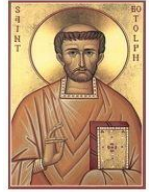




The Botolphian

Newsletter of
The Society of Saint Botolph

www.botolph.info



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Issue Number: 27

[Updated a little 31 August 2026]

1st July 2015

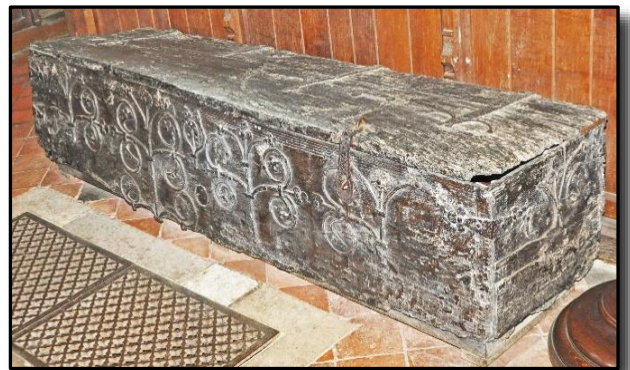
Highlights this month

- St Botolph's church Burton Hastings.
- I am delighted to welcome a new member Molly Kady from Nash in Buckinghamshire, who found us 'on the web'.
- Emails from Dick Pascoe, Duncan Hopkin, John Sennett, Mary Jackson, Patricia Croxton-Smith, Kathleen Tyson, Lorna Brabin-Smith and Peter Coleman.
- SOSB ANNUAL LUNCHEON ON **TUESDAY 13th OCTOBER 2015 AT THE CAMBRIDGE CITY HOTEL AT 12.30 for 1 p.m.** I have negotiated a price of £25 which includes two courses and tea or coffee. There will be an after-luncheon speaker. Please contact me and let me know that you are coming to join us.

Editorial

Since the last issue I have discovered that I have been terribly remiss in not taking more notice of ancient chests and coffers that I have stumbled across since starting my rounds of visiting Botolph churches. This was brought to my attention by the coffer detailed last month in the feature on St Botolphs Church with Chapel Brampton.

Derek Cummings gave me a lot of information about this coffer and its partner in St James Church Icklingham Suffolk but its importance still did not really dawn on me although I was pleased to include it as an important feature of the Brampton church. It was very old; it was a box; it had some lovely ironwork; it was reputed to have been used as a 'strongbox' for storing treasures in an upmarket monastery such as Ely ... and that, I thought, was it!



In the past couple of weeks however I have been focussing my attention on Botolph's *Translatione*. In simple terms this is when, in about 970, his body was disinterred from its burial site at his abbey of Icanho (a hundred years after Icanho had been desecrated and ruined by the Danish Great Heathen Army) and then taken 15 miles up the road to Grundisburgh where, so the story goes, it was secreted for 50 years before being divided into several pieces. The head was taken to Ely, the middle taken to King Eadgar's private chapel at Winchester (perhaps via Bury St Edmunds) and the rest given to Thorney Abbey.

This is the simple story but of course it turns out to be much more complicated than that. My focus turned to the practical problems of retrieving a buried body, transporting it, storing it and then enshrining it.

History tells us that the body was buried in c. 680 and disinterred in c. 970, so after 290 years we can be fairly sure that only a skeleton would remain. We can speculate how careful or otherwise the disinterrers might have been but it is suggested that Botolph and his brother Adulph shared the same grave and that there was some difficulty in separating them.

Either way the body snatchers would have ended up with a couple of rib cages and skulls and an assortment of disarticulated long and short bones. How reverend would the translocators have been? Would there have been a service and a blessing of the bones? Would they have brought along a box specially for the purpose or would they have simply bundled the bones into a sack and made their getaway 15 miles up the road to the fortification of Grundisburgh where the relics could be safely stored?

And what then? Would the bones have remained lumped together in random order or would they, when time and circumstances permitted, have been washed and cleaned and the two skeletons laid out in a reverend and anatomical fashion?

The instigator of their recovery was Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester (c.906-984). He was a man whose mission was monasterial reform and he energetically refounded Peterborough Abbey in 965, and the abbeys of Ely and Thorney in 972. He might have attended Botolph's disinterment himself but he would in any case certainly have visited Grundisburgh to inspect the relics later. He would surely have seen them properly displayed and asked for assurance that they would remain in safe keeping until their shrines were ready to receive them. He might have expected this to take a few months. He would certainly not have expected it to take fifty years.

