

THE SAXON CHURCH AT KINGSTON.

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KINGSTON-UPON-THAMES has the distinction of being the crowning-place of the first Kings of all England. More than a thousand years ago "that famous place called Kingston in Surrey" (as it was described in a charter dated A.D. 838), was the crowning-place of the English Kings.

Beginning with Edward the Elder, the son and successor of Alfred the Great, seven Kings of England were crowned at Kingston, the ceremony in each case, then as now, being performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

These Kings were Edward the Elder, who was crowned A.D. 902; his sons Athelstan, Edmund, Edred, and Edwy, in succession, afterwards Edward the Martyr and Ethelred II. In addition to these, Edgar and Edmund Ironsides are stated by some historians to have been crowned at Kingston also.

The Saxon Coronation Service used at Kingston by the archbishops a thousand years ago still exists, and the same prayers are still in use in our Coronation Service of to-day.

There are two recensions of the pre-Conquest Coronation Service; the earliest is inscribed in a manuscript of the ninth or tenth century, and is known as the "Recension of Egbert," the other is known as "The Coronation Order of Ethelred II." These two services are almost the same, the main difference being in the rubrical directions; each consists of three divisions—the Anointment of the King by the Archbishop of Canterbury, after he has taken the oath and been chosen by the people, his Coronation, and the gifts to

him of the rod and sceptre, to which insignia the ring and sword were added in the second recension, and then his Enthronement.

The Coronation Stone which, according to tradition, was used during these coronations is preserved within iron railings in Kingston Market Place, but the Church in which these coronation ceremonies were performed by the Archbishops of Canterbury has utterly disappeared, its site has been forgotten, and none of the early writers have left us any description of it.

Apparently there has been a Saxon church at Kingston from a very early date, for a large fragment of a stone cross, with eighth-century carving of an interlaced pattern upon it, is preserved with other ancient carved stones in the Parish Church (Plate I.). Although this Saxon Cross was of stone, the Saxon Church in the eighth century would have been of wood.

A great Ecclesiastical Council, attended by the Archbishop of Canterbury, fourteen Bishops, and other Church dignitaries, was held at Kingston in the year A.D. 838; but there is no mention in its records of a church being in Kingston at that time, although it is obvious that there must have been one. Nor is there any actual mention of a church being at Kingston in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, or in the writings of the old Chroniclers, although they mention the coronation ceremonies performed at Kingston, and the names of the Archbishops of Canterbury who crowned the kings, who were evidently crowned within the Church which then existed at Kingston.

The Domesday Survey compiled for William the Conqueror in 1086 contains the earliest known record of a church at Kingston, and it merely states "there is a church" which was there at the time of Edward the Confessor. It is generally believed that this church which is mentioned in Domesday was the Church of the Coronations, and that it subsequently became known as the Chapel of St. Mary; the Parish Church of All Saints being built beside it some time after the Norman Conquest. This belief is founded on the statements made by Aubrey, who recorded what he saw and heard in 1673, and has the support of Manning and Bray, so that it cannot be lightly set aside.

(b)

- (a) FRAGMENT OF A CROSS WITH EIGHTH CENTURY SAXON CARVING.
(b) FRAGMENT OF STONE WITH SAXON CARVING.



Aubrey, in his *Antiquities of the County of Surrey*, which he began to write in 1673 and printed in 1719, when writing about Kingston says "several of the Saxon Kings were crowned here, their pictures are preserved in St. Mary's Chancel," which was at that time united to the Parish Church, and he adds that under the portraits of Edred, Edward the Martyr and Ethelred II there were at that date inscriptions saying that those three Kings were "crowned in this chapel." Cox's *History of Surrey*, 1730, copies and repeats Aubrey's words. Manning and Bray's *History of Surrey*, published in 1804, speaks of "The Chapel of St. Mary adjoining to the south side of the Parochial Church of Kingston-upon-Thames in the County of Surrey in which several English Saxon Kings are said to have been crowned," adding "we have no account of its foundation."

