

# Statement of Significance



**St. Botolph's Church, Hadstock**

**Saffron Walden and Villages Team Ministry  
Priest at Hadstock: The Rev. Paula Griffiths**

**District Council: Uttlesford**

# January 2019

## Statement of Significance

### Section 1: Brief history and description of the church building(s), contents, churchyard and setting

St Botolph's Church at Hadstock (Grade I) has been a key part of this small Essex village (current pop. about 330) for nearly 1000 years. Its presence, and its palpable sense of history, witness to the continuity of Christian faith throughout the changes in the world around.

Much of the village is a conservation area. It is surrounded by rural arable farming land, and lies between the market town of Saffron Walden (5 miles away) and Linton (just under 2 miles away), both served by shops, banks and doctors' surgeries. It is a short drive from Cambridge.

There is evidence of a stone Saxon church predating the present building – *possibly* the Monastery of Icanho built by the Saxon saint Botolph between AD654 and AD680. In c. 1240, Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury referred to Hadstock as “dedicated in the days of old to the Holy Botolph, there at rest”. Certainly, it is hard to explain such a large building in this small village without some significant reason for its foundation. Carbon dating of mortar samples and charcoal has indicated pre-Danish dates, and geophysical examination has shown that the original Saxon chancel was 2.9 metres longer than the present one - a very large church for the period and in a poor agricultural area. Excavations in 1974 revealed twenty different floor levels in the north transept. Parts of the nave and the lower courses of the north transept may also be pre-Danish.

There is a strong case for the present nave and north transept (first quarter of C11), being the church founded by King Cnut to commemorate those killed on both sides - Saxons and Danes - at the Battle of Assandun in 1016, and dedicated in 1020, as described in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and other key sources. This powerful Christian message of a victor seeking reconciliation still resonates today. Other evidence supports the Cnut link: the church has consistently had a Royal patron, except for a period after 1087 when it was granted to the bishops of Ely. The parish intends to celebrate 2020 as the church's likely Millennium.

The north porch door has been dendro-dated to c. 1034-1042, thus probably the oldest working door in the country still in daily use. [Westminster Abbey also boasts an early door, but was founded shortly before the death of Edward the Confessor (1066): Rochester Cathedral's oldest door is Norman, ie post 1066.] It speaks of simplicity and solidity, as well as age and continuity of worship over many centuries.

It has always been a cruciform Church. The present high, narrow nave has 4 double-splayed Saxon windows; a C15 window and door were inserted on the south side. The west tower is C14-C15. There is said to have been a central tower, probably wooden, which fell in a C13 storm – a jumble of timbers in the nave roof seem to bear this out. The crossing arches were rebuilt in the C13-C14 and windows inserted in both transepts in C15. The north porch itself is also C15. These mediaeval additions – together with pews containing some pre-Reformation elements – speak of the development and continuity of faith in the village.

In the 1790s the original Chancel, then ruinous, was demolished and replaced by a very small Chancel built for the Rev. John Addison Carr. This was not grand enough for the Rev. Francis E. Smith, who commissioned Butterfield to build the present Chancel and Vestry in the 1890s. These additions suggest a Victorian attempt to regain a mediaeval ethos (probably in a way never actually present in Hadstock) - but in a manner which, by Butterfield's

standards of bright polychromy, was comparatively restrained and sought to be compatible with the existing building.

In the 1970s the floor was removed to install underfloor heating, and replaced with a concrete floor, until recently covered with coconut matting. This jarred with the mediaeval building, but has now been considerably improved – see below.

### **Setting**

St. Botolph's stands high above Hadstock on its south side. A bench seat by the north porch commands a view over much of the village and to Rivey Hill beyond Linton. A well-used public footpath crosses the churchyard, and Church Path links the church and village and the Village Hall (originally a Victorian school), to the east of the church and on the edge of farmland. To the south are a large Victorian former rectory and Glebe House. There are good views of the church from the main road (B1052, Walden Road) and the tower is a landmark from many houses in the village.

### **Churchyard**

The church has 2.5 acres of land, much of it churchyard, together with a car park also serving the Village Hall. The grounds are well maintained with a small nature conservation area. With relatively few memorials, and none of any size, the churchyard has a pleasing open aspect facing the village.

Much of the churchyard is mown grass, with many burials in unmarked graves. There are about 180 memorials, mostly simple headstones. The oldest recorded death on a headstone is 1796 and there are 47 of C19 date, the rest being modern. A flint wall, rebuilt over the last few years, surrounds the churchyard. Mature trees bound the churchyard along Walden Road and to the south. The churchyard was extended into the area behind (south of) the church in recent years and now provides adequate space for future burials. The PCC is currently planning an area for cremated remains in the extension, in discussion with the DAC.

