

THE LATEST EXCAVATIONS AT
ST. AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY.

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Abbey Church on 19 May 1921.)*

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Before proceeding to describe the latest excavations it may be convenient to repeat very briefly the story of the buildings on this site, giving first the dates of the buildings, so far as we know them, and then the account of their uncovering in recent years.

The earliest building in this precinct of St. Austen is without doubt the Church of St. Pancras, whether it goes back to earlier days, or, as is more probable according to Mr. Micklethwaite and Sir William Hope, it was built by St. Augustine very soon after the conversion of the king, to accommodate his growing flock, before the two larger churches of SS. Peter and Paul and of the Saviour were completed. In this case it must belong to the first year after St. Augustine's landing, for in 598 he began with the king's assistance to build his other two churches, the Abbey Church of SS. Peter and Paul here without the walls and the Cathedral Church of Christ on the site of Ethelbert's palace within the city. The monastic buildings were completed by 605, the year of Augustine's death, but the Abbey Church was not finished till 613, when it was consecrated by his successor Laurence. It consisted of a nave with a porticus or chapel on either side. That on the north was dedicated to St. Gregory, and intended for the tombs of the Archbishops; and that on the south, which was to be the royal burying place, to St. Martin, the principal altar being that of the Apostles. There may have been an apse at the east end and possibly another at the west end, where, as in the Cathedral, there was an altar to St. Mary (*cf. Goc. Trans., ii., 13*), but of these we have not yet found any traces.

East of the Abbey Church, and between it and St. Pancras, was the Chapel of St. Mary (*oratorium beatae virginis*), a separate church built by Edbald, the son of Ethelbert, between 616 and 618 as an act of penance on his repentance from his apostasy.

In 978 an enlargement of the Abbey Church took place, and the enlarged church was dedicated by St. Dunstan, the Archbishop, to the two Apostles with St. Augustine, whence in after years the Abbey, though originally the Church of SS. Peter and Paul, became known simply by the name of its founder and third patron.

In 1006 Elmer or Almer became Abbot, and at some time between that date and 1022, when he became Bishop of Sherborne, he began to prepare for rebuilding the Abbey Church, removing to the cloister the arches and columns of the shrine which had been built over the bodies of the Saints with "Roman elegance." (*Goc. Trans.*, ii., 1.) Later, becoming blind, he resigned his see and returned here to the infirmary, where he ended his days to the great edification of the monastery, and was buried outside the chapel of St. John.

His successor Ælfstan in 1027 brought the body of St. Mildred from Minster-in-Thamet and placed it in front of the altar of the Apostles.

He was succeeded in 1047 by Abbot Wulfrie II., who, after his return from an embassy to the Pope at Reims in 1049, full of zeal to do his part in the revival of church life under Leo. IX., set about a great reconstruction. His plan was to unite the two churches, the Abbey Church and the Chapel of St. Mary, and to do this he took down the west end of St. Mary's and the east end of the Abbey Church, cleansed the intervening bit of cemetery, and built on it a new central building, octagonal without and round within, with a circle of pillars in the centre, possibly with the intention of making a grand new tomb of St. Augustine. How far he completed his work we do not know: we have discovered its foundations, and the chronicler speaks of walls and arches and columns and the admiration of all Kent at

the new work, though the inexperience of the workmen made it unsuitable for a monastic building. The sudden death of the Abbot in 1059 or 1061 brought the work to a standstill.

