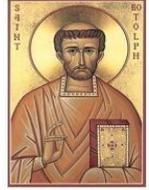




The Botolphian

Newsletter of
The Society of Saint Botolph

www.botolph.info



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Highlights this month

- **St Botolph's Church and Priory, Colchester.**

Editorial

Advent Greetings to you all as we approach Christmas once again. The older I become the smaller the gap between each Christmas seems to be. Having a three and a half year old grandson (Jacob) to enjoy it with me this year will, I am sure, provide much added value and merriment. I hope that, in spite of the return to masks and caution, you all have a wonderful Christmas and enjoy the festive season as much as I am determined to do.

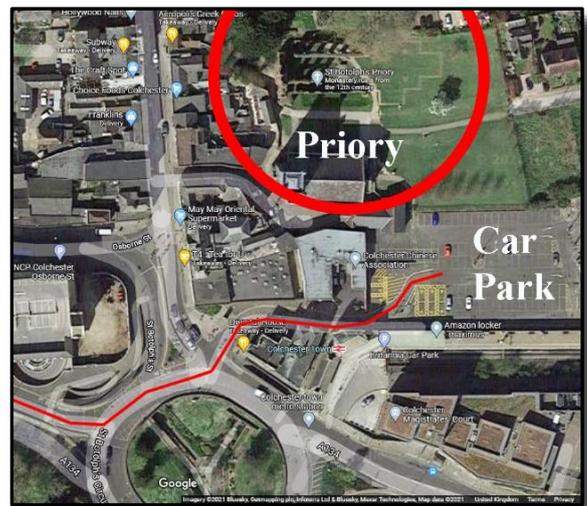
This month we are taking a second look at Colchester - the previous 'look' was in January 2015. The main part of this update is concerned with adding in the fact that the early St Botolph's Church spawned the first Augustinian priory in England - something which I had failed to recognise the first time round.



Feature

Colchester, Essex

Approach:- If leaving the A12 at Junction 26, take the A133 Cymbeline Way (named for Cunobelin, king of the local tribe between c.5 BC and AD. 40) which leads into Colne Bank Avenue. Take the third exit at the roundabout and drive down Westway taking the third exit at the next roundabout along Balkerne Hill. Then turn left (first exit) along A134 Southway to St Botolph's Circus. Cross the roundabout tangentially into Britannia Way (see satellite map below) and enter the car park.



Key: Sadly, for security reasons, the church is now kept locked when not in use but the churchwardens, David Poppleton: Tel:01206 570-725 or email poppletons21@gmail.com or Ron Levy 01206 574-210 will be pleased to open the church for any visitors.

Priest in Charge: *There is now no incumbent but the church is operating very successfully with the help of Local Lay Ministers and Mission and Ministry Units. They are fortunate to enjoy great support from both the Venerable Michael Fox (former Archdeacon in the Diocese of Chelmsford) and Canon Paul Norrington, the former Area Dean.*

Church services: *Matins: Sundays 1030.*

Concerts and events: *See the church's website: <https://stbotolphs.org/concerts/>*

Location of Car Park: *51.88658, 0.90460, Postcode: CO2 7EF. NGR: TL999249.*

Listed Grade of church: II

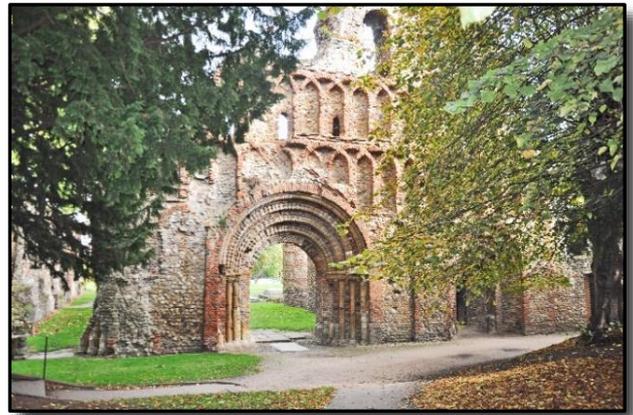
Colchester - City of Victory

(*Colonia Victricensis* as it was called by the Romans after the Claudian conquest of AD 43). Three decades or more earlier it had been known as *Camulodunum* - the stronghold (-dunum) of the Celtic god of war *Camulos*.

