

St Margaret *in combusto* or St Margaret Fyebridge

Location

THE CHURCH of St Margaret stood at the northern end of Magdalen Street on the west side. It was the most northerly church within the walled city and probably had a parish which extended beyond the line of the city wall. This can be deduced from the post-medieval extent of the parish of St Paul which could have gained its extramural area either side of Magdalen Road after it absorbed All Saints church in 1550/1551 (Sandred and Lindström 1989, 34); All Saints in turn appears to have absorbed a redundant St Margaret sometime after 1453 (Tanner 1984, 174). Blomefield deduced as much about the extent of St Margaret's parish when he stated:

'... all the land lying on the west side of the road, which is now in St. Paul's parish, originally belonged, and paid tithes to this parish, and that the triangular hill where the gallows formerly stood, now given to lay muck on, was also in this parish.' (Blomefield 1806, 4:440)

THE GALLOWS hill was mentioned because common criminals executed upon the gallows had the right to be buried in the churchyard of St Margaret. In consequence the church was also known by the suffix *ubi sepeliunter suspensi* ('where those who have been hanged are buried'). Of the other suffixes, *in combusto* relates to much of the area of Magdalen Street (cf St Mary Unbrent *in combusto*) and must relate to a significant fire here. The date of this fire is unknown and, while it is tempting to link the suffix to the destruction of Norwich in 1004 AD by King Sweyn Forkbeard of Denmark ('Swein came with his fleet to Norwich, and completely sacked the borough and burnt it down', Garmonsway 1972, 135), this remain unproven. The suffix *Fyebridge* refers to *Fibrigestrete* (c.1200) or *Fibbriggate* (1233) (Sandred and Lindström 1979, 106), earlier names for the length of Magdalen Street (and now confined, as Fye Bridge Street, to the short stretch between Fye Bridge itself and Colegate.)

THE GALLOWS probably stood somewhere in the vicinity of present-day Churchill Road. Blomefield states that the gallows was for

'the liberty of the prior of Norwich, he having liberty of infangenthef or judgement of theft, within his jurisdiction of Pokethorp, Norman's croft, Newgate, Holm-street, and the Prior's precinct.' (Blomefield 1806, 4:43 n.2)

This seems appropriate because the church of St Margaret was in the patronage of the Prior and Convent of the cathedral.

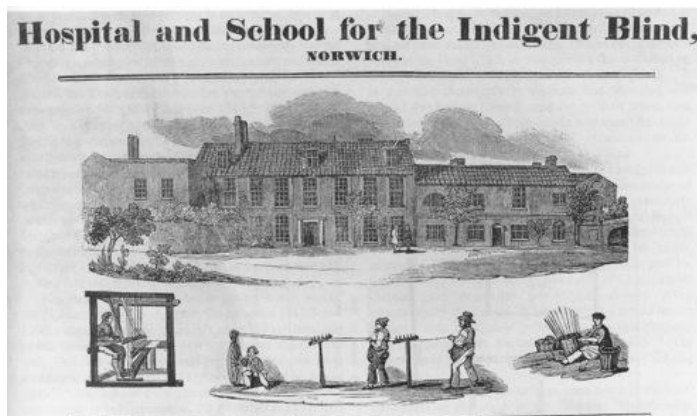
THE APPROXIMATE southern extent of the parish can be deduced from the Enrolled Deeds where it seems likely that, on the west side of the street, the parish boundary with that of All Saints was only a tenement or so away. East of the street, the parish extended further, to about halfway between the two churches. The full extent east and west is unclear although Kirkpatrick, writing

in the 1720s, stated that 'several Pieces of Ground as well Pasture ground as Gardens lye hereabout together, between the City Walls North, the House of Magdalen Street East, and those of St Austin's Street S.W.; part of it was called St Margaret's Croft [in 1465]'.

He further notes that 'in Hen. 3ds time a common Pathway ... lead ... from St Austin's Church Eastward, into the Church of St Margaret in Fibriggate' (Hudson 1889, 80). It can be suggested that the eastern end of this lane survived into the 18th and 19th centuries given indications on Hochstetter's map of 1789 and the First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1883.

