

ST. MILDRED'S CHURCH, CANTERBURY

FURTHER NOTES ON THE SITE.

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DR. GORDON WARD in his paper in Volume LIV of *Arch. Cant.* on the age of St. Mildred's Church, Canterbury, thinks some light is thrown on it by a grant made by Coenulf, King of Mercia, and his brother Cuthred, King of Kent, in the year 804 to Selethryth, Abbess of Lyminge and her convent, of six acres in Canterbury as a refuge in time of need (i.e. in the Danish invasions).

I. THE SITE OF THE REFUGE.

The Charter is to be found on page 68 in the Appendix of Battely's edition of *Somner's Antiquities of Canterbury*, London, 1703. The site in the original is thus described :

"Sex jugera pertinentia ad ecclesiam, quae sita est in honore [*sic*] beatae Mariae in occidentali parte civitatis, et quorum termini sic cingere videntur : ab oriente fluvius Stur : ab occidente et ab austro murus civitatis : a statu ecclesiae protenditur *in Aquilonem*, emissione virgarum circiter, ut fertur, quindecim."

Strange to say Dr. Ward, who apparently is quoting from Canon Jenkins, entirely ignores the underlined words *in Aquilonem*, and this materially affects the position of the "refuge." A reference to Somner will make this quite clear.

The following is an exact translation of the passage above :

"Six acres belonging to the church which has been built in honour of Blessed Mary, in the western part of the city, whose [i.e. of the six acres] boundaries seem to enclose it as follows : on the east the River Stour : on the west and south the city wall : from the site of the church it extends to the north about fifteen rods, so to say " (i.e. about 250 ft.).

Three of the boundaries are quite clear. On the east is the Stour running a few feet to the west of St. Mildred's Church, to the west and south are the city wall. It is the north one which is the difficulty. It is said to be about 250 feet from the site of St. Mary's Church. (N.B. St. Mildred's Church is about 150 ft. east of the Stour.) It seems therefore to be impossible to identify the site of St. Mary's 250 ft. on the north side of the "refuge," with that of St. Mildred's on the other side of the Stour which forms the eastern boundary. I suggest that, as Somner says in the passage quoted by Dr. Ward on page 62 of *Arch. Cant.*, LIV, nothing is known of St. Mary's Church in that part of the city. It was

probably destroyed in the great destruction by the Danes in Ethelred's reign and may, as Somner says, like some of the other early churches, have been built of wood. The site of the refuge was on the island of Binnewith on the left bank of the Stour as given by the east, south and west boundaries somewhere on the site of the present tannery (*vide* plan on page 66 of Vol. LIV), but the unknown church of St. Mary was 250 ft. to the north of it.

2. THE ISLAND OF BINNEWITH.

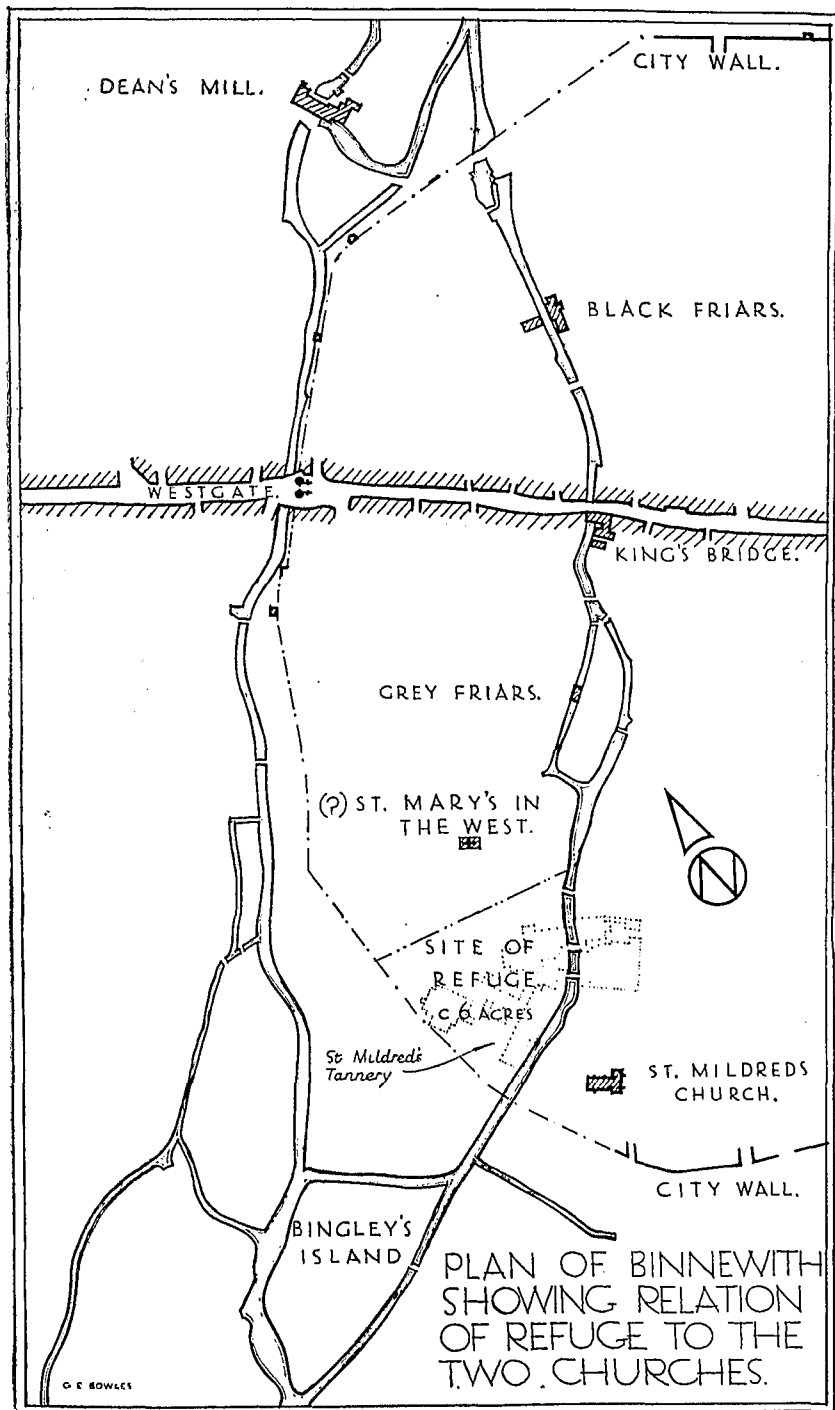
Binnewith is the long island, Binnen Ea ("that which is within the waters," which I understand is the meaning of the Saxon words), which is enclosed by the two arms or branches of the Stour, which divides on the south-west of Bingleys Island, a low, marshy, triangular field of nearly 5 acres in extent. This is well outside the city wall and so could not have been part of the "refugium." It is cut off from the main island by a channel which connects the two branches of the Stour, the western one outside the city wall which flows on to Westgate, and the eastern one which flows on past the Grey Friars to King's Bridge where it passes under the main street, by the Black Friars, to Dean's Mill. Here it joins the western arm and so encircles the island.