Until the latter part of the fourteenth century the Chapel of St. Mary which stood on the south side of the Parish Church was a separate building, but afterwards the two were united. The Parish Church is dedicated to All Saints; prior to the Reformation, down to 1535, the dedication was "All Hallows," which is the Saxon for All Saints, indicating that it was thus named while a church could be dedicated by Saxon-speaking prelates, that is before the Norman Conquest in 1066; so that apparently both the Chapel of St. Mary and a Church dedicated to All Hallows were built by the Saxons at unknown dates. As only one church is mentioned in Domesday, the latter may have been in ruins.

Although the Chapel of St. Mary may have been the Church of the Coronations, as stated by Aubrey and by Manning and Bray, it is possible, however, that the present Parish Church of All Saints stands on the site of the original church, and that the Saxon Church of All Hallows stood where the nave and tower of the Parish Church now stand, and that the Chapel of St. Mary was a later pre-Conquest structure built alongside it; and that when the Norman builders built their church in 1130 they either used or rebuilt the Saxon nave of All Hallows Church as their nave, and built their tower over its chancel, and their new Norman chancel to the east of their tower, as they did in so many other cruciform churches in Surrey and in the Thames

Valley. This would account for the two dedications, St. Mary's and All Hallows.

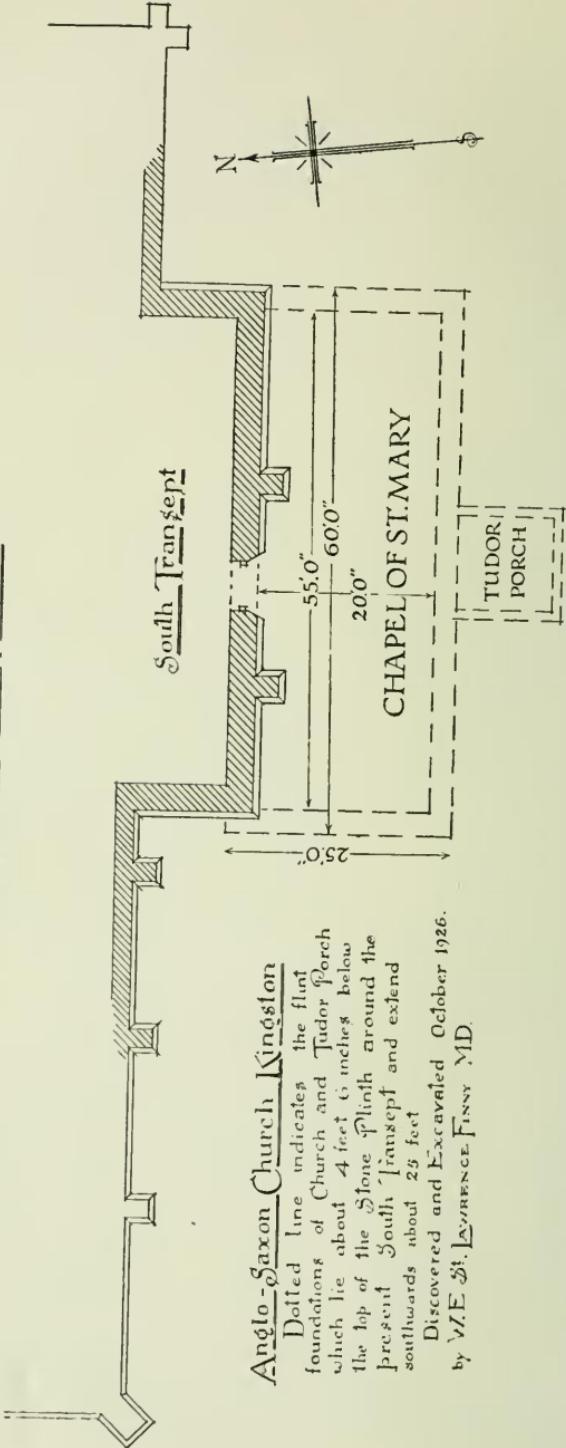
In 1006 the Danes raided this district as far as Chertsey, where they killed 90 Monks and burnt the Abbey; it is not improbable that they burnt the Saxon Church at Kingston also, and that the Chapel of St. Mary, built alongside the ruins of All Hallows Church, was one of the many churches built in recompense for such ravages after Canute came to the throne in 1017. Manning and Bray's picture of the Chapel of St. Mary gives the impression of a building of this date.

