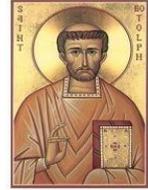




# The Botolphian

Newsletter of  
The Society of Saint Botolph

[www.botolph.info](http://www.botolph.info)



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## Highlights this month

- St Botolph's church, Bale, Norfolk.
- It gives me great pleasure to welcome Marcia Barton from St Botolph's Church, Chevening in Kent as a new member..
- Correspondence from Revd Roger Smith, John Sennett and Guy Hartfall.

## Editorial

I am greatly looking forward to the Society's Annual Luncheon in Cambridge on 4th October - and particularly to Roy Tricker's talk:

*Amazing Iken - Botolph's Holy Place.*

Zina and I are also looking forward to renewing the friendships that we have made with people who have attended in previous years.

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The pace has been hotting up regarding Zina's and my visit on 11th October to the St Botolph Club in Boston, Massachusetts. I am most grateful to Roger Howlett, my contact there, who has been doing sterling work (in the face of some adversity) attempting to arrange as many meetings and lectures as he can in order for me to raise the profile of our saint on the other side of 'the pond.' I am looking forward to meeting face-to-face the many friends that I have made 'electronically' through the Society.

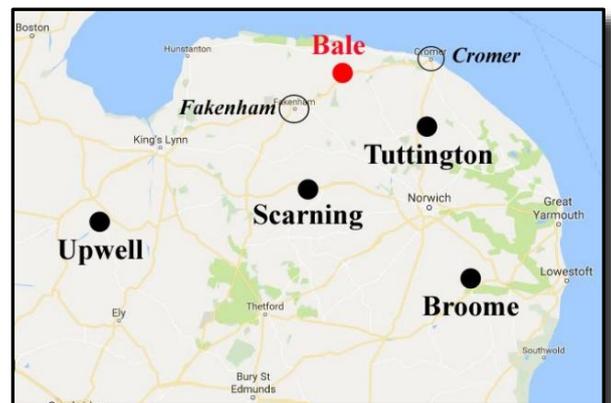
## Free Chapels and Chantries in Norfolk

On page 8 of his introduction to *English Royal Free Chapels, 1100-1300*:(Manchester University Press, 1970), Jeffery Denton writes that a 'Free Chapel' is described as such because **it is not**

**dependent upon a parish church and has no parochial responsibilities.** Thus the *freedom* refers to freedom from the parish. It does not include freedom from the control of a bishop.

In Norfolk there are five churches dedicated to Saint Botolph which are recorded as being 'Free Chapels' and these were once to have been found at **Bale, Broome, Scarning, Tuttington and Upwell.**

I say 'once' because sadly they have now sunk from view leaving hardly a trace of their former existence. We have already featured Tuttington in the June 2017 edition of *The Botolphian* and Upwell was featured in June 2016. The time has now come to consider the remaining three chapels to see if we can discover some relationship between their status of being 'free' and the fact that (at least above ground) they have generally not stood the test of time as successfully as their 'unfree' sisters.



At this point it might be interesting to note that of the 82 British churches and chapels that are on record as bearing St Botolph's name, two exist only as surface ruins and another thirteen exhibit no sign above ground. Of these thirteen the exact

locations of eight are known, two are guessable and three are, for the moment, totally lost. Authenticity for labelling seven of the 82 as 'Botolph Churches' is still being researched and 'new finds' are constantly coming to light.

All five of these Norfolk Free Chapels have suffered the common indignity of being razed and built upon. As we investigate the first of these three - namely the chapel at Bale we must keep in the back of our minds the possibility that their early demise was somehow caused by their 'freedom.'

### Church Feature

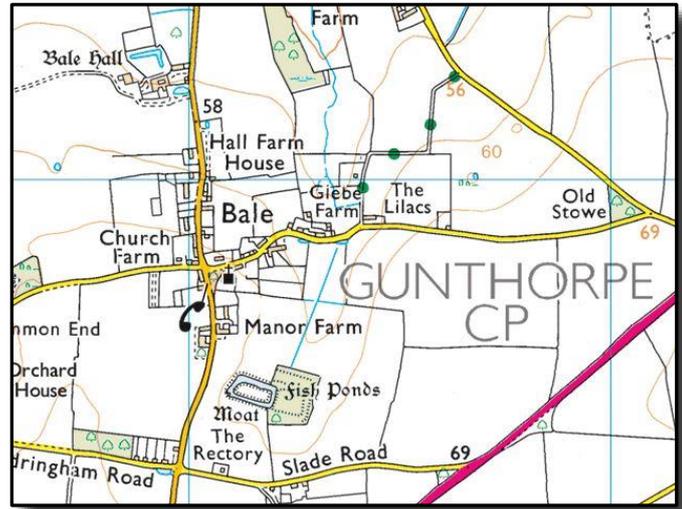
## Bale, Norfolk.

