ST. BOTOLPH'S BRIDGE, COLCHESTER.

BY J. H. ROUND, M.A., LL.D.

As the road from Colchester to West Bergholt approaches the borough boundary, it descends a steep incline, known as 'St. Botolph's hill,' to the stream now known as 'St. Botolph's brook,' which has formed from time immemorial the boundary between the borough liberties and the parish of West Bergholt. This stream it crosses by 'St. Botolph's bridge.' I have often wondered what could be the origin of these names, for the Colchester parish of St. Botolph's is far away, nor, so far as I know, had St. Botolph's priory any land on the spot Even if it had, one would not expect it to give name to a hill, to a brook, or to a bridge.

Now this bridge was one of the landmarks named in the old perambulations of the boundaries of Colchester. Morant gives four of these, and in those of the seventeenth century (1637, 1671)[1] the brook is styled 'Buttolph's Brooke' simply. But in that of 1563[2] we find the notable *alias* 'Todulnes Bredge *alias* Botolphes Bredge.' But this perambulation is taken from the *Oath Book,* and Mr. Gurney Benham, in his edition of that volume, reads the text as 'Godulnes Bredge *alias* Botolphes Bredge' (p. 258). For the earliest perambulation we have to go so far back as the thirteenth century. Morant here again gives 'Todulnes Bregge ' (without any *alias),* but Mr. Gurney Benham reads the name as 'Godulves bregge' (p. 4).

'Todulne' is quite impossible as an Old English name, but 'Godulf' would not be.[3] As a matter of fact, it is actually found on the Pipe Roll of 1171 (P.R. 17 Hen. II., p. 122), where Ralf, son of Godulf *(filius Godulfi),* under Essex, appears as fined for a forest offence. On the Pipe Roll of 23 Hen. II. (1177), a Roger, son of Codulf, is found under Surrey (p. 192) as in receipt of the king's alms. Mr. W. H. Stevenson, of St. John's college, Oxford, a recognised authority on 'Old English' names, has been good enough to inform me that God-wulf is an old English name, but is curiously rare. In late (*i.e.,* Norman) times it is liable to be confused in writing . . . even with Gold-wulf." We are not, however,

---

1 *History of Colchester,* p. 96.

2 *Ibid.,* p. 95.

3 This is not the only occurrence of an 'Old English' name in these perambulations, for they also mention a 'Levegores bredge,' which is obviously named from an Old English Leofgar.

dependent on conjecture, for a charter relating to West Bergholt, in the cartulary of St. John's abbey, contains a reference (unindexed) to "the brook which flows down to Godulf's bridge" (*rivulum qui currit versus pontem Godulfi)[1]* This, it will be seen, vindicates absolutely Mr. Gurney Benham's reading. The obvious inference is that, here again, 'folk etymology' has been at work. When the name 'Godulf's' became meaningless, some bright genius must have suggested that the more familiar Botolph's (*Botulfi)* was the true form of the name. By 1563 this had already become an *alias* and had indeed given name to the brook, previously nameless. The hill leading to the bridge followed, and, finally, the humble Godulf, under his strange *alias,* was, in a more reverent age, duly canonised as St. Botolph.[2]

It is not only 'St. Botolph's bridge' by which West Bergholt is entered from the liberties of Colchester. On the south of the parish it is connected with Lexden by a bridge, which, at least as far back as 1204, was already known as Newbridge *(novus pons).[3]* For many years I have been puzzled by this singular name. Even if, at a remote date, the present bridge replaced one of earlier construction, it seems hardly likely that this would explain the name.[4] An even earlier date, however, is suggested by such a name as that of Godulf's bridge. Moreover, the road which the latter bridge carries across the stream must always have been of more importance than that which enters Bergholt on the south. If, therefore, the road crossed the Colne—as Dr. Laver held it did—by an ancient ford at the termination of what is called 'Gryme's Dyke,' Newbridge may have been so called because, when it took the place of the ford, Godulf's bridge on the other road was already in existence.

---

1 *Cartularium* (Roxburghe Club), p. 433. It belongs to a group of charters which are certainly of the first half and probably of the second quarter of the thirteenth century.

2 So also was Ontesley green, in Great Dunmow, corrupted into 'Hounslow green' in the Ordnance map of 1886 *E.A. Transactions,* ix., p. 233); and Atlingford, between Rivenhall and Great Braxted *(Cartularium,* p 164), made more intelligible by corrupting it into 'Appleford' (bridge). In his *Crecy and Calais,* p. 53, my late friend, General the Hon. George Wrottesley, observed, of Calais, that "On the west side it was further protected by an arm of the sea, which was passable only by a bridge called by the English the Newland (*sic*) bridge, but of which the French name was Neuillet or Nieulay." Perhaps, however, the best parallel to the change, by 'folk-etymology,' of 'Godulf' to 'Botolph' is afforded at Warnford, Hants, where the remark-able building which is "now commonly called King John's House" was "the old house of the St. Johns" in the thirteenth century (see *Victoria History of Hants,* iii., p. 268). In both instances, the initial letter was, virtually, all that had to be changed, for 'St. Johns' is pro-nounced 'Sin Johns.' The name of King John, of course, is more familiar than that of the St. Johns, from whom the manor passed away in 1355.

3 Another document of John's reign speaks of it by this name.

4 A 'new bridge' at Brightlingsea raises the same problem (see Dr. Dickin's book, p. 168).