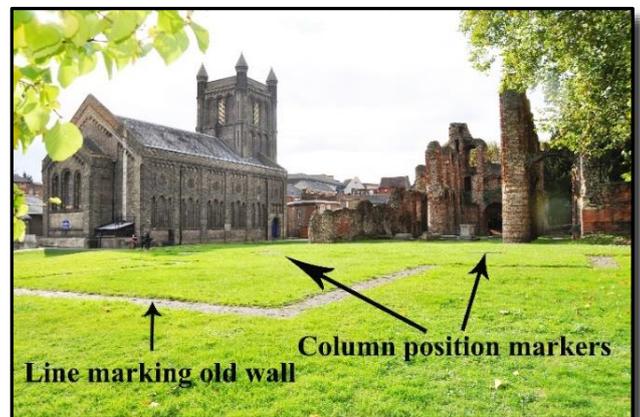
Another of its names was *Colneceaster* - fortress on the River Colne and indeed one of the reasons for the Roman's choice of *Camulodunum* as their capital was the existence of this river which (wider and deeper then) would have afforded good protection for a great number of vessels as well as providing a moated defence for the town. Throughout the Middle Ages Colchester was the largest town in Essex and by the end of C14 held the eighth biggest collection of habitations in England.

The town is celebrated as *the place where British urban life began* - on the basis that before the Romans changed our culture, our Celtish ancestors lived separately - rather than grouping themselves in 'towns'. After the Roman conquest the town was glorified for 17 years (AD 43-61) as the capital of Britain until Boudicca put the Roman noses out of joint.

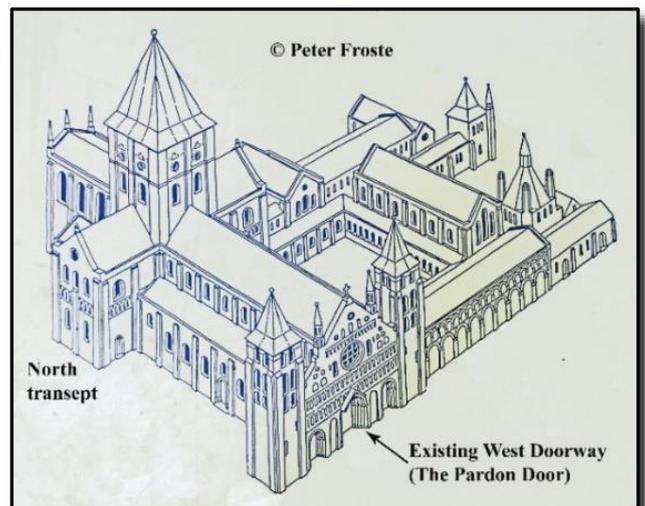
London was similarly sacked but rose to greater importance once rebuilt. Colchester was restored and reached its peak of prosperity in Roman times, in about AD 200. After the departure of the Romans (c. AD 410) there was a lull before the area was over-run by the arrival of Anglo-Saxons.



The Norman West Doorway is probably the first thing of architectural beauty that strikes one upon arrival. It was known as the *Pardon Doorway* because pardons were granted there on the feast of St Denis (9 October).



Walking through the doorway and onto the green area one finds the groundplan of the priory church conveniently marked out on the grass.



This picture (courtesy of Peter Froste) shows how the complex would have looked once it was properly up and running.

Another triumph to occur in the name of Saint Botolph was that Colchester Priory was the first Augustinian¹ house in England.

