

The church of St Martin, Canterbury.

When Augustine arrived in Kent in 597 he baptised king Ethelbert, who was married to Bertha, a Christian of the Frankish royal house. Bede records that on the east side of the city there lay a church dedicated to St. Martin, and built while the Romans were still in the island, where the Queen used to worship before the coming of Augustine. The nave is broad and low, in contrast to Minster-in-Sheppey, but is built of the same sort of material and constructed in a similarly rough manner, suggesting that it dates from the seventh or eighth century. The chancel foundations are overlain by that of this nave indicating the chancel is earlier. It is therefore quite likely that (the western half of) the chancel is Roman, but even if it was built for Bertha in the late sixth century, it still has the distinction of being the oldest standing Christian structure in the country. *Sources: E. Fernie & H. Taylor.*

Queen Bertha was a Christian Frankish princess who arrived in England with her Chaplain, Bishop Liudhard. King Æthelberht of Kent, the Queen's pagan husband, allowed her to continue to practise her religion by renovating (c. AD 580) the existing church.

All photos these pages are described viewed clockwise from top left.

1. The western portion (half) of the south wall of the chancel. The later extension lies to the right. Part of the Anglo-Saxon nave is to the left just in picture. Taylor states that this western portion of the chancel once extended further west than it does at present, and this was the nave of the church referred to by Bede, in which queen Bertha worshipped. The later medieval extension of the chancel has swept away and overlays the original eastern end, and the present nave has destroyed the western portion of the old nave (now chancel). The square headed doorway which blocked (marked by black dot for clarity) originally led to a very small porticus, foundations were described by Taylor, and those of its west wall are overlain by that part of the existing nave. In the 1895 and 1900 excavations an area of *opus signinum* flooring was discovered besides the doorway, together with considerable parts of the side walls running south from the chancel. The blocked round-headed doorway to its east is of a later date and is an Anglo-Saxon insertion, possibly belonging to the same date as the nave. H. Taylor puts the eastern extent of the 'first' nave where I have placed the black arrow. See picture 5 on page 2 for a more easterly change of walling. We should bear in mind that during the time before the Conquest this building was subjected to many alterations.



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2. Seen to the right is the square headed doorway (previously described) in the chancel wall, and running to the left is the south wall of the nave. Comparing the make up of the nave walling with that of the chancel in picture 1 it is seen that the former is of a very different character, the Roman bricks are used not in regular courses as in the old chancel but rather with single bands of brick that are neither continuous across the walls nor even horizontally laid.

3. A closer view of both the openings in the south wall of the chancel.

4. The interior of the chancel, the south wall, a good run of walling here lies exposed. The blocked round-headed doorway centre picture with the square-headed blocked opening to the right. The black arrow corresponds to that on the exterior in picture 1 (previous page) and picture 5 also.

5. A view of the eastern 'half' of the south wall of the chancel, the common point with picture 1 on the previous page is the much later buttress with its white squared ashlar (black arrow). There is a further join, a change of wall type, which is indicated by the blue arrow, this being the final extension to the chancel.

The north side of the exterior of the chancel is not shown here, it is to some greater extent masked by the much later vestry.