### **The church in the village**

The Church plays a key role in the village. In June 2001 it became part of the Saffron Walden Team Ministry (renamed Saffron Walden and Villages Team Ministry in 2012). It is open every day and attracts frequent visitors tracing family history and many interested in the church's own history and architecture, as well as ramblers and people just wanting a quiet space. It is frequently used for community purposes – concerts, meetings and other events, fetes, family sessions to make Christmas /Easter decorations, and social gatherings. There is an active bellringing group.

A recent survey found that 99% of the village population wanted the Church there, preferably still used for worship. Nearly all will support fund-raising for the building.

### **Church repairs**

Major repairs began in 1969. Between then and 2008 Hadstock raised nearly £500,000 to reroof the whole Church; stabilise the cracked Tower; repoint walls; repair stone and windows; and recast and install the lightweight peal of 6 bells.

By 2014 however much plaster in the nave and North Transept was peeling or crumbling, with some mediaeval plaster detached from the wall. Running the electric underfloor heating felt prohibitive for a small congregation.

The congregation worked hard to address these issues, recognising that a cold building with peeling plaster gave a very negative message about Christianity. New thermostatic heating control, simple draught exclusion round the North Door and making (colourful and comfortable) pew cushions have provided a warmer, more welcoming environment for worship and events.

Further work began in September 2017: extensive plaster repairs to the nave and north transept; re-limewashing the nave, nave ceiling and north transept; providing safe access to the roof space; patinating the concrete floor with ethyl silicate coloured with natural mineral pigments which harmonise with the colours of the stonework of the walls: and conserving the stone surround of the historic North Door.

During these works, the nave ceiling was found to be dangerous and needed complete replacement. This increased the cost of the programme from approximately £62,000 to £94,000 (including fees but excluding recoverable VAT). The extra cost was met through an appeal to the village, whose determination to raise the funds underlined its care for the building. The works were completed by Easter 2018 and the church reopened. (Worship took place in the chancel while the works were in train.)

The results have transformed the building. Clean, light walls and ceiling radiate joy. The floor harmonises far more fittingly with the building: the coconut matting has been removed, and the heating works more effectively.

## **Section 2: The significance of the church (including its contents and churchyard):**

### **i. Special architectural and historical interest**

This is a church of national importance, reflected in its Grade I listing. Its age, Saxon origins and pre-Conquest fabric make it particularly significant, together with the later work over the centuries from the mediaeval to the modern. The chancel is the work of a first-rank Gothic Revival architect (although not often mentioned in the corpus of his works). The likely historic association with St Botolph himself and Cnut give this extra significance. It is a focal point within the attractive village, and its oldest building.

### **ii. Significant features of artistic/archaeological interest**

#### **Wall paintings**

Advice on wall paintings has been provided by Tobit Curteis Dip Conservation (Courtauld Inst.) ACR FIIC. In his initial appraisal Tobit states "...although only a small section of painting is exposed, it is significant because it may suggest the presence of other surviving areas of painting. It also provides a wonderful insight into the visual history of the church which allows the modern visitor to begin to see that the colourful past of the building which is almost entirely lost."

Removal of damaged loose plaster in September 2017 exposed a fragment of painting on the south nave wall: this, with some previously exposed painting, is the subject of the condition survey and conservation report prepared by Tobit Curteis Associates, generously grant-aided by ChurchCare. The fragment seems to show a male head surrounded by a nimbus, probably C13-C14, or possibly a consecration cross. Evenly spaced decorative roundels appear on the nimbus's outer edge. Tobit Curteis advises that it is best considered as an 'archaeological fragment' rather than a work of art. However, it is clearly significant – the decorative roundels are apparently unknown in other wall paintings, although there are parallels in mediaeval illuminated manuscripts. The painting therefore seems to indicate the church's importance during the mediaeval period. The parish hopes to access further information in the Courtauld Institute and Church Buildings Council about other traces of mediaeval painting in the church, to help provide appropriate interpretation and information for villagers and visitors.

**Other features**

The north door – see section 1

The font - a Saxon base and stem below a C14 bowl.

Exposed late Saxon stonework in the nave and around the north door.

The south door - C13

Finial cross on the south transept – C14.

Bells - a light peal of early C18 bells, recast in 1970 by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry.

Millennium cross of stainless steel (2000) at the chancel arch

Four embroidered banners telling the story of the Battle of Assandun and the consecration of

Cnut's church - handmade in the village in 2016 and dedicated by The Most Revd Rowan

Williams at a service to commemorate the Millennium of the battle.

Many pieces of older stone stored in the Church, some dug up from fields or retrieved from foundations of demolished farm buildings. These would benefit from better interpretation and display.

