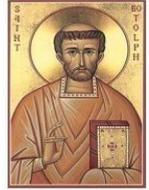




The Botolphian

Newsletter of
The Society of Saint Botolph

www.botolph.info



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Highlights this month

- **The Collegiate abbey of St Peter's at Westminster.**

Editorial

Despite the fact that Westminster Abbey is the most prestigious¹ of all the institutions with which Saint Botolph is associated, it has somehow been left until last to be featured in *The Botolphian* and, I must confess, was almost forgotten.

Invariably, even when in the Sicilian sun, my Botolphian enthusiasm bubbles up to the surface despite my vain attempts to keep it under wraps. One way or another people eventually discover my passion and, whether out of politeness or a genuine thirst for knowledge they soon begin to ask me questions about my subject. It would be churlish not to encourage them and I therefore tell them about the parts in which I think they would be interested.

It was while engaged in such a question and answer session with my new friend Pieter from Pijnacker (in the Netherlands) while we were sailing off the Sicilian coast testing the quirks and habits of his new boat, that I suddenly realised (with more than a little horror) that I had not covered this highly redoubtable foundation known as the Collegiate abbey church of Saint Peter the Apostle at Westminster.

Within a few days a regular contributor to *The Botolphian*, Graham Ward, kindly emailed me with some further information he had unearthed regarding the Billingsgate site and this prompted me to revisit my research there. It is the

combination of these two events which has led to the contents of this month's *Botolphian*.

It should be noted that Westminster Abbey is not the same as Westminster *Cathedral*. The latter opened in 1903 and is the mother church of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales.



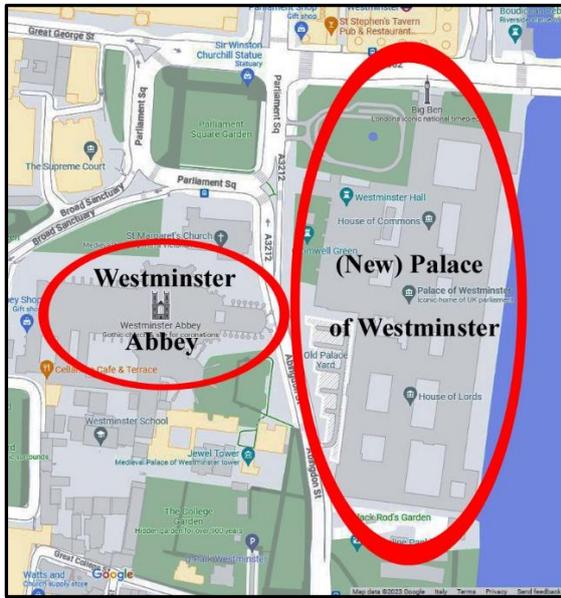
This image of Westminster Cathedral was copied from <https://lookup.london/westminster-cathedral/>

It lies three-quarters of a mile to the south-west of the abbey in Victoria Street and is a red and white striped structure with a gold, mosaic and marble interior.

¹ Prestigious – yes, but see 'Conclusion' on page 8.

Westminster Abbey

The abbey lies adjacent to the section of the River Thames where it runs in a north-south direction. Thus the east end of the abbey points directly towards the river and between them lies the (New) Palace of Westminster.

