



# St. Margaret's Church

I P S W I C H

## Beating the bounds of a parish - an ancient custom.

In England "Beating the Bounds" of a parish dates from Anglo-Saxon times and is mentioned in the laws of Alfred the Great and Æthelstan. It may even be derived from the Roman Terminalia, a festival celebrated on February 22nd in honour of Terminus, the god of landmarks. The Norsemen also brought similar practices, of pagan origin, to this country.

At a time when maps were rare it was usual to make a formal procession around the parish boundary on Ascension Day or during Rogation week. The accompanying clergy would ask (Latin - rogare) God's blessing upon the parish lands for the ensuing harvest.

Knowledge of the limits of each parish needed to be handed down so that such matters as liability to contribute to the repair of the church, and the right to be buried within the churchyard were not disputed. The priest of the parish with the churchwardens and the parochial officials headed a crowd of boys who, armed with green boughs of birch or willow, would beat the parish boundary markers. Sometimes the boys were themselves bumped on the boundary-stones to make them remember where the bounds were. The reason for taking boys along was supposed to ensure that witnesses to the boundaries should survive as long as possible.

The practice is still lawful and parish officers have the right to enter private property in carrying this out and also to use funds to cover expenses "properly incurred".

At the St Margaret's Vestry Meeting, held on Easter Monday April 6th 1896, the members considered the advisability of Perambulating the Bounds of the Parish. A record of the meeting is held in the Vestry Minute Book for 1896 (Now in the Suffolk Record Office FB/93/A2/7).

The meeting began well with over 23 people turning up and it was proposed *that the meeting be adjourned to the Parish Rooms owing to want of space in the Vestry!*

It was proposed that *The Boundaries of the Parish be Perambulated, and that the legal costs incurred in doing so be allowed.*

After discussion for and against, it was also proposed that *instead of perambulating the bounds an Ordnance Map be obtained, that it be marked by the overseers with all new buildings and that all necessary costs for doing so be paid.*

*Having consulted Archibolds' Legal Parish Guide it was noted that it was advisable to beat the bounds.*

It was finally agreed that *the question of Perambulating the Parish Bounds be left to a committee with instructions to report to a future Vestry Meeting*, a ploy still to be found in many modern committee meetings! It is interesting to note that amongst the subcommittee members, the Rev A A Dowsett (Congregational) served on the full and sub committees on behalf of the non-conformists of the Parish.

Whilst the Vestry Meeting records the dry outline of the debate, the local newspaper reported in more depth and provided a much more colourful account of the proceedings.

They noted that the proposer *complained that difficulties had lately arisen as to the property of the parish, and urged that the beating...was not merely the due observance of an old custom, but a necessary act from the business point of view*. Recalling one from his youth 30-40 years earlier he noted the *"bumps ... had become associated with the phrenological "bump" of memory"*.

*The Chairman (The Rev Percival Smith) in serious if not apprehensive words, invited an exposition of the law upon this subject. Was the vicar expected to make this perambulation? Would they have to get through windows and climb over walls?* The proposer noted to much laughter that *former vicars used to slip off when we got half-way around*.

One member *appealed rather mischievously to the only lawyer present for a statement as to the law*, but he was too careful to give an opinion off hand but he got a book from the Vestry Clerk and began to look the matter up.

The matter was condemned by another member *as an attempt to revive an old and stupid custom, and a perfectly useless one into the bargain. He waxed almost wroth about the absurdity of tramping round through gardens and private property destroying every poor man's onion seed, clambering though the kitchen window &co [Laughter]*.

Finally the lawyer read an extract from Archibolds' Parish Law *which seemed to bear out the contention of beating the bounds. A statement that the Curate usually headed the procession caused some laughter*.

The sub-committee met on April 27th 1896 and agreed a motion *That in the opinion of this Committee it is inexpedient at the present time to beat the boundaries of the parish, but that the Vestry should authorise the overseers to purchase an Ordnance Map of the Parish and to employ such surveyors assistance as may be necessary to insert on it any new buildings which cross the Boundaries*.

A full Vestry meeting was held later that evening which adopted the motion *with the addition of the following words viz: provided such expenditure be sanctioned by the Auditor*.

It was also agreed that the map should be purchased and that the Vestry Clerk write to the Auditor for his opinion.

At the Vestry Meeting held on May 14th 1896 it was reported that *The Vestry Clerk read a letter from the Auditor in reply to an enquiry made of him, as to the legality of charging the expenses of the Beating the Boundaries of the Parish as follows*

*Dear Sir or Madam: In reply to your letter of the 2nd I must inform you that I am unable to express any opinion or give any advice on any question that may afterwards come before me for decision at an audit.  
I cannot therefore answer your question.*

*It was finally resolved That this meeting authorises the Boundary of the Parish to be beaten in 1897 and that prior to carrying out the same, part of the resolution passed at the last Vestry meeting with reference to the purchase of an Ordnance Map and the employment of Surveyors assistance be confirmed.*

On Easter Monday April 19th 1897 it was agreed that the arrangements should be left to the Churchwardens and overseers. On November 18th 1897 *it was resolved that the sum of Twenty one pounds and four pence be allocated for the expenses incurred in Beating the Boundaries of the parish.* There is no further mention of the episode – nor whether the Auditor approved the accounts!

