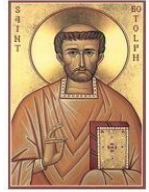




# The Botolphian

Newsletter of  
The Society of Saint Botolph

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



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## Highlights this month

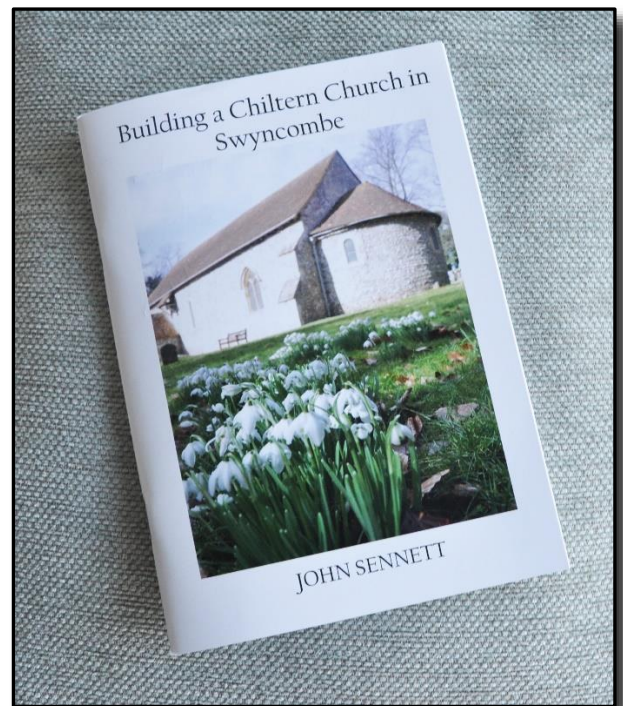
- **Iona Abbey, Argyll, Scotland**
- Correspondence from 47 people this 'double month' – all of which I was delighted to receive; comments were mainly congratulations – regarding the newsletter's 100<sup>th</sup> issue, my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, St Botolph's Day, 'The Flag' and also a lot of appreciation about the contents of the Ely newsletter. I am glad you enjoyed it, and I hope you enjoy this month's newsletter too.

## Editorial

Life continues its hectic pace I am glad to say. I returned a little early from Sicily to give me time to visit my old sailing friend Ray Theakston and help him to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday near York. As we were travelling that far north we decided to make the most of it and continue to Oban in Argyll, Scotland where I have family and Zina also has a niece. We had a great time celebrating our reunion because with Covid and other obstacles it had been 12 years since our last visit. I was also eager to take the opportunity to do some long-overdue Botolph research and what follows is the result of this.

While I have been away, one or two members of the society have emailed to ask me whether or not there is any chance of reinstating the **Annual Saint Botolph Luncheons** in October in Cambridge. On balance after due discussion we decided that we should forego it again this year ... but put it in your diaries for **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at 12.30 for 1 p.m. in Cambridge** – actual venue to be announced later.

Congratulations to John Sennett of Swyncombe, Oxfordshire, on his publication *Building a Chiltern Church in Swyncombe*.



I received my copy when I arrived home but did not get around to reading it until yesterday. It is packed with useful information – both about the history of St Botolph's Church at Swyncombe and about its connection with Bec Abbey – and indeed about Botolph in general. I found the 'Ancient Terms' section at the back to be very comprehensive. The book is available at £10 per copy plus £2.25 p&p, directly from John Sennett.

John says:

*To purchase the book email him at [johsennett@aol.com](mailto:johsennett@aol.com) with the address you want it posted to and remit your payment of £12.50 to John's bank account 40-47-75 account 70302309. Otherwise you could turn up with £10 cash at a Swyncombe Service (10.30 every Sunday) at RG9 6EA.*

# Iona Abbey, Argyll & Bute.

## Introduction

I am aware that readers' first thoughts might be "How on earth can there be a connection between the highly-prestigious Iona Abbey - way up in Scotland - and our saint who flourished mainly in eastern England?"

Although in these newsletters we usually feature churches which are actually *dedicated* to Saint Botolph, I refer to my forthcoming book on the subject as 'a gazetteer perusing the origins, architecture and culture of buildings in the United Kingdom that are known *to be associated* with Saint Botolph', and it is on this basis that I include St Columba's Abbey on Iona.

## **Iona**

Iona Abbey is perhaps the epitome of early Christianity in Britain.<sup>1</sup> It was founded in 563 by the renowned Saint Columba (521-597)<sup>2</sup> who is often referred to as Colm Cille (pronounced 'Columkilly').<sup>3</sup>

In Volume I of my Botolph Trilogy,<sup>4</sup> using the information I had at the time, I wrote of Botolph being born into a noble family which had been defeated in battle; Botolph, his parents and his siblings were fleeing for their lives. I arbitrarily chose East Sussex as his first home location, there seeming to me at that stage no authenticated indication of where his life actually began.

Today, after twelve years research, I find it is possible that my choice was 460 miles too far to the southeast.

Much of the information we have concerning the life of St Botolph comes from the work of the C17 Jesuit, Daniel Papebroch, of the *Society of Bollandists* who are now based in Brussels but were earlier in Antwerp. Papebroch collected or copied, from all over Europe, a total of 28 manuscripts each of which contained information about our saint. One of these manuscripts, the *Schleswig Breviary*, referred to Saint Botolph as having Scottish origins and Papebroch postulated that if this were the case he must have been a son of King Eugenius IV of Dalriada<sup>5</sup> who reigned

<sup>1</sup> It might be said to share this privilege with St Martin's Church in Canterbury.

<sup>2</sup> This saint is not the same man as St. Columbanus (540-615), who was also an Irish saint at a similar period but his speciality was founding monasteries in Italy and France. Columbanus also has associations with Saint Botolph in that it was he who helped to found the monastery of Faremoutiers-en-Brie where our saint was professed.

from 608 to 629. The king's more commonly-used name was *Eochaid Buide*.

I had originally considered this to be Papebrochian conjecture – and indeed he presented it as such – but over the last few years I have studied the subject closely and as far as I can make out his conjecture was not far short of the mark. I think he might well have placed Botolph in the correct location, but my research suggests that he was wrong about the identity of Botolph's father. Having studied the history of Eochaid's nine sons I can find none of them who strike a chord as identifying either with Botolph or his brother Adulph.