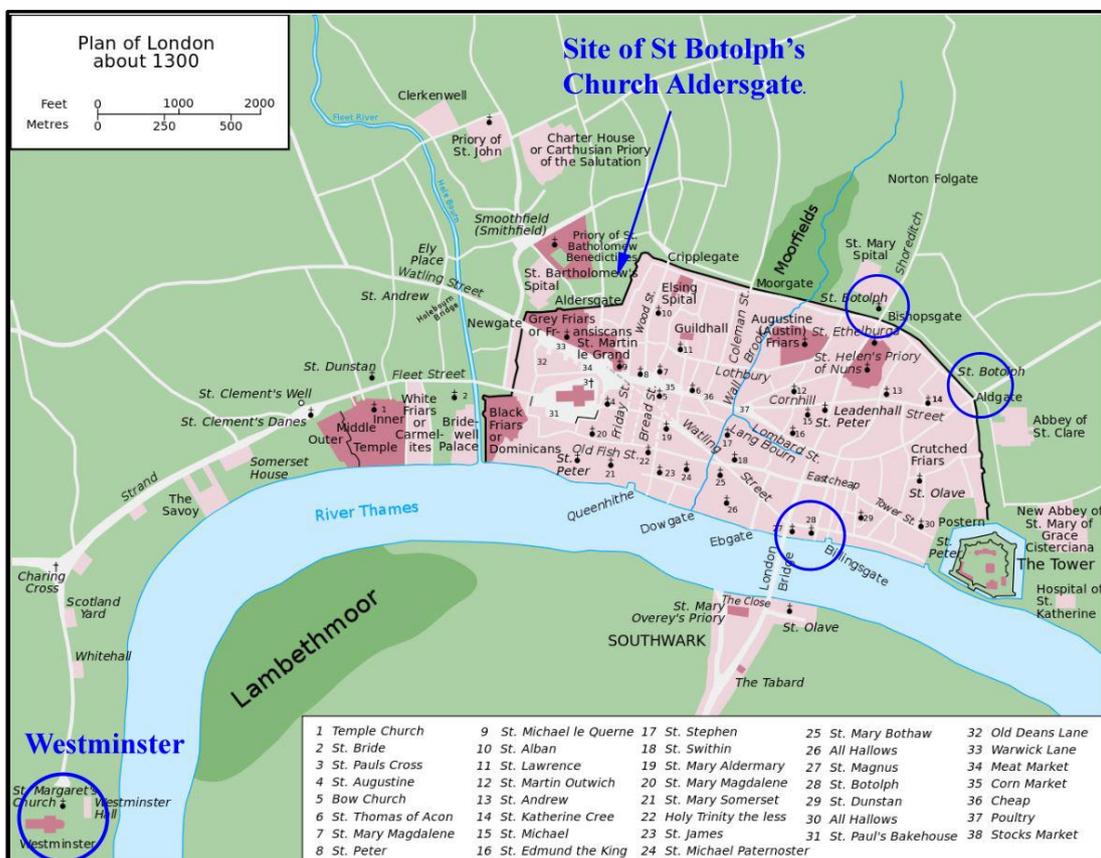


with aisled, eleven-bay nave, transepts and chancel with ambulatory and radiating chapels, and French in the height of the vault with its two tiers of flying buttresses.



The abbey is constructed mainly in Reigate stone. It is described by British Listed Buildings as being *Geometrical Gothic, exceptionally French in plan*

This image of Westminster Abbey was copied from <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>
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Taking a brief look at the above *Plan of London about 1300* first published in 1923 by William R Shepherd (courtesy of Wiki Commons) there are certain features which are particularly worth noting:

1. The massive predominance and position of the City on the north bank of the Thames – well distant from places like The Strand and Charing Cross which you will see lying much further to the west.
2. One solitary London Bridge.
3. Paucity of activity on the south side of the river and ...
4. similar paucity in the bottom left hand corner at Westminster.

We might, in passing, also observe (as now noted on the map) that the cartographer has erred by omitting the church of Saint Botolph at Aldersgate (although the dedications at Bishopsgate, Aldgate and Billingsgate are properly drawn).

In 1300 therefore *Westminster* was somewhat out on a limb in the countryside by comparison with the mass of churches in the north-eastern metropolis.

To quote *The Botolphian* of April 2019 which featured the Billingsgate church:

Much of the information that is available about this [Billingsgate] site comes from the work of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society of which the booklet shown below constitutes a fascinating 200 page report.



The front cover, by Martin Bentley, shows the late C10, early C11 jetty at the New Fresh Wharf with the breached Roman riverside wall behind. It well illustrates the sort of appearance we might have expected when the first post-Roman bridge was being built following a 600 year lull (c.400 - c.1000) during which time there was no firm crossing over the Thames.

Although the larger green plan shows the site in 1300 with just one bridge, we must now transfer our thoughts back three centuries to the period when there was no bridge at all, for that was when the **Minster in the West** was born.

