

St Clement's Church

St Clement was believed to be a Roman tanner who was converted and became Pope after the death of St Peter. He was banished by Emperor Trajan and eventually sentenced to death. He was bound to an anchor and thrown into the sea.

Of the churches dedicated to St Clement, there are only 50 known mediaeval foundations in England, four in Scotland, none in Wales and one in Ireland (Dublin).

There is a theory that the preponderance of Clement churches in the ancient Danelaw (the areas of north and eastern England settled by Vikings in the ninth century) reflects the interest of the Danish communities in trading and seafaring, since St Clement was thought to protect sailors.

However, a few other churches outside the Danelaw also bore this dedication, and they are often in coastal regions, positioned by a bridge or ford, or in areas prone to flooding. It seems that St Clement was generally invoked for his protection against drowning, even inland.¹

The manor was confirmed as a possession of St Frideswide's monastery in 1004, and St Clement's Church was one of the royal chapels given to the same foundation by Henry I in 1122, though the title was disputed by Oseney Abbey. At the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, control over St Clement's Church (and its tithes) passed first to Cardinal College and then to the king.²

The population was small: in 1481 the 'smokefarthings' (a hearth tax) collected in St Clement's amounted to five pence (compared with sixteen pence in the parish of All Saints, Oxford).³ By the 1820s the population of the parish had grown to around 2,000 and the church at the foot of Magdalen Bridge was too small. Its energetic young curate, one John Henry Newman, began to collect subscriptions, and in 1827 a new church was built on 'Nacklingcroft Meadow', on land donated by Sir Joseph Locke.⁴

1. Barbara E. Crawford, "The Saint Clement dedications at Clementhorpe and Pontefract Castle: Anglo-Scandinavian or Norman?" in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) 189.

2. "Parishes: St Clement's" in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 5: Bullingdon hundred*, ed. Mary D. Lobel (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Historical Research, 1957), 258-266.

3. Henry Paintin, MS Top. Oxon 285, Vol II, Folio 334. Bodleian Library.

4. "St Clement's Church" accessed January 6 2013, <http://www.stclements.org.uk/home/about/history/>