

The Lost Church of St Botolph

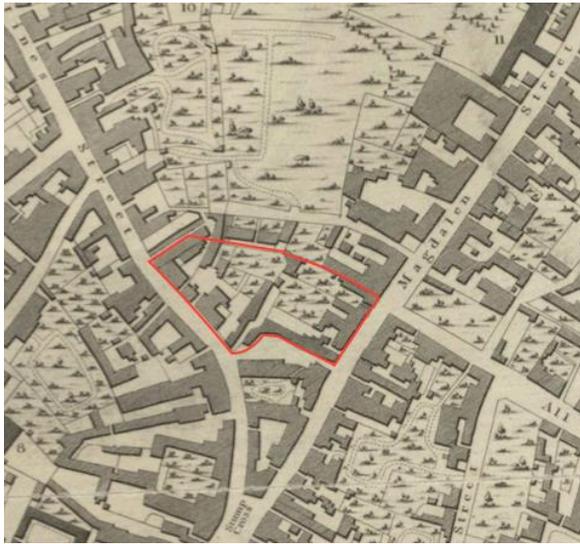
St Botolph was a 7th-century East Anglian saint, traditionally associated with the pre-Conquest monastic community at *Icanho* (probably Iken near Snape in Suffolk). This monastery was allegedly destroyed in Viking raids and the saint's relics were then removed in the 10th century (although Pestell contends that the story of the destruction may have merely been justification for the removal - Pestell 2004, 91). The translation of the relics ultimately entailed the splitting of the body into three parts for distribution to different monastic establishments: the head went to Ely, the middle part to Thorney, and the remainder to Westminster.

In London, four churches were dedicated to the saint: St Botolph's Aldgate, Aldersgate, Bishopsgate and Billingsgate. All the London churches were located next to gateways in the city wall, even Billingsgate where the foundations of the lost church were excavated in the 1980s next to river access through the remains of the Roman riverside wall. This association with boundaries seems to have been common by the end of the 11th century and indeed St Botolph Billingsgate was where merchants from Flanders, Normandy and the Rhineland paid tolls. Even churches abroad, such as St Botolph in Viborg, Denmark, were located at the boundary of the medieval town (Morris 1989, 219). The position of the lost St Botolph in Norwich therefore is intriguing.

The earliest known documentary reference to the Norwich church is in the later 13th century when it is referred to as *(Ecclesia) Sancti Botulphi* (Sandred and Lindström 1989, 36) but it seems very probable that the church existed before 1066. Deconsecrated by 1548, it was amalgamated with the parish of St Saviour and presumably demolished. The exact location of St Botolph's church and churchyard remains to be ascertained although there is tentative archaeological evidence as well as antiquarian assertion. The former consists of skeletal remains uncovered by a mechanical excavator digging a trial hole near the junction of Botolph Street with Magdalen Street in 1967 (preparatory to the construction of Anglia Square). This observation is supplemented by anonymous anecdotal evidence of significant numbers of skeletons being disturbed on the pre-Anglia Square Odeon cinema site. The antiquarian assertion is by Blomefield, writing in the 1740s. Discussing St Botolph's church, he stated that

'its churchyard abutted east on the said street [Magdalen Street], and west on St. Buttolph's, commonly called Buttle-street: and is now the White-horse-yard
(Blomefield 1806, 442)

White Horse Yard is indicated as linking Magdalen Street and Botolph Street on Millard and Manning's map of 1830. The church and its yard would have extended north of this location, between the yard and another lane and, in 1830, immediately south of a large area of open space (Fig. 1). The probable location is shown particularly well on the 'Invisible Works' website and depicted in relation to other lost churches nearby (such as All Saints) and the extant church of St Saviour (<http://www.invisibleworks.co.uk/magdalen-street-hidden-history/>).



Detail of Millard and Manning's map of Norwich 1830 with probable extent of the churchyard of St Botolph highlighted

South of this location, Millard and Manning show a small triangular area of development between White Horse Yard and the open space known as Stump Cross, which formed the junction between Magdalen Street and Botolph Street (since destroyed by the building of Anglia Square). Here a further attribute of St Botolph is relevant. As well as being linked with boundaries, he was associated with merchants, merchandising, markets and fairs. One of the greatest fairs of medieval England was held in the shadow of the great church of St Botolph at Boston, Lincs.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the Magdalen Street area is one of the earliest parts of Norwich to be settled, most probably predating market activity on the south bank around Tombland which itself perhaps originated in the mid-10th century (the name

Tombland deriving from ON *tōm* 'empty' or 'open' and *land*) The inverted triangle of a widening street north of St Saviour's church towards St Botolph has the landscape characteristic of a market place and indeed the place-name Stump Cross probably indicates as much. This was a relict shaft of a cross, still standing in the 18th century, and most probably indicating a lost market location.

The suggested situation of St Botolph's church, astride the land at the base of the triangle and with frontages to its churchyard on both Magdalen Street and Botolph Street, is therefore appropriate in two ways. Firstly, Botolph's association with boundaries means that this Norwich church was a double 'gate guardian', standing close to where both streets went through the early 10th-century Anglo-Scandinavian defensive bank and ditch (Ayers 2009, 33 and fig. 11). Secondly, the saint's association with markets and trade ensured that the church oversaw mercantile activity in the widened street immediately to its south, activity perhaps obscured from the churchyard by market infilling beyond White Horse Yard.

The advowson, or right to nominate the priest, of the church was in secular hands for much of the medieval period. Blomefield notes that the advowson was purchased in 1308 by Master Eustace de Kimberle and then conveyed to Aylmer de Sygate of Erpingham. It only passed into ecclesiastical hands in 1446 when it was given or sold by Sir Thomas Kerdeston to the prior and convent of Horsham St Faith (Blomefield 1806, 442-443). This private patronage suggests that the origins of the church were, in common with other churches north of the river, neither ecclesiastical or royal but probably resulted from mercantile endowment.

Bibliography

- Ayers, B. 2009. *Norwich: Archaeology of a Fine City*. Stroud.
- Blomefield, F. 1806. *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk IV*. London.
- Morris, R. 1989 (1997 edition). *Churches in the Landscape*. London.
- Pestell, T. 2004. *Landscapes of Monastic Foundation: The Establishment of Religious Houses in East Anglia, c.650 - 1200*. Woodbridge.
- Sandred, K.I. and Lindström, B. 1989, 'The Place-Names of Norfolk: Part One - The Place-Names of the City of Norwich', *English Place-Name Society*, vol. XVI.