-0-

The Palace of Westminster.

Although there is some suggestion that it was **Cnut the Great** (King of England 1016-1035) who was the first to elevate the Westminster site to royal use, its main development dates from the 1040s when **Edward the Confessor** (King of England 1042-1066) constructed his palace on the banks of the River Thames. This had nothing to do with an abbey – Edward simply wanted a ‘desirable residence’. In fact, by Botolphian coincidence, the site was (like the location of that other abbey near Peterborough which enshrined Saint Botolph’s relics) also called **Thorney** (derived from the two words ‘Thorn’ and ‘Ey’ the latter meaning ‘island’). Clearly not an uncommon name in those days when much of the land was still firmly in the grip of nature.

The Old Palace of Westminster

King Edward’s Old Palace did well to survive for **five centuries** until **1512** when the royal apartments were consumed by fire, and the royal family were forced to move half a mile north into the (renamed) Palace of Whitehall which in its turn burnt to the ground in **1698**. Kensington Palace and then St James’ Palace were the next official royal residences before Buckingham Palace took its turn in 1837.

Meanwhile, back at the Old Palace of Westminster, the administrative offices of central government which, for three centuries had been sharing the site of the royal residence, had broadly survived the 1512 fire and continued to operate there until 1834 when another fire gutted what had developed into a massive property. Only the Cloisters of St Stephen’s, Westminster Hall, the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft and the Jewel Tower remained relatively intact,

The New Palace of Westminster is the correct name for the parliamentary building we see today.

Monastic Reform

Also referred to as *the Monastic Revival* and the *Benedictine Revival* this movement (which we have mentioned frequently in the past) was promoted² by King Edgar (reigned 959-975) and orchestrated by Aethelwold, Bishop of Winchester and his friend Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury together with Oswald, Bishop of Worcester.

The object of the movement was to rebuild and refurbish amongst others the abbeys of **Peterborough, Ely, Thorney and Westminster**. Aethelwold broadly took on the responsibility for the first three and Dunstan was more concerned with the latter, founding a Benedictine abbey at Westminster in c. 965.

There is a tradition³ that Dunstan's Benedictine abbey at Westminster was just one of a series of Christian churches which were founded on that site dating at least as far back as AD 612. The timeline that is suggested is as follows:

1. **c.612:** A church founded by King Saeberht of Essex (reigned 604-616) - the son of King Ethelberht of Kent's sister Rricula. He is reputed to have been the first East Saxon king to have become a Christian. This, and other details about the site during the early Saxon period were recorded by the monk Sulcard⁴ in C11 and transcribed in C13. The church was said to have been a small building which was neglected after the deaths of both King Ethelberht and Saeberht in 616.
2. **c.735:** Widmore⁵ suggested that in c.735, a small foundation was established for twelve monks.
3. **785:** A charter of 785 points to beneficence shown to this monastery by King Offa of Mercia (757-796).
4. **c.965:** Following Viking destruction in c.870, the remains of the monastery were re-founded by King Edgar and Archbishop Dunstan as part of the Monastic Reform process.
5. **c.1018:** Further Viking attacks in c.1013 left the buildings in ruins once more, but it seems that there was less damage this time and if King Cnut did indeed construct the first royal residence at Westminster then it seems likely that, since he was in the habit of restoring Viking desecrations, he would also have restored the Westminster monastery.

6. **1045:** Edward the Confessor starts the construction of Westminster Abbey but it is not consecrated until 1065.

It should be noted that it might be wise to treat some of the notes above – particularly numbers 1,2 and 3, with some scepticism.

The '*reform*' aspect of the movement was concerned with the removal of secular clergy (many of whom were married) from existing monasteries and replacing them with celibate Benedictine monks. It is for this reason that the '**Benedictine Revival**' is another term which is often used in this context.

To all intents and purposes the four abbeys mentioned above were *new*, and the reformers had a clean sheet to staff them as they wished and to put into place an effective business plan of which *the attraction of pilgrims* (who, through their votive offerings, would provide the funds necessary to maintain and further develop these special sites) was an integral part.

