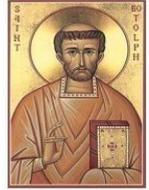




The Botolphian

Newsletter of
The Society of Saint Botolph

www.botolph.info



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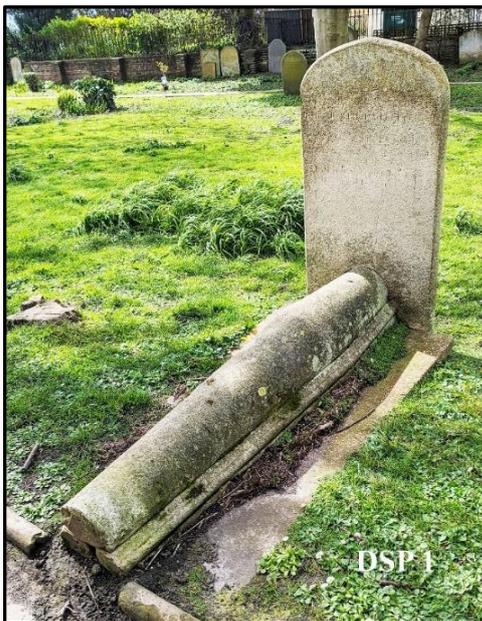
1st April 2024

Highlights this month

- **Barrel tombstones**
- **The cluster of Saint Botolph Churches and a Botolph's bridge in Kent**
- **Communications:** My friend Colin Nicholson pointed out my error in the last edition of *The Botolphian* where I referred to Colchester Priory as Colchester Abbey. Mea culpa.

Editorial

I hope that you all had a very happy Easter. Many thanks to those of you who sent me cards. An essential element of Easter Day is of course the rolling of the tombstone back from the sepulchre. During my Easter Saturday stint of being a 'Welcomer' at St Mary and St Eanswythe's Church in Folkestone, I was asked about the *barrel tombstones* in the churchyard.



This is the second query on this subject that has arisen in the past month and as a member of the *Saint Eanswythe's Research Group* I felt that, before I left the church, I should count and photograph just how many of these tombstones we possess.

I counted fifteen and to my surprise when I started researching them I discovered that they are quite uncommon. It seems that up until now we have been in error by taking these curiosities for granted.

The 'questioning gentleman' who I met on Saturday came from Burford in Oxfordshire and he wondered if the artefacts might be related to the 'Bale Tombstones' found in that part of the Cotswolds (picture below).



The above picture is courtesy of Arlene Stafford Wilson.

Here the wool indicated the deceased's association with sheep farming. This attracted my attention further in view of a potential Saint Botolph connection. I have never heard of **Bale Tombstones** in the sheep farming areas of East Anglia, and if any reader has spotted any I would be most interested to hear about them. Similarly I would like to hear about any **Barrel Tombstones** you might have come across elsewhere.

I am still at the beginning of my research on this matter, but I noticed when photographing them that, as far as I could make out, these features were

marked by headstones which put the dates of death between 1790 and 1833.

Encyclopedia.com (Oxford University Press) tells us that *the heyday of grave-robbers was between 1780 and 1832.*¹

The website also notes “*the work of the body snatchers was crucial to the historical development of anatomical knowledge and expertise.*”

Another relevant fact might be that Dr William Harvey (1578-1657) known popularly as ‘the discoverer of the circulation of the blood’, was born in Folkestone, and strangely as I write this. I notice that he was born on 1st April and that today is the 446th anniversary of his birth. (This is not an April Fool’s joke).

His life was of course two centuries before the date of our Barrel Tombstones, and Harvey gained his knowledge of anatomy from human dissection which he carried out, not in Folkestone, but on cadavers in Padua and London.

Nevertheless, Harvey was a Folkestone man and the mere prospect of body-snatching would have been enough to strike terror into the minds of the population; the practice was rife at the end of C18. Perhaps you are ahead of me and can see where my thoughts are leading.

I wonder if the Barrel Tombstones were anti-theft devices designed to thwart the body-snatchers by providing a gravestone that was much heavier than usual due to that extra lump of concrete on the top. Perhaps we had a monumental mason in Folkestone who designed these tombstones to put the minds of his clients (as well as their bodies) at rest.

It maybe that as the research proceeds we will find evidence of such a mason, and also perhaps evidence that such body-snatching had occurred in Folkestone in the past. After all, this churchyard lies at the cliff-top close to the beach, and bodies disinterred in the middle of the night could easily be spirited away by boat before daybreak.

