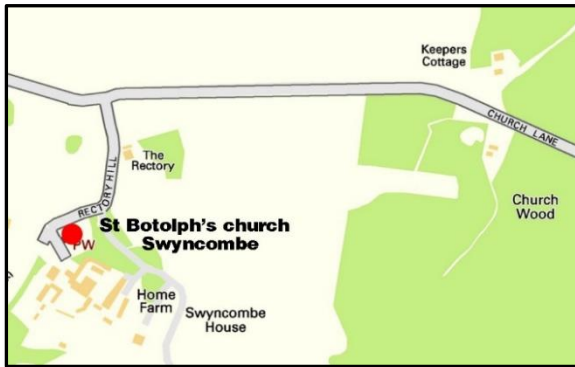
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Listed Grade: II*.





This newsletter represents my *second* literary excursion to the pretty little church of St Botolph's at Swyncombe.



Set on the edge of the rolling Chiltern hills in Oxfordshire, close to the Buckinghamshire border, it is famed for the glorious display of snowdrops which suffuse the churchyard each spring. At these times and for many years the church has organised their Snowdrop Teas and these attract not only the cognoscenti from far and wide but also ramblers hiking along the ancient track called the Ridgeway.

The fame of Swyncombe's snowdrops might have already reached them or, perhaps like a gift from heaven, they might just happen across the church and be in the right place at the right time to enjoy the spectacle.



I first wrote about Swyncombe in *The Botolphian* of January 2014 during the days when I had even more to learn about church architecture and ecclesiastical history than I do now. I was collating my research recently and it seemed that Swyncombe was hiding more secrets than I had been able to elucidate at my previous attempt, so it was time for a second look.

This was precipitated further by the fact that my friend John Sennett, a Swyncombe parishioner whom I met in the early days of my 'botolphing',

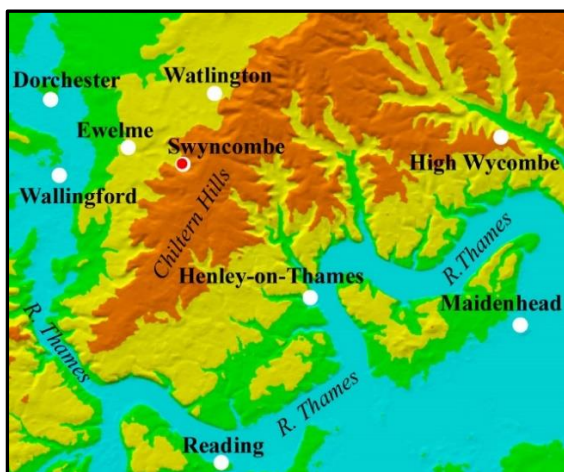
has been writing his own history of the church and we have been corresponding regularly and bouncing ideas back and forth. John, most generously and unhesitatingly, sent me a copy of all his research to date to help me to write this feature. He will probably be relieved to discover that I have not used all his work – the aims of our research are different - but I have found his notes most helpful and I am most grateful.

Visitors to the church quickly become aware of the beauty and peace which surrounds them but, tucked away under the trees in its ‘cumb’ (or coombe as we call these hollows in Kent)¹ and with long distance views obstructed, it is not immediately apparent what a magical and important place this is in terms of England’s history.

Looking at a normal modern map does not help since over the centuries a veil has been cast over the countryside’s topography as a result of weathering, alluviation and civilisation. *Weathering* has reduced the height of our hills and partly filled in the valleys; *alluviation* has turned wide shallow rivers into narrow streams; and *civilisation* has raised and reclaimed land to build bridges and provide for agriculture.