## **Oswald**

At this point a very important personage enters the scene. His name is Oswald (604-642) and he eventually becomes King of Northumbria, but in 616 when he was twelve, his father Aethelfrith, king of the two separate entities *Bernicia* (centred around Bamburgh) and *Deira* (centred around York) was killed in battle and Oswald, his mother and his siblings had to flee their homeland and seek asylum elsewhere. The 'elsewhere' turned out to be at Eochaid's court on the island of Dunadd in what we now know as Scotland.



Eochaid took the family under his wing and arranged for the young ones to be educated by monks on the nearby island of Iona. This

<sup>3</sup> Columba = 'Dove', and Cille = 'of the church'. The 'Kil-' prefix found in the names of many Scottish villages refers to 'Cell' – i.e. of a hermit or a church.

<sup>4</sup> ISBN 978-0-9567508-0-8.

<sup>5</sup> Dalriada (Dal Riata in Gaelic) as it is sometimes written, covered the area now known as *Argyll & Bute*.

involved a journey by sea of nearly forty miles, so they would have had to ‘board’ on Iona for extended periods. The initial sail from Dunadd would not have been without excitement since they would have had to have passed between the islands of Jura and Scabra where a rocky pinnacle 95 feet below the surface turns the 8 knot current into cauldron-like whirlpools famously known as the *Corryvreckan*. The Gaelic translation of this name is the ‘Cauldron of Breccan’ but it seems to me that since the vessels they sailed would have been *currachs*, the title *Curragh-wrecker* would not have been inappropriate and sounds much the same.

### Botolph’s Birth

Amongst the senior members of Oswald’s family who would have escorted the group to Dunadd, was his paternal uncle Ecgulf (his father’s younger brother), and it is towards him I look (partly, I must admit, due to the similarity of the suffix<sup>6</sup> of his name) as the possible procreator of our saint. Oswald’s father was 49 when he was killed in 616, and Ecgulf was perhaps ten years younger at which age he would have been well able to have fathered Botolph/Botulf in 620 - perhaps by one of Eochaid’s daughters. Botolph’s brother Adulf would have been born earlier – either to the same mother (making him just a little older than Botulf), or perhaps to an earlier wife of Ecgulf while he was still in Bernicia. In this case Adulf could have been considerably older than his ‘brother’.<sup>7</sup> This satisfies all the requirements of Papebroch’s manuscripts where Adulf is said to be ‘of the Saxon people’ whereas Botulf is ‘of Scottish origin’.

### Education

Oswald remained in Dalriada from the age of twelve until he was twenty-nine. Being sixteen years older than Botulf, by the time our saint was ready to go to Iona to be schooled (maybe at the age of seven), Oswald would have been twenty-three and perhaps spending much of his time on Iona. Here he would be continuing his learning and working in the Iona Abbey scriptorium practising the art of writing illuminated scripts. He would also be honing his fighting skills both there and at Dunadd.

There seems little doubt that, in the enclosed confines of the Dunadd and Iona communities, if my previous speculation is true, Botulf and Oswald would have known each other. Nor is it unlikely that in 634 when the situation presented

the potential for Oswald to claim back his inheritance and his kingship, that the fourteen-year-old Botulf would by then have also learnt the art of combat and have been keen to join Oswald’s army as he set out for ‘England’.

### King Oswald

Whilst in the service of the kings of Dalriada Oswald had proved himself many times in battle and had acquired the nickname of *Lamnguin* which translates as ‘Whiteblade’ – perhaps because of the way the blade of his sword flashed due to the speed at which he handled it.

On 12 October 633 at the Battle of Hatfield Chase, (near Doncaster in South Yorkshire) King Edwin (in Oswald’s view the usurper of the ‘Northumbrian’ throne) was killed by the combined alliance of the armies of Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd and Penda of Mercia.

This left the way open for Oswald’s family to reclaim what they felt was theirs by right. Oswald’s elder brother Eanfrith immediately left Dalriada and took control in Bernicia and Edwin’s cousin Osric took power in Deira. Oswald seems to have stayed where he was. By this time Eochaid had died and Eochaid’s son Domnall Brecc had taken over as Oswald’s new overlord. Cadwallon ap Cadfan had had a grievance against Edwin for many years, and he continued to wage a vicious vendetta in the north - and both Osric and Eanfrith were soon killed. Even then Cadwallon had no mind to go back to Wales and a year after killing Edwin his army was encamped just south of Hadrian’s Wall near Corbridge.



Oswald saw his opportunity, but he needed an army. Domnall Brecc and the Dalriadans were prepared to fight for him and, surprisingly, Ségéne, the current abbot of Iona, was able to offer

<sup>6</sup> The suffixes ‘-olf, -olph, -ulf, -ulph’ are regarded as being interchangeable, so ‘*Botulf*’ can be regarded as an accepted spelling; ‘*Borwulf*’ is also sometimes used, but incorrectly in my view since there is no evidence for its justification.

<sup>7</sup> This becomes relevant later in the story of St Botolph when researchers become confused about the possibility of Adulf having been bishop of Utrecht.



a large band of fighting monks (their killing consciences were salved on the basis that their mission was ostensibly that of restoring peaceful Christianity to the area).

Oswald's journey would take him and his army in a large fleet of curraghs from Dunadd to the Solway Firth and then into the land called Rheged (basically Cumbria) from which they would then need to cover the 45 miles to Corbridge as quickly and as secretly as they could.

It seems that Oswald was able to capture the imagination and support of the Rheged leader and he was supplied with horses and fighters. Most importantly the annexation of the loyalty of the Rheged men meant that news of Oswald's intentions were less likely to enter the spy chain and alert Cadwallon. It was said that Roman troops could, at a forced march, cover 45 miles in two days. Oswald's army was travelling light so his army could move even faster than that and would have been able to quickly and secretly make camp within range of Cadwallon and make an early morning strike the next day.

During the night Oswald dreamt that Saint Columba promised him victory. He woke before dawn and gave orders for a large wooden cross to be quickly constructed and set up in the earth. The army were all assembled when he knelt before the cross in the first of the morning light, and spent several precious minutes in prayer. Immediately afterwards he mounted his horse and his army attacked.<sup>8</sup> Cadwallon and his men were caught off guard and were routed; Cadwallon himself met his doom somewhere near Hexham.