**Approach:** (For anyone who is eccentric enough to want to go to see a chapel that is not there). Approaches to Bale might be via Cambridge, Bury St Edmunds or Norwich but either way it is probably best to make Fakenham your original target. Once there take the A148 Holt Road towards Cromer. After about 7 miles start looking for the BP Service Station on your left and once past it take the next left hand turning and drive along Field Dalling Road for 700 yards whereupon you will see the church and village sign on your right. Take the next turning right along Sharrington Road and after 80 yards you will find the flint and brick faced cottage on your left.

**Location:** Sharrington Road, Bale, Gunthorpe, Norfolk, NR21 0QY. NGR: TG0115436826. Lat/long: 52.891210, 0.988873.

As seen on the first map (above), the village of Bale lies 14 miles west south west of Cromer on the road to Fakenham which is 9 miles further on.

Francis Blomefield in his *Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* starts the complications by telling us that 'Bathele or Bale' was 'in the Crown as a **beruite** to the royal manor of Fakenham.' The Oxford English Dictionary was of no help to me regarding this obscure word and the internet seemed reluctant to accept that I did not want to know about Beirut. Eventually through devious means I discovered that a 'beruite' is a 'small lordship.'



Today there is only one church in Bale and that is dedicated to All Saints. It dates from C14 and is positioned near the crossroads.



Outside the church is the village sign, the top part of which represents an ancient oak tree which used to stand nearby until 1860 when it became unsafe and was removed. It is said that the tree was 500 years old and that the site upon which it stood had, in times gone by, been used for pagan worship.



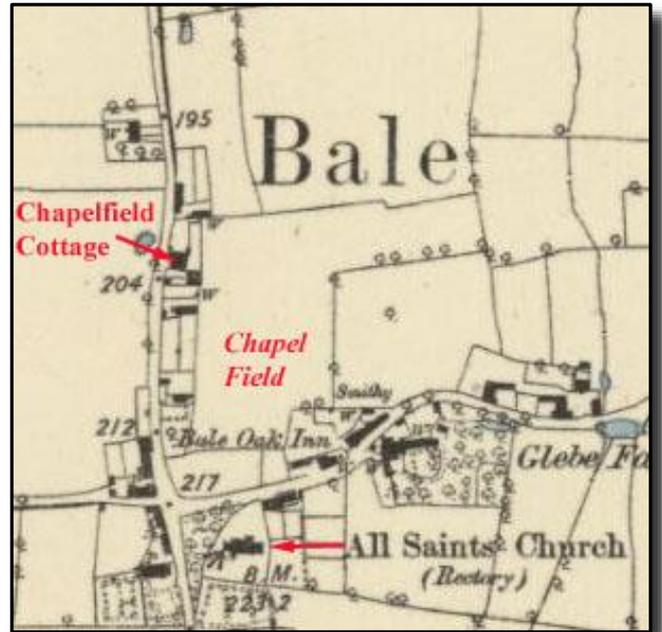
Francis Blomefield records its hollow being “so large that ten or twelve men may stand within it.”

Blomefield wrote in 1808: “In this town was also a chapel dedicated to St Botolph in 1421. Richard Brown gave by will, in 1510, 13s 4d to the repair of it.”

I was somewhat flummoxed regarding the actual location of the chapel until I happened across an advertisement for holiday lets at Chapelfield Cottage on the Field Dalling Road - which was in the area where I suspected the lost chapel might have been. I took my courage in both hands and telephoned the owner, Judith Everitt, and ventured the question of why her property was so named.

Judith might have been less than helpful but was quite the reverse and spent a generous amount of time talking to me on the telephone. She explained that she had named her house on the suggestion of a local gentleman who told her that she should call it that because there used to be an old chapel at the bottom of the field in which the house was built.

Judith also said that an hostelry called the Angel and Oak Public House once stood close to the lower end of the field. It had since been turned into a private dwelling and she recalled some ancient skeletons being discovered there some months previously.



Following these clues I looked up the local newspaper reports and found the following photograph heading an article written by Chris Bishop and published on 8th December 2015 in the Eastern Daily Press.



Chris Bishop wrote: “It transpires that there could have been a chapel on the site before a pub was built in the 1750s and the remains were found because the owner is having underfloor heating installed.”

My next action was to contact Norfolk County Council who kindly sent me two reports compiled by the archaeologists who had looked into the case.

The first report was concerning the existence of the chapel and two sources were quoted - the first being Blomefield as mentioned above and the second being the *All Saints Church, Bale: Guide*

Book which recorded that a St Botolph's Chapel stood 'until 1776 northeast of the church.'