A report of the activity was given in the July 1897 Parish Magazine:-

*In accordance with a resolution of the Parish Vestry, the bounds of the parish were beaten on Friday, May 28th. Some idea of the extent of the civil parish may be formed from the fact that though the start was made about 9.30 a.m., the perambulation was not finished till 5.10 p.m. Among others who assembled at the start were the Revs Percival Smith, P H Badcock, W. S. King, W. J. Garrould, E. W. Baker; Messrs. F. Turner, and F. Corder, Jun., Churchwardens; and Messrs. G. Abbott, C. Smith, J. Tibbenham, E. S. Singleton (Overseers), E. Stiles, E. Scott, Mr. A. Sandbach with Mr. George Turner, Vestry Clerk, kindly pointed out and explained the boundary lines. Long white willow wands were provided for the beaters; W. Motts (Steeplekeeper), carried a short ladder; a stencil plate "M.B., 1897" and a pot of black paint were carried by H. Gould. Mr. E. W. Bevan kindly lent his drag. The incidents of the day cannot be recorded here, suffice it to say that two boys, Ramsey and Wright, crawled through the culvert on the Henley Road, a stone was thrown across the pond to show the boundary, and in regard to the Gaol we had to be content with looking and pointing, as we might not enter. It may be useful to record here the bounds, and we follow substantially the account given by Mr. Sandbach.*

The start is from Mr. Geo. Abbott's office at the west end of Crown Street (formerly called Clay Lane), the boundary line then diagonally crosses High Street to the northern boundary of Crown Street Chapel property, then runs westward (there is a considerable



Paget Road near Anglesea Road junction  
Possibly a modern copy

discrepancy here between the Ordnance and the Parish maps), to the back of houses fronting High Street, northward to the back of the Museum. It then turns westward, crossing a small garden to the middle of St George's Street, thence in a continuous line in the centre of the roads along St George's Street, the lower part of Henley Road, along Anglesea Road as far as Paget Road, and along the centre of Paget Road, and along to the south-western boundary of "Westwood. Thence (there is here a slight discrepancy between the two maps), in a north-easterly direction to approximately the northern boundaries of "Woodside" and the other lands to a culvert on the Henley Road, across land to fence by Tinker's Hole House,

then following the fence northwards to Grove Farm, thence north-easterly to near the end of 72 on Ordnance map (there is here a slight discrepancy between maps), turning right, ending between two ponds by the Westerfield Road. Thence the boundary runs in an irregular line to the northern corner of the plantation by Red Farm House, and follows the southern (there is a slight discrepancy here between the two maps), end of the plantation to a large pond, which it crosses about midway, and goes thence in a direct line to the Tuddenham Road. It follows the centre of Tuddenham Road north-easterly to a point about the centre of the Felixstowe Railway, and follows the north-western boundary of field 135 on Ordnance map. From there it crosses a large field to the north-western corner of the Little Roundwood, along the roadside of the garden of Little Roundwood, branching off partly through the buildings and residence to a sharp turn in Sidegate Lane. Thence it crosses southerly fields 147, 148, and 150 on Ordnance map in an undefined line to a tree near the north-eastern boundary of 196 on Ordnance map. Through the farmyards of the Roundwood to Rushmere Road, it crosses three fields in a broken line (there is a discrepancy here between the two maps) to the northern end of a ditch by cottages. It then runs south to the centre of the Woodbridge Road, then east to a point near the Lattice Barn, and from there in a broken line southerly along the western boundary of property belonging to J. W. Rouse, Esq., now occupied by the Board of Guardians. Thence it goes westwardly to the north-eastern corner of 224 on Ordnance map, then southerly it follows the old fence to the centre of Foxhall Road, near the Asylum, westward along the centre of the Road to a point near the "Blooming Fuschia", being the old fence belonging to Mrs. Byles, following this boundary it crosses Felixstowe Railway to the centre of St John's Road in a broken line, thence in an irregular line across St John's Road, taking in a small part of the house and garden of Gothic House, and parts of two houses recently erected by the Freehold Land Society, on to the centre of Spring Road; then westward down the road to a point near the Lodge of Cauldwell Hall. It then goes north-westerly into the meadow fronting Cauldwell Hall, then along the valley almost due north to the centre of Woodbridge Road, turning there westward down the centre of the road for a long distance to opposite the eastern end of the Stay Factory, near Argyle Street. It then runs southward at the rear of houses fronting Argyle Street into St Helen's Street, a slight distance westward along this street, branching off by, and including two shops owned by W. Copping, into St Helen's Street again; along its centre, opposite about the middle of



