

## CHAPTER II

Previous work on the subject of shared churchyards has been largely confined to speculation and listings; the only serious work is Warner's article 'Shared Churchyards, Freeman Church Builders, and the Development of Parishes in Eleventh-Century East Anglia', published in 1986.<sup>1</sup> The only other published work of any weight is Messent's *The Ruined Churches of Norfolk*, published in 1931, which is a gazetteer of all ruined churches, but with the slightest of commentaries,<sup>2</sup> and Batcock's *The Ruined and Disused Churches of Norfolk*, published in 1991, which is a much fuller work, with systematic notes on the history, archæology, and architecture, with interpretations.<sup>3</sup>

Messent's book, as already suggested, is of little actual use now, although it was a useful exercise in its day. Many of his vanished churches are inaccurately or imprecisely placed, and he ascribes parochial status to a large number of subsidiary buildings which never in fact enjoyed such status. A random selection from the book, all from pages 12 and 13, will suffice:

BARTON BENDISH ... There were originally three churches here – St Andrew's, St Mary, and All Saints'; the first and last standing in the same churchyard. St Andrew's is standing and in full use, but All Saints', which stood in the same churchyard a little to the south-west, was pulled down in the summer of 1787 ...

All Saints in fact stood in its own yard, to the south-west indeed, but separated from S Andrew by a well-defined highway.<sup>4</sup>

BARSHAM, NORTH, four miles north of Fakenham. A chapel dedicated to St Catherine is known to have been in existence here in 1531. All traces above the foundation have disappeared.

This is a typical entry, with no locations or references. How do we know the chapel existed? Where was it, if the foundations are still known?

The book does contain some useful material, however: on page 40 is a measured plan and elevation of the ruins of St Saviour at Surlingham, and there are several other plans and sketches. A measure of the caution with which one must approach the text is perhaps sbest demonstrated in this entry, on page 30:

SALLOW was a hamlet which went with Wroxham. It has a Parochial Chapel, which was dedicated to All Saints. All traces of this have disappeared.

Sallow, or more accurately Sallows, is now spelt Salhouse; it was indeed a dependent settlement of Wroxham, but it eventually gained parochial status in its own right, and the church of All Saints is still very much in use!

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<sup>1</sup> *Landscape History*, vol 8, 1986, pp39-52.

<sup>2</sup> CJW Messent, *The Ruined Churches of Norfolk*, Norwich, 1931.

<sup>3</sup> N Batcock, *The Ruined and Disused Churches of Norfolk*, East Anglian Archæology Report no 51, Gressenhall, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> See *East Anglian Archæology*, vol 32, 1987, p 2.

Messent's stated aim is to record all ruined and vanished churches, and as such has no special interest in the sharing of churchyards by two or more buildings. It is, however, important to be aware of the limitations of his work when we come to look at Warner's article, as he relies heavily on Messent for building up his list of shared churchyards. This list has no fewer than 'thirty-six recorded examples'.<sup>5</sup>

Some of Warner's second buildings were in fact chantry or guild chapels, which for reasons not now discernible were built separately from the main church, rather than as an extension to it (as Gissing and Kimberley); some were not in the same yard as the first building, as can be seen from a large-scale Ordnance map (as Langham Parva and Snetterton) or from ruins (as Great Walsingham); one, Brandiston/Guton, is the result of following Messent, who followed an erroneous reading of Blomefield;<sup>6</sup> at another, East Dereham, the second building was the shrine chapel over Withburga's well; and his final entry, 'Quettacre', which is clearly Wheatacre, is again a misreading of the facts, and the supposed second building is now known as the parish church of Burgh St Peter (originally Wheatacre Burgh) some two miles away, although the two villages originally formed one parish.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Barton Bendish (see Messent's entry *supra*), he woefully misinterprets the facts:

... or in the case of All Saints Barton Bendish, which was pulled down in 1787, the materials went into the repair of the other two churches left standing in the same churchyard (Messent 1931, p 12.) [Warner, p 40]

Even Messent knew that St Mary's is in a separate yard, as it is still standing. The corrections to Warner's list of thirty-six churches are given in Appendix II.

This erroneous listing does not, of course, allow for an accurate assessment of the facts: 'the even distribution of shared churchyards in Norfolk defies geographical interpretation' he says on page 40; as we shall see in Chapter IV, all the true examples are, with the exception of West Dereham, to be found in the eastern half of the county, and this makes interpretation much easier.

He is also struck by the number of (what he considers to be) subsidiary foundations which are dedicated to St Mary. This is brought out in the case of Thorney chapel (St Mary), built on the edge of Stowmarket (St Peter) churchyard. The total number of Marian dedications in Norfolk is 20 per cent;<sup>8</sup> the percentage in Warner's list is 30. The percentage in the revised list of thirteen is 33 (nine of the twenty-seven churches being St Mary). Indeed, he places such importance on this

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<sup>5</sup> Warner, p 40.