Or perhaps there is an entirely different reason for our *Barrel Tombstones*?

Feature

St Botolph in Kent

On 11th March I gave a talk to Barham Down History Society and the title I chose was Saint Botolph (c.620-680) in Kent. I produced the title

¹ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/law/crime-and-law-enforcement/body-snatching>. Accessed 31 March 2024.

rather off the top of my head, but subsequently realised that a comparison of several churches in one county might prove academically profitable – so I have adapted it for this month’s Botolphian.

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In C7 the population of Britain was only about two million, that of Kent was perhaps 80,000 and Folkestone was probably around 300. Thus many more people knew or recognised each other than is the case today.

The closest stepping off point from Britain to the continent was at Dover and Folkestone.

Voyages across the channel were common-place. The vessels were small and flat-bottomed. They could easily be drawn up onto the beach and so did not need deep-water moorings.



Although it was not formally recognised until C10 the Via Francigena was a route that stretched from Rome to Canterbury along which travellers passed on a regular basis.

France (Frankia) was way ahead of Britain in the Christianity department and abounded in monasteries and nunneries.

When, in 597, St Augustine landed on the Isle of Thanet bearing the good news of the Christian Faith with the compliments of the Pope, Botolph would not be born for another 23 years. It was the beginning of a time for massive change – most of it for the better.

Historians are disinclined to refer to the period between 410 and 1066 as the Dark Ages as the

only thing that is really ‘dark’ about the period is the Black Hole of knowledge that exists where we would hope to find historical records, but are often so sadly disappointed.

It is not that there was any paucity in the number of manuscripts written in C7, but they were stored in the minsters that came to stretch the length of the land, and the Viking raids of c.793 to c.950 are generally blamed for the destruction of both the minsters and their archives.

We have little alternative but to gather and value the information that does exist regarding this period, and do our best to ‘join the dots’, and reason out to the best of our ability the details of the lives led by those people we choose to study. This does mean that sometimes a tiny pinch of salt has to be recommended as part of the readers’ literary diet, and acknowledge that even when the Vita seems to be genuine, some of it might have been fabricated and added in later centuries.

The people to whom I was speaking on 11th March were well versed in Medieval history although Saint Botolph was a new subject to them so before I could broach the specialist subject of *Saint Botolph in Kent* I felt obliged to provide a biographical outline.

I find myself somewhat ‘hoist by my own petard’ however in that today this is much harder than it was fourteen years ago when I started my research and Botolph’s details were relatively brief. Today a reasonably full narrative has to include:

1. *The likelihood that Botolph was born in Scotland.*
2. *Because of the above, a mention of his likely link with the future King Oswald of Northumbria.*
3. *His association with Wenlock Abbey and hence with Thanet Minster.*
4. *The way his cult was promoted during the period of Monastic Reform.*
5. *The fact that the proliferation of churches dedicated to him in Britain and Scandinavia was to some extent **secondary** to his actual life, and caused instead through the adoption of his cult by the sheep and fleece trade, together with its farming, and sailing aspects.*

Our Botolph’s life and influence was very important throughout nearly *all* of the Medieval period i.e. over **eight centuries** from his birth in c. 620 to the demise of the classic sheep trade in c. 1450.

