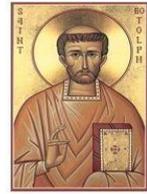




The Botolphian

Newsletter of
The Society of Saint Botolph

www.botolph.info



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1st May 2014.

Highlights this month

- St Botolph's Church, Aspley Guise, Beds.
- Correspondence from Dick Pascoe, Revd Dr James Olson, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Joe Bain and Peter Van Demark.
- Welcome to 9 new members.

Editorial

Once again this is rather a full issue. I hope my enthusiasm is not running away with me. I will curb it a little by keeping this editorial to a minimum and saving the 'Focus on Saint Botolph' for another time.

Church Feature

Aspley Guise.

Approach:- Coming from the south, leave the M1 at Junction 13 and take Bedford Road to the south west. After just over a mile, turn right into Church Street. 500 yards further on you will see St Botolph's on your right. Turn left just before you reach the church and park in the lay-by in Church Hill.

Key: The church is open daily from 10 a.m..

Contact: Revd Graham BRADSHAW,

Email: gbradshaw@tinyworld.co.uk.

Tel: 01908 583-169.

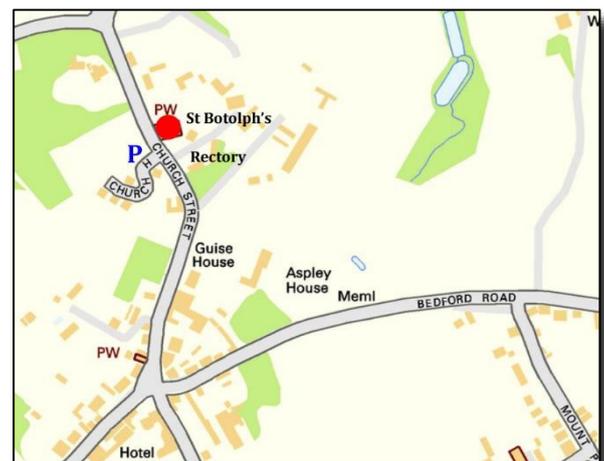
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Listed Grade: II*

The Village.

The toponym 'Aspley Guise' is one with which I have had some difficulty. Churches have 'apses' and I suppose it was for this reason that (until I knew better) I always reversed the second and third letters. To compound my felony I pronounced the second word as 'Geze', rather than using the local pronunciation of 'Guys'.

It seems that the name of the village derives from 'Aspen-Lea' (i.e. Aspen Meadow) and this helps with remembering the correct spelling. The village was first mentioned in a charter of 969 when King Edgar granted it to his thegn, Alfwold.



In 1259 Anselm de Guise became lord of the manor and the village adopted his name in 1375. There seems to be no connection between Anselm de Guise and the C16 pretender to the French throne (the Duke de Guise), other than the fact that both their families must have originated in the small commune of Guise in Picardy, Northern France.

The village lies 50 miles to the north-west of central London, close to Milton Keynes and the wartime code-breakers centre at Bletchley.

The Church.

The fabric of the building is mainly coursed ironstone with ashlar dressings; the tower is of coursed limestone rubble.



The church is very smart and clean and obviously much-loved and well-used. A considerable amount of restoration work was undertaken in the mid-nineteenth century and this, together with the Victorian memorials, camouflages its ancient provenance which becomes more evident as one investigates further.

If Grimston church struck me as being the 'St Botolph's Church of Wood-carvings', Aspley Guise is the 'St Botolph's Church of Decorated Headstops'. The Headstops are figures sited at the ends of such structures as labels and hood moulds which surround the tops of windows etc. I counted twenty at Aspley Guise.