St Botolph's (Augustinian) Priory was founded on the site of an earlier St Botolph's church which lay just outside the town wall. We will consider later the implications of the existence of this early building. The hero of its conversion from a humble church to a highly significant Augustinian priory was a Kentish priest called Norman who had studied under Abbot Anselm (c.1033-1109) at the French monastery of Bec².

Bec

The abbey (which was named after the beck or stream which ran nearby) was founded in 1034 by the Benedictine monk Hellouin and eventually rose to become *the most influential abbey* of the C12 Anglo-Norman relationship.

It started from impoverished beginnings but in 1042 a blessing arrived in the guise of a former Italian lawyer called **Lanfranc** who, having gained a high reputation as an orator and teacher, decided to put his intellectual work to one side and enter monastic life. For the first three years of his time at Bec he lived in total seclusion but was then persuaded to open a school - the original purpose of which was to provide some income for the abbey.



¹ A Christian religious order which follows the Rule of Saint Augustine of Hippo, devised c. AD 400. The monks are sometimes known as *Austin Canons* or *Canons Regular* (i.e. Canons following a Rule).

The erudite Lanfranc quickly attracted pupils from all over Europe and Bec soon became the epitome of C11 intellect and teaching. One of his pupils was the 27-year-old Italian nobleman **Anselm** who renounced his inheritance in order to learn at Prior Lanfranc's feet.

In 1063 Lanfranc moved upwards to Caen to become the first abbot of St Stephen's Abbey (which Duke William II had just founded). Anselm replaced him as Prior of Bec.

In 1078 Bec's founding abbot Hellouin died and Anselm also moved upwards to replace him. Under Anselm's leadership the abbey went from strength to strength to become the foremost seat of learning in Europe.

Meanwhile in England, following the Norman Conquest, many French lords found themselves tenants of land and, partly as a way of relieving themselves of the responsibilities of administration and partly as a means of finding grace with God, they habitually gifted the tenancies to worthy abbeys in their French homeland. Caen and Bec were notable beneficiaries.

As part of his duties, the conscientious Anselm saw a necessity to regularly inspect those institutions for which his abbey had become responsible as a result of these lordly donations. His visits to England came with a bonus in that they gave him the opportunity to maintain a friendship with his former mentor Lanfranc who by then was Archbishop of Canterbury.

This sets the scene for the arrival at Bec of Norman the Kentish priest.

Norman was attracted to Bec by its reputation as a seat of learning, and after absorbing the logic of Anselm's theses on *Scholasticism*, *Neoplatonism* and *Augustinianism*, he returned to England. The little Botolphian church at Colchester was, at that time, home to a college of secular³ priests who lived without following any particular religious Rule (such as Benedictinism). It is not known whether at the time that Norman joined their ranks there was some dissatisfaction in their lack of regular direction or whether Norman, enthused by his time at Bec 'sold' the idea of Augustinianism to them.

Either way the idea proved to be a popular one and Ainulf, the college's leader, suggested he might

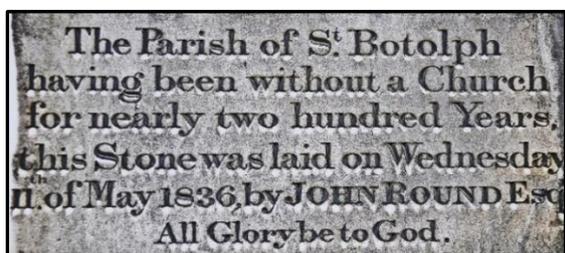
² Bec, you might remember, has featured several times previously in *Botolphians* - particularly in connection with St Botolph's church at Swyncombe in Oxfordshire.

³ 'Secular' - 'not belonging to any religious order'.

like to seek (on the college's behalf) the advice of his former tutor Anselm who had moved up again to replace Lanfranc as Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm's response was to give Norman a letter of introduction to the abbot of **Mont Saint Eloi**⁴ (near Arras) which had been established as a monastery in 1068 following the Augustinian Rule⁵. At Mont St Eloi, Norman and his companion received instruction on the principles of Augustinianism and advice on how to set up the first Augustinian priory in England. This latter event took place c. 1097⁶ and was formalised by a papal bull in 1116. Work on building the priory church started in early C12.