In 1070 Egelsin, his successor, having fled to Denmark, Scotland was appointed by William I. to be the first Norman abbot. He, too, was sent on an embassy to the Pope, and took the opportunity of getting advice as to rebuilding his church. Something had to be done; there was a blight on Wulfric's work. It had been hasty and tactless. There may be some hint of his headstrong way in Gocelin's description of him as "*egregius suæ gregis aries.*" So, after much consideration and prayer, Scotland determined to make a new beginning from the east end. He took down the whole of the Chapel of St. Mary, and levelled Wulfric's round church and built up a new crypt and presbytery above it, with three eastern apses, and then went on with the transepts, and had got down to the second bay of the nave when he died in 1087, a day before the Conqueror, and was buried in the centre of his own crypt. His successor Guy, or Wydo, carried on his work and completed the Norman nave, taking up in 1091 the bodies of Augustine and his successors, the Archbishops, from their tombs in the north porticus of the Saxon church, and translating them to new shrines round the east end of Scotland's sanctuary, and also removing the royal tombs from the south porticus to new tombs in the Chapel of St. Anne at the end of the south aisle. The account of this translation was written in great detail by an eye-witness, Gocelin, a monk of St. Bertin, who had come to England with Herman, Bishop of Salisbury, in 1058, and was then living here in this house. His account, dedicated to St. Anselm the Archbishop, was written within seven years of the occurrence, and the MS., which is now in the British Museum, was once used in the refectory here, and is said by experts to have been written not later than the first quarter of the twelfth century.

Thus, then, to recapitulate, we have three churches of the First Age (*i.e.*, the end of the sixth and beginning of the

seventh century), St. Pancras to the east, SS. Peter and Paul to the west, and between them, but not at first connected with either, St. Mary's Chapel. In the latter part of the tenth century, in the time of Dunstan, SS. Peter and Paul's was enlarged both in length and breadth. Just after the middle of the eleventh century Wulfric tore off the west end of St. Mary's and the east end of SS. Peter and Paul's and built his new circular building to unite them. Then in the last quarter of the eleventh century Scotland levelled to the ground St. Mary's Church and Wulfric's church and built over their site his own new church, the nave of which was completed by Wydo.

Of further rebuilding of the church we have little clear information. It was nearly burnt down in 1168. The High Altar was dedicated again on 24 October 1240 to SS. Peter and Paul and St. Augustine, and on the 5th of March 1325 to the same two Apostles, St. Augustine the Apostle of England and St. Ethelbert the king, according to the picture in the Trinity Hall copy of Thomas of Elmham's chronicle. In the middle of the fourteenth century the Chapel of St. Anne in the south aisle was rebuilt or altered. In the early part of the sixteenth century, beyond the eastern apse was built a new rectangular Lady Chapel with flying buttresses. Then, in 1538, came the enforced dissolution, and the church fell into decay, some of the monastic buildings becoming a royal palace.

Our object in these excavations is to try to discover what remains of this, the first home of St. Augustine and his companions, the first Benedictine Abbey in England, and of the successive churches built on this site, and of the tombs of the sainted archbishops and first Christian kings and queens of Kent who were buried within those churches.

Between 1867 and 1868 the monastic buildings on the north side of the cloister, including the refectory and hexagonal kitchen, were partly uncovered and planned, and covered up again.

St. Pancras was fully explored by Canon Routledge and Sir William St. John Hope in 1900 and described by the

latter in *Arch. Cant.*, Vol. XXV. Twenty-five years ago it was covered by cottages and pig styes. About the same time, through the death of the farmer who owned the land, a large part of the old precinct (embracing part of the site of St. Pancras, Scotland's crypt and presbytery above it, almost all the transepts and a slice of the nave, together with the chapter-house and dormitory and infirmary buildings), now known as the Abbey field, came into the market. At the suggestion of the then warden, Dr. Maclear, with the help of Canon Routledge and hearty approval of Archbishop Temple, who appealed to the leading churchmen in this diocese and throughout the kingdom to guarantee a sum sufficient to purchase so important a site, the field was purchased and vested in four trustees—our President, one of the principal contributors to the fund, Sir William Hope, Canon Routledge and Mr. F. Bennett Goldney, then Member for Canterbury. After excavating as far as possible, the field was to be handed over to the College as a further, but not final, instalment of the lands of the Abbey restored to the Church.