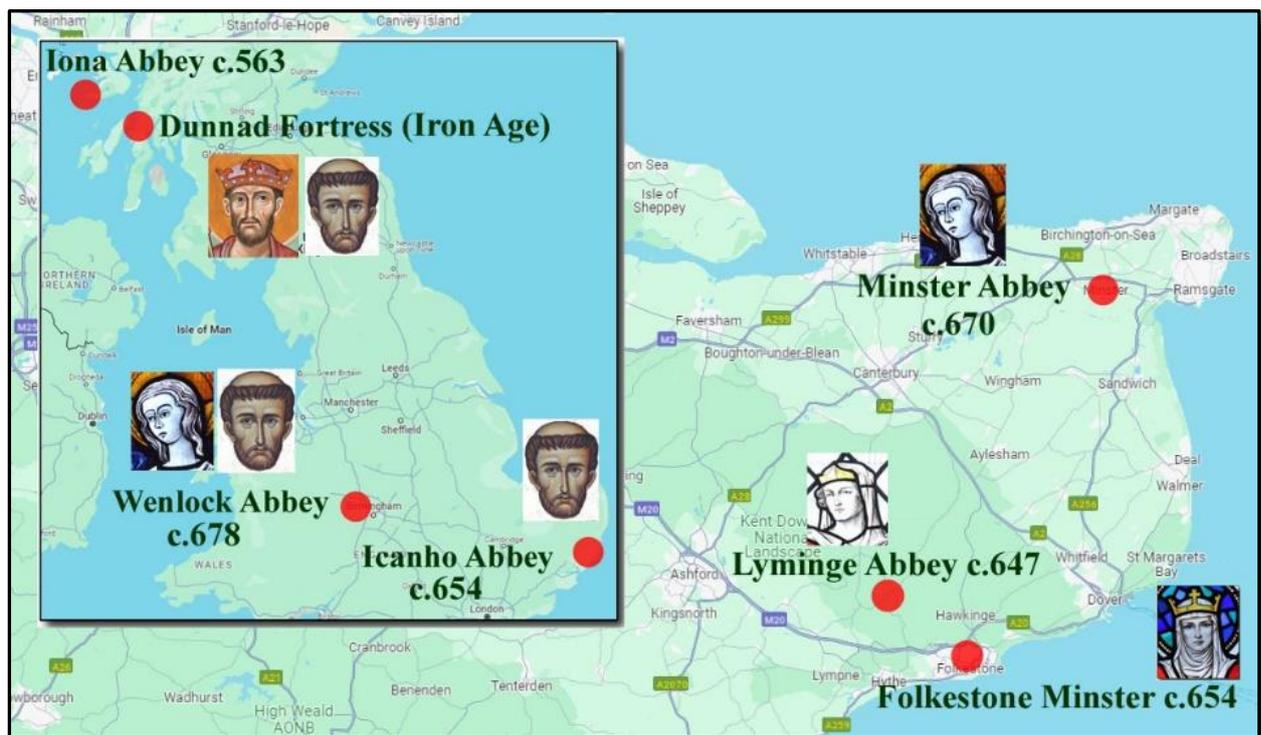


Fig: The earlier distribution of some of the people who later influenced Kent.

This makes one wonder how on earth he could have become so obscure (in comparatively recent years), despite the great number of memorials to his name that still exist. The answer lies I suppose, in the obfuscations of the Reformation, together with some bad luck in his saintly

patronage of Travellers when he was unseated by Bishop Voragine’s invention of the cult of St Christopher.

Regarding hard facts about our saint, his earliest mention is in the Anonymous Life of Ceolfrid (Bede’s mentor) written about 710, and his main

Vita was written by Abbot Folcard of Thorney in c.1070.

In the picture above, we have at the top, in the north of Britain (wearing the crown) Oswald, King of Northumbria (reigned 633 to 642). Next

to him is our Saint Botolph whom the Schleswig breviary tells us was of **Scottish** descent – his putative father having been King Eugenius IV who ruled Dal Riata from c. 608-629.



Fig. 2. (Clockwise from the top) Scotland, Dunadd surrounded by sea in C7, Dunadd today, Iona Abbey.

Oswald. In A.D. 616 when his father King Aethelfrith was killed by King Raedwald of East Anglia, Oswald fled from the eastern side of Northumbria to exile in the north-west.

At the time he would only have been about twelve years old, and exiled with him were his mother, Acha, his elder brother Eanfrith (aged about 20), Oswiu aged about eight, and his sister Aebbe – a babe in arms.

Sanctuary at Dunadd

The story goes that King Eugenius IV (his Gaelic name was ‘Eochaid Buide’) offered them protection at his stronghold of Dunadd (now in Argyllshire) which had been a fortress to various communities since the Iron Age.

If Botolph was indeed Eochaid Buide’s offspring then the only person who fits the genealogy was one of his sons called **Conall Bec**. He was born c. 620, and is likely to have grown up in awe of the boy exile Oswald who was sixteen years older than he. Not only would the two have met at Dunadd but they would also have met on the relatively close island of Iona where the Dalriada youngsters ‘attended school’ taught by Abbot Aidan’s monks.

Edwin marries Ethelburga of Kent

Meanwhile on the eastern side of the country the battles continued. The usurper of Oswald’s

kingdom following the death of his father, was Edwin (reigned 616-633).

