In Unenvied Greatness Stands: The Lordly Tower-Nave Church of St Mary Bishophill Junior, York

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The late 11th-century tower-nave church of St Mary Bishophill Junior stands within the city walls of York, adjacent to the important early monastery of Holy Trinity (formerly Christ Church). Its unusual architectural form and apparent location within a small enclosure indicate that it was a private, lordly chapel rather than a congregational church. This is supported by the break-up of the old monastery of Christ Church at the hands of secular power, and by the integration of St Mary Bishophill Junior into the regional landscape of Anglo-Saxon civil defence.

Yet thus it all the field commands,
And in unenvied greatness stands
Andrew Marvell, *Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilbrough*.

Introduction

Tower-nave churches are a small group of free-standing towers incorporating chapels. Their limited capacity and elaborate construction suggest that they were not built as conventional congregational churches but rather as private, high-status buildings. Over fifty years ago, C A R Radford (1953) suggested that one of these towers, in the village of Earls Barton (Northamptonshire), stood at the fortified dwelling of a late Anglo-Saxon lord. A truncated earthwork is associated with the tower, and the proximity of a *burh* place-name to the site is further evidence that this was a defended place. Radford further pointed out the potential relevance of the *Geþyncðo*, ('Promotion Law') of *c*1000 which describes a private chapel and bell-tower as pre-requisites for thegnly status:

> *If a freeman prospered so that he had fully five hides of his own land, a chapel and a kitchen, a bell-tower and a* burhgeat *[defended enclosure], a seat and a special office in the king's hall, then henceforward he was worthy of the rights of a thegn.* (Whitelock 1979, 468–9).

Furthermore, Radford made the insightful suggestion that high-status tower-nave churches such as that at Earls Barton combined the functions of chapel and bell-tower into one status-affording lordly structure. While this may be taking the *Geþyncðo* too literally, it does introduce the idea that these towers were architectural symbols of early medieval lordship: signalling-systems for secular power – as well as private piety – potentially far into their landscapes. Nonetheless, along with any aristocratic symbolism these would have been practical structures. Each would have accommodated a private chapel for a tiny, presumably high-status, congregation. Additionally, their loftiness would have made them obvious

watchtowers, even focal points for mustering troops, which were two key lordly responsibilities in the Anglo-Saxon period (Abels 1988, 116–8). If tower-nave churches were indeed lordly structures, which their form certainly suggests, we can expect them to have been suitably placed to have fulfilled these two requirements.

Recent work has begun to look at the small number of tower-nave churches known from Anglo-Saxon England as a coherent group (Audouy et al 1995; Shapland 2008 and forthcoming; Rodwell and Atkins 2011, 313–20). However, the majority remain largely unstudied and poorly understood. One of the few to have been subjected to full architectural investigation is that of St Mary Bishophill Junior in York, which stands in the city's southwest suburb on high ground within the former Roman *colonia*, adjacent to the former Holy Trinity Priory (Figs 1 & 2). It is the intention here to investigate what the place of this tower in the landscape of 11th century York can reveal about the social context of its construction.

Description

St Mary's was first recognised as being of Anglo-Saxon construction in 1843 (Wenham et al 1987, 170) and was partially described by Baldwin Brown (1925, 489), and again in more detail by Fisher (1962, 143–4), the Taylors (1965, 697–9) and the RCHME (1972). It has since undergone comprehensive recording and partial

Fig 1
The church of St Mary Bishophill Junior from the east.
Note the curving street alignment around the church
(photo: author)

Fig 2
York southwest of the Ouse in the medieval period
(redrawn from Briden and Stocker 1987, 84)

excavation, the results of which are published by Wenham et al (1987) and are briefly summarised here.

The church presently consists of an aisled nave, a chancel with a chapel to the north, a south porch and a western tower. The tower is 8.0m square externally with walls 0.9–1.0m thick at ground level, reducing to 0.7–0.8m at the level of its belfry stage. It was formerly accessed via a doorway in its west wall, which was removed in 1908. The tower is presently 23.4m tall; its early fabric survives to a height of 19.15m, above which there is a late medieval parapet. It is separated externally by a string-course 13.5m above ground level which divides the tower into two stages. Both stages have predominantly side-alternate Millstone Grit quoins, some of which are megalithic, many clearly re-used from Roman buildings. Aside from these, the stages are of markedly different fabric. The lower stage is mainly characterised by roughly squared and coursed Lower Magnesian Limestone, laid with Millstone Grit, Upper Carboniferous sandstones and Jurassic limestones to create a deliberate, if somewhat uneven, decorative banding effect. The upper stage is constructed from massive coursed and squared rubble, mainly Millstone Grit, with no attempt at decorative banding. There were formerly two small, square-headed single-splayed windows in each of the tower's north,

south and west elevations, one at first- and one at second-floor level. Above, each face had a large round-headed two-light belfry-opening of a type similar to those that characterise the Lincolnshire group of towers (Stocker and Everson 2006). Their mid-wall shafts were probably re-used from a Roman building.

