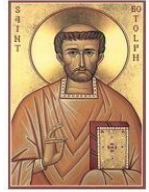




The Botolphian

Newsletter of
The Society of Saint Botolph

www.botolph.info



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Highlights this month

- Sheep, wool and fleece
- A resumé of Saint Botolph's resurgences
- Botolph becomes fashionable
- Wool churches
- The London Sheep Drive
- A view from Melrose Abbey

Editorial

Many thanks to all of you who sent sympathetic correspondence regarding the cancellation of this year's Annual Luncheon.

I have taken the opportunity to use this month's *Botolphian* to clarify the connection between Saint Botolph, Boston in Lincolnshire, and the sheep trade, and to address the slightly thorny problem of Wool Churches.

Feature

Sheep, wool and fleece, but first a resumé ...

C7

Saint Botolph's dates are c. 620 to c. 680, and for a considerable number of centuries after his death he was revered in Britain as the **patron saint of travellers**. It is difficult to determine the date when this baton passed to his successor, but since Saint Christopher was largely the invention of Jacob de Voragine (1230-1298), the Archbishop of Genoa, and author of the mediaeval best seller '*The Golden Legends*' which brought us these fanciful stories, we cannot place the date earlier than C13.

C7-C13

Saint Botolph's Life spanned much of C7, and his patronage of travellers lasted from C7 to at least C13.

C10 – his name's first resurgence

In C10 his cult had an uplift when it was selected (arguably above all others) as the figurehead of the vanguard of Monastic Reform leading (eventually) to a shrine to his name in each of four major holy centres – the abbeys of Thorney, Ely, Bury St Edmunds and Westminster.

C11

In 1014 a massive storm changed the topography of southern Lincolnshire such that the Saint Botolph's Church at Skirbeck suddenly found that the small stream, which had been on its doorstep, was suddenly transmogrified into a sizeable river. Before long foreign trading ships that had previously berthed at Bicker Haven (some eight miles to the southwest, where the storm had blocked the river and turned the area into a land-locked mud flat) began to find alternative shelter on the River Witham close to the little churchyard. The storm was the catalyst that turned the churchyard into a trading area that grew into a town that was first known as **Botolph's Town** and then as **Boston**.

C11-C15 – his name's second resurgence

Thus the *name* of Saint Botolph gained a second lease of life as it became associated with the trading of fleece and its transportation to foreign ports. This lasted from C11 to C15 when the trade in raw fleece declined in favour of cloth – with which his name was never associated.

It seems that it was because of this decline that in C15 the name of Saint Botolph began to fade into obscurity. A century later the strictures of the Reformation dealt a further body blow...

C18-C19 - a third resurgence

... and yet, evidence is beginning to appear that in C18 our saint's name had a third resurgence which originated in London, and is likely to have been prompted by the rebuilding of the three extra-mural City churches at Bishopsgate, Aldgate and Aldersgate. [Ed: you might note the happy coincidence that when the initials are put together the acronym *Baa* provides a guide for those who wish to remember the order in which this group of churches were built].

BOTOLPH BECOMES FASHIONABLE



Bishopsgate, built in 1725.



Aldgate, built in 1744.

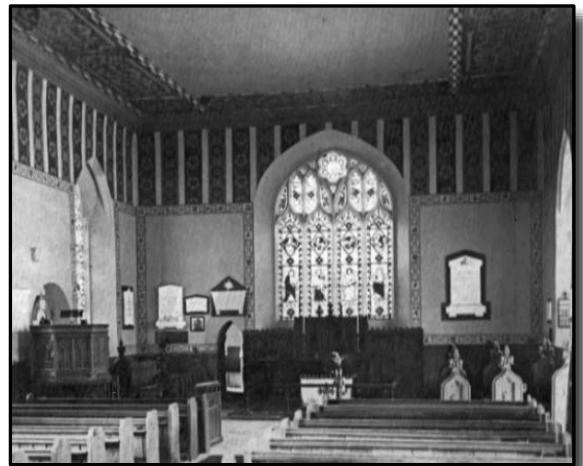


Aldersgate, built in 1788

Following the Great Fire of London in 1666, Christopher Wren (1632-1723 [knighted 1673]) was charged with re-building of over fifty churches in the City of London. These were all completed by 1685 but none was dedicated to Saint Botolph, although one of them (dedicated to Saint Magnus the Martyr) lay adjacent to *Saint Botolph's Church Billingsgate*. It rather looks as if Wren had the choice of rebuilding one or the other, and that Magnus won and Botolph missed out. So in C17 our saint seems to have been somewhat cast to one side.