In 625 he married Ethelburga of Kent, (she is the person who is shown on the Kentish part of the **Fig. 1** map at Lyminge Abbey where she died in c. 647). She was the sister of King Eadbald of Kent, and the aunt of Princess Eanswythe whose minster was founded in Folkestone in c. 654.

In 633 her husband Edwin was killed in Northumbria by the combined forces of King Penda of Mercia, and Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Wales. The latter subsequently led a tyrannical and brutal rule over the area for many months. Ethelburga and her family had meanwhile fled to Kent where they installed themselves at Lyminge.

Oswald (with Botolph?) regains his crown

By this time Oswald and his fighting skills had grown in strength and confidence, and grasping the opportunity, he asked Eochaid Buide’s successor (the old king had died c. 629) for leave to reclaim his kingdom; he also asked for men to boost the numbers in his army and this too was granted – the conscripts being fighting monks who justified their taking up arms on the basis of the fact that they were fighting for a Christian leader against pagan evil.



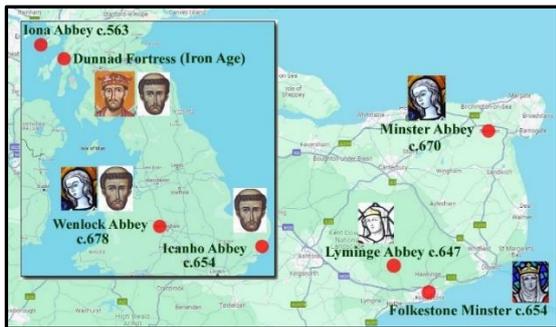
It seems likely that rather than travelling overland they sailed from Dunadd to the Solway Firth, where, in the kingdom of Rheged, Oswald was able to gather more soldiers before continuing his trek east to where spies had told him that Cadwallon ap Cadfan was camped at Heavenfield near Corbridge.

It was three days march and they struck camp early in the morning, but not before Oswald had erected a cross, and in front of his soldiers prayed to Christ for an early victory. Despite Oswald's inferior numbers he was successful in killing Cadwallon ap Cadfan, and he thereby regained his rightful role as King of Northumbria which he then ruled for nine years.

Botolph - a soldier in Oswald's army?

The Acta Sanctorum Ordinis Benedicti of 1701 tells us that Eochaid Buide's successor was a son called Ferquar, but that he was a useless leader and had criminal tendencies to the extent that the elders put him in prison where he eventually died. Botolph (perhaps as 'Conall Bec') was called to accede to the throne despite being only 13 years of age. It is said that he refused the crown. Such a refusal would only have been acceptable if his reason had some validity – something, for example, like the fact that he wanted to join the Dalriadan army that was travelling south in support of Oswald.

The *pinch of salt* (mentioned on page 1) should perhaps be taken here, but there is as much chance that the story is true as that it is false.



Referring again to Fig. 1, (copied above) as we

move south in the general direction of Kent, we find two images which depict Botolph's connection at Wenlock Abbey with the redoubtable Queen Domne Eafe. Hers is the extra face shown at Wenlock. She was the wife of King Merewalh of the Magonsaete tribe which were based in the south-west. We also find her face at Minster Abbey, on the Kentish part of the map, but more of that later.

A little further south on the eastern side, the map shows Botolph's abbey of Icanho, but that does not become relevant for another twenty years into the story.

Cnobersburgh and Canterbury

Young Botolph seems also to have spent some time at Cnobersburgh monastery near today's Great Yarmouth before deciding to head to France. During his journey he would almost certainly have passed through Kent. He might even have spent time as a humble student at St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury – by which time he would have been about seventeen, and the year would have been c. 637 – just four years after Oswald's foe Edwin's widow Ethelburga had fled to Kent with her family.

Botolph's Journey to France

From the Canterbury area he could, if he had been a wealthy person, have sailed directly up to the River Wantsum and then across the Channel, and down to the Seine estuary before taking a riverboat up the Seine towards Paris (aka Lutetia). As an impoverished novice monk however it seems more likely that he would have looked towards the shortest sea crossing i.e. that from Dover or Folkestone. If Lyninge minster were on his itinerary then rather than pressing on to Dover, he would have turned further south along Stone Street and then, subsequently, sailed from Folkestone.

Nine years in France

Botolph ... then *Monk Botolph*, later *Father Botolph* (after his ordination as a priest and his work as a chaplain) ... was in France until c.647, when he returned to Britain.