The tower was originally divided into four floors. Its internal elevations are only partially visible, but it is clear that the banding of the external elevations is not visible, reinforcing their interpretation as a decorative effect. It communicates with the extant nave through a large and relatively plain gritstone tower arch 5.0m high and 3.0m wide, thought to have been re-used *in toto* from a Roman building (Briden and Stocker 1987, 98). It is decorated on its western face, visible from the tower-space, as well as to the east. A vertical scar in the wall-fabric adjacent to the east elevation of the tower arch is indicative of the original eastern structure of the tower having been a narrow chancel rather than a nave (Fig 3), something supported by evidence for extensive re-facing of the masonry in this area. A single stone interpreted as belonging to this structure survives protruding from the base of this elevation. A roof-scar above the present nave roof is also congruent with this postulated chancel, which would have been approximately 6.0m across with walls 0.8m thick and 4.5m tall (Briden and Stocker 1987, 137–9). Additionally, a pair of blocked features, interpreted either as a recess or an external doorway with a small window above, are partially visible in the south wall at ground level.

Fig 3
Reconstruction of the plan and elevations of the original church of St Mary Bishophill Junior (redrawn from Briden and Stocker 1987, 135)

At first-floor level the tower seems originally to have been plastered internally. An above-ground doorway in the east wall, constructed using a quantity of Roman stone including a monumental slab and part of a later cross-shaft, would formerly have looked out over the tower's chancel (Briden and Stocker 1987, 101). There is no evidence for a liturgical use for the upper chambers of the tower, and the size of the windows was not particularly suited to lighting an altar. However, the presence of wall-plaster in the first floor chamber does indicate that it had a level of importance, possibly as a dwelling-place; the second floor chamber does not appear to have been similarly treated (Briden and Stocker 1987, 142). The doorway in the east wall of this first floor chamber that may have looked out over the tower's chancel is further possible evidence for a high-status use for this chamber.

The excavations

Archaeological excavations in the 1960s encompassed a small area of the churchyard to the north of the tower (Wenham and Hall 1987). They uncovered the remains of a high-status Roman house with a worn opus signinum floor that had undergone several phases of subsequent modification and repair, indicating that the structure remained in at least perfunctory use as late as the Anglian period before being abandoned or dismantled. Previous interpretation of the building as part of a late Anglian or Anglo-Scandinavian fish-processing factory are believed to be incorrect, and it is now thought to have been used for this purpose in the late-Roman period. Within its walls were four burials dated by a coin of *c*905–915; a further four burials thought to be of broadly contemporary date were uncovered on the same alignment in an adjacent trench. Interestingly, their broadly east/west alignment neither respected the Roman building nor the later church of St Mary, implying that they were not associated with either building. They do however align with Holy Trinity Priory, in whose truncated precinct St Mary's church stands, suggesting that they may have belonged to this important early institution. The relationship between St Mary's and Holy Trinity in discussed further below.

Building sequence and date

Despite the apparent break in the fabric at the level of its string-course, the tower is thought to have been constructed with its belfry-stage conceived from the start. There was no identifiable difference in the tower's

petrology, no break in the internal fabric of the tower was recorded, and the distribution of putlog holes either side of the string course was relatively consistent (Briden and Stocker 1987, 130). The narrow chancel that lay to the east of the tower seems to have been enlarged by a south aisle in the mid 12th century before being replaced in the late 12th or early 13th century by a wider nave, whose north aisle arcade survives (Fig 3).

The tower itself has been dated to the second half of the 11th century on the basis of the construction and style of its belfry-openings and tower-arch, tentatively refined to the period *c*1060–80 due to the presence of stripwork on both of these features (Briden and Stocker 1987, 143–6). This date is supported by the apparent mention of the church as already existing in a survey of the rights and laws of 'Archbishop T' – assumed to be Thomas of Bayeux (1070–1100) – dated to *c*1080:

> *These are the rights and the laws which archbishop T. has throughout York, within the borough and without. That is first Layerthorpe, and on the north side Monkgate, and from Thurbrand's House all as far as Walmgate, and all Clementhorpe and around St Mary's, with sake and with soke, with toll and with team, and every third penny from the fishery throughout the bishop's ditch(?), and the third penny which comes from the Gildegarthes.*
>
> This syn that gerihto and tha laga, thet archebiscop T. ah ofer eal Euerwic bynan burh and butan. Tæft is, ærest Legerathorp and on nordhealf Munecagate and fra Thurbrandes hus eal up on Walbegate and eal Clementesthorpe and Sancte Marie circa, mid sace and mid scone, mid tolle and mid teme, and alcne thriddle penig of thonne fiscoup scrasudwrasas forth y' b. dic and throne thidde, the up cumð of les Gildegarde. (Rollason 1999, 210–11).

