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ROMAN FOUNDATIONS AT ST. PANCRAS, CANTERBURY.

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THE accidental re-interment in this spot of some bones dug up under the Kent and Canterbury Hospital led to the finding of a few coloured tiles; and further search, prosecuted without any preconceived plan, has resulted in what bids fair to be an interesting archæological discovery.

The only authentic traditions with regard to St. Pancras Church, which I have been able to meet with after an investigation of the early chroniclers, are fitly summed up in the following passage of Thorn, a Benedictine monk of St. Augustine's at the end of the fourteenth century: "There was not far from the city (of Canterbury) towards the east, as it were midway between the church of St. Martin and the walls of the city, a temple or idol-house where King Ethelbert according to the rites of his tribe was wont to pray, and with his nobles to sacrifice to his demons and not to God: which temple Augustine purged from the pollutions and filth of the Gentiles; and, having broken the image which was in it, changed it into a church, and dedicated it in the name of the martyr St. Pancras—and this was the first church dedicated by St. Augustine."

The passage which immediately follows I will quote hereafter.

Before advancing any theory about the remains that have been discovered, I will say at once that we have been able to trace them only partially, as the owner of the ground on the other side of the wall has declined to allow any diggings to be carried out there.

Let me then give a brief account of the excavations, beginning at what I will call (for clearness' sake) the

western porch. There are still standing (as you may see) portions of a wall built with Roman tiles and sea-shore mortar, considered by Mr. Parker and many others to be a veritable Romano-British wall, with apparent traces of the spring of an arch at right angles to it.

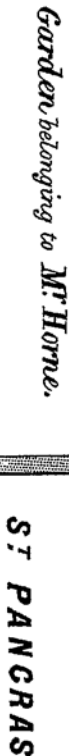
This wall is about 9 feet long, and 8 feet high *above ground*, with buttresses of 16 and 18 inches. We have uncovered the foundations of a wall and buttresses exactly corresponding on the other side—forming a porch 10 ft. 6 in. long, and 9 ft. 3 in. wide, with an opening at the west end of 6 ft. 6 in.

Below the surface, at an average depth of 14 inches, there are parts of a pavement consisting of coloured and patterned tiles. These tiles are mostly of the date of the latter end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century. They have been found in all parts of the building, and some of the earlier ones apparently formed the pavement of that church, of which the east window-arch and the chancel's south wall are still remaining.

At a depth of about 15 inches below this pavement, on the north side of the porch, as well as on the south side and at the western entrance, there are some rather remarkable tombs, in one of which was a perfect skeleton, in the others fragmentary bones. The body in each case has been laid on the bare earth, then built round with stones accurately following its shape, and covered with large chamfered slabs of what looks like Portland oolite, somewhat similar in character to the so-called sarcophagus of Queen Bertha in St. Martin's.

On the eastern side of the porch is a doorway, 2 ft. 8 in. wide, of Norman workmanship, splayed internally, and leading into the nave of the church.

The wall trends southward for a distance of 12 feet from this doorway; then eastward, till at a little over 16 feet from the turn we come to a slab of Bethersden marble and some fifteenth century work, forming part of a doorway leading into the southern chapel, chantry, or aisle (which I will describe hereafter); then on for 24 feet, till we have reached the end of the nave, where we find a lateral buttress



extending 3 ft. 5 in. to the south, and a mediæval wall or buttress reaching 6 ft. 9 in. to the east. Here also imbedded in the wall is a massive circular Roman pillar, at the foot of which has been found the upper portion of an apparently Roman phial.

The foundations of the old chancel wall (on which that of the later church has not been evenly and symmetrically placed) start 10 inches farther in than those of the nave wall, and can be traced for 12 or 13 feet more till we detect something like the commencement of an apse; but at this interesting point we are warned off by the owner of the adjacent ground.

We will now return to the southern chantry or aisle, which is of identically the same size as the western porch.

Thorn goes on to say, after the passage I have already quoted, "There is still extant *an altar* in the southern *porticus* of the same church, at which the same Augustine was wont to celebrate, where formerly had stood the idol of the king—at which altar, while Augustine was celebrating mass for the first time, the devil, seeing himself driven out from the home which he had inhabited for long ages, tried to overturn from the foundations the aforesaid church: the marks of which thing are still apparent on the exterior eastern wall of the abovementioned *porticus*."