Between 1900 and 1902 the crypt of Abbot Scotland's presbytery and the Tudor Lady Chapel to the east of it and the east wall of the north transept and crypt, together with the site of the chapter-house and infirmary buildings, were laid bare by Sir William Hope, Canon Routledge and Mr. Sebastian Evans, and described by the two latter in *Arch. Cant.*, Vols. XXV. and XXVI. The chapter-house and infirmary were covered over again, and the crypt half filled again with débris. No remains were found of the shrines of St. Augustine and his successors, which stood round the altar of the Holy Trinity in the eastern part of the quire, but the tombs of various abbots were discovered, and the bases of three altars in the apsidal chapels in the crypt.

In 1913 we obtained the permission of the Kent and Canterbury Hospital to remove a modern boundary wall running diagonally across the nave, and so got a vista of the whole length of the Norman church. Then, after we

had begun to clear the floor of the north aisle and found the bases of the columns, our attention was drawn by the Rev. C. E. Woodruff to the chapters in Gocelin's *Translation of St. Augustine* (i., 17 and 18), in which he says that St. Augustine's original tomb was where now the third pillar from the crossing stood, and goes on to describe the position of the other tombs of the Saints in relation to that tomb. Accordingly we began to dig to the north of the sleeper wall, and found some curious foundations. Then, on Sir W. Hope's advice, we dug on the south side, and, little by little, below the chalk foundations of the later pulpitum, came out the foundations of what afterwards was recognized as Wulfrie's circular church. Then further digging on the north revealed the whole of the north porticus or aisle of Ethelbert's and Augustine's church of SS. Peter and Paul, together with the original tombs of Laurence, Mellitus and Justus, precisely as they were left when the bodies were translated by Wydo in 1091 to their new shrines in the eastern part of the Norman quire. The tombs of Augustine, Honorius and Deusdedit had been removed to make way for the new sleeper wall. Gocelin's account with its minute detail left no doubt as to the identity of the tombs. All this was fully described by Sir William Hope in *Arch. Cant.*, Vol. XXXI. This naturally made us wish to go further.