'St Mary's' has been identified with St Mary Bishophill Junior on the basis that it was reconfirmed to the possession of the archbishops of York in 1194, and was known as 'St Mary of the Bishop' after this date, before gaining in its present name after the Reformation. However, some doubt must remain due to the existence of at least six medieval churches dedicated to St Mary in York, of which St Mary Bishophill Senior and St Mary Castlegate are known to have existed in the

11th century (Harvey 1965, 380–1; Briden and Stocker 1987, 88).

To summarise, St Mary Bishophill Junior seems to have been constructed in the decades either side of the Norman Conquest as a free-standing tower-nave church with a small eastern chancel. It was located on the site of an earlier cemetery associated with the adjacent Holy Trinity Priory, and seems to have belonged to the archbishop of York by *c*1080. Its unusual tower-nave form has been linked to high-status, lordly practice on the basis of the limited congregational capacity of such towers, documentary evidence associating them with lordly residences and status, and their obvious usefulness for undertaking the responsibility of military watch that lords of this date were obliged to fulfil. However, these ideas have never been applied to St Mary's church, which is something of a mystery. Further light may be shed by examining the topographical context of its construction.

The tower in the context of 11th century York

St Mary's stands on the southwest bank of the Ouse within the area of the Roman city's former *colonia*, on the crest of some of the highest ground within the walled city (Fig 2). The character of this part of the city in the late Anglo-Saxon period is still debated. It has been suggested that it was a commercial area serving the main part of the city across the Ouse (Palliser 1984, 107), and although the archaeological evidence for this is still equivocal, it seems to have been relatively intensively settled by the 11th century (summarised in Moulden and Tweddle 1986, 13–14; Hall 2004, 490–1).

The Bishophill area and the archbishops of York

The former *colonia* area is also likely to have been one of the seven 'shires' (*scyre*) that the *Domesday Book* records as the sub-divisions of the city of York (Williams and Martin 2002, 785). Although the location of these shires is not stated, the term itself is thought to roughly equate to an urban ward rather than a large area extending outside the city: 'Marketshire' is used in the later medieval period as a term for the commercial area around Pavement and the Shambles, which would seem to support this theory (Dickens 1953, 140–3). The *Domesday Book*

further states that the archbishop held one of these seven shires of York together with the third part of the revenues of one other. This latter shire has been persuasively identified by Dickens (1953, 139–40) as encompassing the Walmgate and Fishergate areas, across the River Ouse from St Mary Bishophill Junior. This is on the basis that the archbishop was due one third of the revenue from these areas in a later copy of an inquest for the year 1106, only two decades after the *Domesday Book* was written.

The 'archbishop's shire' itself is thought to have consisted of the area of the city around the cathedral, and it is difficult to resist the assumption that the part of the city most likely to have belonged to the archbishop would have been here (Dickens 1953, 140–3). Despite this, Harvey (1965) suggested that the 'archbishop's shire' consisted of the Bishophill area, but his theory has since been overturned by the more detailed study of Jones (1987, 106–8) and is now generally rejected (Palliser 1990, 11–12; Rollason 1999, 185–6). It must also be said that the name 'Bishophill' is a red herring in this debate, since it is first recorded only in 1271. The area was previously known as *Bichill* ('Bitch Hill'), and it has been suggested that the name 'Bishophill' arose as an amalgamation between the name of the hill and the name of the church of St Mary of the Bishop, that is St Mary Bishophill Junior (Palliser 1978, 5).

Nevertheless, Harvey (1965) did uncover evidence that the Bishophill area was of particular importance to the archbishops from an early date. In 1276 it was noted that the cathedral owned an important prebend in the parish of St Mary Bishophill Senior, centred on properties on what is now Victor Street and Bishophill Senior (Fig 2). The acquisition of many of the cathedral's prebendal properties is thought to have occurred following the reformation of its clergy in the early Norman period, implying that the holding was of this date (Harvey 1965; Jones 1987, 83–8). Additionally, as has been mentioned, St Mary Bishophill Junior seems to have been in the archbishop's possession *c*1080, and was reconfirmed into his possession in 1194. More tenuously, the archbishop also held much of the land outside the city walls to the southwest of the *colonia* at the time of Domesday, including the parish of Upper Poppleton, which later became part of the parish of St Mary Bishophill Junior (Harvey 1965). It must be noted, however, that the archbishop had considerable estates in all the city's suburbs at this time (Jones 1987, 99).

To summarise, it seems that the archbishop had important holdings southwest of the Ouse during the middle ages which may have dated back to the late 11th century and which may have centred on the church of St Mary Bishophill Junior. Although the church seems to have been in the archbishop's ownership *c*1080, it was not necessarily constructed by the archbishop in the first place. Since no reference to the church can be taken back to before *c*1080, it is also possible that the church only came into the ownership of the archbishop around this time. The obvious context for this is the mass confiscation of property in the aftermath of the 1069 rebellion centred on York; the urban residence of Marlswein, for example, one of the leaders of this rebellion, was confiscated and incorporated into the Old Baile, York's second castle (Williams and Martin 2002, 785). Significantly, the archbishops had responsibility for the defence of this castle, and it may have formed part of their post-Conquest landholding (Jones 1987, 98–9).

