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Aust, the Place of Meeting

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AUST, THE PLACE OF MEETING.

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THE purpose of this paper is to develop more fully the consideration of the subject dealt with during our Spring Meeting at the meeting in Over Park, as to the place at which the first meeting between St. Augustine and the British Bishops took place.

It will be well to consider somewhat in detail the passage of Bede in which he records the meeting: "Interea Augustinus adjutorio usus Aedilbercti regis convocavit ad suum colloquium episcopos sive doctores proximæ Brettonum provinciæ in loco, qui usque ad hodie lingua Anglorum Augustinaes Ac, id est robur Augustini, in confinio Huicciorum et occidentalium Saxonum appellatur."¹ "In the meantime, Augustine, with the assistance of King Ethelbert, drew together to a conference the bishops or doctors of the next province of the Britons, at a place which is to this day called Augustine's Ac, that is Augustine's Oak, on the borders of the Wiccii and West Saxons." I have used Dr. Giles' translation, but I should myself have rendered "bishops *and* doctors," "the *nearest* province," and "near the boundary."

Every sentence of the passage can be illustrated from other parts of Bede's writings. In his epistle to Ecgbert, Bishop of York, he tells him² that he has a most ready helper (*adjutorem*) in his most righteous work in King Ceoluulf. With regard to the Council of Hertford in 673, he says that Archbishop Theodore "gathered a Council of bishops together with those many masters of the Church who both loved and knew the Canonical statutes of the

¹ H. E., ii. 2. ² § 9.

fathers.”¹ So also he tells us that when Theodore feared that the Monothelite Heresy might infect the English Church, having gathered an assembly of very many venerable sacer-
dotes (no doubt bishops) and doctors, he enquired carefully of what belief they each were, and found them all of one consent in the Catholic faith.”² This was at Hatfield in 680. In each case, at Augustine’s Oak, at Hertford and at Hatfield, Bishops and Doctors were summoned on equal terms, not to determine what the Catholic faith was, but to bear witness to what they had received.

The phrase “*usque hodie,*” *to this day,* is a very common one in Bede’s writings. Thus the spot where S. Oswald had set up his cross near the Roman wall a century before was still known in Bede’s day; till his day also were diseases, both of men and cattle, healed at Maserfield where the Saint was slain; and the place near a waterfall where James the Deacon had chiefly baptised, now no doubt Aysgarth,³ was still known by the Deacon’s name.

So far as I have been able to find, the word *confinium* is used, except in this place, only for the Humber.⁴

It was shewn at Over Park that Aust was known as Austin about 691, in Bede’s lifetime, and as Austan in 794 and 929; but it will be better to state more fully the nature of the documents in which these forms of the place-name occur.

About 690 or 691 Æthelred, King of the Mercians, granted thirty cassates at Henbury and Aust to Oftfor, Bishop of Worcester, the operative words being these:—
“Ego Æthelred Christo donante rex Mercensium pro absolutione criminum meorum, et pro amore Dei viventis terram qui vetusto vocabulo nuncupatur Heanburg et in alio

¹ H. E. iv. 5 Theodorus cogit concilium episcoporum, una cum eis qui canonica patrum statuta et diligenter, et nossent, magistris ecclesia pluribus.

² H. E. iv. 17. Collecto venerabilium sacerdotum doctorumque plurimorum cætu.

³ *Notes and Queries*, Nov. 2, 1901.

⁴ H. E. i. 25, v. 23.

loco Æt-Austin hoc est circiter in illis duobus locis xxx cassatorum Oftforo meo venerabili episcopo." ¹ The Harleian MS. 4660 contains, according to Kemble, who accepts the Charter as genuine, "copies of Charters from originals in the Archives of Worcester, probably by Hicces."

In 794 King Offa restored to Worcester Cathedral land at Aust which had been stolen by the Comes Bynna; the incident is thus related: "Contigit autem in diebus Offani regis Merciorum quod Bynna comes regis sustulit sine recte hanc terram æt Austan v manentes quod Æthelbald rex ante liberavit." The Charter is headed Austan. ²

In 929 King Æthelstan granted to Worcester Cathedral "quandam terræ particulam in loco qui ab indigenis æt Austan nuncupatur vocabulo." The Charter is headed Austan, and the land boundaries commence thus: "This syndon tha land-gemæro to austan."³

These two documents are derived from "A Chartulary of St. Mary's, Worcester, compiled by Heming in the eleventh century from the originals at Worcester. A Collection of the highest value."⁴

We learn then, on the best authority that we can obtain short of original documents, that Aust was known about 691 as Austin, and in 794 and 929 as Austan. Kemble's *Index* gives no similar form except Austeen, which proves to be a boundary point in a Glastonbury Charter of 940, by which King Edmund gave to his thegn Elswith land at Batecumbe near Chedder. The boundaries run from high up on Mendip, down and across the Marsh to Axe, including Nyland; Austeen or Austien must have been on the high ground.⁵ But this throws no light on the derivation of Aust.