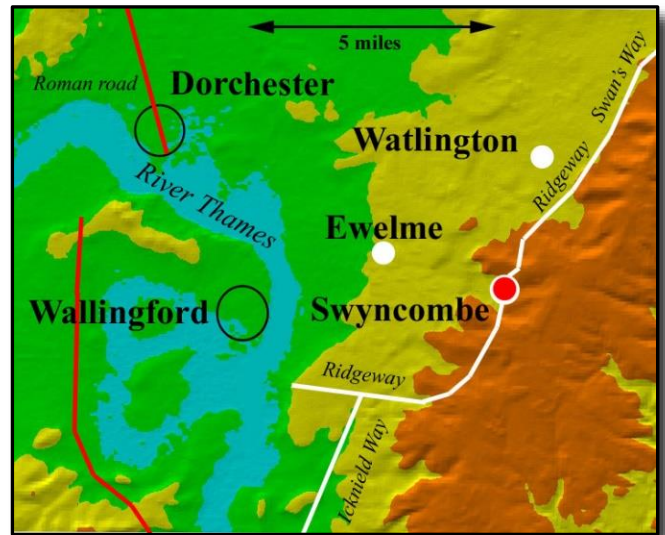
Recently in my home city of Rochester, Kent a section of the old Roman High Street was discovered which was 2.5 metres lower than that of today.

It is for these reasons that whenever I *really* want to see the nature of a place, I discard my faceless Google and Ordnance Survey maps and reach for my Relief Map programme so that I can see the nose, chin and deeply sunken eyes of the site.



This is the face that peers out from around the pimple of Swyncombe.

¹ Swyncombe from Swyn (wild boar) & cumb (hollow) - the huntsman’s name for the hollow where the wild boar are to be found.



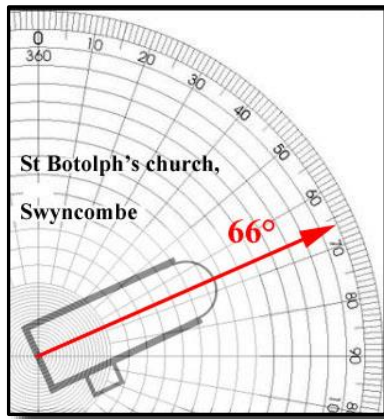
And these are the features which count. A closer view reveals the ancient Icknield Way, that led traders and drovers between Wiltshire and East Anglia, passes right through Swyncombe where this section is known as The Ridgeway. As John Sennett reminded me there are two Ridgeways – the winter one taking the ‘high road’ and the summer one the ‘low road’ on the flatter lower ground nearer to the water.

The map above shows the Ridgeway making a (literally) pointed move towards Wallingford. We can take this habitual detour as an indication that west of Swyncombe lies an area that was influential in the village’s development. We will look at this later but for the moment let us have a closer look at the church that brought us to the subject.

The large picture in the introduction was taken from the northeast which is the direction from which those travelling by car are likely to approach the church.



Above is a view of what we will call the church’s southern aspect although this church, like several others we have seen, is somewhat misaligned.



Normally we expect churches to be built more or less on a line running east - west but there are no hard and fast rules about this. As we saw at Aldersgate, churches are sometimes built to satisfy the layout of the roads. The angulation of older churches was often decided when the site was pegged out ready for construction and the rising sun would be used for guidance.

From the point of view of Swyncombe, low down on the western side of the hill, the rising sun would always be late on parade - although its arrival would still have given the builders a reasonable clue as to where east might be.

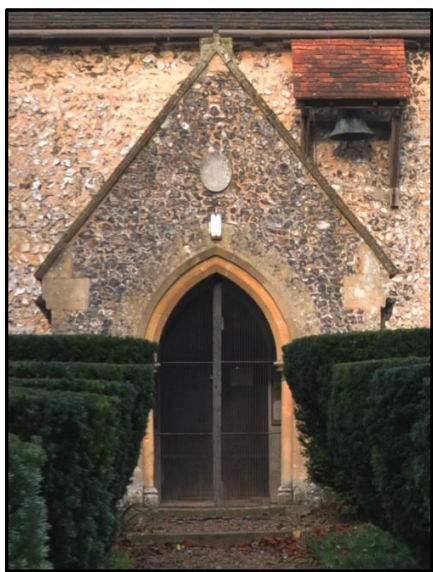
The sun only rises due east (i.e. at 90°) at the equinoxes - which occur around 20 March and 22 September. For the rest of the year, sunrise varies between 52° (roughly northeast) and 132° (roughly southeast) - the former in June and the latter in January. If we ignore the change between the Julian and Gregorian calendars, we can therefore expect this site at Swyncombe to have been pegged out either in early May or early August. Swyncombe is one of the most eccentric of the St Botolph churches on this easterly alignment scale, its companion on the opposite side of the equation being the church at Barton Seagrave which aligns to 110° .