Early medieval ownership: a second monastic centre in York

The main reason for suspecting that St Mary's had a different owner prior to its first appearance in the records as the property of the archbishop is that the major ecclesiastical power in the Bishophill area until the late 11th century was not the archbishop but the monastery of Christ Church, which was refounded as Holy Trinity Priory in 1089. Although it was certainly in existence before this date there is little firm information about it. Its 1089 (re-)foundation charter tells us that it had formerly been served by canons, that it had enjoyed the rents of estates, and that it had been embellished by ecclesiastical ornaments. It also had immunities from secular interference, something shared in Northumberland at the time of Domesday only by Durham, Ripon, Beverley and York Minster itself, suggesting that Christ Church was of considerable regional significance (Morris 1986, 82; Briden and Stocker 1987, 86). This has led Richard Morris (1986) to suggest that it was the location of the church of the 'Alma Sophia' (Divine Wisdom), mentioned by Alcuin as having been consecrated in 780 in York (Godman 1982, 118–21). This church was described by Alcuin as a large, impressive building, presumed to have been constructed on a pre-existing religious site able to support the thirty altars that it is supposed to have contained, but there is no subsequent record of it or its dedication within York. There are, however, references

to an unnamed *monasterium* in York, seemingly distinct from St Peter's Cathedral, from as early as the late 7th century (summarised in Morris 1986 80–2). Although these references cease after 852, a vill called *Monechetune*, '*tun* of the monks' appears in the Domesday Book in the possession of Christ Church, indicating the presence of a monastic community there well established by 1086. Furthermore, Alcuin was the author of a treatise developing the Biblical idea equating Christ with the concept of Divine Wisdom, implying that what he termed *Alma Sophia* was in fact a foundation consecrated to Christ, which would explain why there is no subsequent recorded mention of the 'Alma Sophia' dedication (Morris 1986, 82–3).

Further evidence for the pre-Scandinavian ecclesiastical importance of the Bishophill area is provided by the nature of the early stone sculpture found in its vicinity. 9th-century cross-shaft fragments have been recovered from St Mary Bishophill Junior and the nearby church of St Martin-cum-Gregory, and fragments of 8th-century cross-heads were recovered from the northern stretch of Bishophill's city wall and from land outside Micklegate Bar (Lang 1991, 80–95, 115–6). The centre of an 8th- to early 9th-century cross-head was also found in the area, probably from St Mary Bishophill Junior. It is of particular interest not only on account of its early date, but also due to the small inscription it carries: *Hail, gracious priest, on account of your merits* (*SALVE PRO MERITIS PR(E) S(BYTER) ALME TVIS*), executed in lettering of an unusual type more familiar from manuscripts than sculpture (Lang 1991, 85–6; Fig 4). Morris has pointed out the similarity of the vocabulary with the known writings of Alcuin, suggesting that it was written by someone associated with the academic milieu of York at this time, which would accord with the date of the piece (1986, 86). Although this fragment and the other early ecclesiastical sculpture in the area could have been moved to Bishophill from elsewhere, the fact that the only other location of comparable sculpture in York is from the Minster does reinforce the interpretation of the Bishophill area as the location of the city's second monastic centre, presumably centred on Christ Church/Holy Trinity.

Even though Christ Church seems once to have been a foundation of some wealth and importance, potentially even the 'Alma Sophia' itself, its 1089 charter tells us that by then it had fallen upon hard times, necessitating its refoundation (Clay 1939, 67–8). It is likely that Christ Church's decline would have involved the erosion of its presumably extensive original territories, and the

Fig 4
Cross-head, with inscription, probably form St Mary Bishophill Junior (Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, photographer T Middlemass)

parochial arrangement of the area of York southwest of the Ouse, thought to date from the 11th and 12th centuries (Morris 1986, 85), certainly seems to suggest this. Both the refounded Holy Trinity and St Mary Bishophill Junior had large parishes which extended outside the city walls; together with the adjacent church of St Mary Bishophill Senior, the three had extensive extra-mural parishes. Several of these out-parishes were re-confirmed to Holy Trinity in 1089, implying its original ownership of them (Harvey 1965, 86; Morris 1986, 84–5). Morris has suggested that the presence of extra-mural parishes belonging to this concentrated group of city churches reflects the fragmentation of a large, early estate centred on the Bishophill area, presumably associated with the important monastery of Christ Church (1986, 85).