An older marker still visible in the wall of the old County Hall

Shirehall southward, then westward through Her Majesty's Prison to a point near Bond Street (there is a discrepancy here between the two maps in the boundary by Bond Street and the Gaol), taking in part of two newly-erected houses and the whole of two other newly-erected houses on the east side of Bond Street thence in a broken line to Upper Orwell Street, along the southern boundary of the Eagle Tavern, down Upper Orwell Street to its junction with Orwell Place and Fore Street.

(Eastward of this point there is a range of houses and shops extending from Crisp and Smith's premises to Bond Street, which are stated to be in St. Margaret's Parish, and are shown on the Parish map but are not shown on the Ordnance map). The line then runs southward along the boundary dividing (there is a discrepancy here between the maps) the Bull Inn from premises occupied by W. Cornell, thence westward in a broken line partly separating the Girls' Endowed Schools from the Unicorn Brewery, up Foundation Street a short distance, westward up a narrow roadway, then partly in a broken line through Messrs. Brand and Son's property into Tacket Street, crossing the street, it includes nearly



Upper Orwell Street (Mgt B 32)

the whole of the premises of W. Ward. It goes eastward to the Congregational Chapel and crosses its burial ground, then eastward to Cox Lane, and up the Lane as far as the northern boundary of the Belvedere Inn. It thence goes along the southern boundary of Dr. R K. Casley's property, and thence a short distance northward, then westward, then southward, then to the centre of Upper Brook Street, including in the last line the shop occupied by Mr. A. Baxter, it then runs northward along Brook Street and Northgate Street to the north-western corner of Gt Colman Street then eastward along Dr. R. K. Casley's property, and thence a short distance northward; then westward, then southward, then to the centre of Upper Brook Street, including in the last line the shop occupied by Mr. A. Baxter. It then runs northward along

Brook Street and Northgate Street to the north-western corner of Gt Coleman St, then eastward along Dr. Durrant's wall north-easterly across his garden to Old Foundry Road, thence turning along Old Foundry Road westward, including a stable belonging to E. Y. Read, then in a crooked line to Northgate Street, taking in part of Mr. C K Moseley's house and garden, and crossing the street it includes the house occupied by Mrs. Bennett. Thence it runs northward along the centre of Northgate Street to the bottom of Fonnereau Road, thence westward along the centre of Crown Street (Clay Lane) to the starting point.

Unfortunately it is not recorded whether the short ladder, stencil plate "M.B., 1897" or the pot of black paint were called into action during the walk.

It is not known how many times since this date the Bounds have been walked but most recently on May 9th 2010, a party once more walked the bounds led by the Vicar. However it should be pointed out that he was not required to climb through any kitchen windows in the process and no children were “bumped” on the boundary!

Over the years there have been significant changes to the boundary. As Ipswich developed at the turn of the C19-20 new churches and parishes were formed and parts of the parish were added to these new parishes. In addition some churches have since closed (e.g. St Michael's Church on Upper Orwell St) and the associated parish has been distributed between neighbouring parishes including St Margaret's. In the case of St Michael's the other parts went to St Helen's and St Mary-Le-Tower.

An accurate map of the boundary still needs to be maintained as it is required for a number of legal reasons such as the right to be married at St Margaret's Church, whether the resident is within the catchment area of St Margaret's CEVA School etc. It is always being updated: some of the most recent housing developments in the area of Bramley Hill off Albion Hill has houses in St Margaret's parish whilst others are in St Helen's parish. The following map gives an idea of the current parish boundary but is not sufficiently detailed to be used as a legal document.

## Notes

Thanks are due to Paul Horne who holds the copyright for the Paget Road and Upper Orwell Street photos, found on the Ipswich Historic Lettering site of Borin Van Loon, and allowed them to be used.

BVL also provided links to two reports of the Beating of the Bounds of St Clement's Church in 1895. One is a hugely entertaining eyewitness account recorded in 1965. Both contain photographs of the party and procession including two people clambering over the roof of the Crisp and Smith's premises, which marks the boundary between the two parishes.

A fascinating set of photographs of Beating the Bounds of St Clement's Parish can be found at:

<http://church.c0853462.myzen.co.uk/st-clements-church/>

A reprint of an eye-witness account of the process in 1895 can be found at:

[www.ipswichsociety.org.uk/newsletter/newsletter-october-2016-issue-205/](http://www.ipswichsociety.org.uk/newsletter/newsletter-october-2016-issue-205/beating-the-bounds-st-clement-s-1895/)  
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