How much taste the fourteen-year-old Botulf had for such a battle it is impossible to tell. Perhaps the horror of it all made him resolve never to use his skills of combat again. Either way, he had broken his ties with Dalriada and was now in northern Britain where the next phase of his life would begin. During the next four years his Christian faith would strengthen and he would cross the Channel to Gaul where he would emulate the good citizens of Iona by starting his training as a monk.

His friend King Oswald, in the meantime, would unite Bernicia and Deira, become the most powerful king in Britain, and be highly successful in spreading Christianity in Northumbria.

As my friend, the Kent Archaeologist Andrew Richardson would scold: "You have not one shred of evidence to support Botolph's involvement in all of this Denis!"

<sup>8</sup> The battle is generally known as *The Battle of Heavenfield* although historians are now doubtful that Heavenfield was the battle's location.

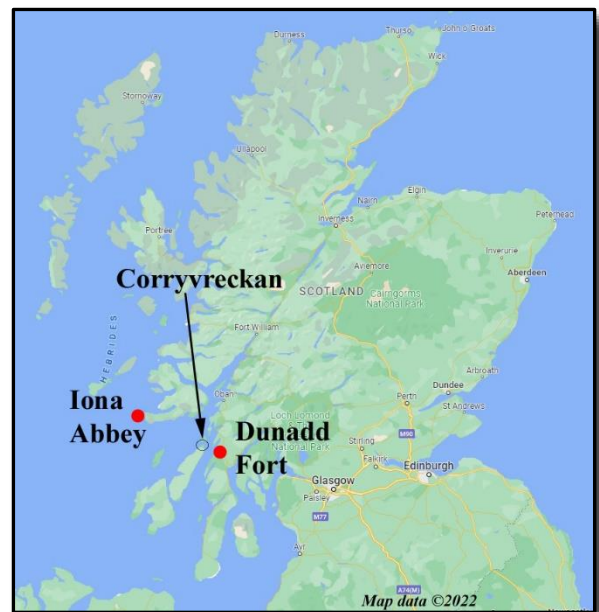
To which my response would be that although there is no hard evidence, what I do have is a number of dots, and I believe my task is, using a modicum of common sense, to try to join the dots together. My gut feeling is that this time I have it right.

### Feature

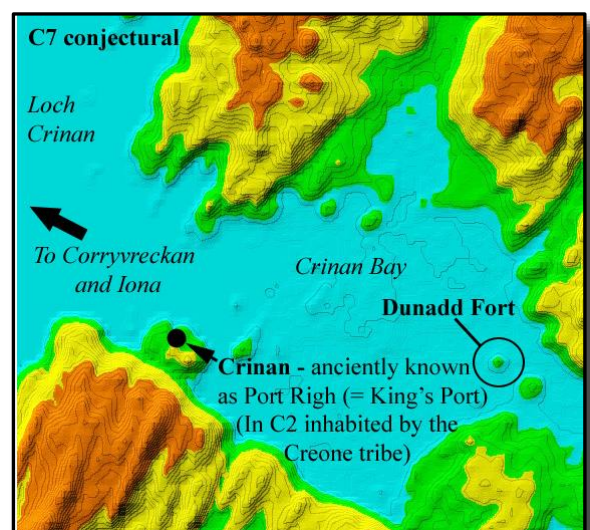
## Dunadd fort, Argyll & Bute.

**Location:** 56.08578, -5.47847.

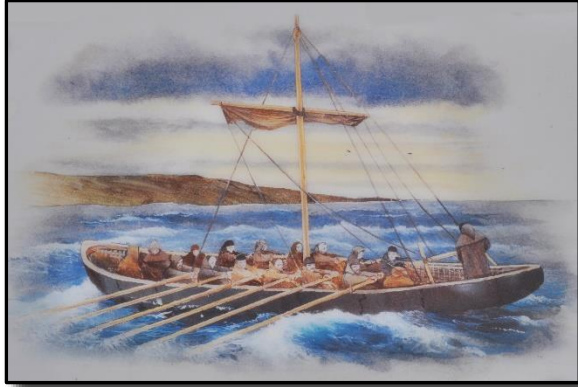
**Details:** Hill site of ancient Scottish Fort.



In this issue of *The Botolphian* then, we are looking at the west coast of the Scottish highlands.



Dunadd Fort lies today in a basin known in Gaelic as *Moine Mhòr* (this translates as ‘Great Moss’ – or extending the translation further, as the ‘Great Bog’) but in C7 we might have called it ‘Crinan Bay’ since it was covered in water that was deep enough for the shallow draught *curraghs* to make their way from the sea to the edge of the island fortress.



The picture above was copied from one of the information boards on the Iona Abbey site. Curraghs were constructed using a timber framework across which animal skins were stretched and then greased to make a hull which was light and waterproof..



In order to sail from Dunadd to Iona, the Gulf of the Corryvreckan had to be navigated cautiously. This meant making the passage when the tidal current was slack and there was not too much wind. The tidal range in this area is only about 2 metres (compared with 7 metres at Dover and as much as 15 metres in the English Channel’s western approaches at St Malo). It is not the tidal range therefore which causes the Corryvreckan phenomenon but a subterranean pattern of rocks which creates a current of 8 knots stirred into a frenzy by the presence of a spire-like rocky

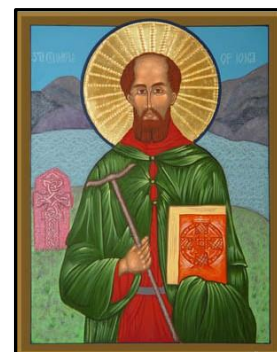
pinnacle which shoots upwards to a position 95 ft below the water’s surface.



Today, instead of a shallow mere, the crag of Dunadd towers over a flat and verdant basin. The picture above is a view westwards towards the sea with the port of Crinan at the top. This photograph was taken from a drone - a new toy which I bought specifically for this trip, and which really proved its worth.