C18 was a different matter however:

Working alongside Christopher Wren was the young architect Nicholas Hawksmoor (1661-1736, who, you might remember, is buried in the private garden that was once the churchyard of *Saint Botolph's Church Shenley* in Hertfordshire). In 1711 Sir Nicholas was appointed as surveyor to a commission accorded the responsibility of building of yet another *Fifty New Churches in the Cities of London and Westminster...* Hawksmoor designed six – but once again none of these were Botolphians. It is almost certain however (since he had a house in the village) that he had a hand in the design of the Shenley church that was re-built in c.1753 seventeen years after his death.



Saint Botolph's Church Shenley in 1900
(courtesy of Peter Buttle).

Steynton, Wales.

Far away to the south-west in Dyfed in **1769**, the name of Saint Botolph suddenly cropped up again, - this time in connection with a manorial property in Steynton that was acquired through his first marriage by **Sir William Hamilton**, 'founder' of the port of Milford Haven and later husband of the **Lady Emma Hamilton** who became very friendly with Admiral Lord Nelson. (See

Botolphian issue 77 of October 2019 for the fuller story).



St Botolph's House (seen above) was apparently renamed as such by Sir William and his first wife Catherine ten years after they married. More research needs to be done on this, but the inference is that both husband and wife were originally London people who had a connection with one of the Saint Botolph's City churches which by then had become very well-known in fashionable circles.

Haverhill, Suffolk.

As we saw in the last issue of the *Botolphian* (August issue number 111), it was in **1794** when the good people of Haverhill saw fit to reclaim their connection with Saint Botolph. and 'posthumously', and somewhat rashly rename their long-since demolished church of St Mary in favour of our saint.



Botolph Claydon, Buckinghamshire.

This hamlet includes our saint in its name, but it stems from the Anglo-Saxon word *botyl* (meaning 'house') followed by *claydon* (meaning 'clay hill'). I spoke recently about this to my friend Dr David Noy who is a recognised authority on that part of Buckinghamshire,¹ and he told me that *Botyl* first became *Bottle* and then around 1830

changed once again ... this time to *Botolph*; a little outside my 'resurgence timeframe' but probably a late participant in the fashionable trend.

To sum up, we have:

1725 Bishopsgate
1744 Aldgate
1753 Shenley
1769 Steynton
1788 Aldersgate
1794 Haverhill
1830 Botolph Claydon

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FIFTEEN YEARS OF RESEARCH

When, in 2009, I first started out on the Saint Botolph Trail the myth still existed in many quarters that the site of his abbey of Icanho was at Boston, Lincolnshire. The theory was tenuous even at that time, but over the past ten years it has now been fully debunked.

To make the matter totally clear: *Icanho Abbey was never located at Boston but was almost certainly sited at Iken in Suffolk.*

Once the Icanho connection was eliminated, we were left with the question of why the name of Boston should stem from 'Botolph's Town' if there was no evidence that our saint was ever there.

This was just one of the many Botolphian questions which I set out to investigate, and the answer to this one seems to be 'sheep'.

So for the past few years I have become more and more interested in finding out how sheep farming and the wool trade are linked to his cult.

Wool Churches

From my 'voyages around Saint Botolph churches' it became clear that a considerable number of landowners had built churches from the riches gained from wool farming, and that many of these churches were dedicated to our saint.

Associated with this it has gradually become apparent that whereas many of us had tended to label Botolphian churches as *Travellers' Churches* (due to his long-term fame as Patron Saint of Travellers) there was in fact a dichotomy due to the fact that some of the churches owed more to 'wool' than to 'pilgrims'.

¹ David Noy, *How One Man transformed a Town – Winslow 1640-1770 and William Lowndes*, (Aylesbury: Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, 2020). ISBN 978-0-9957177-6-3.