In an engraving, bearing the date 1784, the so-called devil's marks are shewn; and I have little or no doubt that the *porticus* mentioned by Thorn is the same which we have excavated. We cannot call it a *porch*, as there are no traces of an external door.

Now the walls of this *porticus* are built chiefly of Roman tiles, coated in the lower part with a facing of concrete, and in the upper parts with thick plaster. In it are the remains of a rude altar, with the pavement of fifteenth century tiles complete on either side: the altar, 4 ft. 4 in. by 2 ft. 2 in. in size, of an uncertain date, possibly contemporary with the pavement, but built on older foundations. In addition to the later fifteenth century doorway on the northern side, there are close to it distinct traces of an earlier entrance

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(most likely of the pre-Norman period), 3 ft. 3 in. wide, and 3 ft. from either end; the jambs not splayed but running straight through at right angles to the walls. Among the debris in this *porticus* were found several pieces of glass and of fused bronze, and portions of a door and late Tudor window; and, deeper down, two or three fragments of Roman pottery. Under a close layer of brick earth, seven or eight inches below the tile pavement, is a floor of concrete, shewing in parts marks of fire. This concrete floor seems to extend beneath the present altar, and is also traceable in adjacent portions of the nave, and again at the approach to the chancel, where we discover something like steps. I need only add that the floor of the *porticus* was originally on the same level as that of the rest of the nave, but was raised one step above it when the later church was built.

Everywhere throughout the excavations are evident traces of burnt earth and other calcined substances.

It is to be borne in mind that the foundation-walls throughout (being twenty inches wide) are composed of Roman tiles bound together in some places by salmon-coloured mortar, in others by mortar made from sea-shells and pebbles, and even later material.

These are the facts and the data. What conclusion then are we to draw? That there was on this spot some early Roman building, whether of a secular or religious character, is indisputable. There is a vague tradition that there was once here a Romano-British church, and this having fallen into decay may have been partially restored and used by Ethelbert for a heathen temple. We have Thorn's story, written 500 years ago, and it is of course possible that he had consulted earlier records. It seems to me incredible that he should have written as he has done if the first church on that spot had been of Norman work, built only some 200 or 300 years before his own time; for he was a monk of St. Augustine's, and had free access to their chronicles. His testimony therefore (though not to be implicitly received) must, I think, be entitled to some weight.

But we must chiefly rely on the excavations themselves. The Roman tiles are pronounced to be of a good time, and

Mr. Roach Smith says, "There can be no doubt of the foundations being those of a rather extensive Roman building—upon which the later edifices were built."

The concrete floor found at different parts of the nave and in the southern *porticus* is apparently Roman or Saxon; the lower portion of the walls of the same *porticus* are also faced with early concrete regularly and evenly laid. The fact of the existing chancel-wall being placed on an interior line ten inches within the foundation of Roman tile seems to me so extraordinary that it has been suggested that the foundations are at this point of double thickness: in which case the existing wall would have been placed in the middle of them; and thus the foundations of the chancel would form part of the very oldest building.

Prudence would here bid me stop; but, not being an expert, I may be suffered to hazard some conjectures, subject to correction from the opinions of cleverer men, and to evidence that may be derived from further excavations.

I would picture to myself a small Roman church, possibly with other buildings adjacent. These would fall into partial ruin after the evacuation of Britain. One portion of these ruins (perhaps the southern *porticus*) might be restored by Ethelbert as a heathen temple, which St. Augustine would purify from pollution and consecrate to Christian worship. He would also take in the remaining site of the destroyed Roman church, using the original materials, and re-erect a building there to provide for his numerous converts. The actual foundation-walls, as well as the existing wall above-ground of Roman tiles, would (from this point of view) date from Saxon times; and I suggest this date because of the sea-shore mortar with which the wall is built, and which appears to me most probably post-Roman. Following the fortunes of this Roman-Saxon church, we can easily fancy it (like St. Martin's) ravaged by the Danes; then restored by the Normans, who would after their manner introduce their own doorways; till in its turn it would fall into decay, and be superseded by the early English church, of which some ruins still remain; and the flooring, as it wore out, would gradually be replaced by later tiles.