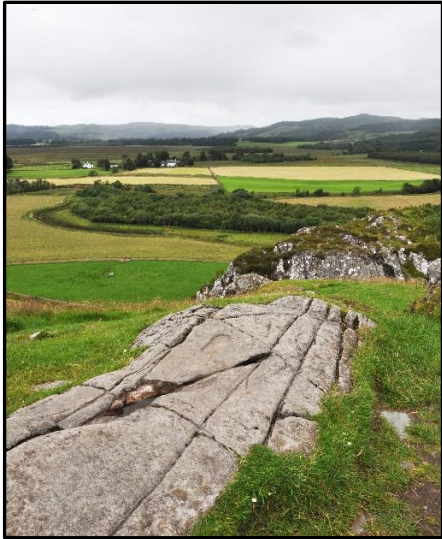
By contrast this picture is taken from an information board on the lower Dunadd slopes. It confirms that the fort was originally surrounded by water and tells us that it started its working life 2,400 years ago as a 175ft high fortified farmstead, and became the seat of the first kings of Scotland in early C6 when it acquired protective ramparts built in four tiers.





The tradition is that this is likely to have been the place where St Columba, (icon above) fresh from Ireland in 563, negotiated with King Comgall for permission to set up his monastery on the Isle of Iona.

Close to the summit of Dunadd Fort lies a rock into which is cut a footprint – *The Footprint of Fealty* - which was used for many centuries for the inauguration of Scottish Kings.



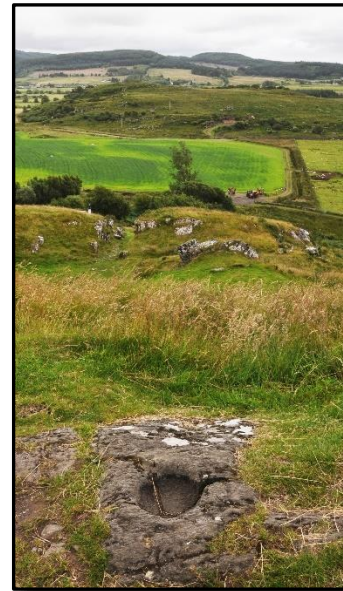
The new king would place his (size 6-7) foot within the print and swear loyalty to the land and its people.



The footprint points NNE. Its deep indentation romantically ensures the connection between the monarch's foot and the bedrock of his country's greatest stronghold. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Dunadd for there is a tradition in Scotland and Ireland of other such footprints being used in the same way.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Scotti' was the name given to the people ruled by the Dalriadan kings. The name differentiates them from the Dalriadans of northern Ireland.



A few metres away lies this crucible-like bowl - and carved into the rock nearer the footprint are the outlines of a boar. As one can imagine, vast quantities of modern tourists with ambitions of kingship would have soon made the footprint unrecognisable so, in their wisdom, the authorities have covered it with what seems to be a remarkably good look-alike made of concrete.

Personally I found that although I could come to terms with Dunadd's use as a stronghold, I had difficulty in conceiving how what I saw as a comparatively small area, could be used to accommodate a whole 'clan'. Measuring it on Google Maps revealed that the hill's base is approximately 250 metres in diameter.

A further calculation however showed that this would provide a flat area of 50,000 square metres, and an internet site estimated that this would be sufficient floor space for 800 office workers. If we allow for the up and down nature of the accommodation it appears that, contrary to my earlier impression, 300 Scottis<sup>9</sup> should have been able to live here quite comfortably.

Having said that, it is clear that, apart from Oswald's family and, later, Botolph, there would have been a great number of children in such a community, and in the event of an attack they would be an encumbrance. Even in times of peace, the prospect of a multitude of youngsters climbing the rocks and generally making a nuisance of themselves would not have been attractive. It seems quite logical then, that once Columba's Abbey was up and running, the children, together with the older men and women, would be farmed out to Iona where the children could be educated by the monks.





The Dunadd visit starts along this little path which leads from the free and conveniently-placed car park. It is not a climb for the faint-hearted however since it is difficult to find anything flat to stand on in parts of the middle section. A crummoch (Scottish shepherd's crook) would be a valuable aid for aspiring octogenarian climbers.



On the upper slopes passageways seem to have been cut for easier access to the circumference of the base of the summit.

## The Corryvreckan,

**Location:** 56.15315, -5.71413.

**Details:** 1.2 km wide hazardous channel

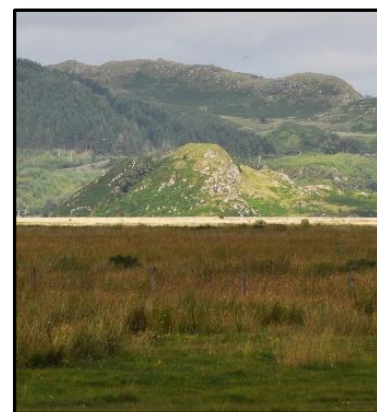
After visiting Dunadd we drove south and then west to the port of Crinan which lies on the banks of the Sound of Jura guarding the southern side of the entrance to the basin of *Moine Mhòr*. One imagines that in C7 a beacon might have been lit here to guide late arrivals into the haven.



Crinan is at one end of the canal that is a sailor's shortcut across the neck of the Kintyre Peninsula to Lochgilphead where one gains the relative safety (from strong Westerly winds) of Loch Fyne and the Firth of Clyde.



I found a high spot outside the Crinan Hotel from where I hoped to be able to see Dunadd rising majestically through the gap between the mounds on the foreshore but sadly the Fort was tucked away out of sight.



As we drove eastwards from Crinan, Dunadd reappeared – looking a little insignificant against the backdrop's mountain scenery, but grasses in the foreground revealed the bogginess of the *Moine Mhòr* soil that in Botolph's day had been the seabed.