How would 'Safe-keeping' have been achieved? Would their containers have been re-buried in a secret place known only to a few? Would the bones have been squashed together in a couple of small boxes? If so, I estimate that the smallest size possible to allow for the rib cage and skulls would have been about 24 inches long by 18 inches by 10 inches? Such boxes could easily be hidden from marauding Vikings. Or would the bones' curators consider their fortifications were strong enough to resist Viking onslaught and believe that, having the Blessed Botolph's relics in their possession, they should be regularly displayed and venerated?

In these circumstances might *bigger* boxes have been made and perhaps lined with white linen? Might this box have had ironwork attached to it to increase its weight and strength and allow the inclusion of a locking device. Such a box would not be easily transportable thus, in some ways, making the relics more secure. When veneration was required it would be a simple matter to throw the catches on the box and expose the saint's bones in all their glory.

I am not suggesting that the Church with Chapel Brampton Coffin was ever used to store *any* relics, - let alone Botolph's. There is no doubt from the dendochronological analysis and the style of the ironwork that Brampton's box is C13 and therefore much too late to have been used in Botolph's translocation. But this still leaves the question of just *how* might his bones might have been stored for those fifty years and is there - tucked innocently away in some old church - a C10 box that might have served the purpose.

The Church with Chapel Brampton Coffin has taught me that church chests might have a more interesting history than their innocent appearances may suggest. They need at least a second look.

Church Feature

Burton Hastings

Approach: *Coming from the south on Watling Street (A5), keep to the nearside lane and follow it left onto the B4109 Hinckley Road and then take the first turning on your right which is sign-posted Burton Hastings. This runs parallel to and eventually crosses the M69 motorway and soon leads into the village taking a sharp bend to the left and then another to the right.*

Immediately after this second bend (instead of turning sharply left again) keep straight on into the No Through Road and you will find the church on your right. Although there is not a lot of room it seems acceptable to park immediately outside the church in Mill Lane.



Key: *If you should be unlucky enough to find the church is closed you will find a helpful sign outside telling you to telephone one of the church wardens, A. Boffey 01455 220362, or A. Dickinson 01455 220711.*

Vicar: *Revd Charles Higgins. The parish is no longer in the Wolvey Group of Parishes but shares its vicar with St James Church Bulkington [updated 31 August 2026].*

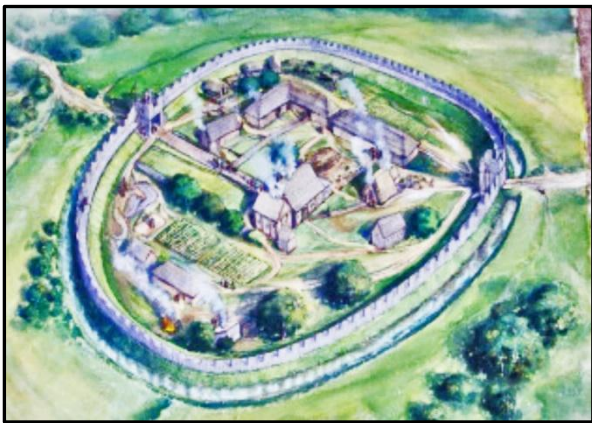
Church services: *Morning Services - Eucharist - are held in the church every second and fourth Sunday at 8.30 a.m. for 50 minutes. Evensong is held every first and third Sunday at 6.30 p.m. for 1 hour.*

Location: *Mill Lane, Burton Hastings, Warwickshire CV11 6XT. 52.5055, -1.3976. SP4098489906.*

Listed Grade: II*



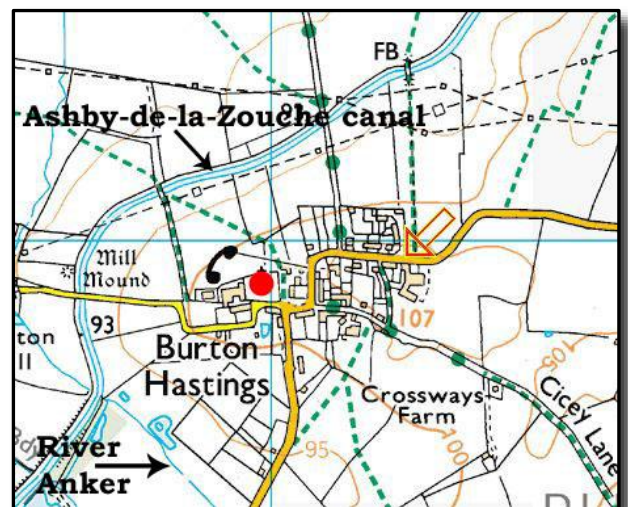
In David Mills' *Dictionary of British Place-Names* we find that 'Burton' is a common name deriving from the Old English words 'burh' (fort) and 'tun' (farmstead). This is the sort of appearance that Burton might have presented:



