

### **The Dedication of the Parish Church of St Saviour, Norwich.**

The church has access on all four sides and may well be a pre-1066 foundation date. There is, of course, no saint called Saviour, and it has 'always been said' that the church is actually dedicated in honour of the Transfiguration of the Holy Saviour, an event recorded in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9: 2-13; Luke 9: 28-36), when Jesus and three of his apostles went to a mountain (the Mount of Transfiguration). While on the mountain, Jesus began to shine with bright rays of light. The prophets Moses and Elijah appeared next to him and he spoke with them. Jesus was then called 'Son' by a voice in the sky, assumed to be God the Father, as at his Baptism.

However, the origins of the feast itself are less than certain. In the Eastern Church, it was widely adopted by 1000, but was not made a universal feast in the Western Church until 1457, when it was fixed on August 6 by Pope Callixtus III, the date that news of the raising of the Siege of Belgrade reached Rome (ODCC 1997, 1648). So, although the Anglo-Saxons knew of the Transfiguration, it is very unlikely to be the actual dedication. The 1254 Taxation of Norwich, Swyneflete's Inventory of 1368 (Watkin 1947, 8), and Goldwell's 1492 Visitation (Tanner 1984, 181) all refer to the church simply as 'Sancti Salvatoris', and the earliest reference to its being the Transfiguration seems to be in Blomefield's 18th-century work – and (as so often) he did not state his source. There are nine other medieval St Saviours in England, including one in York, known to be in existence by 1088, and one, now lost, at Surlingham near Norwich.

Elsewhere, Canterbury Cathedral was dedicated to St Saviour, probably by St Augustine around 603 though this was changed after the Norman Conquest. Another St Saviour dedication is in Dartmouth where the church was founded in 1286 and consecrated in 1372 as Holy Trinity, but by 1430 it was known as St Saviour. St Saviour or Christ Church was thus often an alternative for Holy Trinity. Nicholas Orme suggests that this is because people could empathise more readily with the Godhead in human form 'than with a cult as theological as the Trinity' – and, of course, of the three Persons Christ is the most commonly represented (Orme 1996, 35). So was St Saviour Norwich also once Holy Trinity? Not necessarily because York managed to have St Saviour as well as three Holy Trinity churches (Goodramgate, Micklegate, and King's Square), so the rule does not necessarily hold. The only other Trinity church in Norwich was the one

supplanted by the Cathedral (unless one of the excavated 'Castle Mall' churches was dedicated to the Holy Trinity.)

Probably the answer is to be found (as so often) in Rome, where the Lateran Basilica bears this dedication. Although it is always called St John Lateran, the large inscription on the façade reads: *Clemens XII Pont Max Anno V Christo Salvatori In Hon SS Ioan Bapt et Evang*; which translates as 'Pope Clement XII, in the fifth year of his reign, dedicated this building to Christ the Saviour, in honour of Saints John the Baptist and John the Evangelist.' Given the propensity for Anglo-Saxons to replicate 'Rome at home' by reproducing the dedications of the Roman city churches (Cambridge 1999, 211), is it too much to assume that St Saviour represents the Lateran dedication?

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