On the left bank of the eastern arm a channel has been cut long ago at some unknown time to serve as a drain for the Franciscan convent, part of which was built over it and still remains.

The refugium must have been on the island and east of the city wall. I have verified the above by reference to the 25-in. Ordnance Survey and by walking over the ground.

3. ST. MILDRED AND HER CHURCH.

The exact date of the death of St. Mildred, the Abbess of Minster in Thanet, who was commemorated on February 20th, is uncertain. The best authorities say it was in the last five years of the seventh century. She was buried originally at Minster in the Church of SS. Peter and Paul, built by Edburga, her successor as Abbess. There she lay till 1035, when her body was translated to St. Augustine's Abbey by Abbot Elfstan, to whom the remains of the monastery were given by King Knut, whose father Sweyn in 1011 had destroyed and burnt everything but the tomb of St. Mildred. The Abbey of St. Augustine removed her body to their own church and placed it in the enlarged north porticus as one of their most precious relics. It is quite possible that at some time shortly after this, on their land in the western portion of the city they may have built the earliest part of the present church of St. Mildred, viz. the massive long and short work at the west end. In fact Somner (Pt. ii, p. 176) says that the Church of St. Mildred in Canterbury was founded by the Abbot and Convent of St. Augustine.



Towards the end of that eleventh century, in 1087, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions that when some of the monks of St. Augustine's rebelled against the appointment of Abbot Wydo by Lanfranc, some of them took refuge near St. Mildred's Church near the Castle ditch.

There must therefore have been a church of St. Mildred built between 1035 and 1087, possibly on the site of an earlier church with another dedication. This eleventh century church was burnt down in 1246 when parts of the present church were built. Further additions were made in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is questionable whether the earliest part of the present church is older than the first half of the eleventh century. Somner is of opinion that most of the pre-conquest churches were of wood, so that it may well be that if there was an early church of St. Mary in the western part of the city between the two arms of the Stour, it may have been burnt between 1009 and 1011.

In attempting a list of the early churches of Canterbury St. Martin's comes first as a pre-Augustinian church in the sixth century; then St. Pancras, and then the Abbey of SS. Peter and Paul and the Cathedral at the very end of the sixth or beginning of the seventh century; then the long and short work at St. Mildred's in the early part of the eleventh century; then come the bases of the towers of St. Peter, St. Margaret's and St. George's, all possibly post conquest.

There would not appear to be any clear evidence that the early work at St. Mildred's is older than the early part of the eleventh century, and I venture to assert that the charter of Coenulf has no bearing on it.

The word "gremiales" (*vide* page 68 of Vol. LIV) is to be found in Lewis and Short's Latin dictionary. It occurs in the Digest and means "growing in a cluster from a stump," what we now call "pollarded." So here applied to the banks of the Stour, it means lined with pollarded willows.