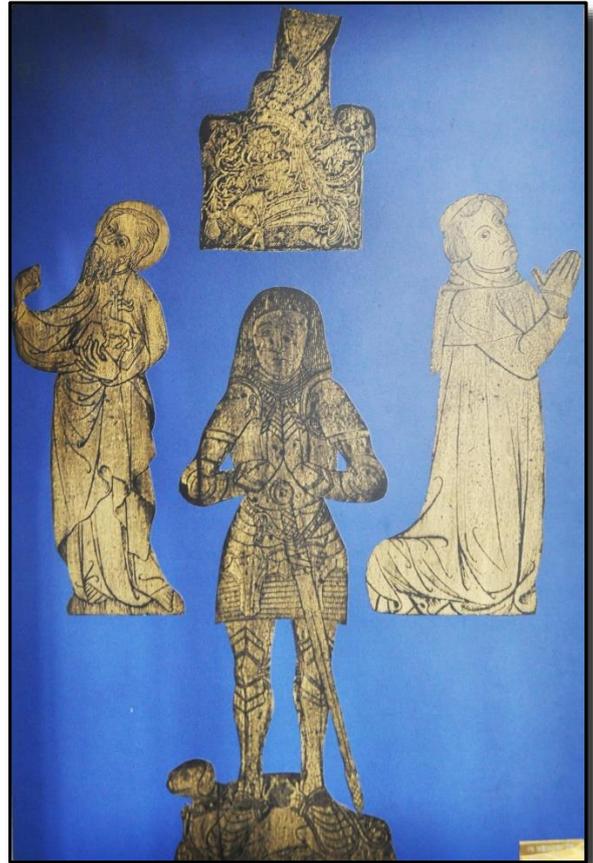


Looking at the depth of character that appears in each face one cannot but suspect that they were based on real people. Whether they were people of the village or friends of the sculptors one can but imagine.



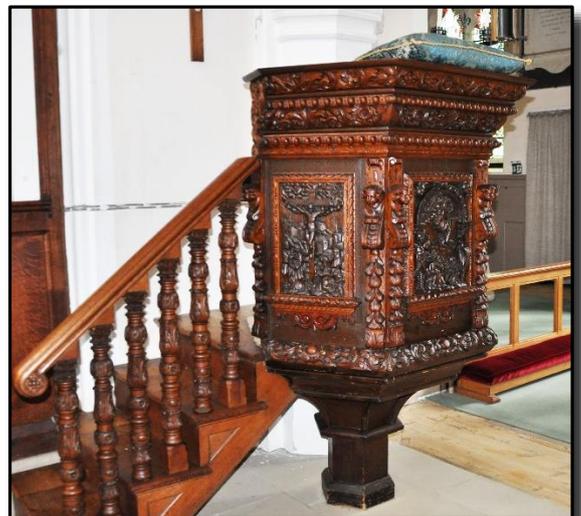
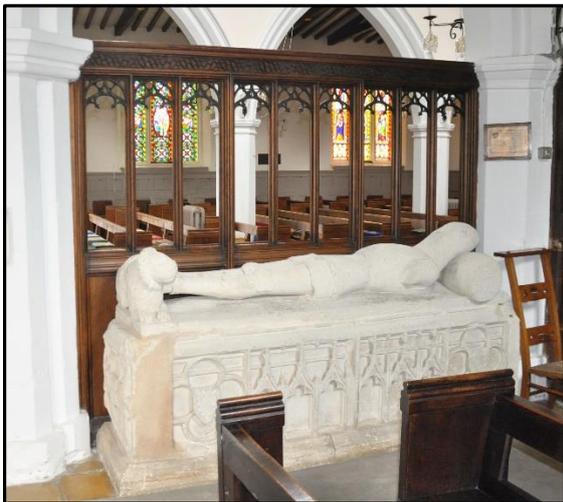


Beneath the carpet which lies in front of the tomb are two brasses, one of which, in memory of John Danvers, Rector from 1396 to 1414, shows St John the Baptist and a priest and is thought (from the aspect to which each is facing) to have come from either side of a much bigger brass. The other brass is of John de Guise (died 1501). There is a notice, close to the floor at the western end of the carpet, which asks that, if you are going to inspect the brasses, you start to roll the carpet from the opposite end.



In the north aisle on the other side of a C15 traceried and crenellated wooden screen, can be found a tomb chest topped by an effigy thought to be that of Sir William Tyrington who was guardian to the second Anselm of Guise (died c.1400).