ALTHOUGH THE CHURCH ceased to have parochial status in the 15th century it seems that the building was still standing as late as 1672. Dean and Chapter records mention '(ground with an house thereupon standing & builded heretofore called) the Chapell of Sct Margarett' (Sandred and Lindström 1989, 44). Detailed documentary research by the Norwich Survey in the 1970s examining Dean and Chapter rentals, abuttals and landgable rentals enabled the location of the churchyard to be determined with some confidence with its size being recorded in 1727 (58ft 9in x 33ft 0in x 57ft 0in x 39ft 9in). That the church stood upon land that was peripheral to settlement both early and late is indicated in the former case by the absence of any landgable rentals to the north of the church (landgable was a tax which ceased to be levied on newly-developed land after about 1130) and by references to barns, stables, orchards and gardens in the 16th and 17th centuries (Atkin and Evans [Kelly] 2002, 175 and 182).

By 1806 part of the site was occupied by a 'large and commodious house' which belonged to Thomas Tawell and which he gave to the Hospital and School for the Indigent Blind' (Atkin and Evans [Carter] 2002, 174). Set back from the frontage of Magdalen Street, this 17th-century building was illustrated in the margin of Corbridge's *Mapp of the City of Norwich* in 1727 when it belonged to John Beddingfield (it is the house second from the top in the right-hand margin) (Frostick 2002, fig. 26). It and other associated buildings seem to have formed the complex labelled as 'Blind Asylum' on the 1883 OS. It was extensively remodelled by Edward Boardman from 1889 to create the 'Norwich Institution for the Blind'. The building was badly damaged by bombing in the Second World War. Subsequently archaeological survey took place in 1973 with larger scale excavation in 1988 ahead of redevelopment. The site is now occupied by Throckmorton Yard.



Thomas Tawell's house illustrated in 1806

Excavated evidence

THE 1973 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY suggested that the church was a post-Conquest foundation of c. 1100. However, work was severely hampered by extensive cellars of the Blind Institute which occupied the street frontage, causing great damage to the underlying deposits and thus constricting excavation. In consequence evidence for the church itself was not found and much of the area of the graveyard consisted of charnel material, burials having almost certainly been disturbed by the 19th-century construction works (only two articulated burials were recovered) (Atkin and Evans [Evans] 2002, 159). More extensive excavation in 1988 also suggested that most of the site of the church had been destroyed although it is possible that flint footings

located at the western edge of the excavation may have represented the west wall of the building. In addition a 16th-century cellar was located at the street frontage which was partly constructed of reused stone, fragments of window dressing being recovered (Ayers 1987, 14).

MANY MORE GRAVES were recorded in 1988. A total of 436 articulated burials were excavated together with charnel material estimated to relate to between 400 and 600 others. All but 23 of the 436 articulated burials were sufficiently complete to enable detailed examination and analysis. As a result the assemblage is one of the best medieval groups from Britain with important results for epidemiology including six early instances of treponemal disease. 76% of the individuals were male and 18% female. The remainder could not be assigned to a sex.



Dressed stone reused in wall of 16th-century cellar
© Norfolk Archaeological Unit



Group burial from St Margaret *in combusto*. Note those buried face-down, one with hands behind his back. Note also the reversed W/E burial rather than the more normal E/W orientation.

THE PREPONDERANCE of males may be due in part to the use of the graveyard for the burials of executed criminals. It is important to note that the analysed sample only represents some 50% of the total number of individuals recovered but the excavation was remarkable for the number of group burials, often of individuals clearly interred in haste: examples were found of face-down or prone burials, burials reversed, individuals with their hands behind their backs and other abnormal positioning. Furthermore some of the burials appear to have been clothed as clothing attachments were recovered such as lace-tag ends.

THE SKELETAL ASSEMBLAGE has been published (Stirland 2009) although the charnel material remains to be analysed. The published volume contains a summary of the excavated evidence but this too awaits full publication.

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