A **wool church** is defined as ‘*An English church the building of which was financed by rich sheep farmers and wool merchants with the hope that as a result of such largesse they would be assured of a place in heaven*’.

Our analyses of humble Saint Botolph churches have revealed that there are many which satisfy this definition and one must assume that there are many more that are dedicated to alternative saints which satisfy this definition too.

There is however a *special* group of wool churches which exceed the normal limits in their opulence and which deserve to be differentiated from the common type. They are *massive, magnificent, spectacular* and *glorious*. There are less than a dozen of them and the collective merits being preceded by the adjective ‘*Great*’. In order to tidy the classification and differentiate them from their humbler cousins I intend in future to refer to this collective as *Great Wool Churches* and I hope that others will follow my lead.

At least three are to be found in the Cotswolds at Winchcombe, Northleach and Cirencester and the other six are in East Anglia at Long Melford, Southwold, Cawston, Worstead, Lavenham, and Ipswich.



Despite his name’s connection with the early wool trade, not one of these Great Wool Churches is dedicated to Saint Botolph, and the one major church that *is* dedicated to him (at Boston in Lincolnshire) is surprisingly not usually referred to as a ‘Wool Church’.

It seems that the reason for this is likely to be that when the inventor of *The Wool Church Category* populated their list they believed that, despite Boston being a major wool-trading port, its church gained its splendour and glory from the former presence of Saint Botolph’s Icanho Abbey rather than from the wool trade.

The time would appear to be ripe for ‘the stump’ to join the Great Wool Churches. It was built in the years between 1309 and 1390 and is therefore earlier than most others of its ilk. As seen below,

its successors are mainly from the following century.

The dedications and dates of foundation of the other Great Wool Churches are as follows:

1. Winchcombe: St Peter, c. 1460, by Ralph Boteler of Sudeley Castle & others.
2. Northleach: SS Peter and Paul, from c. 1440 by Thomas & John Fortey.
3. Cirencester: St John the Baptist, 1508 major reconstruction re wool.
4. Long Melford: Holy Trinity, c. 1467, by John Clopton.
5. Southwold: St Edmund, c. 1430.
6. Cawston: St Agnes, c. 1400. De La Poles.
7. Worstead: St Mary, C14 by weavers.
8. Lavenham: SS Peter and Paul, c.1340, by De Veres and Springs.
9. Ipswich: St Clement, C14.

Great Wool Churches will be found to share the common characteristic of being not only great in beauty but also great in size. The nave of our Boston church is 242 feet (74 m) in length. Further research is necessary on this subject.

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London’s Sheep Drive and Livery Fair Sunday 29th September 2024

On Sunday (in further pursuit of knowledge regarding sheep and their wool) Zina and I attended the Annual Sheep Drive and Livery Fair at Southwark Bridge in London. My aim was to get to grips with how the farming and trading of sheep was carried on in the past and make a comparison with how it is done today.



The event started at (sort of) 10 a.m. and (sort of) finished at 5 p.m. We found it rather disjointed and were frustrated by lack of information, but it was nevertheless a very enjoyable and worthwhile day despite the fact that when the sheep were driven over the bridge we were resting our feet and enjoying mezes in a nearby Greek restaurant, and

by the time we returned to the bridge the action was over. Fortunately the driving of the sheep was of little importance to me in comparison with talking to the people manning the stalls.



We found Chris spinning ...



... Andy shearing ...



... (and tucked away round the corner), Mervyn eating ...



... but while their colleague refuelled (an urgent necessity after his early-morning start) these two young woolmen (?women?), demonstrated evidence that the Worshipful Company of Woolmen was one of the oldest of the Livery Companies of the City of London and could trace its roots back to 1180. Subsequently, a long and informative discussion with Mervyn ended with him providing me with a link to the Clerk of the Livery, Duncan Cole, and opening up the possibility of my using their reference library. The event was held on Southwark Bridge because it is used by far less traffic than London Bridge which nevertheless is the bridge to which the original charter refers.