We therefore actually approach the church's 'southern side'... from the southeast.

As we saw in an earlier picture, a line of well-trimmed evergreens leads us to the south porch which was built in C19 to replace what is thought to have been a two-tier porch where the upper room contained two bells - one dating from C15 and an older one. The porch had a sundial over the door. When the porch was replaced the C15 bell was placed in a bellcote under the eaves of the west wall; the other was stored in the church. In 1960 the C15 bell was moved again and we see it in the picture above in its new bellcote near the porch.



The church is constructed of plate flints set in rubble and dressed with limestone ashlar. There are many areas, particularly on the apse where the flints are placed vertically in a herringbone pattern. This is said to be an Anglo-Saxon building technique, but the style of construction continued for some time after the Norman conquest. As we move east, we find a lancet window on our left and the remains of an arch indicating where once there was a doorway. All the walls of this church show signs of continuous repair.



I have tried to define the patchwork here in this eastern part of the south wall. In reality one can

see fairly easily where one style of repair ends, and another begins but it is not so easy to identify which repairs were carried out at the same time and it is impossible to date them. The reddish patches in the picture above, however, are mainly constructed in herringbone style and might well represent the original structure.



the eastern half seems slightly different to that of the west - suggesting that one half of the nave-chancel might be of a different age to the other.



This is the western half of north wall showing the blocked north doorway

At the southeast angle we see the beginning of the semi-circular apse the construction of which is mostly in herringbone pattern.



As we round the northwest corner before returning to the south porch, we note the C19 bellcote above the west window.

This style continues round to the northeast angle.



It does not show up as well as I would like on this picture but, like the south wall, the construction of



The western end of the south wall is similarly heavily patched.



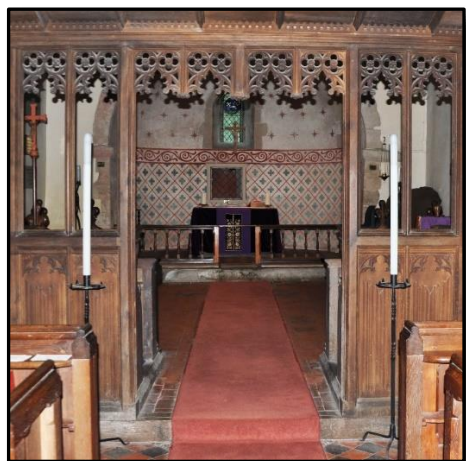
Entry to the church is from the left of this picture. Here we are looking towards the west window.



The Norman tub-shaped font is placed in its traditional position just inside the south doorway. It looks quite pristine because it was tidied and recut in C19.



Turning around we see this view down the nave which ceases abruptly at the C15-style rood screen which was installed in 1914 to replace 'a disfiguring [C19] partition of deal'.



Although the nave ceases abruptly the view continues under the screen and through the chancel to the sanctuary in the apse. You will notice that things get a bit out of kilter here. The red carpet leads directly to the altar, but the east window appears slightly off centre and the square aumbry behind the altar is 'out of step' with both the east window and the red carpet.



A view from the threshold of the chancel reveals the choir stalls and the starry ceiling of the sanctuary.



As we look towards the northeast corner, we can see that there is a wide double reveal to the lancet window. This window is actually the oldest of the lancets and the upper horizontal ledge within the reveal suggests that all the earlier windows were set at this height.



Looking at the southerly part of the sanctuary we see two of the apse windows, two square aumbries and a free-standing but plumbed-in piscina.



I say free-standing on the basis that it does not form an integral part of the wall.



The bowl is decorated with a carving of the 'green man motif'. This piscina quite intrigues me because I have never seen a free-standing piscina anywhere else. It was apparently discovered, in pieces, as part of the foundations of the earlier south porch when it was rebuilt in C19.



Following some research, I discovered that it is not alone in this world. In the C12 church of All Saints at Easington in Yorkshire there is a similar piscina. This picture comes to you by courtesy of Britain Express Image Library. I must say that I do not find this piscina as attractive as the Swyncombe example, but strangely enough it too was discovered in C19 during renovations when it was rescued from its position as part of the fabric of the wall above All Saints' east window.