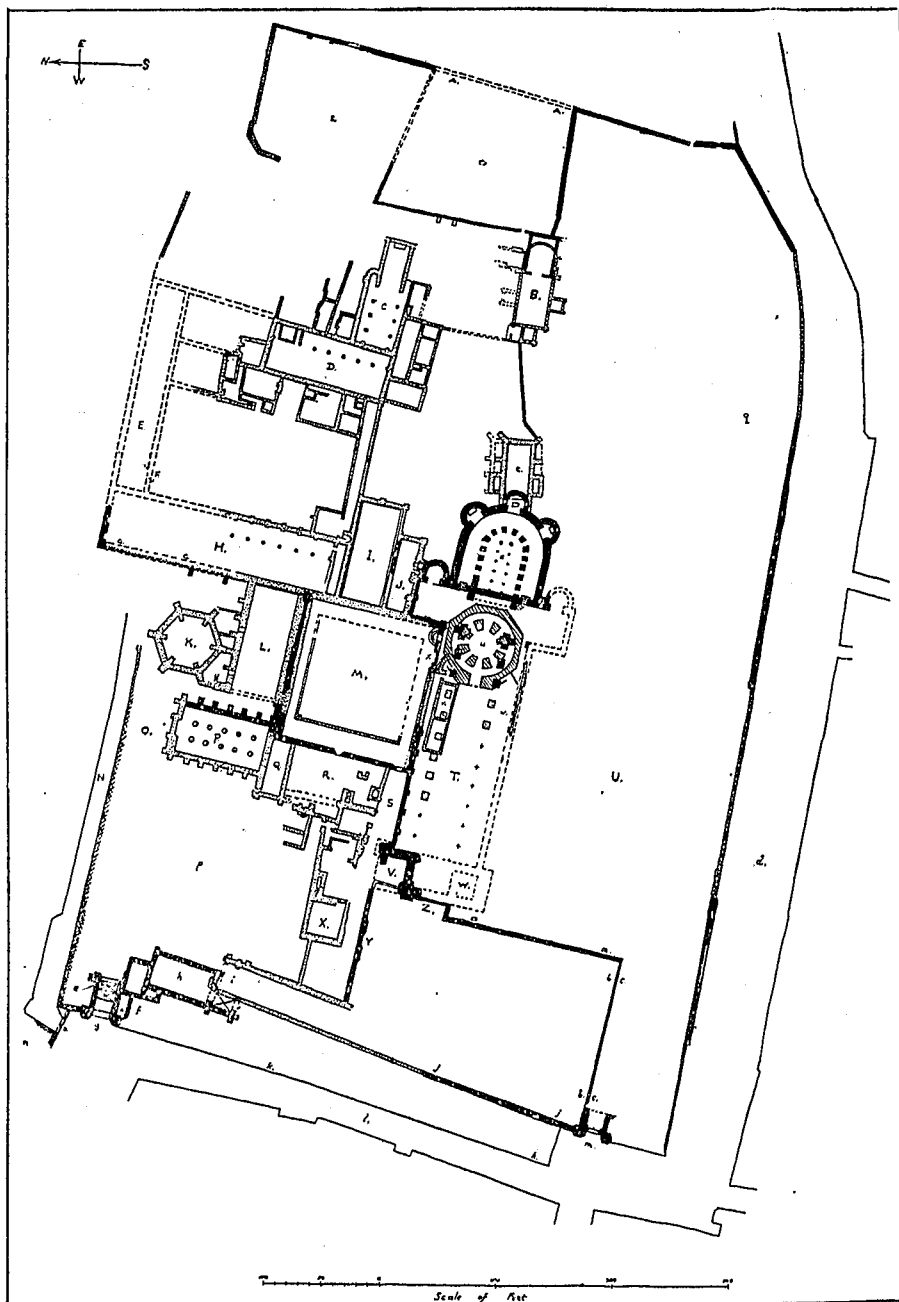
It was clear from Gocelin that as, on the north side of the original abbey church of SS. Peter and Paul, there was a porticus of St. Gregory, which we had found with the tombs of the archbishops, so on the south side was a corresponding porticus of St. Martin, in which, in parallel order, first reposed Ethelbert and Bertha, and Bishop Letard her chaplain, and various other Saxon princes who in 1091 were also translated to new tombs in St. Anne's chapel at the east end of the south aisle of the nave. We also wanted to lay bare the whole plan of the Norman church. But this ground belonged to the hospital, whose mortuary stood near the west end of the nave, while the laundry covered both the earlier and later sites of the Royal tombs.

The War necessarily postponed our operations, but at the

end of 1919, through the great generosity of our President, who gave four-fifths of the sum estimated by the hospital as sufficient to pay for the re-erection elsewhere of a new laundry and mortuary, we obtained a 60 years' lease of the remainder of the site of the church. We had to wait a year till a new mortuary could be built, and it was only last January that we were able to begin what we hope may be the last stage. With the help of a few subscriptions and kind grants from the Society of Antiquaries, the Kent Archæological Society and the British Archæological Association, we have now been enabled to clear a large space down to the level of the Norman floor. There you can see the four eastern bays of the nave and of the south aisle with the south wall of the church. There is St. Anne's Chapel, later known as the Countess' Chapel, because in it was buried in 1367 a great benefactress of the Abbey, Juliana de Leybourne, Countess of Huntingdon. Round about this site we have found a large number of fragments of a very beautiful fourteenth-century tomb, which may have belonged to this lady, who in her will made 30 October 1367, two days before her death (*Arch. Cant.*, Vol. I.), desired to be buried in the new chapel on the south side of St. Augustine's Abbey. Unfortunately the ground has been disturbed by two modern wells made during the hospital occupation of the ground, one of which is at a very important point.

There are in the centre some curious remains of steps under the chalk foundations of the later pulpitum. So far we have not, except in one or two small holes, got below the Norman level. We must first remove to the other side of the field the great mass of débris which we have got out, or we shall be blocked up.

There are all sorts of important questions which can only be solved when we get down to the Saxon level on the south side. We do not know for certain the width of the Saxon nave; our only real clue is the fact that Wulfrie's round church must have had its western opening in the centre of the nave, and so a line to the south taken from the centre of that opening, equal in length to the distance on the north,



ST. AUSTIN'S, CANTERBURY.