Domesday gives two forms resembling Aust, both in Yorkshire: Austburne (f. 299, b), a member of Driffild, evidently Eastburn, and Austun (315, b) in Siraches Wapentake, a very large area; this might be Aston near Rotherham,

¹ K. C. D. xxxii.; *Cart. Sax.* 75; MS. Harl. 4660, fo. 1.

² K. C. D. clxiv.; C. S. 269. ³ K. C. D. cccxlvii.; C. S. 665.

⁴ Kemble, C. D. vi., xv. ⁵ K. C. D. ccclxxxiii.; C. S. 749.

but its modern equivalent is quite uncertain. Austwick, in Clapham, is also no doubt from its position Eastwick. These Yorkshire forms seem to take their origin from the Northmen's word *Ost*, East, and are no guide for us, because Austin and Austan date from a period before the Northmen came here. Aust must be taken to stand on its own ground, and must be considered by itself, starting from the fact that at the time when Bede was ordained Deacon it was known as Austin.

And we must begin by making a clearance. A derivation sometimes proposed is *Trajectus Augusti*, by which name the Old Passage is supposed to have been called. But though this suggested derivation is found even in so excellent a work as *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*,¹ it is an entire fiction; there is no evidence at all that there ever was any place so called in Roman Britain, still less that the name was applied to the Old Passage.

There was a Station *Trajectus* on the road between Isca (Caerleon) and *Aquæ Solis* (Bath), which station is stated in the 14th *Iter* of the Antonine Itinerary to be viiii Roman miles from Abone and vi from Bath. It is true that Camden placed this station at Aust Passage; but even if, in spite of the distances assigned, we adopt this identification, it does not help us to the place-name Aust.

Again, we find two places in Roman Britain, and so far as I can discover only two, known as *Augusta*.

London was certainly called *Augusta*. The Ravenna geographer, writing in the seventh century, gives it in his list of British cities as *Londinium Augusta* (v.r. *Augusti*)²; while Ammianus Marcellinus, about 380, speaks of London as "an ancient town which in after times was called *Augusta*," and as "*Augusta*, which the ancients called London."³ It would seem that in his time the name London was already out of date.

Again, *Caerleon*, *Isca Silurum*, was also known as *Isca Leg: Augusta* (v.r. *Augusti*);⁴ and it derived this name from

¹ III. 41. ² M. H. B. xxv. 2. ³ M. H. B. lxxiii. 2, lxxiv.

⁴ M. H. B. xxii.

the fact that the Second Legion (Augusta) was long stationed there.

If, then, Aust Passage had been known in Roman times as Trajectus Augusti we might have expected that the name would have been recorded. As a fact we find no mention of any such name. Aust first appears in history in the lifetime of Bede as *Æt Austin*; and we naturally connect this fact with that other fact recorded by Bede, that the meeting place of St. Augustine with the British Bishops was in his day known as Augustine's Oak. We were, however, told at Over Park that it was doubtful whether at so early a date the old English *g* would have been softened, so that *Augustinaes Ac* could be pronounced *Austinaes Ac*. This point must be carefully considered.

It will be remembered that Bede, writing in Latin, gives the place-name in two forms: first the old English name by which the place was called; and then, as an explanation, the Latin form, "*Augustinaes Ac, id est robur Augustini*;" the old English paraphrase of Bede, dating from King Alfred's time, gives only the English form *Agustinus Ac*. But it does not at all follow that Bede's English and Latin forms were pronounced alike in his day. It is a very remarkable thing that there is an instance in which Aust is called in Latin *Augusta* at a time four centuries after King *Æthelred* had granted it to Bishop *Oftfor* as *Austin*, and about a quarter of a century after it had been entered in *Domesday Book* as *Austre clive*. Mr. Round, in his *Peerage and Family Hist.ry* (p. 193), relates that *Winebaud*, brother of *Hamelin de Ballon*, gave c. 1100 the churches of *Torteoda* and *Augusta*, and the tithe of *Godrinton* and *Pedicovia*, to the Abbey of *St. Vincent at le Mans*.