The old stone London Bridge was commissioned in 1176 by a penitent Henry II following the murder of Thomas a Becket, and it had a central chapel dedicated to that saint. It was in operation from 1209 and was the only bridge over the River Thames until 1738 when Westminster Bridge was built.

If the Worshipful Company of Woolmen were involved with driving sheep from the south before 1209 they would have been using the rickety old wooden predecessor built in 1163. The first Freedom of the City of London was presented in 1237.

It was sheep from pastures in the south which were destined to cross London Bridge because Smithfield (originally Smooth Field) market was the place where their fleeces would be sold. Profits from the sale would be greater if a toll did not have to be paid for each sheep, so this was a great incentive for owners to be Freemen of the City.

One such Freeman who was also Lord Mayor of London for several years was Lord Gregory of Rokesley (d.1291) whose sheep farming community worshipped at the church in Ruxley that he had provided for them and dedicated to **Saint Botolph**. He owned other sheep pastures at Lullingstone where again we find a **Saint Botolph's Church** supporting farming families.

He was Mayor of London from 1263-4 and from 1270-71, and I will be interested to discover if it was he who negotiated for the freedom of tollage. Near my hometown of Folkestone, we have an historical record of the presence of a Saint Botolph's Chapel, together with a Botolph's Bridge. We also have the ancient grazing grounds of Romney Marsh which produced the first Romney Sheep.

It is natural for historians to have a bias towards finding out how their own locality dealt with things in days gone by, and my question to Mervyn was "Would the Romney Marsh and Folkestone sheep have been driven up to the market at Smithfield, crossing London Bridge on the way, or would their fleeces have been traded at local ports such as Sandwich, Dover, Folkestone, New Romney or Old Winchelsea?" Mervyn felt that 'to Smithfield they would go' and he might well be correct in that the laws which stated that such trading must only occur in designated Staple ports would have precluded an alternative.

This coastal area has a hard-won reputation for smuggling however and the large church of St Nicholas in New Romney stands at a port made rich by international trading.

Again: more research necessary.

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North next - once more up to Scotland and the Borders, which is where Zina and I went in August after our annual trip to visit the Scottish side of my family. This time I was to make my first visit to the Isle of Skye – but still with sheep in mind, for it was from here that the Scottish drovers brought their sheep (and other cattle) to the markets of (amongst others) Crieff and Perth.

I liked Skye despite the weather. Once again we rubbed shoulders with the Highland Games and the skirl of the pipes caused goose pimples as it always does. I was interested to see the terrain through which the cattle had to be driven and to assess for myself how easy or difficult it might have been. The visit, sadly, was necessarily brief and there was even insufficient time for us to visit the distillery which produces my favourite whisky – namely Talisker.

On we went on our return journey, travelling south-east until in a particularly heavy rain shower the windscreen wipers seized up and instant blindness brought me to an abrupt halt.

We limped slowly into the carpark of a nearby hotel which, interestingly, was part of the Black Sheep group, and here we enjoyed lunch while we waited for the AA to 'send a man who could' and indeed did, get us going again.



While in the hotel, right on cue, I came face to face with this picture which added another dimension to the transport of sheep. During our sailing in the Aegean we have seen the same sort of thing – that time with 40 or so goats that were being transported to another island. It astonishes me how calm and quiet they always are in those conditions.

Much of my reading on this subject has had references to the Cistercians and their sheep farming expertise so my targets were the (now ruined) monasteries at Melrose (Cistercian), Kelso (Tironian), Jedburgh (Augustinian) and Dryburgh (Premonstratensian).

While looking southwards from the Borders I was able to view the medieval commercial activities in Boston in a different light.

Firstly I was gratified by the importance that Melrose Abbey placed on the Annual St Botolph's Fair. It was clear that the fair was of *international* importance, with regular attendees from as far away as Scandinavia, Italy and Spain. The visitors were not only interested in the sheep trade but merchants from all fields.

The other thing that struck me was that the sheep trade was by no means a single filament. Multiple landowners, farmers and monasteries were offering their fleeces to a wide variety of purchasers.

Many of the fleeces would have been driven overland on their own sets of cloven hooves, but many of the buyers would have come by sea and Boston harbour would have been packed.