Back in Britain

Here the speculation starts again: 'where did he land?' The most likely place seems to have been at **Bosham** in West Sussex, and one wonders if the name of the settlement might derive from *Botolph's Home* in the same way that **Boston** in Lincolnshire derives from *Botolph's Town*. Another pointer is that 25 miles to the east of Bosham is a little village called '*Botolphs*'. Furthermore there are several churches in this part of West Sussex which are dedicated to Saint Botolph, and each one has the potential of a C7

foundation as indeed do the five churches in the neighbouring county of Kent.

Do these churches represent the footsteps of the monk-priest Botolph as he made his way back through Britain? Do these churches live on as today's churches but on sites where he had founded field chapels on his journey east? Or are they (as we shall see later) the product of another facet of Botolph's cult.

Icanho

He eventually arrived at Iken near today's Aldeburgh where in 654 he started to build Icanho Abbey – this was the same year as the death of the man we believe was his benefactor, King Anna of East Anglia. Sadly there is neither space nor time to include Anna in this discourse.

Abbot Botolph died at Icanho in 680 but not before, in the final three years of his life, taking over the responsibility of overseeing the building and management of Wenlock Abbey for his friend, the aforementioned Domne Eafe.

In short, she had been in the process of building Wenlock Abbey when her brothers were tragically murdered by Ecgberht, the then king of Kent.

Domne Eafe demanded the compensation of *weregild* for this foul act, and Ecgberht agreed to grant land on the Isle of Thanet where she could build a minster in memory of her brothers. Being physically unable to run two such widely distanced minsters, she asked Abbot Botolph, who was renowned for his expertise in monastic management, to manage the final setting up and to take control of the new abbey's finances.

Here endeth the summary of Saint Botolph's life in the Seventh Century.



Fig 2. In Kent there are five churches dedicated to Saint Botolph and one bridge bearing his name.

We now move on to his Kentish churches, and consider the evidence with regard to whether their foundations date from (i) Saint Botolph's lifetime, (ii) the Monastic Revival period, or (iii) to his name's involvement with the Sheep Trade. The three green dots in the map above indicate the Kentish Saint Botolph churches which are still in regular use. The red dot at Ruxley shows that the building exists but that it is *not* now used for regular worship. It has instead been used for

many years as a barn or storehouse. The mournful black dot at Folkestone (indicating that no building is now discernible) signifies that although a Saint Botolph's chapel existed here, the details of its precise location are today sadly unknown. These churches have all been featured individually in previous newsletters. The purpose of this month's exercise is to look at them as a group and try to discover if they have anything in common.

Notes and Questions

1. The Northfleet cluster of four churches is separated from the Saint Botolph sites at Folkestone by about 45 miles.
2. For pilgrims starting at Chevening (the southernmost Saint Botolph's Church in the Northfleet cluster) and walking to Lullingstone and thence to Ruxley, each step is an easy journey of 5 miles, which should take a walker less than 3 hours.



3. The shaded areas in the map above, mark the main thoroughfares which would have changed little since Roman times. Each of the churches lies on one of these roads. Is this relevant?
4. Was each of these the site of a 'Travellers' Church' dating right back to the early Medieval period?
5. Was the Folkestone church so positioned because it was at a point of entry for travellers from France?
6. Or was there another *raison d'être* for them?

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We know about the link between Saint Botolph's name and Sheep Farming.

We know that this form of commerce became widespread and highly-profitable from C11, rising to a peak in early C14 and then gradually dying away a century and a half later.

We know that Botolph's town of Boston in Lincolnshire was a major centre of fleece exportation, and that it was through this that his name spread widely to Scandinavia. During those centuries from C11 to C15 his name was on everybody's lips.

How do Kent's five Saint Botolph Churches relate to the major trade at Boston? Was the trade the impetus behind their naming and existence?

Boston delivered its fleeces via the River Witham. Was the Northfleet cluster of churches linked to the River Thames as an artery of export?

We know that the Hanseatic 'steelyard' at London Bridge became a focus as London competed with Boston for superiority.