Conquest and settlement: aristocratic and other secular foundations

Morris' (1986, 85) suggested context for the fragmentation of Christ Church is the Scandinavian conquest and settlement of York. Indeed, many of the churches present in York prior to 1100 appear to have been founded as private churches by Anglo-Scandinavian lords whom we have every reason to believe were firmly Christian (Stocker 2000, 194–5; Rollason 2004, 318–20, 322). Lordly foundation in York is demonstrable in the case of St Olave and St Mary Castlegate, as related in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 1055 for the former ('D' Chronicle;

Swanton 1996, 185) and in the surviving foundation inscription of the latter. The Domesday Book also includes a reference to an unidentified church in the ownership of an 'Odo the Crossbowman' (Williams and Martin 2002, 785).

The origins of the church of St Mary Bishophill Senior, which lies adjacent to St Mary Bishophill Junior (Fig 2), are in keeping with a local picture of Anglo-Scandinavian secular patronage of a fragmented early monastic estate centred on Christ Church/Holy Trinity. Sculpture from a total of fifteen monuments dating from the late 9th century onwards were recovered during its demolition in the 1960s (Lang 1991, 80–95, 116), considerably more than the 3.1 fragments per church that is the average from Anglo-Scandinavian Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. A few other churches in these counties have also produced unusually large quantities of sculpture of this date. In a study of this phenomenon David Stocker (2000, 200–7) has proposed that these particularly productive churches were constructed as a result of communal patronage by the Hiberno-Norse trading community, citing the close proximity of each site to contemporary beach-markets – the Skeldergate area in the case of St Mary Bishophill Senior.

As something of an aside, it must be said that, like the name 'Bishophill' itself, the church of St Mary Bishophill Senior is potentially confusing and need not indicate any early importance. The church is first recorded as 'St Mary in Lounlithgate' between 1180 and 1202, and was subsequently referred to as 'St Mary the Old' after 1252, presumably due to the close proximity of the Old Baille (Briden and Stocker 1987, 88). Although excavations of the site have shown that it overlay and partially incorporated a 4th century Roman house, there is no evidence for continuity of worship between the two structures and, as at St Mary Bishophill Junior, the first certain ecclesiastical evidence on the site was a small enclosed cemetery with stone crosses dating to the 10th century (Moulden and Tweddle 1986, 25–8). Despite its name it was not a foundation to rival Christ Church.

Further evidence for Stocker's theory can be found in the late 11th century 'Rights and Laws of Archbishop T.', related above. It mentions *les Gildegarde*, ('the enclosures of the guild'), as an aspect of the city quite distinct from the trading area of Walmgate and Fishergate from which the archbishop was due a third part of its revenue. The term implies the existence of one or more guild-houses established before *c*1080, and a guild-house ('*Hanshus*') is also referred to in an archiepiscopal charter of *c*1130 (Farrer

1914, 90–2). The location of one of these guild-houses is indicated by the documented sale to York's Vicars Choral of 'the Gildgarthes' on Bishophill between 1355 and 1364. A 19th-century plan of Bishophill locates the only property of the Vicars Choral in the area to be a little to the north of Lower Priory Street, between the churches of St Mary Bishophill Junior and Senior (Dickens 1953, 133, 137–41; Jones 1987, 87, 211). Later, a will of 1426 leaves a garden in '*les Gyldgarthes lying between the King's street of Besyngate and land belonging to the Mayor and Commonality of York*'. The location of 'Besyngate' is uncertain, but it is thought to survive as the present Bishophill Senior, again between the churches of St Mary Bishophill Junior and Senior (Raine 1955, 236–7; Palliser 1978, 5; see Fig 2). Assuming that this was the location of an early medieval guild-house, then the close proximity of a guild-chapel in the form of St Mary Bishophill Senior is a sensible suggestion.

Like several of the churches in the Bishophill area, the tower-nave church of St Mary Bishophill Junior therefore seems to have been constructed on the fragmented estate of the formerly wealthy early monastery of Christ Church (later Holy Trinity), which appears to have been broken up during the 9th and 10th centuries by the agency of Anglo-Scandinavian secular powers. The sculptural evidence recovered from St Mary Bishophill Junior fits in with this picture of Anglo-Scandinavian secular patronage. Aside from the early inscribed cross mentioned above, several fragmentary cross-shafts and heads of mid-9th to 11th century date, part of a late 9th to mid-10th century grave-cover, part of a 10th-century hogback tomb and fragments of an 11th-century screen have been found there (Lang 1991, 83–7, 115–16). The original context of this body of sculpture, which was mainly found re-used in the fabric of the tower, is uncertain (discussed in Briden and Stocker 1987, 122). Nevertheless, assuming it came from a common location in the immediate vicinity of St Mary Bishophill Junior, it is consistent with '*a single elite family burying in their own "proto-parish" church*' (Stocker 2000, 200). Only further excavation could establish whether St Mary Bishophill Junior was indeed preceded by an Anglo-Scandinavian aristocratic chapel or cemetery. Nevertheless, the sculptural evidence does seem to indicate Anglo-Scandinavian aristocratic activity in the area, which provides further context for the break-up of Christ Church before the time when the tower-nave of St Mary Bishophill Junior was built.