Melrose monastery had their own vessel and thus enjoyed a certain amount of independence. Much of their trading was done in the port of Berwick-upon-Tweed, and others traded through Hull, but *The Saint Botolph's Fair* in mid-summer was not to be missed.

Sheep and the Saint Botolph cult.

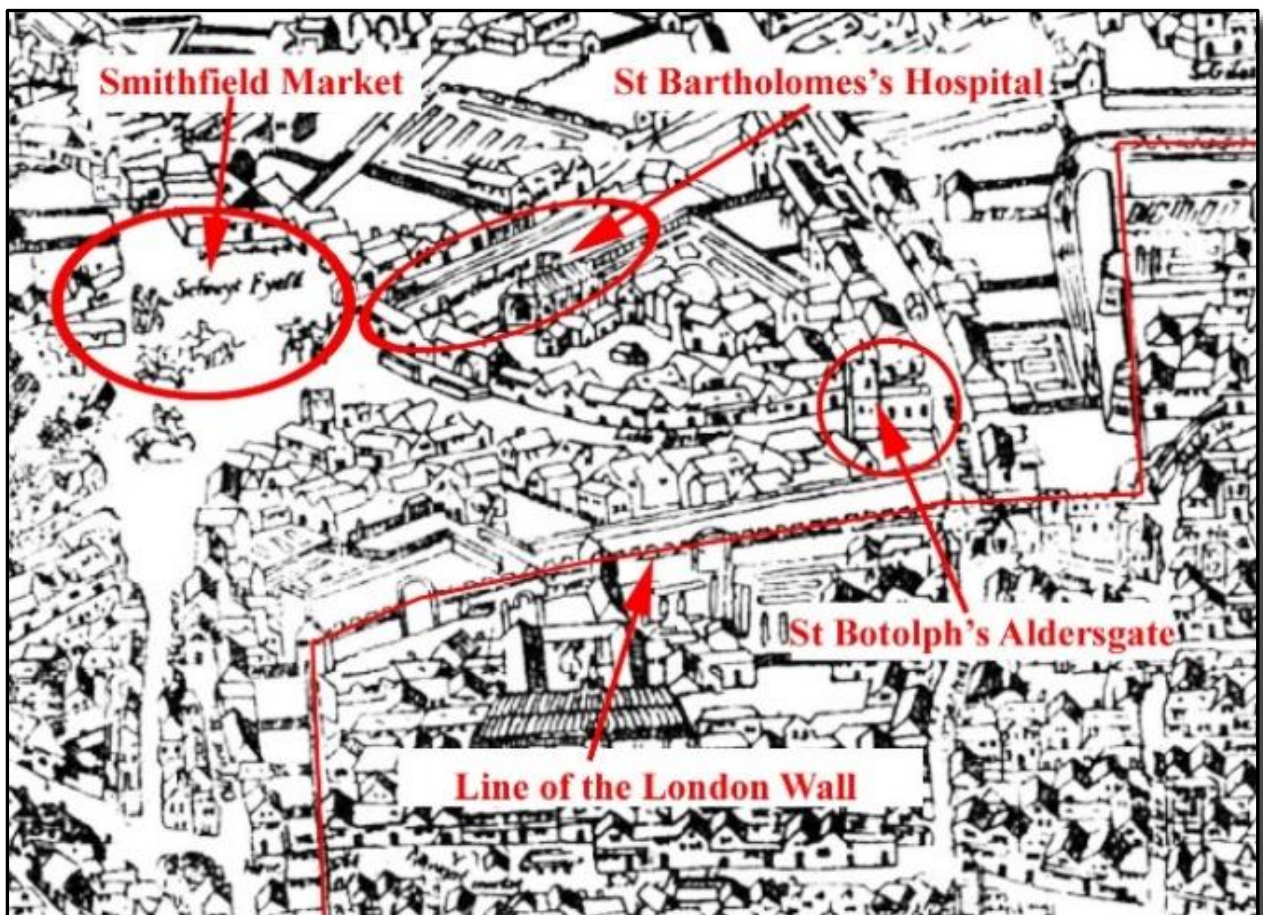
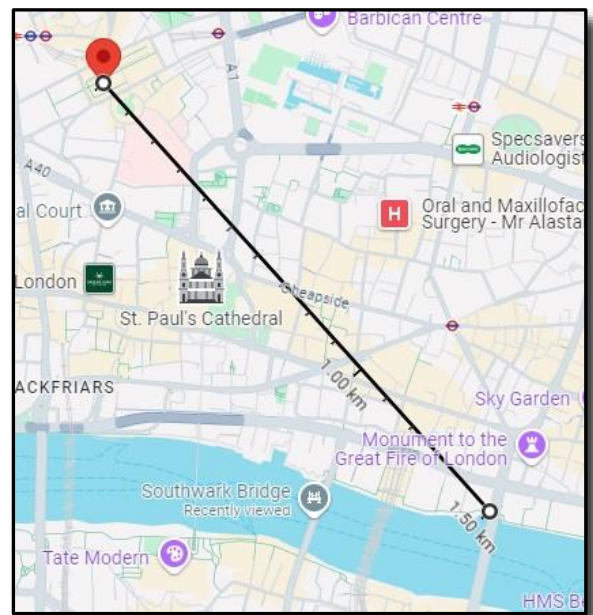
The reason for Saint Botolph's name being so firmly connected to the sheep trade is because for many years Boston was the premier sheep trading port in the country and the cult of our saint was firmly established here.