In modern parlance these abbeys were the 'Alton Towers' of their time and they needed *attractions* in order to '*bring in the punters*'. Saint Botolph was high on the list of desirable *attractions*.

In c. AD 970 when his body was exhumed specifically for this purpose, his memory (three hundred years after his death) was *still* vibrantly revered. He *still* retained a magnificent reputation as having been a most holy man of high learning and erudition.

Another important and highly-relevant fact making him the ideal candidate was that it was *he* who was credited with bringing **Benedictinism** from France to Britain, and he who had been the first to demonstrate its superiority to other monastic administrative protocols when he employed this 'new' Benedictine Rule in his Abbey of Icanho from AD 654. The biographer of Bede's mentor Ceolfrid had testified to Abbot Botolph's efficacy in this respect.⁶

Regarding pilgrims, – in AD 970 *nobody* of course had any inkling that four centuries later the obscure and mostly-mythical personage **Saint Christopher** would be called upon to take over (until 1969 when the newcomer's foundations were found to be faulty) as the Patron Saint of Travellers. Until then, for hundreds of years, *Saint Botolph's* tenure had been secure - a fact of

² It was actually King Edgar's 'half-uncle' King Athelstan (reigned 927-939) who conceived the original plan but King Edgar who put it into practice.

³ 'Benedictine monks: St Peter's abbey, Westminster', in A History of the County of London: Volume 1, London Within the Bars, Westminster and Southwark, ed. William Page (London, 1909), pp. 433-457. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>

/vch/london/vol1/pp433-457 [accessed 31 July 2023].

⁴ Cott. MS. Titus, A. viii, fol. 2 et seq.

⁵ Richard Widmore, (1681-1764) Historian, Priest and Librarian at Westminster Abbey.

⁶ Bede was born in 673 and died in 735. The Anonymous Life of Ceolfrid was written c.715 and it is likely that Ceolfrid visited Icanho Abbey c.670.

which wayfarers were constantly made aware each time they availed themselves of the services of one of the churches dedicated to him at river crossings and borders.

The Disinterment

Bishop Aethelwold clearly had no difficulty finding Saint Botolph's shrine which would have been extant within the ruins of the desecrated abbey at Icanho. It was probably looked after by a handful of brethren who, one hopes, were encouraged in their duties more by pride in serving the deceased holy father, than by the guarantee of a good income requiring minimal effort.

There is no doubt that in the years between his death and his exhumation, our saint's famous memory had remained well-preserved, but by arranging for his relics to be enshrined in the 'new' abbeys of **Thorney, Ely, Westminster and Bury St Edmunds** the monastic reformers paid him an enormous compliment and at one stroke raised his holy reputation to a noble level.⁷

The 1065 abbey

Once again I take the liberty of harking back to a previous *Botolphian* – in this case that of February 2022 when I was comparing three abbey churches each of which had connections with our saint: *The history of the three churches of Bury, Westminster and Ely until, say 1030, is similar in many ways ... After 1030 however their routes diverged somewhat and Westminster Abbey Church took on a special secondary role - that of a mausoleum - when it was rebuilt⁸ by Edward the Confessor as his burial place and that of his successors. It was consecrated in December 1065, just before his death on 5th January. I think that we can assume that the consecration would not have occurred before the old shrines were properly installed and that that of St Botolph would have continued to be venerated in spite of the new masters. After all, his position as Patron Saint of Travellers remained secure for another 200 years during which his Westminster shrine would, if it remained, have continued to generate an income on that account.*



A reconstruction drawing of the Norman Abbey and Palace by Terry Ball and Richard Gem

A conjectural picture of the 1065 abbey

The above picture was copied from <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/about-the-abbey/history/history-of-westminster-abbey>

⁷ Somewhat surprisingly there is no record of there having been a St Botolph's shrine at Peterborough Abbey - which was dedicated to Saints Peter, Paul and Andrew. Despite the monastery being severely damaged in Viking raids the relics of these saints apparently survived and their shrines were clearly thought to be quite capable of attracting pilgrims without any help from relics of Saint Botolph. It is interesting to note that if our saint had not been needed to aid in the spawning of Thorney, Ely and Westminster, his body might have been left *in one piece* and *in peace* at Icanho and the flame of

reformed monastic life rekindled there. If this had been so, the sleepy village of Iken in Suffolk (the presumed site of Icanho abbey) might have been required to expand to Westminster-like dimensions.