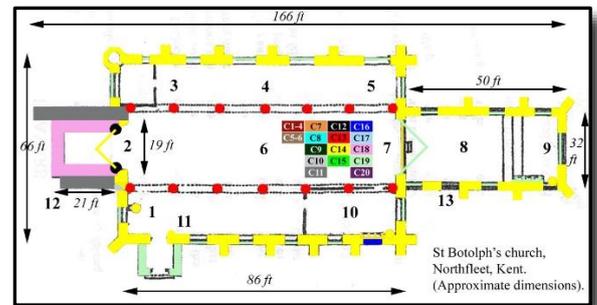
Did the early sheep farmers of north-west Kent muscle in on the trade and try to persuade Scandinavian skippers to stop and buy at Northfleet rather than tacking all the way up

London River to the Steelyard of the Hanseatic League?

THE FIVE CHURCHES

St Botolph's Church Northfleet

Land worth £28 in 1086. Church built 1290-1310 on the site of an earlier Anglo-Saxon church. Markets and St Botolph's Fairs held in the area in C13. Sited on the River Thames with its own harbour lying 23 meandering miles short of London Bridge.

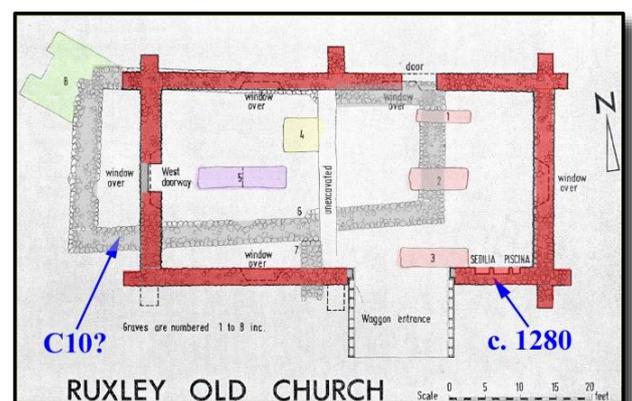


This groundplan is rather small, but all that readers really need to note is the high preponderance of yellow (C13) with a touch of red (C12) and a slice of grey (C10-11) around the west tower.

Northfleet land was held by the Archbishop of Canterbury until the Reformation when it passed to the Crown. The diocese had a great financial interest in sheep farming in Kent and the Lordship was held by Richard, son of Count Gilbert. Richard had 175 similar estates many of which were in the sheep farming area of Suffolk. He was also known as Richard de Clare, which surname frequently arises in connection with Saint Botolph. Richard entered a monastery in 1088 and is buried at St. Neots.

St Botolph's Church, Ruxley

Worth £5 in 1086, the land at Ruxley was initially held by Odo of Bayeux i.e. by the Crown, but leased to the knight Mauger alias Malgerius alias Rokesley (he took on this latter name once he became 'lord of the manor'). He granted some of this land to Hugh de Crevecoeur (the family who founded the Priory of Leeds Castle).



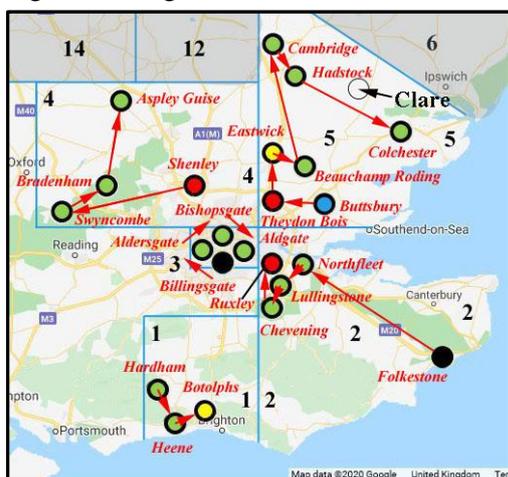
Pole (from a well-known sheep farming family) also held land in the area. Chevening lies within the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of the diocese of Rochester, and is a peculiar of the archbishop. Again, like Ruxley, it looks as if the early church was a *travellers' church*, set, as it was, on the Pilgrim's Way. Again, like Ruxley and Northfleet, it benefitted from the sheep trade, but again not excessively – just enough to make it an elegant and functional country church.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE FOUR CHURCHES

One conclusion might be that these churches were in a cluster because of the sheep farming activities in the area. It seems that Northfleet was the hub and that its siting near the Thames made it so. If Northfleet was the *hub* then perhaps the line of churches represent the *tail*. They are remarkably close together and they are maybe an indication of the route travelled by sheep and/or fleeces coming north from the Weald of Kent.