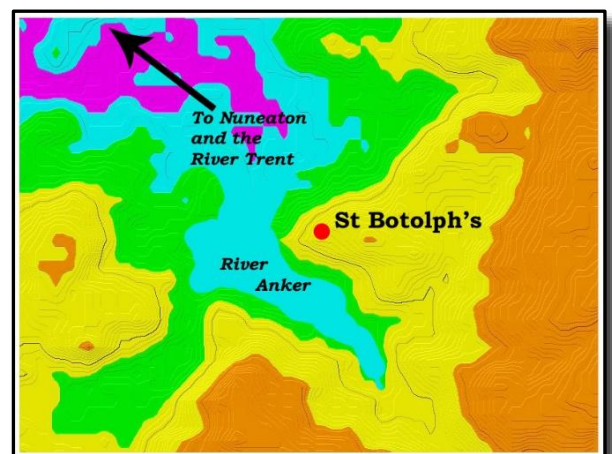
There are records of the village being referred to as 'Burhtun' in 1002, 'Bortone' in 1086 (in the Domesday Register when a priest was also recorded as being present) and 'Burugtun de Hastings' in 1313. The latter was after the Hastings (the Earls of Pembroke) became lords of the manor.

Somewhat earlier, in 1170, half of the manorial land together with the church of Saint Botolph was granted to the prioress of Nuneaton at the request of Ralph de Turvill, one of the heirs to the demesne, whose mother Emma had become a Nun at the priory.

Nuneaton lies just over three miles to the west-north-west of Burton Hastings and is also of interest. This whole countryside is very low-lying and wet - little of it is much more than 100 metres above sea level. Nuneaton itself was originally just called 'Etone' which was Old English for 'Water-town'. When the nunnery was built it became 'Nuneaton'. The building was destroyed in the Reformation.



Although this is not a region of high hills and deep river valleys, there must, a millenium ago, have been waterborne access via the River Anker to Nuneaton and thence to the River Trent (where we find another Burton ... on Trent). It seems unlikely that the River Anker was very deep and, there must, at some point, have been a bridge to carry Watling Street across it.

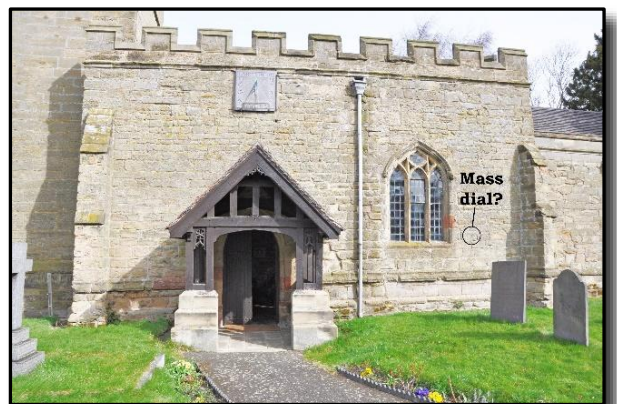


The church at Burton Hastings was built in C14 although it has been heavily restored several times since then. The only C14 work that can be seen today is the lower part of the south wall of the chancel and some of the tower although most of the latter was rebuilt in C16 as was the nave.

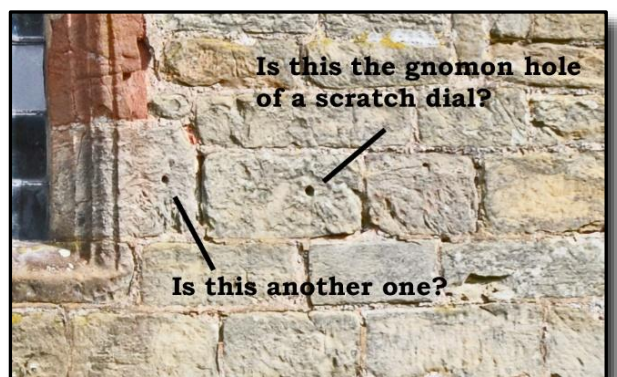
The fabric consists of squared sandstone with the east chancel wall and the tower being of ashlar. The sandstone is a beautiful creamy-yellow and, has apparently been found ideal for sharpening steel as can be seen by the 'scratchings' on the south wall of the tower. It is said that these were caused by the men of Cromwell's army sharpening their arrowheads.



