

# Opening the book on Boulston Church

In the first of three articles, Mark Muller follows the fascinating, and multi-faceted, stories surrounding Boulston Church

THE trouble with arriving at Boulston Church with the intention of perhaps just gathering together a description and some images of it, is that it becomes similar to researching any topic in the Pembrokeshire Archives facility.

In the atmosphere of that remarkable collection of more than one million documents, I defy anyone to remain focused on the topic in hand that is being researched without giving in to the addictive, time-consuming passion of following one or (many) more of a host of tangential subjects and topics and documents that appear as a matter of course whilst researching almost every subject or person or thing.

Boulston Church is the same.

It opens like a book in front of you and it becomes impossible not to mention and delve into the Wogans, one of the most powerful of Pembrokeshire's families.

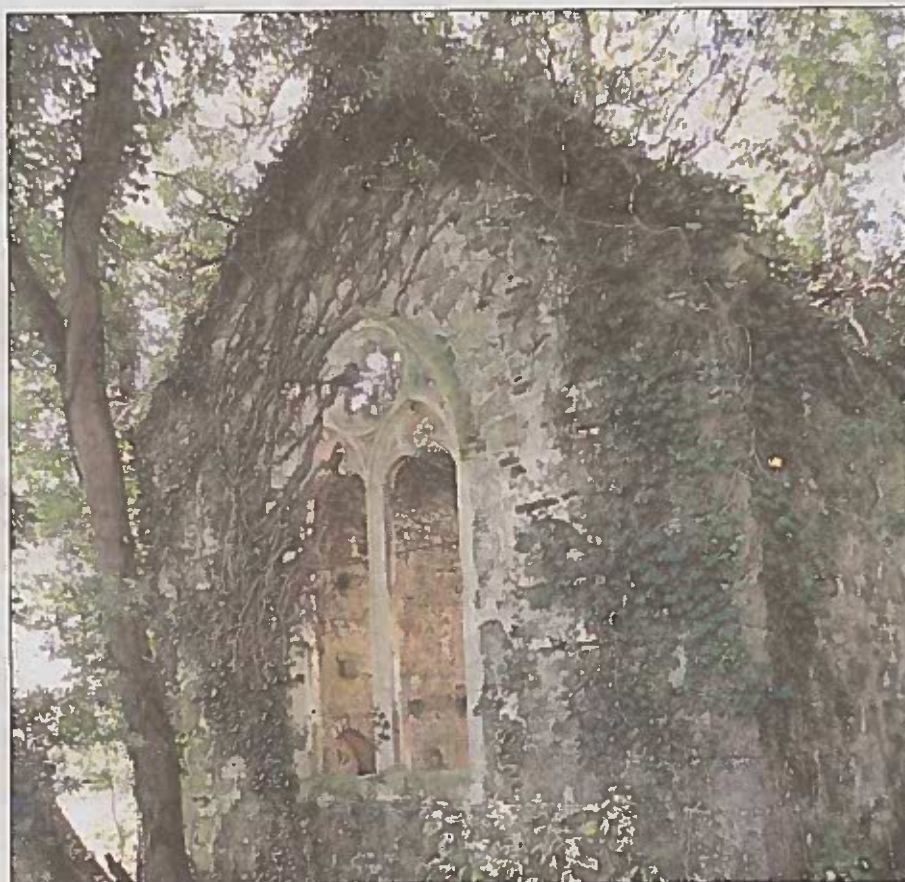
It was their place of worship; it was they who probably built it and who lived in the nearby, once immense mansion (Old Boulston Hall).

Or who can resist following another tangent of the 'new' mansion built in 1798 by the Acklands, who followed the Wogans in merging with the greatest land-owning families of the county and married into the Lloyd Philippses of Dale Castle?

It just goes on and on and if you dare step into the frame that surrounds any of these attachments, then edging in on from all sides comes the Civil War; the fearful monster called the Basilisk and much, much more.

So I don't know where this is going to go or where it might end up, but I can promise you that it is all deliciously intriguing; let's start with the church.

Amongst the many unused churches and chapels



This beautiful Gothic window was installed in the late 19th century as part of a long period of renovation.

in this county, Boulston Church must stand as one of the most beautiful ruins.

Everyone who has ever written anything about Pembrokeshire over the last two centuries has been intrigued by it and I am certainly no different.

It is difficult to get to and is on private land which means that it slowly and sedately crumbles unseen, on the northern bank of the river, three miles outside Haverfordwest.

In addition, it is surrounded by a grove of trees that make it, in any case, almost invisible.

What remains as a romantic ruin isn't old; it was rebuilt, as were a huge percentage of churches in this country in the mid 19th century, with the gothic aspects, most notably the windows, added even later and dating probably from the late period of the same century.

However, the rebuild was on the site of a much older, medieval church that served

a branch of the Wogan family, whose remarkable family seat of Boulston Hall lies in dramatic ruins a few hundred yards further along the river bank.

What is odd about Boulston Church, and which adds potentially another dimension to it, is that no description of it in any document or book which mentions it provides us with a dedication name.

It has no saint attached to it and remains purely and simply, and perhaps a little nakedly, Boulston Church.

It is Richard Fenton, writing in 1811 who poses a reason.

In his *A Historical Tour of Pembrokeshire* he describes the church as having a reputation of 'being a "peculiar", a species of property but little known to the clergy of this country, being a particular parish, having jurisdiction within itself.'

The idea of churches being allowed to function outside the jurisdiction of the bishop of a diocese appears

to have originated in Anglo Saxon times.

Over time, some became known as 'royal peculiars' with only the monarch having jurisdiction over them.

Whether this status of Boulston Church as a non-royal peculiar had anything to do with the Knights Hospitaller Commandery at Slebech, three miles away is unknown - although they certainly owned it.

A few peculiars remain (the concept was abolished in the mid-19th century) with perhaps one of the most famous being St Mary le Bow in London, the great bell of which has to be within hearing distance at the birth of anyone born wishing to claim to be a Cockney.

Frustratingly, Boulston Church does not appear on lists of known former peculiars, which perhaps makes Boulston particularly peculiar - or dare I say it, peculiarly peculiar.

There's lots more to come.



Boulston Church

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