⁸ Simultaneous with the re-building of Westminster Abbey, Edward built the Old Palace of Westminster (to become the monarch's principal residence) on nearby 'Thorney Island'. This might have been the same site as that upon which Cnut resided between 1016 and 1035.



A depiction of Westminster Abbey on the Bayeux Tapestry (embroidered c.1077)

The 1269 abbey

1269-c. 1534: *In 1245 Henry III started to re-build the abbey on a much grander scale and the shrines were moved once again.*

The new building was consecrated at a time when the wool trade was in full flight. From early C12 to at least mid C15, there was a resurgence in St Botolph's fame and popularity as he was hailed as the principal intercessor in the prayers of traders and sailors who were seeking their fortunes in the wool market.

Westminster was only two miles west of the Hansa's 'Steelyard' headquarters at Billingsgate and although a St Botolph's church lay at the docks, a ship's master would probably have thought it well worthwhile to be rowed in a skiff two miles upriver to pray at St Botolph's shrine at Westminster before setting out across the hazardous North Sea.

There are certainly no signs of Botolphian relics, shrines or chapels at Westminster Abbey today,

but we have the effects of three consecrations to consider: those in 1065, 1269 and c.1534.

1065 consecration.

For the reasons mentioned earlier it seems likely that Saint Botolph's relics would have been enshrined in the abbey by the time it was consecrated in 1065 and, although we have no record of there having been a separate chapel dedicated to his name, it is likely that there was one.

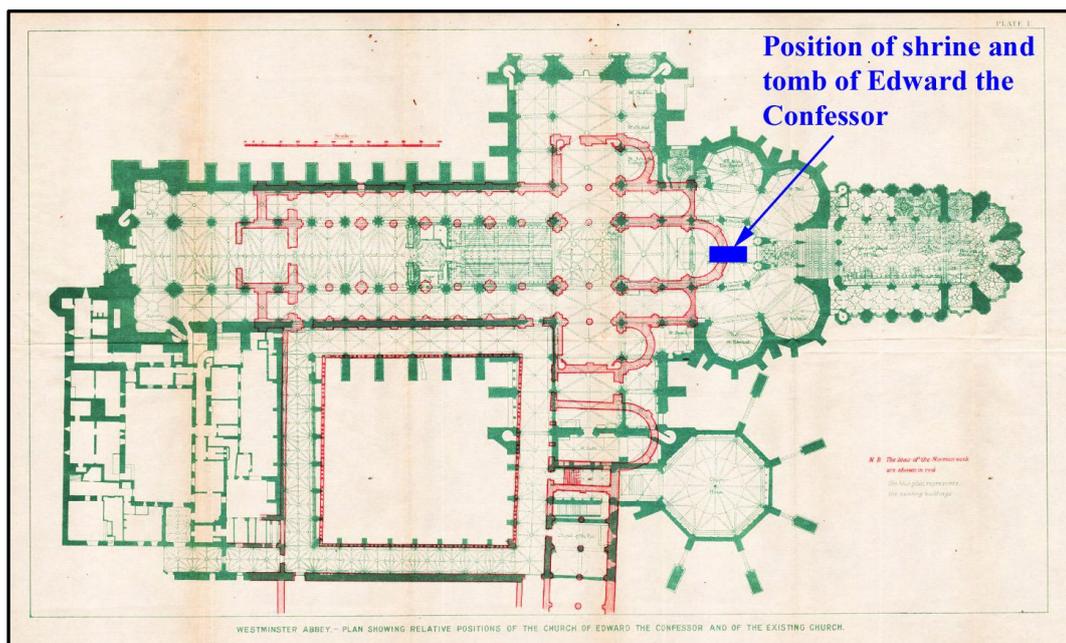
1269 consecration.

