

St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury.

Also the churches of St. Peter & St. Paul; also St. Pancras.

Photos these pages are described viewed clockwise from top.

The site of St. Augustines Abbey is somewhat complicated, not only are the two pre-conquest churches of St. Peter & St. Paul overlain by the great Norman Abbey begun by Abbot Scotland in 1070, but prior to that the vastly expanded Abbey by Abbot Wulfric encompassed the earlier church of St. Mary which lay immediately to the east of his new octagon, or rotunda. For an excellent plan of the site refer to page 136 in H.M.Taylor's Vol I Anglo-Saxon Architecture. There is little left of St. Mary, its west wall being up against the octagon. There was a fourth church, or tower which stood a little to the west of Sts. Peter & Paul and with a later western stair turret. These buildings were all more or less on a common axis, a characteristic of early Anglo-Saxon monastic sites, and substantiated at several places both by written history and by surviving remains, but nowhere more fully than at St. Augustines. St. Pancras was known by late tradition as a heathen temple of King Ethelbert and stood some 170 feet distant from the east end of St. Mary. Because of this isolation there are still standing remains there. We deal here with that church, and the remains of the foundations of St. Peter & St. Paul with its attendant burials of the early archbishops, and also the octagon of Wulfric.

The early history is an ongoing catalogue of additions and alterations, right up to Abbot Wulfric and his octagon. The first church of St. Peter & St. Paul was built by King Ethelbert, and St. Mary by his son King Edbald. Additions to the original church seem to have taken place about the middle of the eighth century with the enlargement of the north porticus.

1. St. Peter & St. Paul, looking west on the north side of the site. The foundations of walling running away just to the left of the three plaques is the north wall of the 'porticus' which was dedicated to St. Gregory. To the right of that and not seen here was a later extension (northward) which was built 731 to 760 to accommodate later archbishops. In fact no burials were accommodated in that extension until Wulfric used it in the 11th century to provide a fitting home for the body of St. Mildred. The three plaques describe and mark the sites of the tombs of archbishops which lay immediately to the south (left) of the north wall. They are, from nearest to the camera, Laurence, Mellitus, and Justus. To the left of the tombs runs the sleeper wall of the Norman nave north arcade.



2. Looking eastward, the piers which supported the octagon begun by Abbot Wulfric, and which were later overlain by the work instigated by the first Norman Abbot, Scotland. Wulfric died in 1059 before his work could be finished and it was left incomplete by his successor Abbot Egelsig, the last of the Anglo-Saxon abbots. An eleventh century chronicler, Gocelin, provided a vivid account of the radical changes which were effected in the early buildings by Wulfric.

3. The remains of St. Pancras looking eastwards. At the time of the conquest the Abbey Church was in the order of 375 feet in length. King Ethelbert's first church (founded shortly after 597) was unfinished when St. Augustine died (between 604 and 609). Considerable enlargement of the earlier church was rededicated by Archbishop Dunstan in 978 in honour of the holy Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul and of St. Augustine, the Apostle of the English.



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St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury.

The church of St. Pancras.

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The church, which was originally in the region of a little over 80 feet east to west, comprised of nave with north and south porticus, an apsidal chancel (swept away by the builders of the later Perpendicular chancel), and a western porch of entry. The vestiges discovered of the original chancel seemed to have the unusual plan of a stilted elliptical apse. The sleeper wall between the nave and chancel supported an arcade of three unequal arches on four pillars. Excavation by Hope and Peers in 1901 indicated a building where yellow mortar was found in the construction of surviving parts of the chancel and lower part of the nave, while the blocking of the arch, the walls of the south porticus, and the upper wall of the nave and the west porch where in bond, were all built in white mortar. The mortar from fallen fragments of the actual arch between nave and chancel were found to be jointed with the earlier yellow mortar. The north porticus had vanished and the access doorway had been blocked in medieval times. The south porticus had no external doorway. The dimensions of the nave are 42ft 7in long internally and 26ft 7in wide, with walls 1ft 10in thick. The triple arcade had a central arch 9ft wide and flanking arches each 4ft wide. The doorways to the north and south porticus are 3ft 2in wide (H.Taylor).

4. The north face of the north wall of the porch remains to a height of eleven feet. The black arrow marks the point at which detail can be found in the small picture 5 (left of pic 4).

5. The junction of the masonry of the west wall of nave to the left, and north wall of the porch, from which you will see it is not bonded, but instead is a butt join. However, at about 3 feet height this changes to a proper bond.

6. The southernmost and only remaining fragment of the columns which supported the arcade, viewed from the west. The (Roman brick) blocking to the left of it belongs to a pre-conquest blocking of the two narrower outer arches (which flanked the main central arch). It remains about 3 feet in height, with properly formed base, indicating it was a re-used Roman column (Taylor). H.Taylor gives an estimate of the original height of the Roman column of about eleven feet.

7. A closer view of part of the base of the surviving Roman column.