As well as being dedicated to St Botolph, the new priory also honoured St Julian, St Catharine of Alexandria, St Denis, St Thomas Becket and St Mary.

It flourished for the next 400 years until in 1536 the Dissolution of the Monasteries brought matters to a sudden halt and, of the buildings, the choir, cloisters and chapter house were destroyed, leaving the nave alone intact. This pressed on as the parish church until 1648 when, during the Siege of (Royalist) Colchester in the Second English Civil War, it faced another attack and was severely damaged by Thomas Fairfax's Model Army's erratic fire intended for the town's South Gate.



As lamented by a notice on the north wall, it would be another 200 years before the parish regained a place of worship.

St Botolph's Church today

By 1830 there was an urgent need for another Anglican church in Colchester and the plea for funding that was sent in 1835 to the Incorporated Church Building Society cited the misfortune of 'the Parish Church being in ruins'. Construction of the new church was speedy however. It was

⁴ Readers of my *Botolph Trilogy* will recognise St Eloi as *Eligius* - a C7 contemporary of the young Botolph. They met in Lutetia (Paris).

⁵ St Augustine of Hippo (354-430).

⁶ The foundation could not have taken place before Anselm became archbishop in 1093 and allowing for Norman's subsequent time in France and a charter of

dedicated in 1837 and had seating for a congregation of over one thousand.

Today's building is not only a masterpiece of masonry but also a joy of engineering in the cast-ironwork it contains. The builder was William Mason of Ipswich. The new church was built over the foundations of the refectory and cloisters of the old priory (see Fig.1 on page 7).

The concerts

It is not the cosiest St Botolph Church I have visited but it has many redeeming features and its size and magnificent acoustics have been put to good use by the church's development of a strong musical tradition.



Indeed it was Colin Nicholson (a member of the Society of Saint Botolph), who met Zina and me in 2014 and kindly showed us around. At that time he was conductor of St Botolph's Music Society.

Sadly, with the strictures of Covid, no concerts have been held here for a period of eighteen months but they were re-instated in Autumn 2021 and one hopes that they can keep going through this next Covid phase.

On Thursday 2nd December the church is hosting an Army Benevolent Fund Concert and on Saturday 18th December 2021 there will be a St Botolph's Music Society Concert.

Both start at 7.30 p.m.

<https://stbotolphs.org/concerts/>.

The church's ironwork

In 1811, adjacent to the priory site, there stood the ironworks of William Dearn, a nail maker. In 1827 his factory was renamed *St Botolph's Works* and from 1836 turned its function to that of an iron foundry.⁷ This coincided with the construction

c.1099 granting protection to the canons of the priory, its foundation must have occurred around 1097.

⁷ By 1871 under new owners it had become the thriving *Britannia Sewing Machine Company* but was overwhelmed by the American *Singer Sewing Machine Company* so as a matter of survival it again diversified into the manufacture of other products.

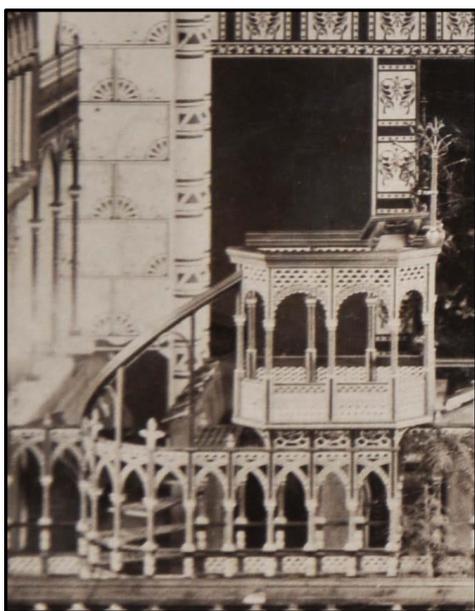
of the new St Botolph's Church and one would have expected the cast ironwork we find there, to have been sourced from this company next door. It was however a different Colchester ironworks which landed the contract - namely that of Arthur George Mumford in Culver Street.⁸



The chancel screens are elegantly crafted - in some contrast to the iron roof-support columns which are better described as 'functional'.