General Plan of part of the monastic buildings and of the Abbey Church. Compiled from details obtained during excavations carried on between 1868 and 1920.

May, 1921.

KEY TO LETTERING.

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| A-A. Old Wall continues. | a-a. Tudor Garden Wall. |
| B. S. Pancras Church. | b-b. Tudor Wall on North face. |
| C. Infirmary Chapel. | c-c. Early Saxon Wall on South face. |
| D. Infirmary Buildings. | d. Longport Street. |
| E. Rere Dorter. | e. Royal Bedchamber over. |
| F. Old Wall. | f. Prison. |
| G. Old Wall below. | g. The Fyndon Gate. |
| H. Dormitory. | h. Guest's Hall, Kitchen below. |
| I. Chapter-House. | i. Guest's Chapel. |
| J. Slype. | j-j. Boundary Wall. |
| K. Kitchen. | k-k. Line of modern Boundary Wall. |
| L. Frater. | l. Monastery Street. |
| M. Cloister. | m. Cemetery Gate. |
| N. Private Road. | n. The Almonry. |
| O. Site of Stairway to Guest Hall. | o. Tudor Archway. |
| P. The Abbot Guest Hall. | p. The Great Courtyard. |
| Q. Abbot's Parlour. | q. Site of detached Bell-tower. |
| R. Abbot's Buildings and Cellars below. | r. Cellarer's Garden. |
| s. Abbot's Chapel above, Forensic Parlour below. | s. Abbot's Garden. |
| t. The Abbey Church. | t. Abbot Dygon's Chapel. |
| u. Cemetery. | u. Abbot Wulfric's Building. |
| v. The Ethelbert Tower. | v. Porticus of S. Gregory. |
| w. Tower. | w. Porticus of S. Martin (site of). |
| x. Tudor Building. | x. Abbot Scotland's Crypt. |
| y. Tudor Wall. | y. Adam de Kyngesnoth's Lavatory. |
| z. Tudor filling to West front of Abbey. | |

KEY TO PLAN.

- Diagonal lines = Saxon work (foundation).
 Solid black = Mediæval work above ground.
 Dotted = Mediæval work below ground.
 Cross-hatching = Modern work, possibly on old foundation.

ought to give us the width, which would be about 25 feet. We ought also to find the sweep of the ambulatory of Wulfric's church beyond the south sleeper wall, and, above all, the tombs of Ethelbert, Bertha and Letard. We have traced the continuation of the apsidal chapel in the south transept, and the end of the transept itself, but for the present we must leave that until we have cleared away further to the west. We have also, while waiting to get on with the church, partially uncovered again, and hope to expose the whole of, the refectory and kitchen on the north side of the cloisters.

The refectory was built in 1260 by Abbot Roger of Chichester, whose remains we found in the south transept in June 1918. The kitchen was built in 1287 in the time of Abbot Fyndon by brothers Thomas of Chichester, William of Romenal and Henry of Kokeryng, monks of this monastery, and finished by Henry de Kokeryng about four years later at a cost of £414 10s.

You will see how much remains to be done, what a mass of earth to be moved; and then, when it is all uncovered, there will be the question of maintaining and preserving it as one of the greatest treasures of this city and of the English people. The trust funds of the College are not available for this purpose, and therefore we must appeal to you and to all who are interested in the history of your country to give freely and without delay, and to urge all your friends to help in discovering and preserving for generations to come this site of such supreme interest to all good Englishmen. It appeals to us as Englishmen, but even more as Christians. This was the first Christian English home. It was "the simple and innocent lives of the first missionaries here and the charm of their heavenly doctrine" which, as Bede says, won both the king and his people, and it may well be that we owe to them that ideal of a Christian home which is one of our national treasures. This is holy ground. Let us in gratitude make it and keep it as a place of pilgrimage and source of inspiration to all English-speaking peoples for all time.