Fig 5
First edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of the Bishophill area

St Mary Bishophill Junior

What makes St Mary Bishophill Junior special is that not only does it arguably inhabit a former estate of Christ Church monastery, like several of its neighbouring foundations, but it also occupies a part of Christ Church's probable monastic precinct (Fig 5). The first edition Ordnance Survey map of the Bishophill area has the '*remains of the Priory Wall*' marked upon it. It is precisely respected by the parish boundary on its northeast and southeast sides, meaning that we can be confident that the wall marked on the map preserves at least its 12th century alignment in the vicinity of St

Mary Bishophill Junior. At the eastern corner of this precinct both the wall and parish boundary zigzag around St Mary Bishophill Junior, which seems to indicate that the churchyard of the latter was cut out of the precinct of the former. It should be remembered that the early 10th century burials found on the north side of St Mary's church respect the alignment of Holy Trinity Priory rather than St Mary's. These burials almost certainly also lie within the original precinct of Holy Trinity. It therefore appears that sometime before York's parish boundaries solidified in the 12th century a section of the precinct of Holy Trinity Priory was carved away

to make room for the foundation of the small tower-nave of St Mary Bishophill Junior. Not only had St Mary's apparently appropriated the earlier institution's lands, but it had taken a piece of its very precinct.

A tantalising piece of topographical evidence supports the idea that St Mary Bishophill Junior was founded, perhaps by an Anglo-Scandinavian lord, as a private lordly chapel on the remains of Christ Church's monastic estate. From other late Anglo-Saxon towns we can infer that chapels of this type were often associated with their lord's urban residences (summarised in Morris 1989, 168–227; Blair 2005, 402–3). As far back as the oldest plan of York – that by John Speed dated to 1610 – the street to the south of St Mary's has a pronounced curve, indicative of a small ovoid enclosure of a type familiar from a number of lordly residences of this date (e.g. Goltho in Lincolnshire and Sulgrave in Northamptonshire: Davison 1977; Beresford 1987). Indeed, several tower-nave churches including Earl's Barton, as well as Barton-upon-Humber in Lincolnshire, Ozleworth in Gloucestershire and the urban example of Guildford in Surrey are associated with similar lordly residential enclosures (Smith 1964, 246-7; Poulton 1987, 208; Rodwell and Atkins 2011, esp. 352; Shapland forthcoming). The limited capacity alone of St Mary Bishophill Junior indicates that it was a private chapel, but we can in addition tentatively interpret it as the chapel of an Anglo-Scandinavian lord, possibly constructed at his defended urban residence.

An alternative possibility, raised by Briden and Stocker (1987, 89), is that St Mary Bishophill Junior was the proprietary church of the archbishop rather than of a secular lord. Although this makes sense with regards to the proximity to the church of the prebendal estate described above, it seems unlikely that the archbishop would have been responsible for the fragmentation of his own daughter-house of Christ Church, even being so flagrant as to demolish part of its precinct for the construction of his unusual tower-nave church. It has also been suggested by Christopher Norton (quoted in Hall 2004, 496) that St Mary Bishophill Junior was built as a part of the complex associated with the newly refounded Holy Trinity Priory in 1089, although again it seems unlikely that the church would have been constructed in such a curious location, or without reuniting its parish or ownership with Christ Church/Holy Trinity. The idea that St Mary Bishophill Junior was constructed on a lords' estate before being surrendered to the Norman archbishop, presumably after the rebellion of 1069,

as one of a number of churches in the city he would acquire through the medieval period (Jones 1987, 113–4) is therefore a more credible one.

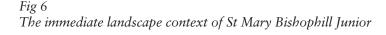## Towers and Beacons: the wider landscape setting

If the interpretation of St Mary Bishophill Junior as a lordly tower-nave offered above is to stand, the building needs to have had the potential to fulfil the roles associated with a lord's tower of 11th century date. As mentioned above, the *Promotion Law* introduces the idea that, even before the construction of the first Norman castles, a lord's buildings would have embodied and projected his status. St Mary's was constructed on the highest part of York's walled area, overlooking the rest of the city, and it would have been visible for at least ten miles across the Vale of York (Fig 6). Additionally, it lies within the Wapentake of Ainsty, which met at Ainsty Cliff in Bilbrough, six miles to the southwest of York, a location intervisible with St Mary's tower. This seems to have been the meeting-place of the city: in 1276 it is recorded that *'the citizens of York held the Wapentake of Ainsty and the City of York of the King'* (quoted in Smith 1961d, 216). Also in the vicinity is the eponymous meeting-place of Barkston Ash wapentake, twelve miles to the southwest of the city (Smith 1961d, 1), and that of Bulmer, five and a half miles to the north (Smith 1937, 8), both of which are also intervisible with St Mary's. These meeting-places were where the political and legal business of their localities would have been enacted, and were obvious centres of power over which a lord might have wished to project his status.