The Chapel of St. Mary fell in ruins in 1729 and was demolished. All knowledge of what it was like would have been lost, but for a statement that it was externally 60 feet long and 25 feet wide, and internally 55 feet long and 20 feet wide, and a detailed drawing of it which was made in 1726, and subsequently reproduced in Manning and Bray's *History of Surrey* in 1804. There is a copy of it on page 99 of these *Collections*, Vol. XXXV. This drawing shows a simple rectangular structure of early date, without an apse or any external indication of a chancel: the lower part of its walls may be Saxon, but the walls, windows and roof have evidently undergone several changes over a number of years, and a heavy porch added, apparently in Tudor times. The west door, which is shown blocked up, may have been Saxon or late pre-Conquest; its rounded arch springing from plain square imposts resembles the arches in the Saxon Church at Worth in Sussex, and in the pre-Conquest Church at Barnack in Northants. The general impression given is that the drawing represents a late pre-Conquest Church, into the walls of which windows had been inserted in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Whatever the original purpose of the building, it is certain that from A.D. 1300, if not before, it bore the name of "The Chapel of St. Mary," and from that date until the Reformation it was used as a Chantry Chapel, and many bequests were left to it for that purpose. After the Reformation and the abolition of the Chantries it was neglected, and in spite of its honourable tradition it was used in 1707 as the storehouse for the timber of the Parish

Church spire, which had recently been taken down. Manning and Bray's *History of Surrey* tells us that in 1729, while the sexton was digging a grave, the Chapel of St. Mary was "reduced to ruins owing to the falling down of one of the pillars and an arch next to the Church." The remains of the Chapel were then demolished, and the building material sold and carted away; so utter was its destruction, that no trace of it was left above ground. Subsequently graves were dug across its foundations, and its former site so utterly forgotten that antiquaries have differed from each other in trying to locate it, each putting it in a different position.

In Volume XXXV of the *Surrey Archaeological Collections* there is an article written by Mr. G. H. Freeman on "The Site of the Saxon Church at Kingston" in which he states his own views, and gives those of Major Heales and the Rev. H. P. Measor and others, as to where the Chapel of St. Mary actually stood, but he was unable to arrive at a definite decision without excavating the ground; accordingly, having obtained the necessary permissions to explore the churchyard, Mr. Freeman and I began our digging operations on the south side of the church on Tuesday, October 16th, 1926. We were fortunate in securing the services of Mr. Cockle, whose experience and knowledge of the church proved invaluable, and the interest and help of Mr. Harling, the Verger. These operations were eventually successful, and although many graves had been dug across its site, it was possible to trace its outline, and in several places to lay bare the flint foundations of its walls, with, in some places, small portions of those walls still standing upon them, and thus to show conclusively that the Chapel of St. Mary, generally believed to be the Church of the Coronations of the Saxon Kings, stood directly to the south of the present south transept, and that the south wall of that transept coincides with the north wall of the Chapel of St. Mary, that the east wall of the south transept is almost in a line with the east wall of the Chapel, and that in front of the Chapel, on its south side, facing the Market Place entrance, a substantial porch had been built in Tudor times.

