

## The Location of St James Pockthorpe

THE CHURCH of St James Pockthorpe stands at the junction of Barrack Street (*Bargate Street* in the 18th century but known as *regia via que tendit apud Pokethorp* in 1298 – Sandred and Lindström 1989, 86- 87) and Whitefriars (historically part of Cowgate). Its present setting, immediately south of Barrack Street and east of a widened and realigned Cowgate, broadly reflects the situation existing in 1883 as observable on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map. However, the creation of the Inner Ring Road and its roundabout in 1974 effected considerable violence on the northward extension of Cowgate. There is also some evidence that the Whitefriars stretch of Cowgate south of the church has itself been realigned, perhaps more than once; evidence for a 14th-century road surface was uncovered in excavation in 1992 (Emery and Ayers 1999, 279ff, plate2 and fig.4). Notwithstanding the proximity of the Norman Hospital, a 12th-century foundation on the west side of Cowgate, the excavated evidence also suggested a hitherto unknown embayment of the river to the east, only gradually infilled and occupied.

Such an embayment or similar would mean that the church of St James was founded close to the river - or river marsh - margins. Linkage southward must have existed, probably via some form of causeway, to St Martin's bridge (now Whitefriars Bridge) over the River Wensum. This bridge is known to have been in existence in 1106, and was probably pre-Conquest in origin (Johnson and Cronne 1956, 55; Ayers 1983, 56). Interestingly, the parish boundary of St James does not reach the river at the bridge; here the location is part of the parish of St Martin-at-Palace, a church on the south bank, and St James only touches the river further east in an area which, from the later 13th century, was part of the Carmelite Friary.



Location of St James' Church,  
detail from the Ordnance Survey, 1883 edition

The complicated nature of parish boundaries in this part of the north bank zone is difficult to explain. St James is largely bounded to the west by Cowgate save for a small westward extension (apparently south of an east-to-west ditch) biting into the parish of St Paul and into the precinct of the Norman Hospital. The parish of St Martin-at-Palace extends northward from a widened 'bridgehead' along the western side of Cowgate as a narrow strip until it reaches the westward extension of St James. The eastern and northern boundaries of St James itself were the line of the city wall by the 19th century although, north of the site of Bargate on Barrack Street, the boundary extended outside the wall and followed the centre

of the (post-medieval?) extramural road. This minor extramural extension is likely to have been a post-medieval adjustment to enable incorporation of housing built against the exterior face of the city wall into St James's parish.

Notwithstanding the above, however, it seems clear that the parish of St James once extended much further to the north and east. It and the parish of St Paul were apparently carved out of the earlier parish and manor of Thorpe, taking the name Pockthorpe (or 'little Thorpe') as a result (Blomefield 1806, 4.425). Thorpe manor was granted to the bishop of Norwich in 1106 who probably also founded St James's church. The bishop had a grange at the eastern end of Barrack Street called *The Lathes*. He also held the parish of St Martin-at-Palace (and had done so since before the Conquest) and was the founder of the Norman Hospital and its associated parish of St Paul. Early post-Conquest control, therefore, of this part of Norwich was solidly within episcopal hands and it is not unreasonable to suggest that the somewhat intricate parish relationships are the result of episcopal decisions. These decisions, however, may well have been influenced by pre-existing administrative and topographical situations.

Administratively, the area within which the church of St James is located was either immediately east of a defensive boundary ditch of probable Late Saxon or Anglo-Scandinavian date (Carter 1978, 201 and fig.8d), or within a possible aristocratic Anglo-Scandinavian *haga* or elite enclosure which was (or became) part of the bishop's liberty (Ayers 2011, 88). Topographically, the street-name *Cowgate* is suggestive. It derives from the Old English *cū* ('cow') and the Old Norse *gata* meaning 'street' or 'way' (Sandred and Lindström 1989, 100). Originally it curved from a junction with Magdalen Street, extending eastward and then south, past St James's church to the river and a crossing at Whitefriars Bridge. This circuitous route, traversing boggy ground north of the river, led to an open space on the south bank (*Bichil* now St Martin-at-Palace Plain) which could perhaps have served as a secondary market place. An admittedly small sample of cattle bone recovered from an excavation adjacent to *Bichil* in 1979 indicated that, at an early period, the animal bone was predominantly derived from butchery rather than domestic waste (Cartledge 1983, 32), suggesting the possibility that cattle for the Anglo-Scandinavian town were driven to this location. St Martin is a known pre-Conquest church and the route to it and its adjacent area may therefore have been partly secured by its parish boundary being extended northwards, thereby compromising the boundaries of the later churches of James and Paul.

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