These meeting-places are also likely to have been used for the mustering of troops in the early medieval period (Brooks 1978, 83), with which any lord with the wealth to have constructed a tower as lavish as that of St Mary Bishophill Junior would have been involved. The inhabitants of Ainsty wapentake, including the citizens of York, would therefore have mustered at Ainsty Cliff, which, although intervisible with St Mary's tower, was not directly associated with it. However, there is a tantalising possibility that the citizens of York would have first gathered on land adjacent to St Mary Bishophill Junior before making the five mile walk west: in 1307 the city authorities refused the Black Friars permission to build on Toft Green, an open area just north of Micklegate (Fig 2), on the grounds that this was where *'from time immemorial'* the people of the

Fig 6
The immediate landscape context of St Mary Bishophill Junior

city had been accustomed to assemble in time of war (Palmer 1881, 400).

It was also mentioned above that a lord at the time St Mary's was constructed would have been expected to have kept military watch as well as to have organised the mustering of troops. The tower of St Mary Bishophill Junior would have been well able to assist in this, given the superb view it provides over the many strategic routes – the major roads and navigable rivers – that converged on York (Fig 6). Recent research has also begun to uncover the role that beacons would have played in the maintenance of late Anglo-Saxon civil defence (Hill and Sharp 1997; Gower 2002; Baker 2011). Although Yorkshire is rich with place-names indicative of the former presence of beacons (Fig 7), only one, Warthill ('Wardhill' 1086), in the parish of Gate Helmsley to the east of York, is in the vicinity
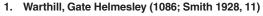
of the city (Smith 1928, 11; see Fig 6). The obvious context for this site is the vulnerable and strategic east coast of Yorkshire, which bears two beacon-names: 'Tod Howe' near Hartlepool and 'Totleys' near Spurn Head (Smith 1928, 149; 1937, 35), and it is possible that coastal erosion, which has taken 300m of coastline since the Anglo-Saxon period in some places (Bell 1998, 313), has accounted for more.

Yorkshire's east coastline had also been protected by a chain of Roman signal-stations, probably running from Hartlepool in the north to Flamborough Head in the south (Bell 1998; Mason 2003, 182–3). Like the example preserved adjacent to the church of St Mary-in-Castro in Dover (Booth 2007), a number of these Roman signal-towers seem to have remained in use into the early medieval period. The tower at Scarborough was rebuilt as a small chapel in the late

1.   Warthill, Gate Helmesley (1086; Smith 1928, 11)
2.   Warthermarske, Mashamshire (1198; Smith 1928, 235)
3.   Tod Howe, Guisborough (1200-1222; Smith 1928, 149)
4.   Totleys, Burstwick (1086; Smith 1937, 35)
5.   Tooth Hill, Bowland Forest Higher (1642; Smith 1961f, 214)
6.   Toot Hill, Sowerby (1316; Smith 1961c, 155)
7.   Toothill, Rastrick (1290; Smith 1961c, 40)
8.   Toothill Ridge, Hartlington (no date; Smith 1961f, 91)
9.   Toot Hill, Great Mitton (no date; Smith 1961f, 199)
10. Tootles Hill, Guisburn (no date; Smith 1961f, 36)
11. Ward Green, Worsborough (1817; Smith 1961a, 295)
12. Warth Mills, Saddleworth (no date; Smith 1961b, 317)
13. Weardley, Harewood (1086; Smith 1961d, 185)
14. Tottelands, Great Ribston (1541; Smith 1961e, 22)
15. Beacon, Ainsty Cliff (1546; Smith 1961d, 236)
16. Beacon Hill, Barkisland (1775; Smith 1961c, 59)

17. Beacon Hill, Conisbrough (1625; Smith 1961a, 127)
18. Beacon Hill, Otley (1817; Smith 1961d, 205)
19. Beacon Hill, Southowram (1771; Smith 1961c, 90)
20. Beacon Plant, Ledsham (1841; Smith 1961d, 50)
21. Beacon Wood, Bradfield (1841; Smith 1961a, 231)
22. Beaconsfield Road, Badsworth (1840; Smith 1961b, 96)
23. Pry, Morley (1843; Smith 1961c, 198)
24. Pry Barn, Buckden (1844; Smith 1961f, 120)
25. Pry Gill, Bentham (no date; Smith 1961f, 258)
26. Pry Hill, Garsdale (1846; Smith 1961f, 262)
27. Pry Ho, Stonebeck Up (1840; Smith 1961e, 1840)
28. Wardgarth, Laukland (1610; Smith 1961f, 228)
29. Pry Hill, Ingleton (no date; Smith 1961f, 247)
30. Wardla Hill, Beamsley (no date; Smith 1961e, 72)
31. Ward Hill, Draughton (1730; Smith 1961f, 67)