All Saints Church
Kington - upon - Thames



At the suggestion of Mr. Freeman the search began by taking up several of the paving-stones in the pathway leading to the south transept door; this was rewarded by finding, at no great depth, a portion of the brick floor of the Tudor porch, a portion of the foundations of the south wall of the Chapel, and some early floor tiles still *in situ* inside the Chapel. Owing to the proximity of the vaults and graves which cut across them, the foundations of the walls could not be traced either east or west; but they were found to be 2 feet 6 inches wide, as stated by Manning and Bray. They were also 2 feet 6 inches deep, and consisted of large flints somewhat loosely bonded together with lime mortar, not well mixed, which, when compared with that in the flint foundations of the Tudor porch, was found to be of inferior quality. The floor of the Tudor porch was cut away at both sides so that its original width could not be ascertained; it extended southwards for 12 feet. The foundations of the porch were very massive and firmly bonded together; they were 2 feet 6 inches deep, and extended as a great table of flint across the floor of the porch. On top of this solid flint table was a red-brick floor, formed of rich red square Tudor bricks, each brick measuring 4×4 inches, arranged two rows deep, and fitted close together. This porch with its substantial foundations served as a useful buttress on the south side of the ancient Chapel of St. Mary. The floor of the church beyond the porch had been covered with tiles, which were laid upon a bed of lime mortar which rested on the virgin soil. These floor tiles had apparently been made of local London clay, burnt red and glazed; their edges were all slightly bevelled, wider above than below, when placed with their glazed sides uppermost. Some tiles were inlaid with patterns of a circular character in yellow; two had fleur-de-lis. Most of these floor tiles measured 4×4 inches, and were $\frac{7}{8}$ inch thick. One of them measured 5×5 inches and was $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick; it had inlaid upon it, under a lead glaze, a King's head, with what look like side-whiskers. The glazed floor tiles were of different dates, indicating that from time to time a process of patching had gone on, the worn or broken floor tiles being replaced

by those of a later date, regardless of the effect produced. The floor tiles found at the east end on the floor of the Chapel were of a quite different character; they measured $10\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and were comparatively modern. Mr. Philip Johnston places the dates of the floor tiles as follows. The plain surface tiles with glaze worn off, A.D. 1050. He considers them to be identical with those found at Waltham Abbey, built by Harold, and very similar to the pre-Conquest floor tiles in St. Helen's, Bishopsgate. The King's Head pattern floor tile he dates at about 1210, and the others at 1220.

Much time was spent when the excavations were begun in carefully exploring the parts of the graveyard suggested as the probable site of the Chapel of St. Mary by such a great authority as Major Heales and others, but nothing was found, and there were no signs of the foundations of any other or earlier stone church on the site or in the vicinity of St. Mary's Chapel, the foundations of which rested on the virgin soil; and further, it was shown that there had never been any apse or extension at the east end of the Chapel. However, eventually, running almost in a line with the east wall of the south transept of the Parish Church, the flint foundations, 2 feet 6 inches wide, of the east end of the Chapel, surmounted by a portion of its stone wall, and some of the lime floor with the floor tiles in position were laid bare. After the discovery of these, by calculating from the dimensions of the Chapel given by Manning and Bray, it was an easy task to locate and trace the outline of the remainder of the building, for although the walls had been destroyed in many places by the grave-diggers, the foundations of the four corners had fortunately escaped destruction.

The walls of the Chapel of St. Mary were of nearly white chalk-like Reigate stone; they appear to have been 25 feet high to the eaves of a sloping roof. All the corner cut stones shown in Manning and Bray's picture have disappeared, sold to a contractor at the destruction of the Chapel. The roof at the time of the demolition of the Chapel appears to have been of red tiles, many broken roof tiles being found, but some fragments of flat roofing-stone

indicate that at some period of its existence there was a roof of Horsham slabs. It is apparent from Manning and Bray's engraving that the roof had been raised; it is probable that it had been renewed several times.

Some fragments of thin glass were found near the east end of the Chapel, but though iridescent with age and the contact with the earth, no distinct evidence of colouring could be found; probably all the stained glass was destroyed at the Reformation, for 46 feet of new glass was bought for the windows in 1566.

Though the excavations have had to be filled in and the paving-stones replaced, a Surveyor's plan was made of them while they were exposed.

It is gratifying to have discovered the foundations of the ancient Chapel of St. Mary, and to have been able to verify Manning and Bray's statement as to its dimensions; but though it is clear that the foundations and walls are those of pre-Conquest builders, there was nothing discovered which would fix definitely their date, or prove or disprove the statements recorded by Aubrey and Manning and Bray, that the Chapel of St. Mary was the Church of the Coronations of the Anglo-Saxon Kings of England.