My thoughts then returned to St Botolph's church at Hadstock in Essex where the function of this jardinière-type structure is believed to have been to hold the paschal candle. I wonder if this too might once have served as a piscina, although its present position (on the north of the sanctuary) puts it at the wrong side of the altar.



The C14 Decorated Gothic window at the east end of the chancel's south wall carries the armorial bearings of: Wigod of Wallingford, Lord Robert d'Oyly, Miles Crispin, King John, the Chaucer family and the de la Pole family. More of them later.

It is thought that the aumbry behind the altar once held a reliquary. One's immediate thought is: *Could this have contained a relic of St Botolph?* Perhaps something like a finger bone might have been purchased or stolen from the monks of Ely, Thorney, Westminster or Bury St Edmunds. The reliquary dates from C11. Was this church already dedicated to St Botolph by this time?



In the quatrefoil at the top of the window is a picture of St Botolph.

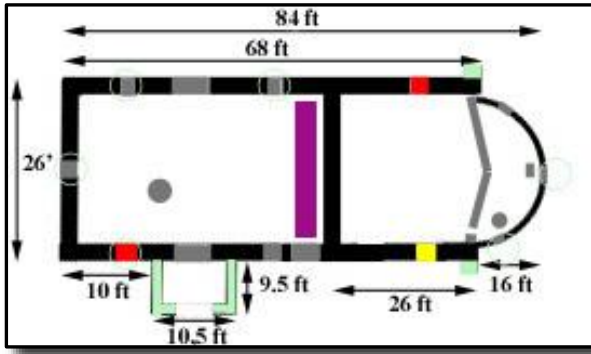


Cut into the south pillar of the sanctuary arch is another C11 aumbry. This one has an ancient oak lining.

Making our way back under the rood screen into the nave we pass this central lancet window in the north wall with its simple reveal.



Ahead of us is the outline of the blocked north door, the west windows of both north and south walls and the west window itself.



C1-4	C7	C12	C16
C5-6	C8	C13	C17
	C9	C14	C18
	C10	C15	C19
	C11		C20

Above is a very approximate guide to the groundplan of St Botolph's Swyncombe with the colours indicating the age of the different structures. I have been unable either to measure the church myself, or to find an architect's groundplan. I hope to rectify that later. In the meantime, my method of calculating the measurements was by the use of a Google satellite picture. Sadly, the satellite was not immediately overhead when the Swyncombe picture was taken so interpreting the measurements was a little tricky. I am confident however that they are not far adrift.

The basic construction of the church is Norman. Various alterations were made up to C14 and then there was a lull before the Victorians set to work. On the groundplan diagram the Norman walls are shown in black and the window and door openings and the sanctuary arch are shown in grey despite the fact they were all built at the same time, as were the font and the two aumbries.

The only original C13 lancet window is marked in red and the genuine C14 double light window is in yellow. All the places where there would have been windows and doors are marked in grey but those that were replaced in C19 have a ring around them.

The Victorian renovations of the new south porch and the two buttresses are marked in pale green.

The windows and blocked doorways.

In the apse there are three round-headed windows. They are of Norman origin, but the northern window (shown here) is the only one which is genuine. It can be distinguished by the individual brickwork of the arch.



With the exception of the double light at the southeast the rest of the windows are all of the lancet variety which were most popular in the first three quarters of the thirteenth century, although they were being built 60 years before that in France - and indeed in Durham. The only genuine one is set at the east end of the north wall. Somewhat bizarrely it is right next to the aforementioned only genuine window of the apse. If this part of the church truly dates from 1080 then we ought to be seeing round-topped Norman windows here rather than lancets. This begs the question of whether the C12 Norman windows were removed and replaced by lancets in C13 or whether the date of this part of the church might be more 1230 than 1080. This cannot be so however because both north and south nave walls have Norman door arches in their structure. What windows there were must therefore have been round-arched too.