Fig 7
Place-name evidence for early beacons in the Yorkshire area

Anglo-Saxon period, possibly by the Danish lord Thorgils 'Skarði' who is believed to have given the *burh* its name in 965 (Collingwood 1925; Bell 1998, 308–11). The continuation of the site with a *burh* place-name is interesting in this context, and is shared by Flamborough Head (*Flaneburg* 1086), 'Flein's *Burh*' (Ekwall 1960, 181) and Goldsborough (*Goldeburg*

1080), 'Golda's *burh*' (Smith 1937, 137). Flamborough was also refortified in the Anglo-Saxon period by a substantial linear earthwork 2½ miles in length, cutting off the headland upon which the watchtower stands (Ramm 1984). The ditched enclosure of the tower at Filey was refurbished and a substantial earthwork, surviving to a length of 30m and a height of 2m, was

added to the tower. The exact date of these works is uncertain, although they are thought to be early medieval in date (Ottaway 1997). Whitby was known to Bede as the 'Bay of the Beacon' (trans Sherley–Price 1955, 183), and the present name may derive from the Old Scandinavian *Vite*, 'warning-beacon', suggesting the curation of this tower into the Anglo-Scandinavian period (Lindkvist 1912, 37; evidence summarised in Bell 1998). The further coincidence of early beacon place-names near Hartlepool and on Spurn Head (Fig 7) is tantalising evidence of the survival of some form of warning-system along this coastline into the late Anglo-Saxon period. It seems possible that other sites, now lost, formerly connected the Warthill beacon site in Gate Helmsley with this coastline.

There is a much greater concentration of beacon place-names to the west and south of York than there is to the east and north (Fig 7), which may partially be accounted for by the eight volumes dedicated by the English Place-Name Society to the West Riding of Yorkshire, compared with only one for each of the North and East Ridings. Broadly speaking, these names cover the western half of the Vale of York before running west across the Pennines, but the closest site to York itself is 'Tottelandes', a field-name of 1541 in the parish of Great Ribston twelve miles to the west of the city. Although this would have been visible from St Mary's, the beacon recorded in the parish of Bilbrough, adjacent to York's meeting-place at Ainsty Cliff is much closer (Fig 6). Evidence of the royal command establishing a beacon-system across England in 1546 survives in the civic records of York, which include a note to the men of Ainsty wapentake, including York, that they should meet in Bilbrough to set their beacon in a suitable place (Raine 1943, 140–3). The first edition Ordnance Survey map of the parish confirms that this beacon was located on Ingrish Hill, a short distance to the north of the meeting-place. It is tempting to see here the late echoes of a much older system whereby the men of York made sure of their western defence by setting a beacon adjacent to a Roman road and to their meeting-place, itself the location of Bilbrough, a *burh* place-name first recorded in 1086 (Smith 1961d, 235). Within the city of York, St Mary Bishophill Junior would probably have been the closest church tower to Bilbrough in the 11th century, and its elevated location overlooking the rest of the city means that it would have been ideally placed to sound its bells to raise the alarm.

Also within the vicinity of St Mary's are a number of other *burh*-names: Benningbrough in Newton-on-Ouse (1086; Smith 1937, 19), Burton Fields in Low Catton (12th century; Smith 1928, 188), the Roman camp at Long Brough in Newton Kyme (1684; Smith 1961d, 80), and the late field-name 'Burton Garth' in Dringhouses (1842; Smith 1961d, 230). Most of these are intervisible with the tower, and the fact that they all occur either on major roads or navigable rivers implies that they may have marked locations of some strategic significance in the early medieval period, over which the putative lord of St Mary's tower could have kept watch.

Conclusion

St Mary Bishophill Junior appears to have been built as a tower-nave church in the second half of the 11th century, in the aftermath of the Anglo-Scandinavian secular fragmentation of York's second monastic centre, Christ Church/Holy Trinity. The sculptural evidence from the church is consistent with aristocratic activity in the area, and a possible ovoid enclosure around the church may mark the former location of a putative lord's urban residence. The nearby church of St Mary Bishophill Senior also seems to have been built on the former territory of Christ Church by a secular power, this time by a merchants' guild rather than by a single lord.

St Mary Bishophill Junior was constructed on high ground overlooking the rest of the city, which gave it an exceptional view over the surrounding landscape, including over the numerous major roads converged on York and over the trading artery of the Ouse. It also had visibility over possible early beacon-sites communicating with the Pennines to the west and, potentially, with the East Coast, as well as over a number of strategically-placed *burh* sites. Finally, it was intervisible with the meeting-place of the city, as well as with other meeting-places in the surrounding area. The tower's landscape context would therefore have been ideal for a lordly tower until it passed into the ownership of the archbishop of York around 1080, which fits in with the nascent interpretation of tower-nave churches as a whole.

Michael Shapland is presently completing PhD research on Anglo-Saxon tower-nave churches at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London and is the Society for Church Archaeology's Conference Secretary and Publicity Officer.

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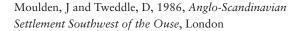Mason, DJP, 2003, *Roman Britain and the Roman Navy*, Stroud

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