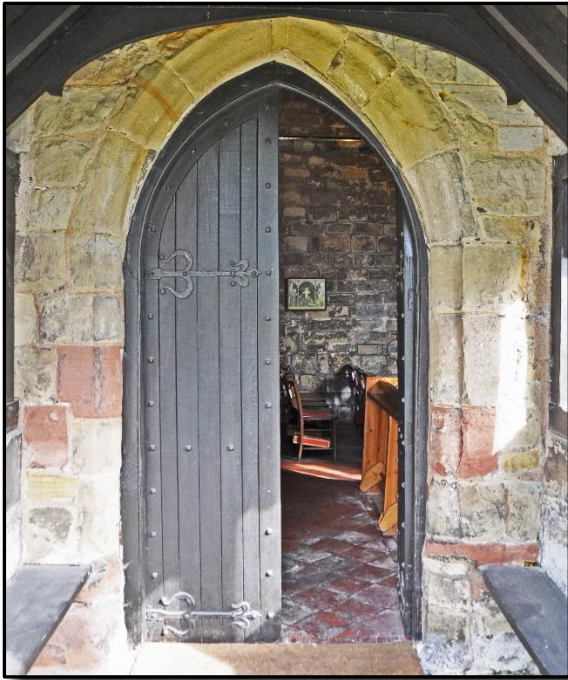
This is not the only means that the church provides of telling the time since, on the south wall, just east of the south window of the nave and about 6 feet above the ground, we find the nearly-invisible remnants of one of our old friends, the mass dial. In fact it was so 'nearly-invisible' that I missed it entirely and had to scan my photographs to find it. If mass dial it be, it is in a most unusual position - but there we are, this is what makes exploring Botolph churches so interesting.



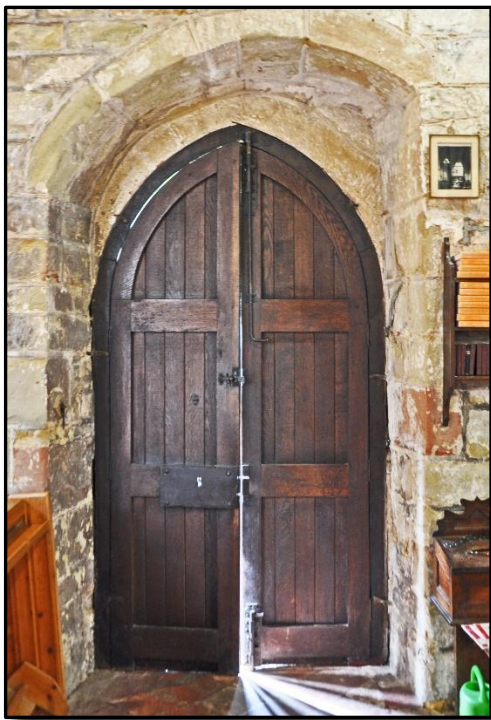
Above the C19/20 South Porch is a rather handsome sundial. Its motto of 'Carpe diem' seems to be celebrating the church's successful restoration works which were completed in 1867 when the sundial was made. Its words of triumph appear to be coming to us, over the passage of time, from the lips of the restorers: 'It needed doing - and we did it. A stitch in time - has saved nine!'



It is here at the South Door where one would have expected the Mass Dial to be but it would have been of no use once the porch was constructed. The C19 double-leaf doors sport those beautifully-crafted iron hinges again.



... but looking from the inside of the church it is clear, from the asymmetry of the opening, that earlier there was only a single door.



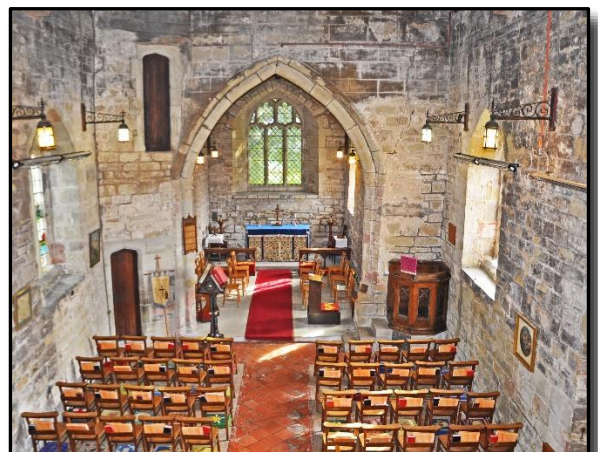
Further inside the church, in its proper place, we find an octagonal sandstone font, variously dated from C14 to C16. Between the foiled arcading

you can see carved rosettes, fleurs-de-lys and ... a hammer! The lid is C19.