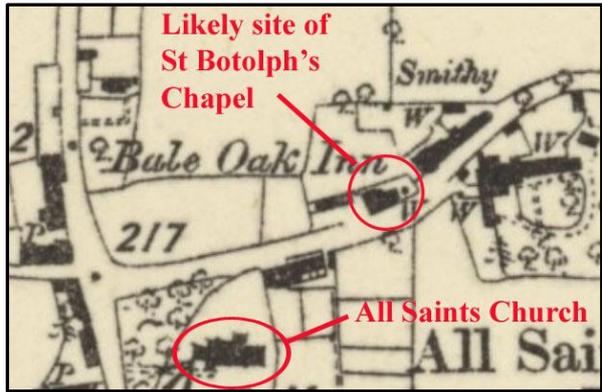
The second report concerned the finds and carried the following note: . . . *the house, which was known as Buttals after it had ceased to be an inn, may be on the site of St Botolph's Chapel.'*

Under 'Monumental Types and Dates' there was the information:

CHAPEL (Medieval - AD 1066 to AD 1539)

Evidence: CONJECTURAL EVIDENCE.

INN (Post Medieval - AD 1540 to AD 1900)



Before the fortuitous discovery of the skeletons it was generally known that the chapel was somewhere to the northeast of All Saints Church but the question was "just how far to the northeast?" Luckily that question seems now to have been answered. The maps above are dated 1885.

There is little doubt in my mind that this now identifies the site of the lost chapel but a mystery has developed regarding the date of discovery of the skeletons because although the newspaper article itself is dated December 2015 - the County Council reports relate to 1990. This makes me wonder if the Eastern Daily Express reporter had not actually *re-discovered* old news and manipulated it to make the event seem more recent and hence more sensational. Speaking to Judith again today however, December 2015 tallies with her memory of the circumstances - and, having lived in the village for 70 years, she would be the one to know.

### Classification:

Less than 4 miles to the northwest of Bale lie the ruins of the former Binham Benedictine Priory. It was founded by Peter de Valognes (a nephew of William the Conqueror and Tenant-in-Chief of Binham) in late C11 and was dependant on St Alban's Abbey. Its maximum occupancy, which occurred in C14, was only fourteen monks. It succumbed to the Reformation in 1539.



If we did not know that Bale St Botolph's was a Free Chapel, one might have suspected it of being connected in some way to the priory. However the Domesday Record shows that, rather than Perter de Valognes, it was King William himself who was Tenant-in-Chief both of Bale and of the other villages that lay along the road from Bale towards Fakenham. In the land *surrounding* the king's demesne, Bishop William of Thetford held sway.

We are left with the following questions about the chapel:

- (i) Was it built before or after All Saints?
- (ii) Who built it and why?
- (iii) Why was it dedicated to St Botolph?

**Logically one could surmise** that, bearing in mind its dedication, the original field chapel might have been founded by Abbot Botolph or his disciples in C7 and subsequently rendered in stone which survived until mid C14 when the local lord updated the facilities by building the All Saints Church whereupon the earlier chapel fell into disuse.

**Against this** are the facts that the archaeologists who worked on the chapel site discovered no evidence of Saxon work - their earliest finding was a lead loom weight dating from between AD 1200 and 1600. The Domesday Book's failure to record the presence of any church supports the view that the chapel could not have been built until C12 or C13.

Francis Blomefield's essay relates that in 1208 Olewic de Clipesthorp conveyed his interest in the land at Bale to a Robert Burnel and that when he died (c.1250) the demesne became jointly owned by the lords of Hengham and Nugun. It was the son of the latter who, in 1303, endowed All Saints Church and instituted the first rector.

This suggests that it would have been Robert Burnel who founded the Saint Botolph chapel - perhaps around 1220. He would have founded it as a free chapel for his own family's use and for the use of the families who farmed his land and there must be little doubt that their products would have been grain and wool. By this date Hanseatic trading would be underway and Bale was well-placed to transport produce to the trading centre 30 miles away at (King's) Lynn where it would have been shipped by the same vessels which would cross The Wash to Boston.

Wayfaring would therefore be the name of the game, whether it be by land or sea and as its patron the name of Saint Botolph would be on many lips. The choice of dedication for the little chapel at Bale would be a foregone conclusion.

Robert Burnel no doubt prospered well and his chapel would have seen good and regular use up to and after his death. It would have been eclipsed however when his grandson Ralph founded the new church nearby. Although this is today dedicated to All Saints it might not have started that way. Indeed the Saint Botolph patronage might *initially* have been transferred but at the Reformation, when dedications to local saints were proscribed, the parish might well have followed the discretionary path of many other churches and swapped Saint Botolph for the less controversial title of All Saints.

