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## RECENT DISCOVERIES AT ST. AUSTIN'S ABBEY, CANTERBURY.

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It will probably interest the members of the Kent Archæological Society to hear something about the remarkable discoveries that have lately been made at Canterbury in the Church of St. Austin's Abbey.

Some months ago it was thought advisable to remove the layer of earth which marked the level of the monks' quire at the Suppression and to excavate beneath it for traces of earlier buildings. The result was quite unexpected, for there were gradually disclosed the foundations or lower parts of huge piers, and part of the encircling wall of the surrounding ambulatory of a large circular structure. It underlay the area of the crossing and of the first three bays of the nave, and extended north and south into the aisles and transept. Further investigations shewed that the principal area was over 24 feet in diameter, that it was surrounded by eight piers nearly 9 feet through for a continuous circular arcade, and that the ambulatory wall was eight sided externally. The total width was about 70 feet.

Since this building was everywhere overlaid by the work of Abbot Scotland, who built the crypt, presbytery, tower, transepts and quire between 1073—1087, it is obviously of earlier date; and there are both historical and architectural reasons for assuming it to be "the new work" begun by Abbot Wulfric between 1056 and his death in 1059. We are told that he raised the walls and constructed piers and arches, and that "Kent rejoiced in the new work, although the inexperience of the builders made it unsuitable for monastic habitations." It was for this reason perhaps that Abbot Scotland pulled down the unfinished structure, which seems to have been built upon the site of the former presbytery.

In any case, the raising of such a work in the eleventh century while St. Edward was King of England is a very exceptional



*Photo.*]

[*E. C. Youens, Dartford.*

ST. AUSTIN'S ABBEY, CANTERBURY.—REMAINS OF THE ROUND TOWER BEGUN BY  
ABBOT WULFRIC.

circumstance, and when its remains have been uncovered a little further measures can perhaps be taken for the permanent exposure of one of the most remarkable ecclesiastical buildings in England.

But the recovery of the plan of Abbot Wulfric's round tower, as we may perhaps call it, does not exhaust the recent discoveries. It has for a long time been an article of belief with some of us that whenever the opportunity should present itself there would be found under the floor-level of the Norman nave the remains of the very church which was begun for St. Austin himself in the year 598 by Ethelbert king of Kent, and hallowed in 613. Now there has been laid open for some months in the north aisle of the nave a tangled mass of stonework and foundations from which it was impossible to evolve order or frame reasonable theories without a more extended excavation round them. These remains had not been found by accident, but searched for at this particular spot, because the historians of the Abbey were emphatic in stating that this eastern part of the aisle marked the site of the *porticus* in which St. Austin and his five immediate successors had been buried. We have also a minute account, by the twelfth century chronicler Goscelin, of the translation of their remains to Scotland's new presbytery in 1091, and a special chapter on the order in which the bodies of the Saints were arranged, written, he tells us, because "it is a kindness to posterity to let them hear, what is no longer to be seen, in what position the Saints formerly rested here."

Within the last few weeks it has been possible to extend the earlier operations westwards and to clear up our puzzle, and with most surprising results; for there are now actually to be seen the veritable remains of the despoiled tombs of Archbishops Laurence, Mellitus and Justus, with portions of the original flooring and part of what may be the altar of St. Gregory that stood between the tombs of Laurence and Austin. There is also the empty grave in which the body of St. Mildred was laid by Wulfric when he destroyed the presbytery. The tombs of the three archbishops lie in a row, as described by Goscelin, against the base of a thin outer wall built of Roman bricks and plastered within and without.

Whether there are any corresponding remains of the tombs of St. Austin and of Deusdedit and Honorius, which lay to the south, has yet to be seen. At present their sites are overlaid by the huge sleeper wall 10 feet wide of the Norman arcades; but it may be possible, without actually destroying this, to burrow

underneath, and meanwhile explorations are now in progress further south.

In any case there seems to be no reasonable doubt that we have established the place of the actual *porticus* or aisle in which Austin and his brethren were originally buried, and that the thin outer wall belongs to King Ethelbert's church, which ought therefore to have been of basilican plan.