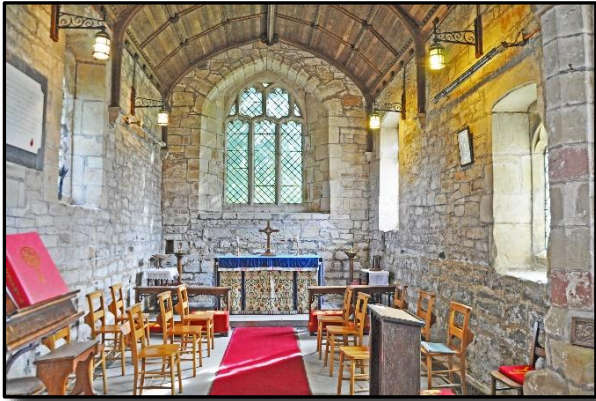


I was afforded an unusual view of the nave by being granted the privilege of climbing up into the province of the campanologists. There is a peal of five bells: two are dated 1657 (one by Brian Eldridge and one by Henry Bagley) and a third of similar era but undated. The final two bells were added in 1937.

In the picture below you can see, to the left of the chancel arch, the two doors which would have led to the rood loft. Between them of course, within the wall, is a spiral staircase (known in architectural circles as a 'vice'). On the arch itself are a series of iron hooks which were used to secure the Lenten veil which, before the Reformation, used to screen the high altar and was only drawn aside for the gospel reading. Between the upper and lower rood doors there are traces of red pigment which is all that remains of the church's original internal decorations.



On the south wall of the chancel (see below) to the left of the altar is an aumbry used for storing communion vessels.



On the north wall of the nave is a colourful 'Millenium Window' depicting life in Burton Hastings at the beginning of C21.



Looking towards the back of the church, in the angle between the north and west walls, high up above the organ a less-than-attractive head is gazing down upon you; it is not clear whether he or she is smiling or grimacing.



Beneath this, with its back to the organ is one of the church's ancient tree trunk chests. The other is in the south west corner of the nave.



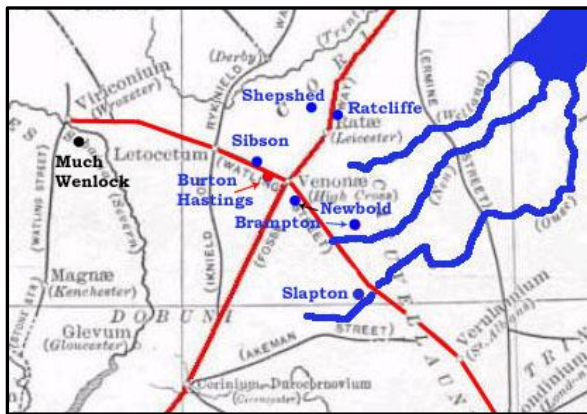
In the light of what I have written in this issue's editorial you will realise that, not (at that stage) being in 'Church Chest Mode', I now deeply regret not studying these artefacts more closely. They are each, apparently, made from a tree trunk, the centre cavity having being entirely dug out. The church's registers go back to 1574 and, following Thomas Cromwell's order after the Reformation that all parochial church registers should be carefully preserved, it seems that this was the use to which these chests were put.

To the right of the organ is a plaque recording the fact that Isaac Wells left the sum of £40 in his will of 1819 so that the interest could be used to buy and distribute bread at the church door immediately after the service on Christmas Day. This custom is still faithfully carried out



Classification of the site.

I can start by repeating, word for word, what I wrote in the last issue about Church with Chapel Brampton: *'Thus, once again, we find a Saint Botolph's Church built in a classical situation: close to both a Roman road and to a watery highway...'* - but this time it is a different 'watery highway' - not taking a tortuous route to the north east and ultimately to the North Sea - but rather heading north west before linking up with the River Trent.



This whole area near Burton Hastings is criss-crossed by ancient trackways: Fosse Way, Watling Street, Ermine Street, Ryknield Street, Akeman Street - all carrying, for thousands of years, people, like ants, following their chosen paths. It is no wonder that here we find such a density of churches dedicated to a Patron Saint of Travellers like Saint Botolph.