In the meantime with the presence of the new church the little chapel would have become redundant - and, if it followed the same pattern as many of its sisters, been used as a barn until it gradually fell into ruins. Whether or not it was still functioning as a chapel in 1510 we will never know but Richard Brown willed 13s 4d towards its repair in that year so it looks as if it would have survived up to the Reformation - perhaps vying for business with the new church. Its eventual redundancy in favour of All Saints may have been precipitated because of its dedication to a local saint.

Much of this is conjectural of course and if any reader would care to offer an alternative view I will be delighted to hear from them. My answer for the moment to the question of 'Why is it that Saint Botolph Free Chapels were so frequently lost without trace?' is that it appears that they were eclipsed by the construction of a nearby 'non-free' church which by virtue of its attachment to the parish could command funds for its maintenance. Some of these new churches would have followed the Botolph dedication in which case we would never know that they had been preceded by a

Free Chapel. It is only when the new church changes its dedication while the memory of the saint associated with the earlier church lingers on that the movement becomes apparent.

This hypothesis will have to be tested against the other Free Chapels but it would seem to be valid in the case of both Bale and Tuttington.

I would therefore give Bale a 'C' classification - i.e. a Hanseatic chapel.

### Thanks

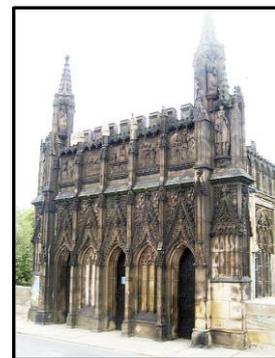
My sincere thanks to Judith Everitt for putting me on the right track in the first place and for spending time on the telephone with me today confirming that I had the local details correct.

### Readers' letters and emails.

1. My dear friend and passionate gardener the **Revd Roger Smith** wrote gently chiding me for suggesting that St Botolph's Botesdale might be better without the tree obscuring its northern face . . . "I'm all for the trees," he said.
2. **John Sennett** from Swyncombe sent the Oxfordshire concept of the appearance of our saint.



3. **Guy Hartfall** wrote from Culpho, Suffolk, drawing my attention to Christopher Howse' article in the Daily Telegraph of 30th October on *Yorkshire's two rare chapels on bridges*. The chapel in question was the one on the bridge at Wakefield which features six statues of saints viz: the Virgin Mary, St Christopher, St Paulinus, St Oswald, St James and . . . **St Botolph**.



I wondered if there was more to our saint's presence there than his position as Patron Saint of Wayfarers but the inclusion of the modern alternative patron St Christopher convinced me not to look for anything more complicated. The chapel is dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, St Paulinus was the first Bishop of York, St Oswald was the man who first united Northumbria and . . . St James? I came to the conclusion that he was there for the benefit of pilgrims on their way to Santiago di Compostela. Further ideas from others would be of interest.

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As far as I can see that is all the 'Readers' Letters' that I have received this month. The mailbox has been struggling to cope with a large amount of correspondence concerning my forthcoming visit to the St Botolph Club, Massachusetts and with emails concerning the SOSB Luncheon in Cambridge next week - so if I have missed any please let me know.

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Please do not hesitate to write to me or send an email to [botolph@virginmedia.com](mailto:botolph@virginmedia.com) if you have any alternative views to those expressed in *The Botolphian*. It is good to engender some controversy from time to time!

#### Regular Endnote:

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'NO THANKS.'

You will frequently see the 'twin' towns of *Boston* mentioned in these newsletters, - one in Lincolnshire and the other in Massachusetts USA. The relevance to the Society is that the name 'Boston' is said to be a contraction of '*Botolph's Town*.'

#### Classification of Botolph Church sites:-

- A: C7 church sites relevant to Botolph's life.
- B: 'Travellers' churches.  
Bearing in mind that the Danish invasions started in c.800 and continued for 200 years, it seems logical to sub-divide Type B (and perhaps type C) churches into those which appear to have been founded:-
  - (i) before 800
  - (ii) between 800 and 1066 and
  - (iii) after the Norman Conquest.
- C: 'Hanseatic' churches.
- D: None of the above.

#### Typical Characteristics of Early St Botolph Churches.

1. All are in the eastern half of England
2. Most have Saxon foundations.
3. Many lie with 3 miles of a Roman road or well-used waterway.
4. Most are situated close to the bottom of an escarpment but well clear of water levels.
5. Many are strategically placed in areas which represent the beginnings, middles and ends of long journeys.

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Folkestone, Kent. 1st May 2013.