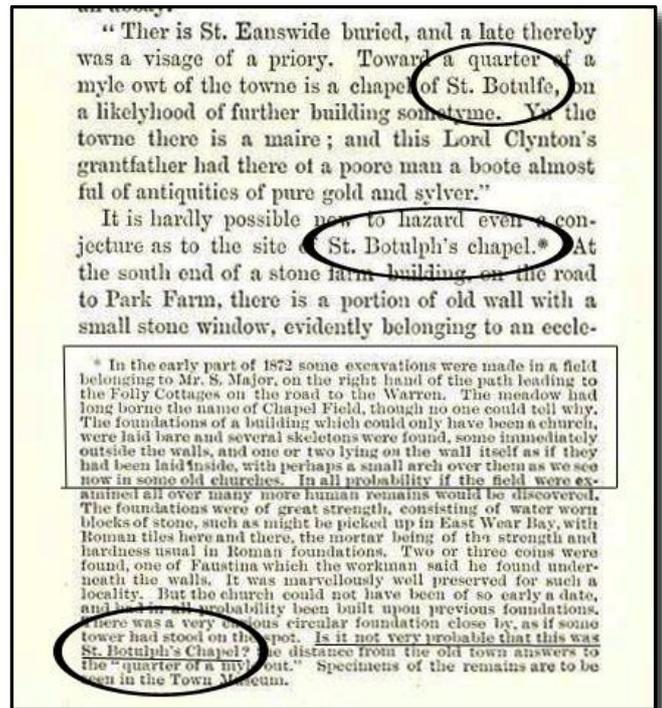


We might ask ourselves why there are no Saint Botolph churches in the centre of the Weald, and that indeed is an intriguing question, but perhaps even more intriguing is the presence of Saint Botolph Churches at each vertex of the Weald triangle (see diagram below).



St Botolph's Chapel, Folkestone

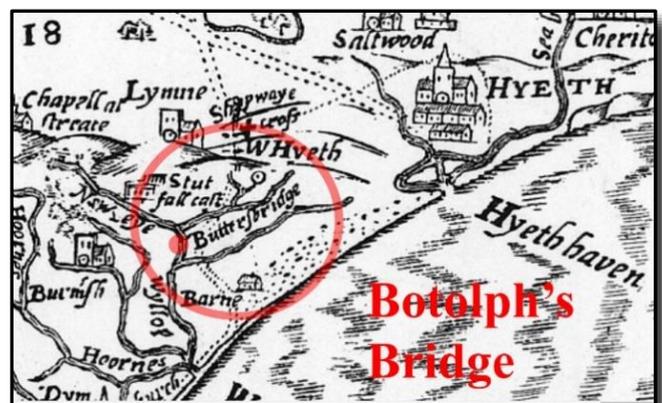
As previously stated, this chapel stood alone and was not part of a cluster, but as we have seen above, it does sit at one vertex of the Weald triangle.



Since it has never been archaeologically examined, and we do not know exactly where it stood, it is difficult to say when it was built, but this was almost certainly before C12, and it lasted until C15.

Botolph's Bridge, West Hythe

There never was a church associated with this bridge which connected Romney Marsh proper with the hamlet of West Hythe. Again Romney Marsh has for many years been sheep farming country. The map below was drawn in 1596. A rationale might be that, to medieval farmers, everything else to do with sheep would have seemed to have a ‘Botolph Tag’ to it, and so they applied the same label to meeting places.



It appears that they did this at Buttsbury in Essex where there was an area known as *Botolphspirie* –

or *Botolph's Pear Tree* where sheep were collected for market. The same seems to have applied at Botolph's Bridge.

There is a lot more research yet to be done on this intriguing subject, but it seems that there is some virtue in examining a *cluster* of churches and comparing the origins of one with the origins of another.

I wish you all a very happy Spring.

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 dp@botolph.info saying 'YES PLEASE.' If you wish to UNsubscribe then send the message 'NO THANKS.'

If you wish to purchase any of the books of the Botolph Trilogy please use the same email address.

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*.'

Types of Botolph Church sites:-

The list of classifications I use has been subject to constant revision over the past ten years. The current version, first revised in 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, rivers, 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. Churches roles have always needed to be flexible. The **Type 6** classification takes into account the increased influence of pilgrimage that occurred from late C12.
- * A star is added to the 'Type' when the church lies on a county border.

Changing functionality.

One church will often have fulfilled many roles during its lifetime so a 'type' will often be transient and need to be defined by dates.

Typical Characteristics of early St Botolph Churches.

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

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