<sup>6</sup> cf Batcock 1991, p 76.

<sup>7</sup> cf Batcock 1991, p 10.

<sup>8</sup> Warner, p 42, following Bond 1914 and Linnell 1962.

that he divides his list in two: those with one or other church dedicated to St Mary, and those with neither dedicated in her honour. He suggests that these dedications ‘may well go hand-in-hand with her rise in popularity as a cult figure’. He goes on to say that, while only about twenty English churches are known to be dedicated to her by the end of the eighth century, the number had risen to over 2000 by the Reformation. However, Farmer, whom he quotes as his authority, also goes on to say that grand Lady Chapels were not usually built onto cathedrals and abbeys until the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries:<sup>9</sup> if these second churches were indeed a cultic expression, surely we would expect to find them following the lead of the great churches? Yet these churches must have been in place by the mid-twelfth century at the latest, when the parochial system starts to fossilize, and the founding of new parishes becomes increasingly difficult. This is also the period during which dedications to St Mary are on the increase anyway. For the same reason, it is difficult to see them starting life as pilgrim chapels connected with the Walsingham devotion (shrine supposedly founded 1061), although there were many of these, and the Shrine certainly influenced the dedicatory pattern round about it. A very high proportion of parishes round about Walsingham are St Mary, and many others are All Saints, which may on occasion ‘hide’ an original Marian dedication.<sup>10</sup> These parishes are, however, largely to the west of Walsingham, in the hundreds of Docking, Brothecross, and Gallow, all hundreds which do not contain shared churchyards.<sup>11</sup>

I am inclined, therefore, to think that the dedication of a church is irrelevant in this context. If all groups of shared yards had one Marian dedication and one other, then it may take on a greater significance.<sup>12</sup> We have seen that the percentage within the groups is thirty-three (nine churches out of twenty-seven): this rises to sixty-nine percent if we examine by group (*i.e.*, nine groups out of thirteen having a Mary church). Equally, if it could be proved conclusively that the Mary church is invariably the younger foundation, then again the significance would be greater. St Mary South Walsham may well be younger than St Lawrence: the parish appears to be carved from the edge of St Lawrence, and St Lawrence holds the detached portions of the parish on Acle marshes; St Mary Antingham appears to be younger than St Margaret by reason of the architecture, but this does not mean that St Mary was not altered and rebuilt during the Middle Ages, while St Margaret (presumably the poorer church, which is why it fell into difficulties later) could not afford such alterations.

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<sup>9</sup> following Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, p 290.

<sup>10</sup> *cf* Bond 1914, p 191; Arnold-Foster 1899, vol II, p 503.

<sup>11</sup> Little Walsingham itself was dedicated to All Saints, until Hope Patten changed it to St Mary in the 1930s.

<sup>12</sup> See further Blair, ‘Anglo-Saxon Minsters’.

St Mary is, however, an important dedication within our revised group of thirteen: of the twenty-nine churches, nine are dedicated in her honour, but the range of other dedications within the group is small: four each to St Andrew and All Saints; two each to St Margaret and St Michael, and St Peter; one each to Sts Peter and Paul, St John Baptist, and St Lawrence (see page 2 for the distribution, and Appendix III for a statistical analysis).<sup>13</sup>

Warner's further reasoning, however, is unaffected by neither his inaccurate base-list nor his preoccupation with the dedications. His eventual finding, that the second church, if not both, were the result of groups of freemen working together, is very similar to the reasons I shall be suggesting later. His over-large list contains many inaccuracies (see Appendix II for the corrections), but much of his detailed work was based, for Norfolk at least, on South Walsham and the Reepham group, which are, of course, true examples of shared churchyards. What he has to say may well apply in a wider context, such as the splitting of parishes (*e.g.*, Wroxham/Salhouse, Wheatacre/Burgh St Peter), but it is beyond the scope of this study to attempt such an evaluation.

After examining tithe-maps of Reepham-Whitwell-Hackford, and also examining the extraordinary parochial divisions of Mendham, Metfield, and Withersdale in Suffolk,<sup>14</sup> Warner goes on to say:

That some vill in eleventh-century East Anglia were highly complex territorial units, in some cases inextricably intertwined with one another, must be a truism for the student of Little Domesday Book. Yet nonetheless these diverse units had and identity reflected both in their individual place-names and in the sense of community evident in the congregations which filled their small churches. In those vill which were wholly or even partly integrated one with another the choice of church site may well have been more arbitrary than in a vill with a more discrete territory. Where freemen with widely scattered lands acted in partnership to build a church the pull of a pre-established graveyard and an ancient sacred site may have seemed more attractive and more equitable than locating to new church on lands belonging to one or other of the partners concerned ... The result might well have been a compromise, and what more convenient compromise could there be than building the new church as close to the established churchyard as possible?<sup>15</sup>

This analysis introduces a new factor which we have already touched upon in the explanation of the title: the unpredictability of human nature. Here we have the words 'compromise' and 'convenient', and we do well at least to bear these terms in mind whilst we search for more definitive evidence.