There were two major Victorian restorers. The first was **Joseph Clarke** who, in 1831 widened the chancel arch, and then in 1845 worked on the three windows of the apse. The northern (genuine) one was probably blocked as early as C14. The reason is likely to have been to keep out the biting north wind since, due to the angulation of the church, that particular window would have been facing directly into winter's icy blast. Clarke unblocked it and replaced the windows at the east and south of the apse with modern windows copying the same style.

The second restorer was **Benjamin Ferrey** who, in 1850 concentrated his attention upon the nave. Copying the style of the genuine lancet at the east end of the north wall, he replaced all the other windows with the exception of the C14 Decorated style Gothic window at the east end of the south wall.

One wonders about the appearance of the windows that he replaced. Had they been updated to lancets from the old Norman windows in C13 too? Or were they the original short round-topped Norman windows set high up in the walls?



Interestingly, under the Norman arch of the blocked north doorway there is a hogsback lintel. I spent some time wondering why and when that was inserted.



After dismissing the theory that it could be a recycled defaced hogshead gravemarker (as above), I came to the conclusion that it had been specifically (if rather crudely) carved that way by the mason in order to perpetuate the impression of an arched doorway. I suspect the doorway was blocked in C16 as a result of the Reformation outlawing processions - *one of the most dramatic and public aspects of the traditional liturgy*². These generally went around the church and in and out of its doorways and by late C16 the north doorway would have been more of a liability than an asset.



The C19 west window has some attractive pictures but although I have ideas about what they represent I am hesitant to guess without the benefit of authoritative advice.



The central figure however would seem to be St Botolph.

Classification

We return to the thousand-dollar questions:

1. Was this the first church on the site?
2. If so, what is its date?
3. If not, then what came before it?
4. And (as always): Why is the church dedicated to St Botolph?

To answer these questions, we need to put a lot of items into our melting pot. Some of these, sadly, I will have neither the time nor space to include in my analysis, but I will leave them in the list for the record:

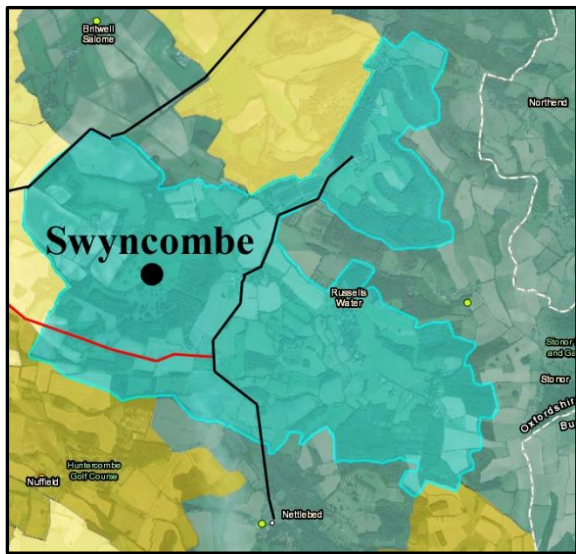
1. The Icknield Way / Ridgeway.
2. The tin, lead, flint and wool trades.
3. The custom of Pilgrimage.
4. The presence of nearby Wallingford, Dorchester and Ewelme.
5. The lords of the manor and other local significant people:
 - a. Wigod of Wallingford.
 - b. Miles (Milo) Crispin...
 - c. ... and his daughter Matilda.
 - d. Robert d'Oyly.
 - e. Bec Abbey, Normandy.
 - f. Alice, granddaughter of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer.
 - g. William de la Pole.
 - h. The church of St Peter & St Paul at nearby Checkendon.

Analysis

Swyncombe has always been poor. Its population reached a peak of 446 in C19. The manor is

² MacCulloch, Diarmaid (1996). Thomas Cranmer: A Life (revised ed.). London: Yale University Press. ISBN 9780300226577.

marked today by Swyncombe House which burnt down in 1814 and has since been twice rebuilt. The demesne was functional by 1086 and there are records of the presence of a church soon after.³



By C12 or C13, the parish boundaries had been defined. One branch of the Icknield Way ran along the north western edge; the Roman road from Dorchester to Henley crossed the southwest corner; and an ancient trackway led from north to south from Watlington to Nettlebed. Evidence of Mesolithic (10,000 to 8,000 BC) and Neolithic (8,000 TO 3,000 BC) population has been found here. In 1248 the parish supported about 26 tenants.