One feels surprised that the columns and capitals are *not* more elaborate but these of course were the days of Telford and Brunel and massive engineering projects where the whole ethos was one of 'might and power'.



⁸ The A.G. Mumford company later achieved worldwide fame for the manufacture of its ubiquitous 'Donkey Engine'.

As if to prove that iron too can be beautiful, the cast-iron pulpit with its sweeping stair access was a rare example of one iron-man's art and craft but, horror of horrors, it was cruelly broken up and destroyed in the 1970s. For hundreds of years church furniture had been made in wood and stone and I find it sad that, when a child of the Industrial Revolution is given the opportunity to express his answer in iron - and makes a more than passable job of it - his worthy efforts should have been allowed to go to waste.



At the same time that pulpit was removed other drastic alterations were made in the chancel area; in the nave the pews were taken away and replaced by chairs.



In 2000 the accent fell on making the church an asset for the wider community and to that end an extension hall was built offering a range of other facilities. It has been a great success and the building is well used.

Why would this site have been selected for a building dedicated to St Botolph.

Colchester is only 34 miles from Iken and if that were indeed the location of Botolph's Icanho

Abbey then Colchester was definitely ‘on his patch’ and it is likely that he would have wanted to extend his ministry to this ‘once capital of England’.

- It would also not be surprising if the ‘original Anglo-Saxon church’ shown in Fig. 1 below, was in fact built on the site previously occupied by a C7 wooden predecessor constructed under the aegis of Icanho Abbey.
- Another fact to be taken into consideration is that archaeologists have discovered a Roman building at this spot. We know that Roman villas sometimes contained ‘Christian House

Churches’⁹ so might this have been the case here?

- New churches were frequently built on sacred sites (Christian or Pagan) where worship had been going on for hundreds of years.
- This particular place is just the sort of location where we would expect a church dedicated to the Patron Saint of Travellers to be erected - immediately outside the town walls on a busy thoroughfare used both by travellers entering the town and by those by-passing the town on their further travels.¹⁰