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<sup>13</sup> An interesting point, but one which probably has little bearing on our topic, is that only three of the groups do not have a female dedicatory saint: Barnham Broom, West Dereham, and Wicklewood – though one of the Wicklewood dedications is All Saints.

<sup>14</sup> The parishes of Mendham and Metfield are divided by a north-east/south-west line, Mendham lying to the north of it. Withersdale, in 1840, comprise fourteen separate detached portions of varying sizes located in the other two parishes. See map in Warner, p 50, *reproduced here as Fig 2.x*

<sup>15</sup> Warner, p 50.

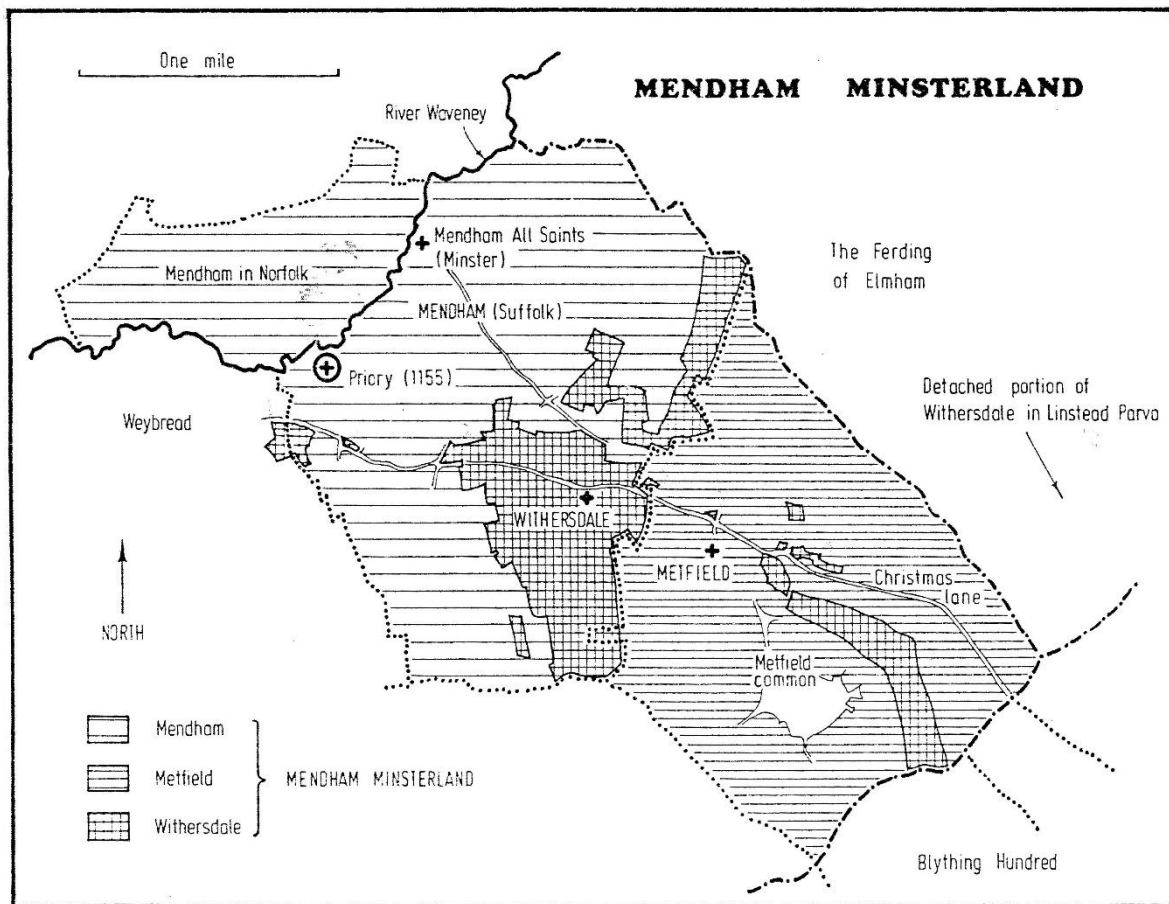


Fig 2.1: Mendham Minsterland  
 (reproduced from Warner, 'Shared churchyards, freemen church builders ...', p 50)