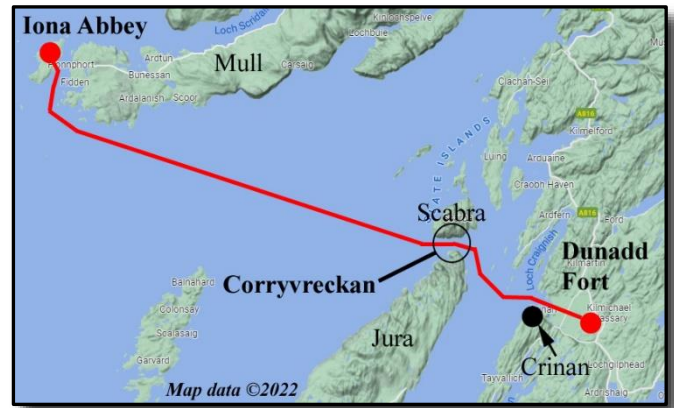


In order to take a decent enough photograph of the Gulf of Corryvreckan we had to drive north to the top of the Ardfert Peninsula where we turned west and then south again and kept going until we ran out of road at Craignish where the map told me we would be directly opposite the gulf. To my disappointment a low island prevented a direct view of the gap between Scabra (seen above on the right) and Jura, but my new drone friend came to the rescue and soared 100 metres above the island giving me the shot that I wanted.

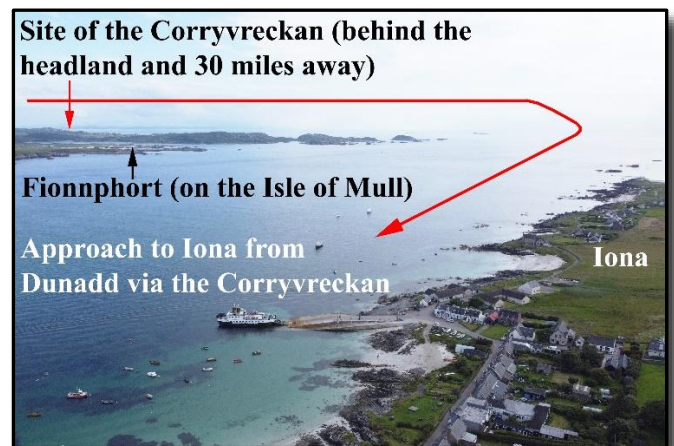
Here, on a calm day, all looked peaceful, but it did not take much imagination to work out how different the conditions would be when the weather was bad.



I was not going to risk sending Mr Dronie to the centre of the 'maelstromic' area so this picture of one of the Corryvreckan whirlpools comes to you courtesy of Wikipedia. You will note the amount of turbulence in spite of the fact that this photograph seems to have been taken on a calm day.



This then was the hazardous channel through which the rowers from Dunadd had to pass on what must have been a regular 45 mile, nine-hour journey to Iona. With a sailor's breeze in the right direction (a rare phenomenon in my experience), the sail could be hoisted making the journey a sinecure for the rowers ... until the Corryvreckan was reached when the sailors might wish the wind had less power to it.



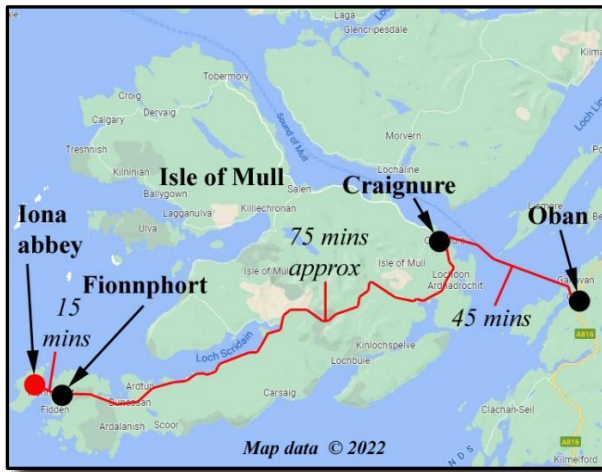
On the outward journey, once through the Corryvreckan, the sailors might hope that the worst was over. There were no doubt times when the weather would have unexpectedly turned during their nine-hour passage, and making a landfall on Iona would not have been without its own dangers.

## Iona Abbey, Argyll & Bute.

**Location:** 56.3349, -6.39169.

**Details:** As one of Scotland's smallest inhabited islands it is just 3 miles long by 1 mile wide.





Details of the modern journey from Oban to Iona.



Our arrival at Iona was made in calm conditions. The quayside was crowded with as many people wanting to leave the island as there were arriving.



So ... as my grandson Hayden had a habit of saying since he was a young boy: "What have we here then?"

**St Columba's Abbey** – the object of our visit – and yet there was more to the buildings and to the rest of the island than at first met the eye.

<sup>10</sup> I hate to labour the point but another of our claims to fame is that the first Augustinian monastery in Britain was St Botolph's Priory at Colchester.

We have already covered the fact that the monastery was founded by St Columba in 563, but on *our* visit we had to constantly remind ourselves that what visitors see today bears little relation to what they would have seen in St Columba's time - and, a century later - in St Botolph's time.

The next picture (again copied from one of the abbey's excellent information boards) shows a different scene in C7, where the abbey church (Number 1 below) was located a little to the north of the present abbey.

Such *wooden* buildings as these were easy pickings for the Viking raiders who attacked in 795, 802, 806 and 825 and each time killed many of the monks, plundered the valuables and relics, and did their best to raze each previously-repaired site.

In 818 in order to provide better staying-power, *stone* buildings were erected - only to suffer another attack in 825. There was no apparent cure for this vulnerability, Iona being such a remote place, so in 849 the abbey's remaining valuables and relics were dispersed between Dunkeld Cathedral (in Perthshire) and Kells (in Ireland). Notwithstanding this, the tradition of burial of the Scottish kings in the abbey cemetery continued unabated until 1057 - when that well-known figure **Macbeth** was interred. The total number of royal resting places recorded in 1549 was 48 Scottish kings, 8 Norwegian, and 4 Irish.



Early in C13, the laird, Ranald MacDonald of Islay, made a move to increase the abbey's potential. **The Benedictine way of life** (thought, you will remember, to have been first introduced into Britain by St Botolph when he returned from Faremoutiers in 647) did not arrive in Scotland until circa 1070 when it was adopted at Dunfermline. It was *Benedictine* monks to whom MacDonald turned 130 or so years later in order to inject new life into Iona Abbey, and *Augustine*<sup>10</sup> nuns to start up a nunnery – a species rarely found at that time in Scotland.

In C15 there were more changes to the abbey church and a project (born of a need to cater for the worship of an ever-increasing number of pilgrims) to build an enormous south transept that would have been as long as the nave. Sadly this never materialised although on the south side of the church a hole in the ground represents an attempt at commencing the work.