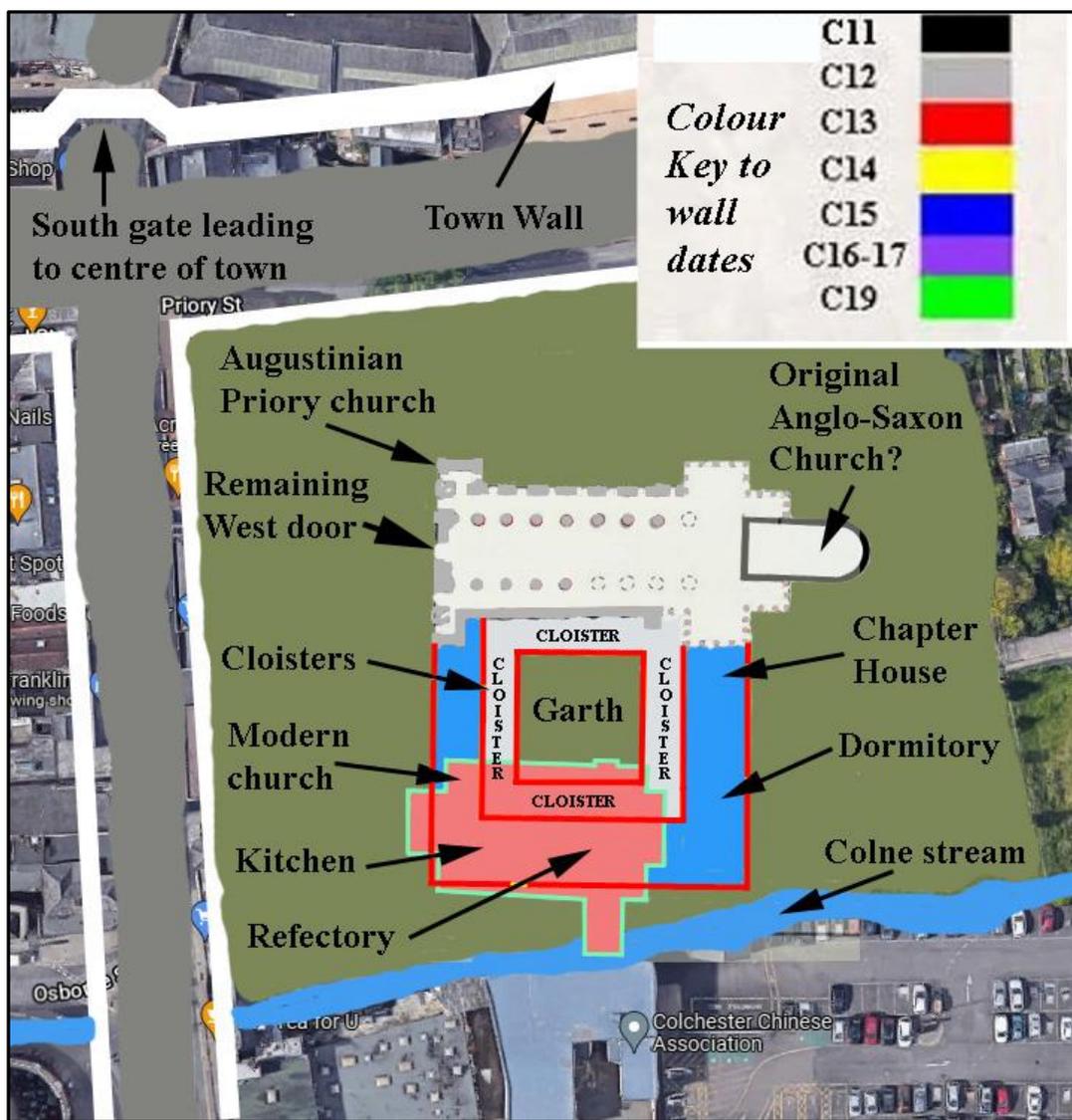


Fig. 1. The priory, its predecessor and successors, super-imposed on a modern Google Satellite map illustrating the likely succession of buildings that occurred on this green space that eventually became the priory precincts outside the town walls.

⁹ Discussed previously in *Botolphian* number 81, February 2020.

¹⁰ The St Botolph Churches in London and Cambridge are similarly positioned.