Mr. Round identifies these places, no doubt correctly, with *Tortworth*, *Aust* and *Gotherington* in *Bishop's Cleeve* in Gloucestershire, and *Pitcombe* in Somerset, all of which places belonged in 1086 to *Turstin Fitz Rolf*. It is doubtful whether the Abbey received any benefit from this grant; the Church of *Aust* and the tithe at *Gotherington* no doubt

pertained to the Worcester Churches at Henbury and Cleeve, Tortworth is still an independent Rectory, and Pitcombe became a dependency of Bruton Priory. But for us the interest lies in the fact that though there had clearly been no hard g sound in the place-name for four hundred years, the scribe Latinised Aust as Augusta. The Charter is also interesting because it contains the earliest known mention of churches at Aust and Tortworth.

There is no doubt at all that Bede would have pronounced the g in *Augustinus* hard; this is evident from his praise of the verses by Prosper of Aquitaine on S. Augustine of Hippo:

“Quod pulchre versibus heroicis Prosper rhetor insinuat, cum ait :
Contra Augustinum narratur serpere quidam
Scriptor, quem dudum livor adurit edax.”¹

And S. Aldhelm, a contemporary of Bede, uses it in the same way in many places, as in his poem on the Minster built by the Princess Bugga :

“Quam jugiter renovant Augusti tempora mensis.”²

But it does not at all follow that because Bede, speaking in Latin, would have pronounced the g in *robur Augustini* hard, that the letter would have had the same sound if he referred in English to *Augustinaes Ac*. There is a very considerable list of place-names and personal names in Bede's writings in which the g, where it occurs in the modern form of the name, is soft :

- H. E. i. 7. Legionum urbs, Caerleon. (Gildas §§ 10, 11).
- ii. 14. Adgefrin, Yeverin in Glendale.
- iii. 8. in Brige, Faremoûtier-en-Brie.
Monasterii Brigensis Abbatissa.
in Andilegum, Andeley sur Seine.
- iv. 4. Magéo, Muigéo (lingua Scottorum) Mayo.
- iv. 19. regio Elge, Isle of Ely.
- iv. 29. Lugubalia, Carlisle.
- v. 2. gae (verbum adfirmandi et consentiendi), yea.
- v. 8. fluminis Genladae, river Yenlade or Inlade.

¹ H. E. x. 10

² S. Aldelmi Opera, Ed: Giles, 117.

It is to be noticed also that in iv. 19 the old English paraphrase translates "epifanie" by "twelftan dege ofer Geochol," "twelfth day after Yule." But this paraphrase was made in King Alfred's time, more than a century and a half after Bede composed his history.

On the Continent the *g* frequently disappeared in place-names derived from Augustus. A Celtic *dun* or hill-fortress became Augustodunum, and is now Autun. A Teutonic burgh or fortress was made a colony by the Emperor Augustus, B.C. 13, under the title of Augusta Vindelicorum, and is now Augsburg in Bavaria. Other instances are Aosta, Augusta Prætoria; Auch, Augusta Ausciorum; Astorga, Augusta Asturiæ; an instance where the *g* survives is Augst, Augusta Rauracorum in Canton Basel. From the same derivation comes Aoust in the Department of the Drôme.¹ But though these instances suggest a derivation for the first syllable of Austin, they do not help us at all with regard to the termination; that clearly points rather to *Augustinus* than to *Augustus* as its origin.

Moreover, these names do not answer the question whether in England in 731 the *g* in the phrase *Augustinaes Ac* might have been softened. It is certain that in the sculptures on the beautiful shaft of the cross which still stands in Bewcastle Churchyard, above the head of the Saviour on the west side are the words "Gessus Kristtus," and again on the north side "Gessus," *Jesus*. This cross was set up in 670, about three years before Bede's birth, in his fatherland, Northumbria; and it is clear that in this case, at any rate, the *g* was soft. But it is only a single instance, and it is well that the point should be thoroughly considered. One difficulty which at once arises is this, that there is no old English literature as early as 731; the glossaries are the earliest, then comes the Vespasian Psalter, an old English interlinear translation of a Latin Psalter made in the first half of the ninth century, and then the old English charters, of which there are none earlier than the ninth century.