All ambitions for the church came to a halt at the Reformation in C16 when the iconoclasts moved in, vandalising much of the abbey and destroying 357 of the stone crosses that peppered the island; what an incredible number!



The penultimate saviour and sponsor of the abbey was George Douglas, the VIIIth Duke of Argyll (1823-1900), who, in 1874 started work preserving the ruins, and 25 years later set up the ***Iona Cathedral Trust*** to which he transferred the abbey's ownership. It is this trust we have to thank for all the subsequent work and maintenance.

Major work on the restoration of the nave started in 1902 and was completed in 1910.

### **Iona's religious buildings**

The road from the ferry ramp to the abbey runs inland for a short while before passing the ruins of Iona Nunnery - which begs for a visit. Despite the fact that this was not part of our plan and time was short to catch the return ferry to link with the Mull bus to Craignure to link with the ferry back to Oban, we felt compelled to comply.

As it turned out I had somehow miscalculated the time of the bus by 25 minutes and we were lucky not to have to spend the night on Mull.



The nunnery's ruined and primitive state served to focus our attention on the fact that the now sophisticated abbey would have been in a similar condition until as recently as 1908.

It transpired that it was here that many of Dalriada's noblewomen were buried. One of the grave slabs found here bore the name of Princess Anna MacLean who died in 1543.



The visit to the nunnery proved to be a short cut to the road to the abbey.



MacLean's Cross (erected circa 1500) marks a waypoint where pilgrims habitually paused and prayed. Today's pilgrims turn left here but the ancient *Sràid nam Marbh* (Street of the Dead) trackway would at this point have carried straight on through the abbey cemetery (known as ***Relig Odhráin***) to the aforementioned burial chamber of St Oran's chapel (seen in the foreground of the picture below) and onwards to the abbey.

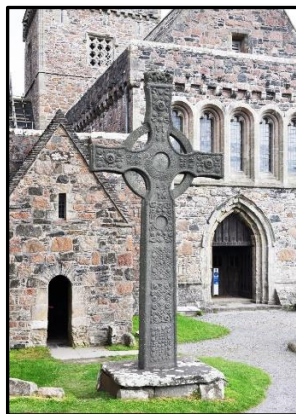




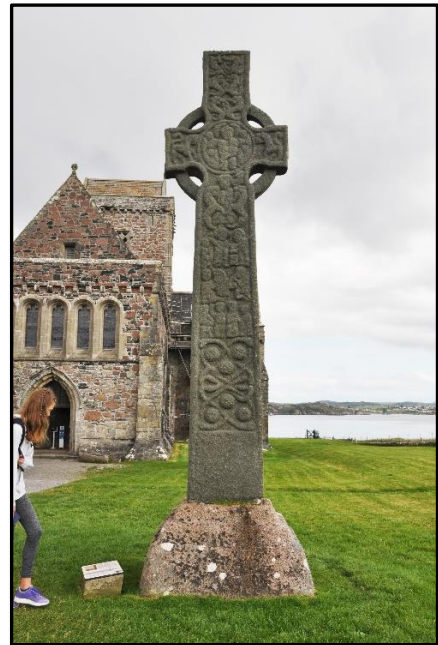
St Oran's chapel with the abbey distant.



When you visit (since surely you must) *do* remember to take your English Heritage card with you since this entitles you to free entry. Two crosses can be seen in the picture above although the one on the left does not stand out well against the backdrop of the abbey stonework so it is reproduced below.

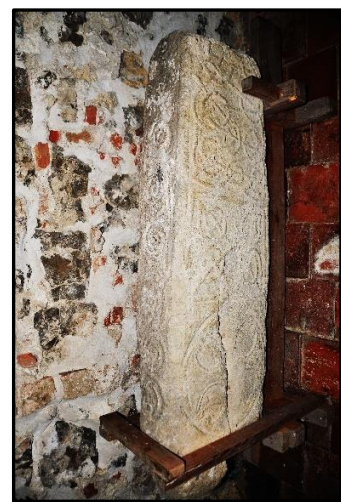


This is St John's Cross and it was but one of three C8-9 crosses that stood between the Sràid nam Marbh road and the abbey church. This replica (the original of which is in the Abbey Museum) has one of the widest spans (2.2 metres) of any cross in the United Kingdom.



The cross on the right hand side of the upper photograph is St Martin's Cross (seen here also) and it has stood in its present position since C10; it is the only one of the three crosses to survive intact. The third cross was dedicated to St Matthew; the base is still in place but the cross is in the museum.

It seems that there was a plethora of crosses on Iona (357 to be exact) and those we see today represent only a fraction. Apart from other uses some served to mark the route from the pilgrims' landing place, to St Columba's shrine.



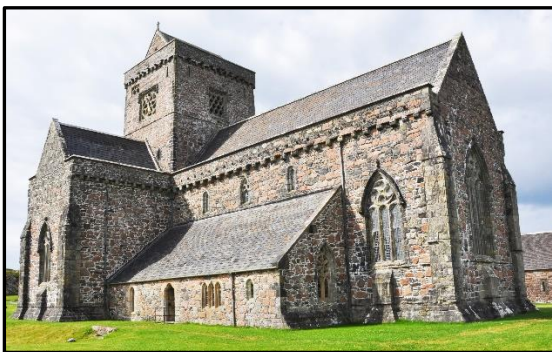
As some readers will remember, a similar cross was discovered by Stanley West in the fabric of **Saint Botolph's church at Iken** in 1977.



The Iona crosses date to C8 and C9 and the Iken cross is thought to bear a similar provenance.



Iona Abbey Church from the southwest.



... and from the southeast.



The view to the east-south-east across the sound to the ferry embarkation point of Fionnphort on the Isle of Mull.



There is no doubt that the abbey was in existence between 1230 and 1350 and so this is where one would normally expect to find a lowside window. The 'lean-to' shown above is a Sacristy and all three of its lower windows are certainly of the right height to be considered 'low-side' but they are not really wide enough to be in character. If there ever was a lowside window in the church, signs of it must have been lost in the church's ruination or restoration (this is discussed again later).