Our saint was still famous and popular in 1269, there having been a revival of his cult by virtue of his connection with the thriving wool trade - so it is likely that his shrine would have been transferred from the old church to the new one. Jacob de Voragine's new *Golden Legend* with its story about Saint Christopher was published in manuscript form close to the time of this second consecration however and by the end of C15 it would be available in printed form ensuring its wider distribution. These changes became instrumental in casting our saint out of his long-held position as Patron Saint of Travellers.

The decline of Saint Botolph's popularity.

By a similar date the power of the wool market had diminished and the days were numbered when Saint Botolph would be a household name.

I believe that we can date the decline in his fame and popularity to this period i.e. 1500 i.e. 34 years before the effects of the Reformation would start to be felt and the careers of *all* non-Biblical saints would be in jeopardy as they faced Henry VIII's banishment.



In red, the groundplan of Edward the Confessor's 1065 construction, and in greeny-blue the groundplan of that of 1269 by Henry III which we see today. The position of the shrine marked in blue above was discovered in 2005.

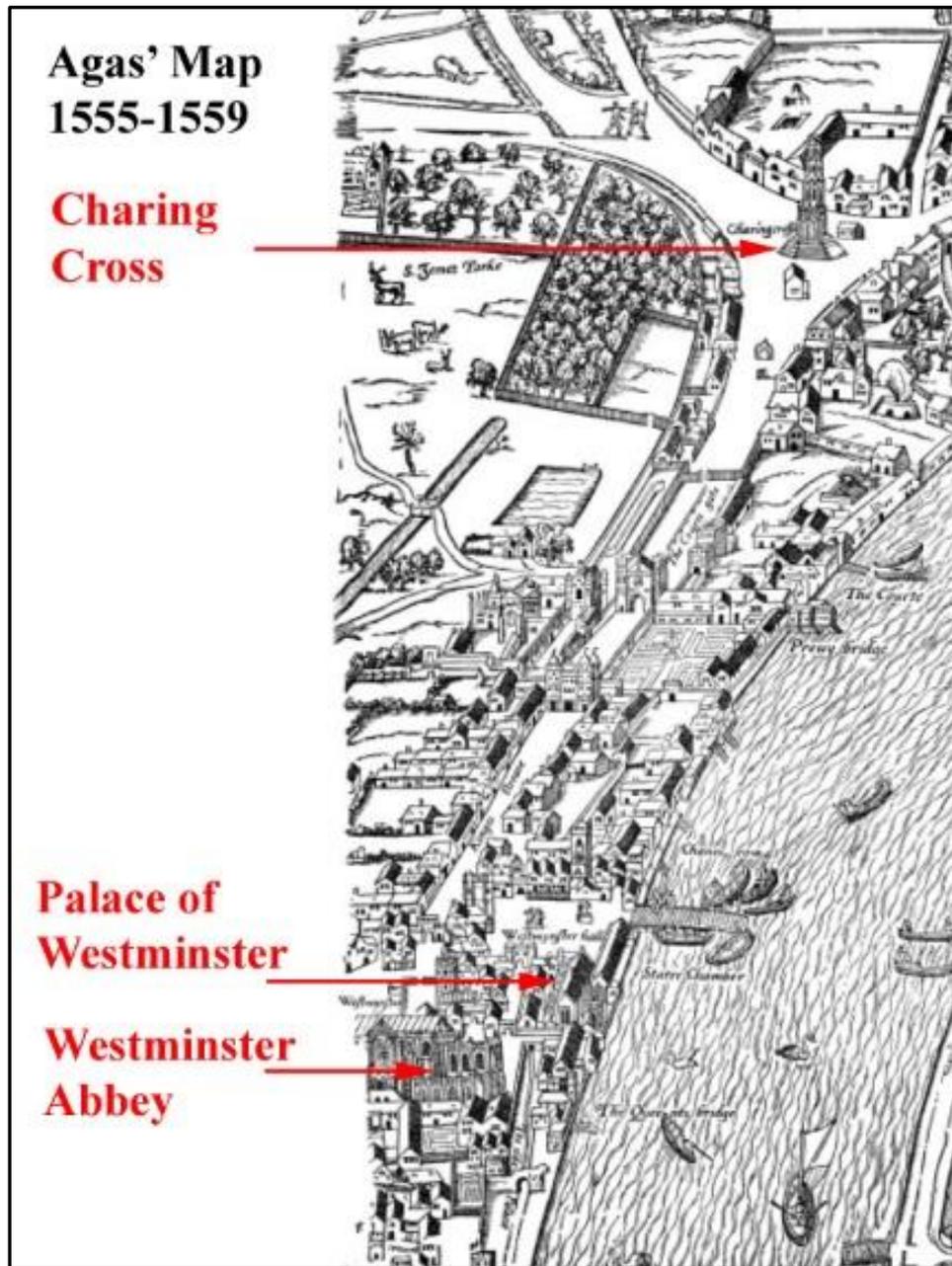
If we compare the two larger pictures above it is clear that the extension to the east end of the abbey would have encroached quite severely on the boundaries of the New Palace of Westminster.