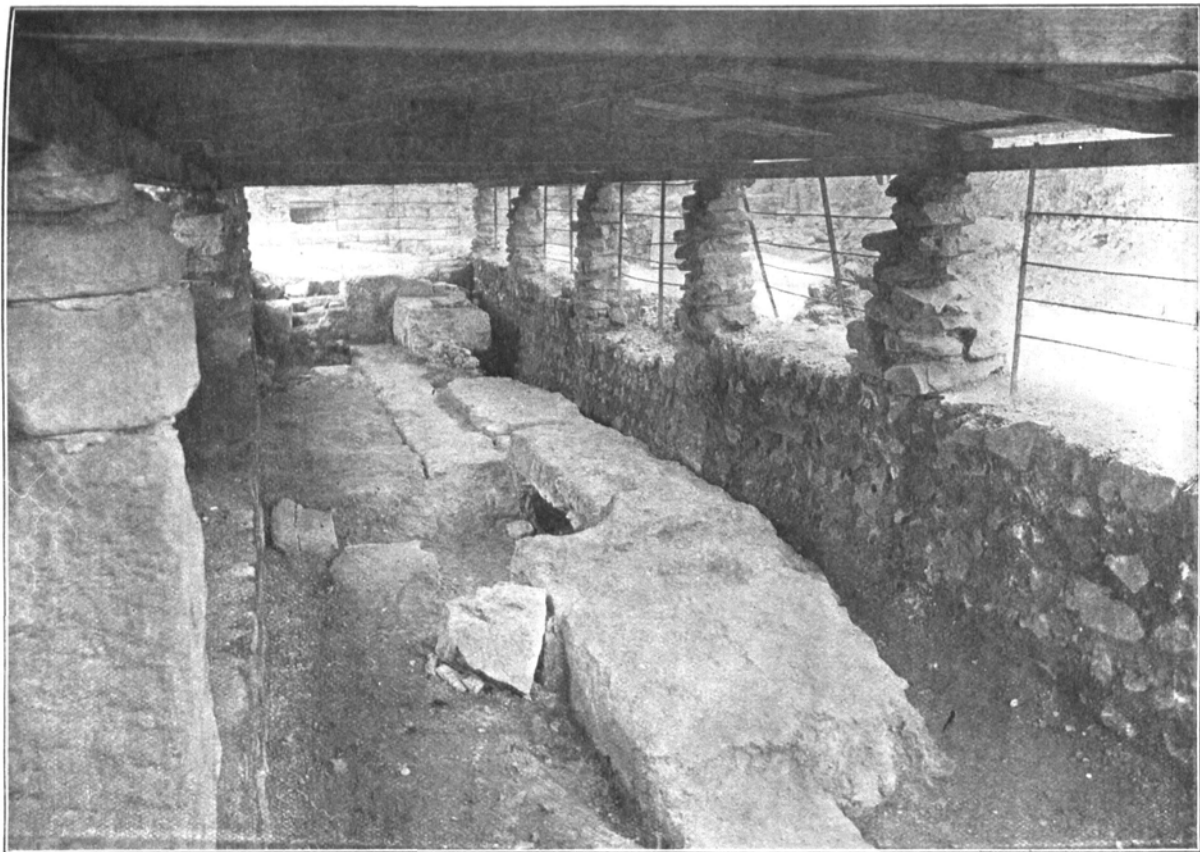
To the east of the *porticus* are the beginnings of a much later and wider apse that evidently belonged to some extension of the building at this point; perhaps in the tenth century, for there is a record of a second dedication of the church by Archbishop Dunstan in 978, a statement that implies a rebuilding or enlargement.

Here we must stop for the present until further finds have been made and fuller details can be laid before you. But meanwhile we may surely congratulate ourselves that a discovery that takes us straight back to the very beginning of the English Church has been reserved to our own time, and there is no saying at present to what it may lead.

I would also venture to remind you that important investigations such as these cannot be undertaken for nothing, and that funds are needed to carry them on. This is a difficult time for raising money for such objects, but if you will remember that every guinea subscribed practically pays the wages of one man for one week, some of you may be induced to help to that extent.

I ought to add that although I am responsible for these brief notes, the credit of the noteworthy discoveries recorded therein is entirely due to the authorities of St. Augustine's College, and in particular to the Subwarden, the Rev. R. U. Potts, but for whose energy and care, with the help of a few willing students, the work would never have been brought to so successful and desirable an issue.

*March 7, 1915.*



*Photo.*]

[*E. C. Youens, Dartford.*

TOMBS OF EARLY SAXON BISHOPS, LATELY DISCOVERED AT ST. AUSTIN'S ABBEY, CANTERBURY.