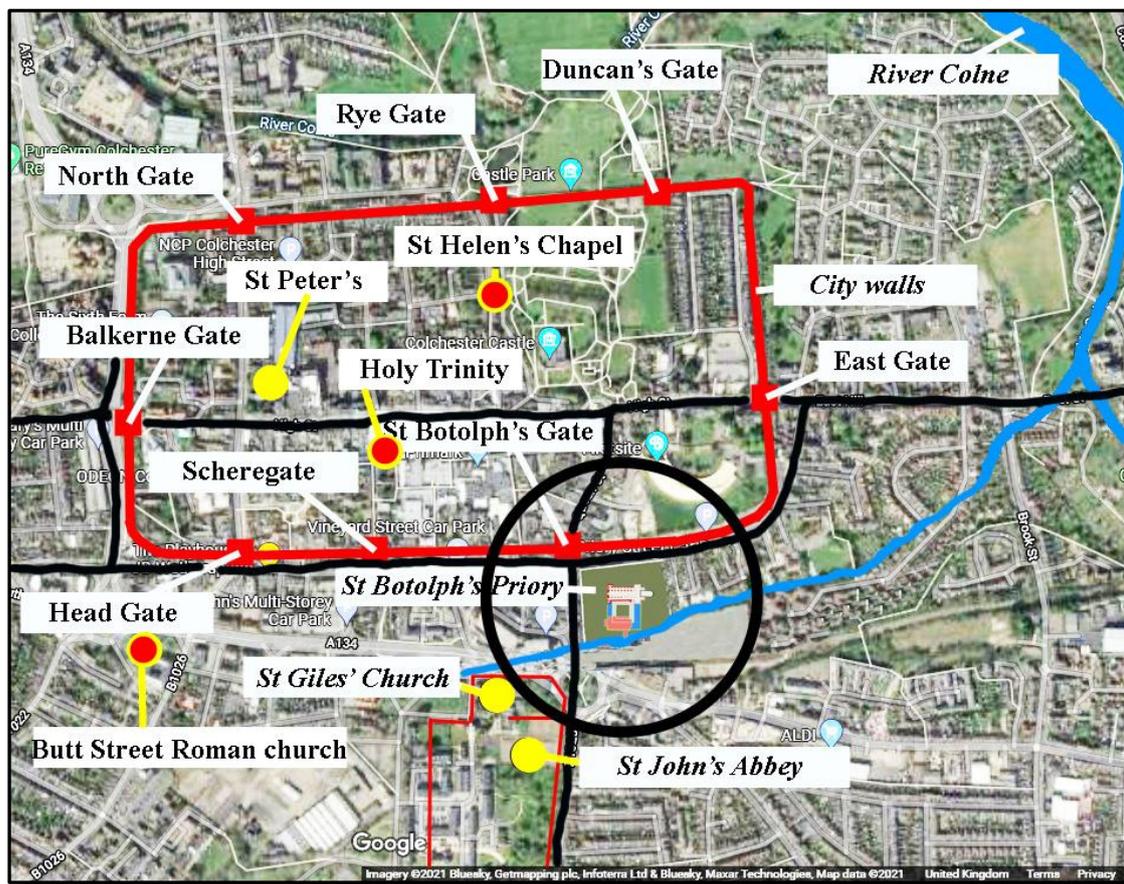
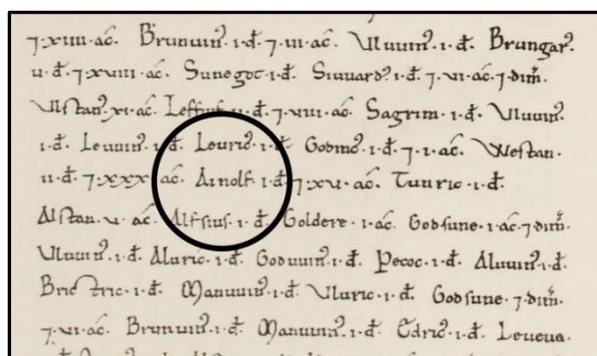


Fig. 2. Similarly super-imposed, the above figure shows the priory site in relation to the town. Marked in black are the thoroughfares of C13. Also shown are the principal churches: those with the red dot existed before the construction of the priory and those in yellow were built soon afterwards.

But who was the original builder?

In the Domesday Book of 1086 we find that Colchester was divided into 17 tenancies: 3 were held by Count Eustace of Boulogne, 1 was held by the Abbey of Rouen, 11 were held by King William, 1 was held by the bishop of St Pauls, 1 was held by Barking Abbey.

Searching through these tenancies I at last found (Phillimore B3a) the name of Ainulf (Ainolf).



We read of him earlier as the leader of the college of secular priests. He was in fact a burgess¹¹ who was one of King William's subtenants of a holding which consisted of 51 acres of meadow and a mill. Not a humble monk but a powerful citizen. It seems likely that it was he himself who built the C11 church from the profits of his business. His reasons were probably fourfold:

- As a mark of his status.
- To provide a place of worship for his workers.
- To curry favour with God
- To provide a place where he and his family could be buried.