This picture is another from a photograph taken of an information board in the abbey grounds. The view is from the northeast and shows the abbey as it would have been in 1450. On the left, the small building marked '2' is the Sacristy we have just been discussing. The note against it says '*Where the monks kept their altar vessels and vestments*'.





Entering the abbey church via the west door we are met appropriately by a magnificent font which dates from 1913.



The support pillars are made of **green Iona marble** which is quarried from under-water seams on the island. It is uniquely composed of a mixture of serpentine and limestone and has been a favourite of jewellers for many centuries. I spent a lot of time in Oban when I was a child and I can clearly remember as a 12-year-old admiring the marble artefacts in The Gem Box on Corran Esplanade. In 2010 when Zina and I last visited, I at last had an excuse to buy a couple of pieces for her.



Come to think of it these are not perhaps the sort of thing you might expect to appeal to a 12-year-old boy but they did then ... and I must admit that they still do now. I find myself somewhat bewitched by what I see as the subtle magical beauty of the stone. Not to everyone's taste I am sure, and indeed I can see that it is probably not the sort of jewellery one might wear routinely – unless one were in Scotland of course.



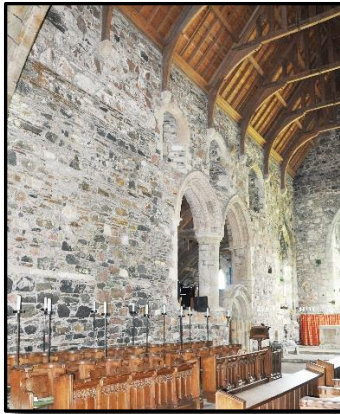
Sadly the speckled nature of the pink, grey and black granite stonework of the abbey walls does not lend itself to wide photographic shots, but as they say '*we are where we are*'.

A view from the east end of the nave to the western and eastern arches of the crossing (which supports the tower) into the choir and the high altar.

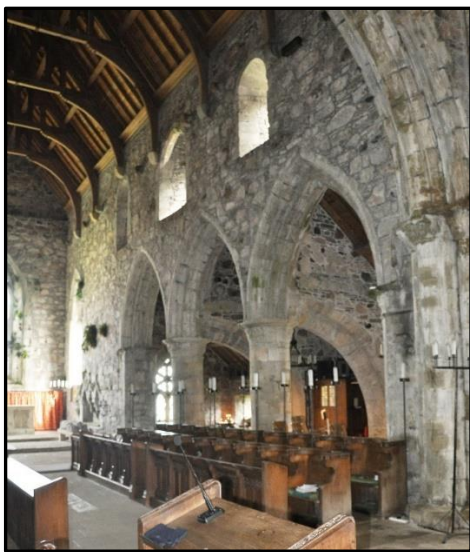




Here, taken from under the crossing, the choir itself.



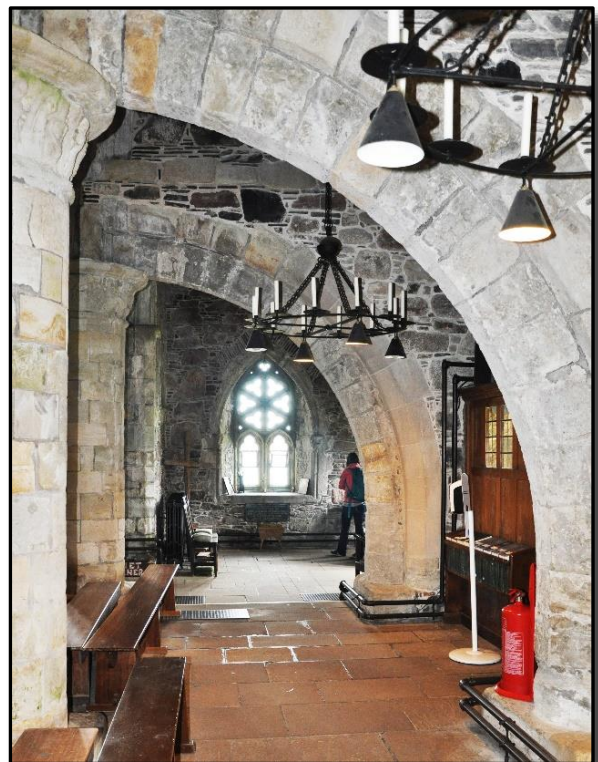
The north wall of the choir ...



... and the south wall of the choir showing the clever internal flying buttresses which support the columns of the arcade.



The south transept (which narrowly managed to escape being extended to the same length as the nave) containing the memorial to the eighth Duke of Argyll and his wife.

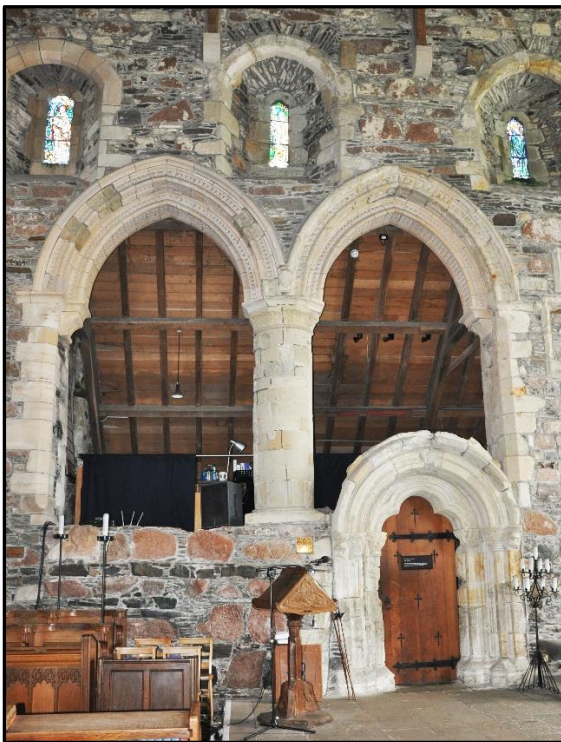


Further shots of the buttress work and an attractive rotunda window in the east wall of the aisle.





In the south wall of the sanctuary we find the partly-restored piscina and ogeed (which in England would date it to late C13) sedilia; indeed the date given for this is 'the 1400s'.