If we assume that **Saint Botolph's shrine** was *indeed* at that time extant and working for the church in terms of being visible and attractive to pilgrims then it is likely to have been situated at this eastern end.

The other alternative is that the relics were not on public display but stored elsewhere in the abbey

and they might well have been relegated to this after early C15.

The abbey was and is a Royal Peculiar which means that it is owned by the crown and therefore would not have suffered the Reformation strictures in the same way as other church buildings. Nevertheless there would seem to be little doubt that all the abbey's relics would eventually have been consigned to the equivalent of the recycling bin.



The Agas' View of Westminster as it was between 1555 and 1559.

<https://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/agas.htm>

The Agas' Map (properly called the Agas' View) has been attributed to Robert Agas, a Suffolk land surveyor and cartographer who died in 1621. At the time of drawing, the population of London was no more than 100,000. Although the view is that

of between 1555 and 1559 the map was not published until a century later at which time the map was updated with some of the changes that had occurred during the intervening period.

Conclusion

If Westminster Abbey was indeed based on an early foundation by King Saebert of the East Saxons - somewhere between 604 and 616 - it would have been several years before Saint Botolph was born so clearly there can be no foundation connection. There is no evidence that it was 'commandeered' as a Saint Botolph Church later, and it does not stand at a particular gateway, river crossing or border that would lend itself to the presence of a church dedicated to the Patron Saint of Travellers. It is also not on the side of a hill. We cannot therefore claim this to be a Saint Botolph Church in the usual meaning of these words and no classification is applicable.

Prestige

We can safely say that nothing fits. The only connection that Saint Botolph had with this abbey church was that some of his relics, purloined from their proper place at Icanho Abbey, were used here to help to attract pilgrims and to generate prestige for the young abbey.

Having said that, from the start the abbey had its own relics such as St Edward the Confessor and possibly even a relic of St Peter.

Thus, prestigious as it is today, we can take pride in the fact that the abbey's early success was in some part due to the high reputation of our saint which was used as a tool to give it a powerful boost in its early days.

End notes

Westminster is another Saint Botolph location which has cropped up rather sooner than I was properly prepared for, so I have been unable to use my own photographs this month. I plan nevertheless to add this task to my ever-growing 'work to be done' list and take the photographs within the next few months.

On that subject I will be heading for Scotland again next week and, amongst other places, I plan to visit St Andrews to catch up with correcting the dearth of photographs that I had when I wrote the feature on this Saint Botolph site.

After I return from Scotland I plan to finalise the arrangements for the

Society of Saint Botolph Annual Luncheon

which, you will remember, from previous announcements in *The Botolphian*, will be held on

**Wednesday 18th October 2023
at 12.30 p.m.
in Cambridge.**

Venue and Price to be announced
in another email in about four weeks' time.

I do hope that you will all be able to come although if all 500 of you sign up for the event it could cause me a little stress – but do not let that put you off.

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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