The existence of St Botolph's itself is regarded as evidence that there must have been a mildly substantial community and that until C16 when the manor house was rebuilt, their residences were clustered south of the church.

Swyncombe Manor

Prior to the Norman conquest Swyncombe was owned by the Anglo-Saxon Wigod (aka Wygod, Wygot, Wigot), the Lord of Wallingford. After the Battle of Hastings and during the subsequent Norman invasion, Duke William was prevented from reaching London when he was repulsed at the River Thames. Wigod, if not treacherous was certainly shrewd because he invited William to bring his army to Wallingford and cross the Thames there.

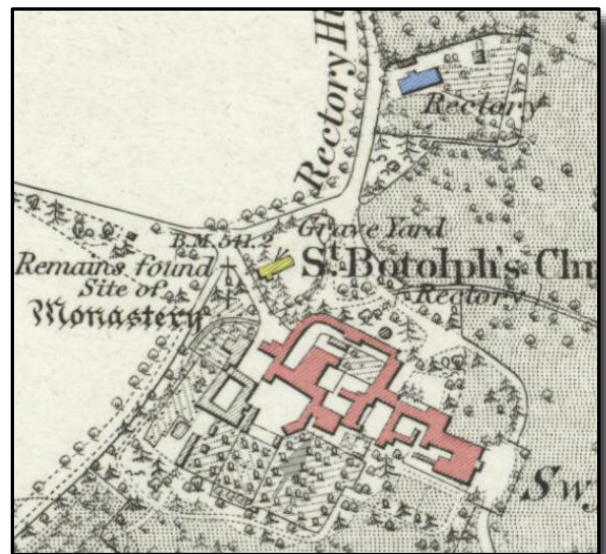
By this act Wigod retained his life and standing but not his lands, for Swyncombe was given to Miles Crispin (d.1107), a wealthy nobleman from Neaufles-Saint-Martin in Normandy and

Wallingford was given to another rich Frenchman, Robert d'Oyly of Lisieux.



All was not lost for Wigod though because he allowed (some might say 'encouraged') his daughter Ealdgyth to marry Robert the new lord of Wallingford.

Meanwhile, back at Swyncombe sometime before the Domesday record was taken in 1086, Miles Crispin off-loaded the lordship of the manor to the Abbey of Bec in Normandy. As you will see from the map above, Bec could almost be called Miles and Robert's 'local'. I wondered at first why Swyncombe should have been given away so freely but clearly this was either a return of old favours, a matter of finding peace with God, a means of infiltrating the new territory with French-style religion, an importation of an organisation to manage his property, or all four.



³ 'Swyncombe', in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 18*, ed. Simon Townley (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2016), pp. 368-392. *British History*

Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol18/pp368-392> [accessed 22 October 2020].

On this 1883 map, St Botolph's church is in yellow, its Rectory in blue and Swyncombe House in pink.

Despite a general decree from Richard II in 1378 that all monks in alien priories be expelled from England, Bec somehow managed to retain the lordship until 1404 when it reverted to the crown. Some years later it passed to Thomas Chaucer the son of Geoffrey. Thomas and his wife Maud were lords of the nearby Ewelme manor.

During the reign of King John (1199-1216) the monks of Bec held a fair on St Botolph's Eve, St Botolph's Day and the day after.

A similar fair was being held on the same days at nearby Wallingford and that being the senior town, the Swyncombe fair was banned in 1227 to prevent loss of profits at Wallingford.

The timing of the fairs was connected with it being the period for sheep shearing. The fairs offered the opportunity of selling the wool on site and retaining the sheep for another season rather than having to drive the sheep up the Icknield Way and sell them at Boston, Yarmouth or the new port of Lynn (aka King's Lynn).

The presence and marketing of sheep give us an important link to St Botolph since the great preponderance of his cult lies in livestock farming areas.