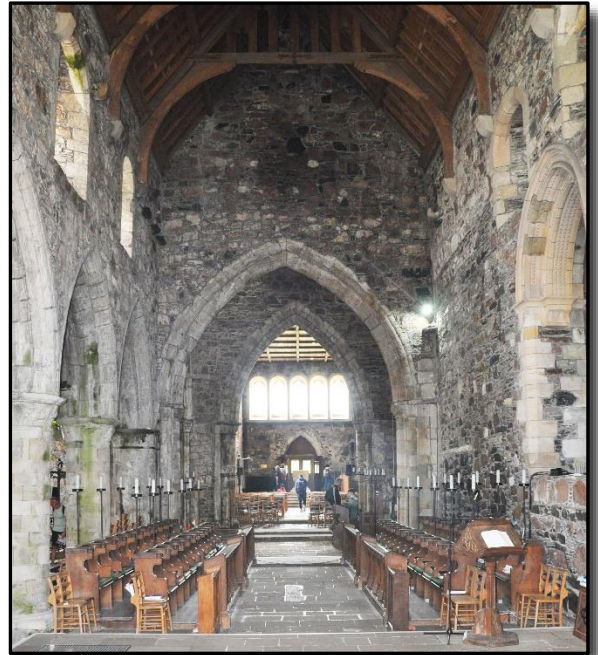
Now here is a sight in the north wall of the chancel/choir. What can it all mean?

In fact the base of the central column marks the level of the chancel floor as it was in early C13 having been raised at that time – presumably to satisfy the edicts of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 when many new requirements were announced by Rome.

The construction of the Benedictine church had begun soon after 1200 and the Papal Bull must have caused some frustration. Nevertheless the raising of the floor created space for a partly subterranean crypt to be built below the high altar and this was used to store some of Columba's relics. North and south side aisles were added (these must have been at the original *lower* floor level and one or both aisles must have contained

the then required lowside windows for which I had been searching).

In C15 it was 'all change' and the crypt was removed and the choir floor was lowered again exposing a humble doorway that had led into the crypt. Its humility was rewarded by making it more grandiose and a top arch was added taking the structure above the baseline of the two upper arches. The now ornate doorway we see today leads into the Sacristy.



A view from the high altar, through the choir and nave to the west entrance from which I took my departure.

It was not until much later that Zina (who had been exploring the abbey separately while I rushed round getting my photographs) asked me what I thought of the cloisters.

"Cloisters? What cloisters?"

"You missed them? They were beautiful!"



While she had been exploring them I had been busy taking some aerial photographs. These captured the cloisters nicely, but failed to draw my attention sufficiently to prompt me to go and look for them.





Time was short however and we were the last passengers to board the ferry so I have to console myself with the thought that even if I had realised I had missed the cloisters I would still have had insufficient time to photograph them.



*Wiki Commons* saved the day however, and provided me with a nice shot of the colonnade, and of the sculpture in the centre of the cloister garth.



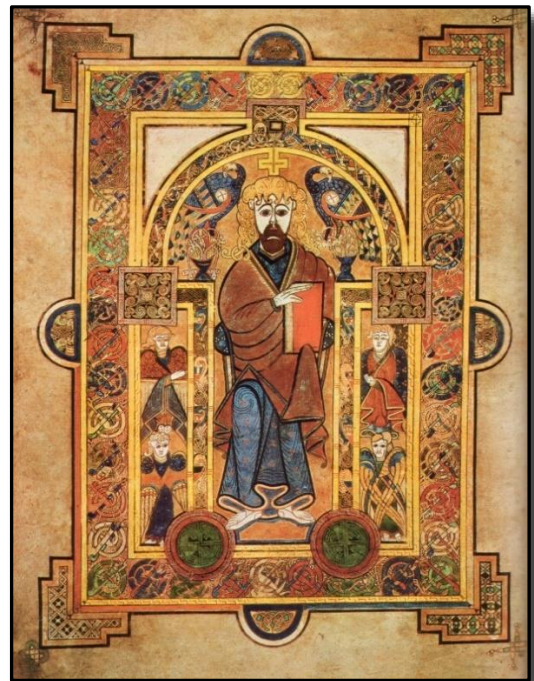
The sculpture, by the Lithuanian artist Jacques Lipshitz (1891-1973) is entitled *Descent of the Spirit*. It was donated to Iona in 1959.



The cloisters and the colonnade were restored in 1959 to their original C13 design. The ‘capitals’ were assiduously carved by the sculptor Chris Hall between 1967 and 1997; the guidebook challenges visitors to identify the two pairs which are original.

### **The Book of Kells**

The Book of Kells is said to have been written on Iona circa 800 although ‘written’ seems hardly adequate for such a marvellous creation.



**Book of Kells** courtesy of *Wikimedia Commons*

There is some controversy about the book’s actual origin but the consensus is that it was probably produced either in total or in major part, on Iona and then transferred to Kells – an Irish abbey inland and north of Dublin, founded or refounded by Iona abbey circa 810. The book was moved to protect it from Viking vandalism; its completion might have been at Kells.

It consists of the four gospels drawn from the Latin Vulgate and is ‘a masterwork of Western calligraphy and represents the pinnacle of insular illumination’.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book\\_of\\_Kells](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Kells) (accessed 30 July 2022)



#### 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: -

The list of classifications I use has been subject to constant revision over the past six years. The current version, revised December 2020, is as follows:

1. A church on a site which might have been founded directly by St Botolph during his life or by his acolytes soon after his death.
2. A church the original of which is thought to have been the product of Danish landowners (c.878-890, c.1016-1035).
3. A church originating from and as a result of Monastic Revival (c. 950 - 1016).
4. A church which, even if it had a humble predecessor on the same site, mainly blossomed as a result of opulence gained from the wool trade (c. 1150-1450).
5. A church lying on or close to one of the major ancient trackways, Roman roads or city gates, the proximity of which merits the suspicion that a major aspect of the function of the church has for a long while been closely linked with long-distance travel.
6. A church lying on or close to a pilgrimage route. For the moment until a pattern becomes clear, this classification has been sub-divided in the following way:
  - a. Churches founded for this purpose before A.D. 800.
  - b. Churches similarly founded but between the years A.D. 800 to 1066.
  - c. Churches founded after the Norman conquest.

#### 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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