All worthy aims but ...

Why did he dedicate the church to St Botolph?

If his new church was simply replacing an earlier wooden Botolphian cult church this would provide an easy answer. From what little we know about Ainulf he sounds like a good businessman so perhaps his church really was *the first* on the site - and shrewdly

¹¹ In C11 a burgess was a freeman and property owner in a borough in which he was allowed to trade as a merchant or craftsman free of charge.

constructed there specifically to attract passing trade from travellers. At the time of building there were already a number of churches in the town centre and it seems likely that Ainulf had an eye to doing something different. 'Passing trade' might sound a strange term to apply to a church but superstition was rife at that time and travellers lived uncertain lives. 'Would they be robbed?' - 'Would they fall ill?' - 'Would their ship founder?' - 'Would trade be good?' Prayers at a church - perpetuated by lighting a candle - and also perhaps a votive offering left in cash or goods, might make all the difference to a successful outcome for that day's trading. A church dedicated to St Botolph would have had the same attraction to a C11 traveller as the name **Thomas Cook** would have had to his C19 counterpart. Such institutions were *designed* to cater for itinerants and so (Ainulf might have hoped) they would patronise it.

Classification of Colchester church.

Although St Botolph himself might have had a C7 connection with Colchester, it seems most likely that it is the C11 building which holds the key to the site's prominence. It fits snugly into the **Type 5** classification:

i.e. A church lying on or close to one of the ancient major trackways, Roman gates or city gates, the proximity of which merits the suspicion that a major aspect of the function of the church has for a long while been closely linked with long-distance travel.

This would fall into line with the ethos of the Augustinian (or 'Austin') canons regular¹² once they became established here in c.1097. Canons regular live together in communities but when the need is there they will venture out into the wider world preaching, teaching and administering the sacraments. The provision of hospitality to pilgrims and travellers is an important part of their function and one can imagine the dormitories of St Botolph's Priory being regularly filled with visitors.

Thanks

My grateful thanks to David Poppleton, churchwarden of St Botolph's Church at Colchester, for his time spent answering my questions about his church.

¹² This whole subject is quite confusing. There were monks, canons regular, canons secular and friars. One group of friars (founded in 1244) were called *Austin*

REGULAR END-NOTES

If this is your first *Botolphian* and you have acquired it by circuitous means but would like to receive an email copy each month then just send an email to botolph@virginmedia.com saying 'YES PLEASE. If you wish to UNsubscribe then send the message '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: -

The list of classifications I use has been subject to constant revision over the past six years. The current version, revised December 2020, is as follows:

1. A church on a site which might have been founded directly by St Botolph during his life or by his acolytes soon after his death.
2. A church the original of which is thought to have been the product of Danish landowners (c.878-890, c.1016-1035).
3. A church originating from and as a result of Monastic Revival (c. 950 - 1016).
4. A church which, even if it had a humble predecessor on the same site, mainly blossomed as a result of opulence gained from the wool trade (c. 1150-1450).
5. A church lying on or close to one of the major ancient trackways, Roman roads or city gates, the proximity of which merits the suspicion that a major aspect of the function of the church has for a long while been closely linked with long-distance travel.
6. A church lying on or close to a pilgrimage route. For the moment until a pattern becomes clear, this classification has been sub-divided in the following way:
 - a. Churches founded for this purpose before A.D. 800.
 - b. Churches similarly founded but between the years A.D. 800 to 1066.
 - c. Churches founded after the Norman conquest.

Typical Characteristics of early St Botolph Churches.

1. Nearly all are in the eastern half of England
2. Most have Saxon foundations.
3. Many lie within 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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Friars - these were itinerants themselves who served the people but survived by begging. They were not the same as the *Austin Canons* of St Botolph's Priory.