To put it crudely the farming and sailing communities of those days were a superstitious bunch. Great profits were being made and the race was on to become the most affluent farmer or shipper in the area. As the money rolled in the landowner would build the most glorious church with the highest steeple in order to demonstrate his prowess. Bargains were made, broken and remade with the upstart Hanseatic League that was doing a brisk trade between the ports of the east coast and Scandinavia. The League and the independent English shippers were making a lot of money, but it was all very precarious. Ships sank, sheep died, and all sorts of other misfortunes were waiting around each corner. The farmers and sailors prayed for success... and they chose St Botolph as their patron saint and pleaded with him to ask God to provide a good harvest and a safe passage. They dedicated their new churches to him so that they and their labourers could have somewhere to pray.

Swyncombe was on the fringes of this marketing metropolis. It never became rich, but it perhaps lived in the hope that St Botolph would help it along.

Foundation of the site

At first glance it appears that, as we saw at Shenley, the Swyncombe church was built on his doorstep by the lord of the manor - either by Wigod, Miles Crispin or the Abbey of Bec. One

cannot, however, escape the fact that the church's appearance makes it look rather older than C11 or C12.

Only 5 miles to the SSE there is another church at the village Checkendon which bears remarkable similarities to the one at Swyncombe.



There are hardly any Saxon churches in Oxfordshire which have an apse but here we have two in close proximity.

At Checkendon there has always been a strong tradition that the church of St Peter and St Paul was closely associated with the French missionary St Birinius (600-650). He was twenty years older than St Botolph but died 30 years before our saint. By 636 Birinius had started to build an abbey at Dorchester (see its location on earlier map). The apse and chancel you see above, like those at Swyncombe, date from C11 or C12.



A tower, chancel and south porch were added later. The dimensions of the whole church closely resemble the measurements at Swyncombe.

There seems a distinct possibility that both churches were built on the foundations of a C7 church and that the new church therefore followed the same 'short chancel-round apse' Anglo-Saxon pattern as its predecessor. The identity of the person who commissioned each building will never be known.

Classification

I believe that the extant building dates from late C11 to mid C12 and that it was constructed on the site of an Anglo-Saxon church which probably dated from C7.

The History of the County of Oxford mentions that there are references to St Botolph in C16, but I can find none before that. It seems to me that the church probably gained its dedication to our saint as a result of the sheep trade combined with the fact that it was on an especially important travellers' route. I cannot imagine that the monks of Bec would have had anything to do with the name of an English saint so the patronage is unlikely to have originated before 1404 although it is possible that the church was so dedicated before the Reformation - probably at the suggestion of someone high up in the sheep trade. A member of the de la Pole family would be a likely candidate. This requires further investigation.

I do not believe St Botolph himself had anything to do with the church's foundation and frankly I found it impossible within the constraints of my existing classification system, to decide on which particular pigeon hole to put this particular church site! The existing *church* would fit satisfactorily into C(iii) - a Travellers' church founded after the Norman Conquest.

The actual *site* called for a new classification which I have labelled A(iii) - a site founded in C7 by somebody other than St Botolph... perhaps St Birinius?

Correspondence

1. **Revd Paula Griffiths** wrote from St Botolph's, Hadstock in Essex. Hadstock had been planning great millennial celebrations of the foundation of their church on 18th October but sadly Covid prevailed. Paula kindly sent me a copy of her beautifully balanced, informative and inspiring sermon. I wish I had been there to hear it - I gather that, all things being equal I would have been invited - but I am sure that the 24 locals who *were* present found it a privilege. She also sent a copy of the service in which the first reading was from the Anglo-Saxon chronicle telling the story of Cnut's raiding army and his subsequent pact with the English King Eadmund. Following this came the story of Cnut's attendance at Assandun in 1020 and the subsequent founding of St Botolph's church at Hadstock.

2. I also had the pleasure of receiving a round dozen letters from various readers saying how much they had enjoyed the history section of the last issue. Many thanks.

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 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.
 - (iii) Founded in C7 by somebody other than St Botolph.
- B: **Danish foundations:** between 800 and 1066
- C: **Travellers' churches.**
 - (i) Founded before AD 800
 - (ii) Founded between 800 and 1066
 - (iii) Founded after the Norman Conquest.
- D: **Hanseatic churches** founded between 1150 and 1450 as a result of commercial enterprise.
- E: 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 within 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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