



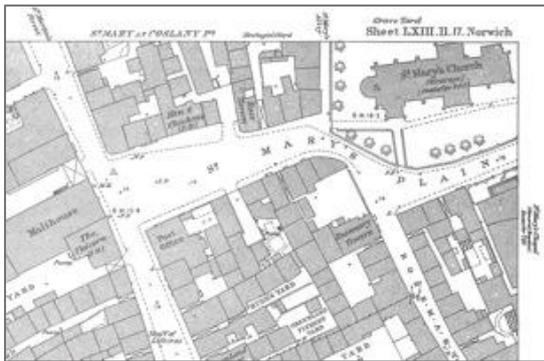
## THE MEDIEVAL CHURCHES OF NORWICH: CITY, COMMUNITY AND ARCHITECTURE

[www.norwichmedievalchurches.org](http://www.norwichmedievalchurches.org)

### The Location of St Mary Coslany

THE CHURCH of St Mary Coslany is located on St Mary's Plain, an open area between Oak Street and Pitt Street. The church and its churchyard occupy the majority of this open area which later appears from cartographic evidence to have been encroached upon west of the church. An alleyway survives to the north of the churchyard, perhaps once linking westward towards Oak Street and, west of this street, to New Mills Yard. To the south, the churchyard has been encroached upon by the east-to-west route which runs past the church to join Oak Street to present-day Muspole Street. This encroachment has occurred since 1883. In short, the churchyard has the appearance of originally being an 'island' church, occupying a widening of Muspole Street immediately north of the low-lying marshy *Muspol* itself.

LINKAGE OF ST MARY'S PLAIN and Muspole Street is suggested by Sandred and Lindström (1989, 138) who note that the early name of Soutergate applied to both in the 14th century with the name St Mary's Plain being first recorded in the 18th century. Kirkpatrick calls the 'large void ground' between Oak Street and the church by the name St Mary's Plain and the street south and east of the church Soutergate (Hudson (ed.) 1889, 74-75). He identifies the origin of the latter 'from Shoemakers there dwelling' as early as the reign of Edward II, a derivation confirmed by Sandred and Lindström.



Ordnance Survey, 1883

THE EXTENT of the parish encompasses the waterfront of the Wensum and, westward, includes a stretch of Pitt Street. To the north, it is possible that part of the parish of St Olave was attached to St Mary after the former became redundant in the 16th century. Campbell states that the parish of St Olave was added to St George Colegate in 1546, presumably in its entirety. However, the northern part of St Mary's parish could have been taken from St Olave or, conceivably, from St Martin (Campbell 1975, 24 and map 7).

THE NORTHERN SITUATION is of interest because of the topographical location of the church. Not only is the site of the church on elevated ground as part of the low ridge of Oak Street but it also overlooked low-lying and marshy ground to the south-west and possibly similarly boggy land immediately to the north. Kirkpatrick recorded that a channel existed within St Martin's Lane (abutted by the parish boundary of St Mary Coslany) 'to convey water out of St Olave's Street [Pitt Street] to the cockey in St Marteyn's' (Hudson (ed.) 1889, 74).

THE SITUATION of St Mary Coslany as an 'island' church is also interesting. 'Island' churches have been discussed by Morris who notes that they are particularly common in towns (Morris 1989, 212). Several can be identified in Norwich from the obvious (such as St Martin-at-

Palace or the lost church of St Michael Tombland) to the less obvious (such as St Clement Colegate and St John Maddermarket). That of St Mary Coslany is striking because the churchyard is extensive yet the church itself occupies the southern part of this large area, confining most burials to the north and east of the extant building. Archaeological evidence is lacking (save for a watching brief in 1985 which recorded a low wall north of the tower during observation of a contractor's trench – see NHER553) but it can be suggested that perhaps an early, possibly timber building, stood to the north with a stone structure being subsequently constructed south of it. Such a possibility is likely at the church of St Benedict where a putative timber precursor to the late-11th-century stone church has been suggested as an explanation for burials which predate the earliest stone building (Roberts and Atkin 1982, 27). A similar situation may have prevailed at St Mary Coslany.

DATING OF THE FOUNDATION of the church is difficult. The earliest extant fabric, long thought to be pre-Conquest in date, is now understood to be from the first half of the 12th century owing to the use of Caen limestone in the tower openings. Any earlier timber structure could have been of more than one phase as was seen in excavation at St Martin-at-Palace (Beazley and Ayers 2001). The dedication, being common, is unhelpful.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beazley, O. and Ayers, B. 2001. 'Two Medieval Churches in Norfolk'. *East Anglian Archaeology* 96

Campbell, J. 1975. 'Norwich'. In Lobel, M. D. (ed.), *Historic Towns II*. London

Hudson, W. (ed.) 1889. *The Streets and Lanes of Norwich: a memoir by J. Kirkpatrick*. Norwich

Morris, R. 1989. *Churches in the Landscape*. London

NHER553, <http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/record-details?MNF553-St-Mary-Coslany's-Church-Norwich&Index=2&RecordCount=1&SessionID=c4e12325-733b-4613-baef-6e66a4cacc3e>

Sandred, K.I. and Lindstrom, B. 1989, 'The Place-Names of Norfolk: Part One - The Place-Names of the City of Norwich', *English Place-Name Society*, vol. XVI