The Medieval Mind was a superstitious one. Life was short and dangerous especially if you spent a lot of time at the mercy of wind and waves. Sailors and Travellers needed a 'mascot saint' to whom they could turn in times of need, and Boston oozed Saint Botolph with the result that the sailors and travellers grasped him with glee and transported his name to far flung places particularly Scandinavia.

But not everyone took to our saint. When the Hansa came to Boston I would have expected them to adopt Saint Botolph too – but I can find no evidence that they did so.

He might have acquired the status of being the patron saint of wool traders in Boston and Scandinavia and all points between the two, but there are no signs that the merchants who transported their fleeces from Boston back to Italy and Spain carried our saint's name with them. In London, although Saint Botolph's Church at Billingsgate served the adjacent Saint Botolph's Wharf at which many fleeces were embarked, his name's influence seems to have been secondary rather than primary like at Boston.

The London trading site was a mile to the north-east of Billingsgate at Smithfield where the major event was the Saint Bartholomew's Fair



When the Hanseatic League set up their Steelyard Wharf it was upstream of London Bridge (sited where Cannon Street Railway Station now stands) and therefore a little closer to the Fair than Botolph's Wharf.

For several years in succession Boston's fleece trading exceeded that of London but fleeces were also being exported from other ports such as Bristol and Hull, and these were unstamped by the name of our saint.

In conclusion, the resurgence of his name during the high fleece trading era was concentrated in Boston itself, and even then it was not universal but seems to have been restricted to Scandinavian merchants.

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In the time and space available I have only been able to skim the surface of this complex subject and I am conscious of the fact that more dates and details are necessary in order to obtain a full picture.

It is apparent that the years between 1215 and 1350 were pivotal – but more on that in a later issue.

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 dp@botolph.info saying 'YES PLEASE.' If you wish to UNsubscribe then send the message 'NO THANKS.'

If you wish to purchase any of the books of the Botolph Trilogy please use the same email address.

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*.'

Types of Botolph Church sites: -

The list of classifications I use has been subject to constant revision over the past ten years. The current version, first revised in 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, rivers, 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. Churches' roles have always needed to be flexible. The Type 6 classification takes into account the increased influence of pilgrimage that occurred from late C12.
- * A star is added to the 'Type' when the church lies on a county border.

Changing functionality.

One church will often have fulfilled many roles during its lifetime so a 'type' will often be transient and must of necessity be defined by dates.

Typical Characteristics of early St Botolph Churches.

1. Nearly all are in the eastern half of England
2. Many lie on what today are county borders.
3. Most have Anglo-Saxon foundations.
4. Many lie within 3 miles of a Roman road or well-used waterway.
5. Most are situated close to the bottom of an escarpment but well clear of water levels.
6. Many are strategically placed in areas which represent the beginnings, middles and ends of long journeys.

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