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# THE REMAINS OF A BUILDING IN THE PRECINCTS OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY, CANTERBURY, EXCAVATED IN 1964

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## INTRODUCTION

Due south of the ruined chapel of St. Pancras, there is a large earthen mound on the southern boundary of the precincts of St. Augustine's Abbey (Fig. 1). It is depicted on the plan of Canterbury by Andrews and Wrenn in 1768. A long section, cut by the present author, south of St. Pancras Chapel in 1972 revealed that the mound was made of layers of soil dumped over a considerable length of time.

About fifty years ago, the wall retaining the south side of the mound fronting on to Longport collapsed after heavy rain. In order to build a new wall further north of the earlier position, and to widen the pavement of Longport, the south side of the mound was scarped away. In 1977, as the mound was to be the prominent feature of a new public garden, the north and south sides were landscaped. Since 1970, the south scarp has been overgrown by ivy, shrubs and trees.

## THE 1964 EXCAVATION

Prior to an earlier phase of landscaping in 1964, the author was requested to conduct a limited excavation on the top of the mound. Here a rectangular building, aligned approximately north-south, containing two compartments, was revealed at the west end of the mound. This structure, of two principal construction phases, was probably the foundation for a timber-framed bell-tower of which only the masonry walls survived. Trees growing over the southern compartment restricted the area of excavation. Only the north end of the south compartment and the northern room were accessible (Fig. 2 and Pl. I).

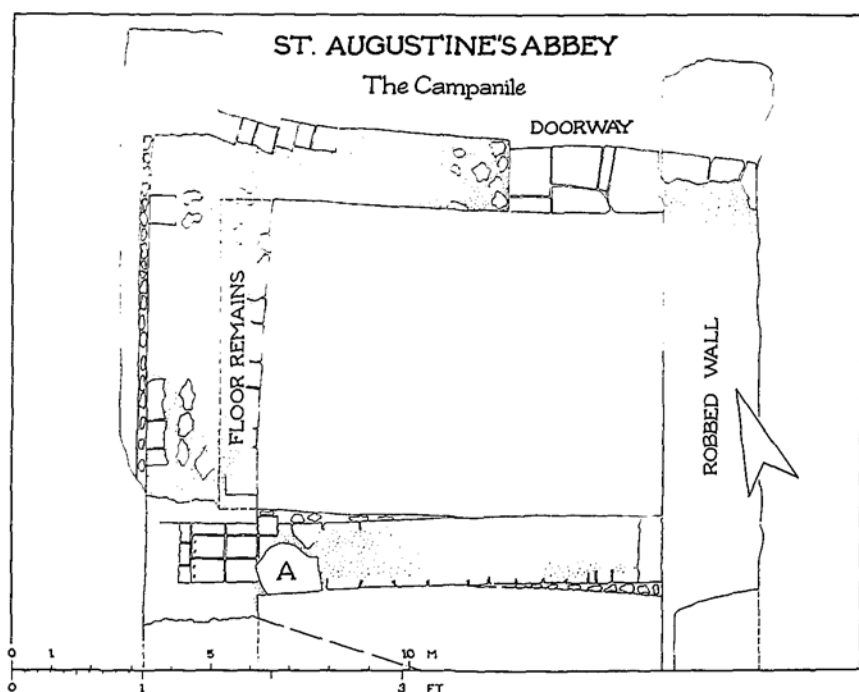


Fig. 2. Plan of the excavated remains of the bell tower.

### *Period 1*

The standing walls of the Period 2 building were raised off an earlier foundation comprising flints bonded in a yellow mortar. This primary foundation 2 ft. wide and 1 ft. deep, was provided with buttresses built against the north wall. A doorway giving access to the northern chamber may have been located in the north wall under the position of the later Period 2 door.

Overall, the primary building contained two compartments of which only the southern part of the south room and the entire northern compartment were excavated. The northern compartment, 7 ft. 8 in. long and 11 ft. wide (internally), had a rammed earth floor 4 in. thick, laid on the dumped soil forming the uppermost layer of the mound. Although no datable finds were recovered from contemporary deposits, the method of construction (flints set in yellow mortar) suggested a possible early medieval date (c. early twelfth century?).





(Photo.: Kentish Gazette)

The foundations of the northern compartment of the bell tower and the excavator, Dr Frank Jenkins, looking south-west.

*Period 2*

The dwarf walls of the first building were systematically reduced to their foundations (including the buttresses) and new walls were constructed over them, but not precisely on the same alignment. The walls of rubble chalk blockwork, sandstone blocks and re-used Caen stone blocks, including part of an engaged column base (marked A on Fig. 2), were bonded in an off-white mortar. A 4 ft. wide opening in the north wall with treads of large Kentish ragstone blocks marked the position of a door leading into the northern chamber. The northern chamber measured internally 7 ft 8 in. north-south by 11 ft. east-west. No trace of the second period floor was found in the southern room. Only fragmentary traces of the floor in the northern room were discerned against its west wall. This consisted of five layers of chalk lumps of two courses laid in rows along the length of the room over the Period 1 earth floor. Elsewhere, the earlier deposits were sealed by successive layers of crumbled chalk, demolition deposits yielded a few residual sherds of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century pottery.

The Period 2 work may represent simply a replacement of earlier dwarf walls underlying a timber-framed structure. Although this work may point to the erection of a completely new edifice, it may equally indicate an extensive underpinning operation below an existing framed structure.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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