The pulpit dates from C17 and is made from a series of finely-carved panels sculpted in the Netherlands and then framed by English craftsmen. It was probably not installed in the church until C19 however.



The cover of the font is of similar style although the font itself dates from C14.



The church contains many beautiful stained glass windows. The C15 nave is bright, light and airy and all that one would expect of a church which lies in a prosperous area where the local community is conscientious about maintaining standards and using privileged facilities wisely. To that end a Community Link Room was built behind the church in 1997 and when I arrived a Pilates Exercise class was about to start. Strangely the same thing happened when I visited St Botolph's Church Hadstock. (This exercise system was developed by Joseph Hubertus Pilates (1883-1967) - no connection to Pontius).



The C15 tower contains 6 bells which are in regular use and at the base of the tower can be

found one of the church's St Botolph's banners; the other is in the chancel.



Summary of items of interest:

1. *The Perpendicular style C15 tower of 3 stages.*
2. *The Tower Clock which dates from between 1400 and 1650.*
3. *C15 Crenellated screen in the N. Aisle.*
4. *C14 Tomb chest.*
5. *C14 Circular font with 4 moulded shafts.*
6. *The brasses under the carpet in the North Aisle. If lifting the carpet, be sure to roll it from east to west in accordance with notice near the floor at the carpet's western end.*
7. *Pulpit with C17 finely-carved panels.*

Summary of the church's history:-

The church is first mentioned in 1223 although its origins are thought to be Anglo-Saxon. By the middle of the nineteenth century the church was falling into disrepair and very extensive work was necessary. This involved the construction of a new organ chamber, new seating and a vestry. The upper half of the tower was rebuilt and two new bells installed, bringing the total to six. A Nativity window was inserted into the wall of the south aisle. In 1980 the vestry was extended and the two-storey Community Link Room was opened in 1997.

Relevance of the church to Botolph's life:

The Roman road (Watling Street) lies just over 3 miles to the southwest. There are no major rivers nearby. It seems unlikely that the site was founded as early as C7. A notice inside the church suggests that 'the cult of St Botolph ... may have been brought to Aspley by emigrants fleeing the Danish invasions'.

If this is another example of a Type B church (i.e. founded specifically for wayfarers to pray to and receive the blessing of the Patron Saint of Travellers) it was built even further 'off the beaten track' than most.

Patricia Croxton-Smith makes the valid point that the reason for the disparity might be because a more remote church would have been less obvious to Viking raiders than if it had been sited on the road itself.

Bearing in mind that the Danish invasions started in c.800 and continued for 200 years, it would be logical to sub-divide Type B churches into those which appear to have been founded:-

- (i) before 800
- (ii) between 800 and 1066 and
- (iii) after the Norman Conquest.

On that basis St Botolph's Aspley Guise would seem to fall into the Type B(ii) category.

Thanks: Many thanks to Graham Bradshaw for opening the church when I arrived a little early.

Readers' Letters and Emails

1. Revd Dr James Olson wrote from Boston USA saying how much he enjoyed the newsletter and promised to write up some 'Botolphian things' about his home town at some stage in the future.
2. Dick Pascoe wrote 'Fascinating as always - thanks'.
3. Joe Bain put me right about the spelling of The Saint Botolph Club - *without* an apostrophe - sorry Joe, and thanks.
4. Diarmaid MacCulloch (yes - the celebrated author) thanked me for the latest issue and pointed out (regarding the rood screen at Bradenham) that the crucified Christ is always accompanied by Our Lady and St John in rood groups.
5. Peter Van Demark sent outline details of proposals for activities on this year's St Botolph's Day at The Saint Botolph Club in Boston USA.

Membership of SOSB

I am delighted to welcome the following new members:-

Nigel Hart (Dover)
Mary King (Dover)
Revd Graham Bradshaw (Aspley Guise)
Lee and Jo Robinson (Ashford, Kent)
Eric and Rosina Jones (Norfolk)
Revds Oz and Pam Maton (Chatham).

Regular Endnotes

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*.'

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Folkestone, Kent. 1st May 2013.