I have found no evidence of any possibility that there was a C7 church on this site. The fact of a priest being present in 1086 does suggest that there was an established church here then though. I feel it is likely that Burton Hastings' church *did* have a predecessor and I would therefore classify the site as B(ii), i.e. a site where a church was founded between 800 and 1066.

Changing parameters.

You will notice that, as time passes and the Botolphian issues roll out, I am perhaps becoming less ambitious for the provenance of the first churches on these sites. It would delight me to discover that a large number of these sites were founded in C7 by the building of wooden field chapels - either by Botolph or by his acolytes - but it is clear that this is too much to hope for.

Nevertheless each site must have a specific 'date of birth' and as my research continues, I am discovering certain details that point to specific factors which make different periods more fertile than others for the development of such foundations. I believe that there is a pattern - or more than likely several patterns and I hope to be able to share my discoveries with you in later issues. In the meantime I will continue with my fairly arbitrary classifications using the meagre information which is available and later I hope to reassess each church site in the light of more recent research.

My grateful thanks

and those of Zina, to Anne Dickinson for smoothing the way for our visit to Burton Hastings and for entertaining us with tea afterwards. It was a great pleasure to meet her and her husband Brian, who, as I mentioned two issues ago, is an artist in stained glass, and who not only accepts commissions but is also happy to teach the art to others.



Readers' letters and emails.

1. Luncheon: Many thanks to all of you who have written telling me that you would (or in a few cases 'would not') be joining us for the Annual Luncheon on October 13th. I look forward to hearing from others. I shall, in the near future, be sending out a personal email to all those who have expressed an interest in joining us.

2. Dick Pascoe (Folkestone) wrote the friendly message of 'Hi, Always interesting, thanks ...'

3. Duncan Hopkin (Folkestone) wrote suggesting that the number of words contained in each issue were directly proportional to the temperature of the climate in which I wrote them!

4. John Sennett (Swyncombe) wrote saying that he did not think the newsletters could get even more interesting and then the latest arrived ... [Ed: It's probably all downhill from here on then John]. John also suggested that next year Swyncombe would be delighted to see visitors on their Saint Botolph Sunday in June. They celebrate with wine and nibbles out in the churchyard after the 10 a.m. service.

5. John, Mary Jackson, Patricia Croxton-Smith and quite a few others made nice comments about my M.A. thank you. I also had some sympathetic comments about my 'senior moments'.

6. Kathleen Tyson wrote to say that she will be starting an M.A. in Mediaeval History at King's College London in September, so I was pleased to encourage her in that and I am sure that we all wish her well.

7. Patricia Croxton-Smith (Hadstock) wrote that although it rained all day they raised another fantastic £4,500 at their St Botolph's Day Saturday Fete. Well done Hadstock!

8. By contrast, Lorna Brabin-Smith (Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake) wrote that their church celebrated with a wonderful concert by the capella group *Mosaic* and a festival service on the Sunday evening.

9. Peter Coleman (Boston, Lincolnshire) wrote sending me the Press Release below, which I am pleased to publish and wish Boston all the best for a successful venture.

PRESS RELEASE

EXCITING PLANS FOR ST BOTOLPHS CHURCH, BOSTON

St Botolphs Church, Boston is developing a major project entitled '*Inspiring Journeys – Moving Stories*' which will tell the many stories associated with this iconic church and the people who have been inspired by it over the centuries.

Whilst still in its development stage the £3.5 million scheme will improve the environment within the church, repair its famous tower; get more people involved with telling its unique story in a new Heritage Learning Centre adjacent to the church. It is also proposed to improve the areas around the church for the benefit of visitors and residents alike.

The church is working with interpretation and activity plan consultants, architects and potential partners to develop the project further.

There is still a lot of work to do but the church is looking towards a submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund later in 2015.

For more information please contact Project Development Officer Peter Coleman on 01472 398637 phcoleman@supanet.com or 07887943125.

Endnotes

Please do not hesitate to write to me or send an email to botolph@virginmedia.com if you have any alternative views to those expressed in *The Botolphian*. It is good to engender some controversy from time to time!

Regular Endnotes

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.

B: 'Travellers' churches.

Bearing in mind that the Danish invasions started in c.800 and continued for 200 years, it seems logical to sub-divide Type B (and perhaps type C) churches into those which appear to have been founded:-

- (i) before 800
- (ii) between 800 and 1066 and
- (iii) after the Norman Conquest.

C: Neither of the above.

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Folkestone, Kent. 1st May 2013.