

## St John Maddermarket

### *Location*

The church and churchyard of St John the Baptist Maddermarket stand on a triangular site adjacent to the north side of Pottergate. The church occupies the full width of the base of the triangle, that is at the southern extremity of the site, with its churchyard extending north towards the junction of St Andrew's Street and Charing Cross (this latter historically *Tonsoria* in 1286 and *le Scherereshil* in 1309; both names relate to shearmen, those who sheared the knap on woollen cloth - Sandred and Lindström 1989, 96). Maddermarket (named thus since at least 1229 when it was *Madelmarkette*) refers to the root of madder (OE *mædere*) and formed an open space presumably for the sale of dyestuffs close to the cloth finishing quarter (Ayers 2006, 32 - 34). It is possible that the churchyard has encroached upon the open space which may have originated as a rectangular area with a small market church or chapel at the furthest extremity from Charing Cross.

The surviving architecture of the church makes it evident that the principal aspect of the building was originally to the north. Access southward to the east and west of the building seems always to have existed, the road to the east known as St John Maddermarket and the narrow passageway to the west as Maddermarket Alley or St John's Alley. This latter was encroached upon by the later medieval tower of the church and access was maintained by construction of a vaulted arch which pierces the tower.

The church of St John is situated on rising ground above both the River Wensum and its tributary, the Great Cockey. It is thus in an eminent position although probably not a pre-eminent one. The most striking location was almost certainly held by St Gregory which not only overlooks the site of the Charing Cross itself and the fork in the road there, but also is likely to have dominated the intersection of two Roman roads and access to early bridging of the Wensum. St John Maddermarket was tangential to all this.

The cockey lies to the east of Maddermarket and today forms the parish boundary between St John Maddermarket and St Andrew. However, it did not do so until c. 1551 when the small neighbouring parish of Holy Cross or St Crowche was amalgamated with St John. Cast iron parish boundary markers survive affixed to the side wall of the Bedford Street (historically Pottergate) frontage building on the east side of Post Office Alley. This eastern parish boundary now runs reasonably directly northward to the river. The western boundary, with the parish of St Gregory, is indented through numerous right-angled changes of direction before it too reaches the river; the somewhat convoluted directional nature of the boundary here perhaps indicates establishment after considerable urban development rather than on a *tabula rasa* site. To the south, the parish boundary lies beyond the line of Pottergate, forming part of the boundary between Wymer and Mancroft wards.



### Dating and dedication

Dating of the foundation of St John Maddermarket is not easy. Blomefield, writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, states clearly that the church 'is as ancient as most in the city, being founded before the Confessor's survey' and 'the patronage of it was in 12 *burgesses*, by whom it is most likely to have been built; it seems the Conqueror seized it and gave it to the *Bishop*' (Blomefield 1806, 4:287). His source for this statement is Domesday Book where 'Holy Trinity' is held by 12 burgesses, a church that he equates, without evidence, with St John Maddermarket (Blomefield 1806, 3:17). The idea that the origins of the church were pre-Conquest in date seems thereafter to have been followed uncritically by other commentators; Sandred and Lindström state that the 'dedication was originally to the Holy Trinity and St John the Baptist' although none of their documentary references mentions Holy Trinity (1989, 42 – 43) while Groves, after an opening statement that 'St John's dates back to Anglo-Saxon times' proceeds, presumably following Blomefield, with the observation that the foundation 'may be one of the churches mentioned in the *Domesday Book*, where it is called Holy Trinity' (Groves 2010, 61). The idea that the church is that referred to in Domesday as Holy Trinity therefore remains unproven and can probably be discounted.

There is nothing in the surviving fabric of the church to suggest a pre-Conquest date and indeed there is very little archaeological material from the surrounding area to enable characterisation of this part of the city as 'urbanised' by the time of the Conquest. Rather, the only excavation to have been undertaken in close proximity to the church, at 5 Lobster Lane immediately to the east in 1977, uncovered evidence for industrial activity in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, late Thetford-type ware pots being manufactured (Atkin *et al* 1983, 70ff). Earlier, pre-Conquest, industry lay to the east on Bedford Street, beyond the Great Cockey. Manufacture seems to have started there and extended westward over time. Indeed the paradox has been noted that, although Bedford Street and Lobster Lane were historically part of Pottergate, they are the only locations where pottery manufacture has been detected, that part of the street now called Pottergate (including the stretch past the church of St John Maddermarket) yet to produce any such material.

Detail from 1883 OS map with the parish boundary between St Gregory (left) and St John Maddermarket highlighted.



St John Maddermarket church viewed from the north  
(Brian Ayers)

There is earlier evidence west of the church, from St Gregory's parish onward, but the parish of St John Maddermarket itself seems to have been formed between this western 'suburb' and the industrial area. Before 1066, the land to the south may have been largely open fields - 'Mancroft', the *magna crofta* ('great fields') or the *Manecroft* ('fields of the men', presumably the common fields) – and the foreshore of the Wensum to the north perhaps a marshy estuarine outflow of the cockey. Without further evidence, it is difficult to ascribe with certainty a pre-Conquest foundation date to the church although presumably there was sufficient activity both to the east and west to ensure

that the ward boundary of the French borough of Mancroft did not extend northward to the river after 1070.

A parish of St John Maddermarket is recorded about 1250 (Sandred and Lindström), the suffix indicative that by that date the church was already heavily associated with the cloth-finishing trade. Textile workers are evident in the late 13th-century Enrolled Deeds; hosier, linen-draper and tailor are among the occupations that are listed. It is perhaps also significant that when the city signed an agreement with French woad merchants from Corbie for the provision of dyestuffs to the city in 1286, the stipulation was made for an annual payment by the Frenchmen of 40s *per annum* 'to the community of Norwich ... at the nativity of St John the Baptist' [24<sup>th</sup> June] (Hudson and Tingey 1910, 211).

### **Bibliography**

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