¹ Taylor, *Words and Places*, 214; *Names and Their Histories*, 56.

There are signs that the position of *g* was not quite secure even in the Latin text of Bede. For instance, the scribe of Cotton MS. *Tiberius*, C. ii., in describing the position of Wynfrid's Monastery at Chertsey writes Suthriena where the Moore MS. gives Sudergeona, and he writes Ecfrid for Ecgfrid, King of the Northumbrians, in iv. 5, 12, 26, v. 19, against seventeen instances where he gives the full form; Eberht for Ecgerct, King of Kent, in iii. 29, against five instances of the full form; and Eberht for Ecgerct "Sanctus" in iii. 27 thrice, and iv. 3, against seven instances of the full form, which is always given in each case in the Moore MS. The latter MS. was written on the Continent about 737, while the Cottonian MS. *Tiberius* C. ii. is a Durham book, possibly brought originally from Lindisfarne, written in the eighth century.¹ The omission of the *g* in the Northumbrian book has its significance with regard to the point under consideration. It is also worth noting that on the dedication stone of Jarrow Church, which was set up in 685 when Bede was about twelve years old, and which he might have seen every day when he attended at the Canonical hours in the Minster, the name of the Northumbrian king is written Ecfrid. It would certainly seem that the presence or absence of the *g* was immaterial so far as the pronunciation of the name was concerned.

In Hauxwell Churchyard near Richmond there still remains the shaft of a cross about four feet high, which, judging from the beautiful interlacing patterns cut upon it, must date from very early Anglo-Saxon times. Just below the springing of the cross-head is a panel on the face of the cross on which an inscription could until recently be read: "Hæc est crux Sci Gacobi." The initial *G* of the name of the saint is still clear, and there is no doubt that the name intended is Jacobi, probably the Deacon James who had remained in Northumbria when Paulinus fled to Kent in 633, who was present at the conference of Whitby in 664, and who was still living in the lifetime of Bede. Here then the *g*

¹ Plummer, *Bede*, i., lxxxix xciii.

before a vowel was obviously soft, as it must have been also in the sacred name on the Bewcastle cross. Unfortunately there is nothing to shew the exact date of the cross at Hauxwell.¹

We pass next to the glossaries described in Mr. Sweet's *Oldest English Texts*, published by the Early English Text Society. These are four in number: *Corpus*, written early in the eighth century; *Epinal*, written at least a generation earlier than *Corpus*; *Erfurt*, written at the end of the ninth century in language evidently as old as *Epinal*; and *Leiden*, written in the ninth century. The language of all, therefore, except that of the *Leiden* glossary, would be as old as the lifetime of Bede. The following instances will show that *g* might very readily be dropped in pronunciation:

EE. is used to denote the text given by the agreement of the *Epinal* and *Erfurt* glossaries.

Aul(a)ea: stregl, C; strel, EE.

Bagula: bridels, C; bridils—brigidils,² EE.

Byssum: tuin, C; ³ tuum—tuigin, EE.

Eumenides: haetisse, C; filiæ noctis: hegitisse, L.

Falcis: wudubil, sithe, riftras, C.

Falces—falcis (falx, falcis) uudubil, sigdi,⁴ riftr—uuidubil, sigdi, riftr, EE.

Limax: snegl, C; snel—snegl, EE.

Oppilavit, clausit: gegiscte, C; ggiscdæ—gescdæ, EE.

This is not intended to be taken as an exhaustive list, but merely as shewing that in vocabularies used during the lifetime of Bede *g* was frequently softened.

These are examples of the various kinds of evidence that can be brought forward from the lifetime of Bede himself; but there can be no doubt at all that in later times before a full vowel *g* had the sound of the consonantal *y*. Thus *iu*,

¹ An excellent account, with figures, of the crosses at Bewcastle and Hauxwell, and the dedication stone at Jarrow, will be found in a little book by the Bishop of Bristol, *The Conversion of the Heptarchy*, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

² *g* from *s*. *Brigidils* and *tuigin* are archaic forms.—O.E. T. 4.

³ Abnormal spelling. ⁴ *si*: *g*.

though rare, may be written for *geo*, long ago; *iung* for *geong*, young; and *iugoth* for *geoguth*, youth. Or the *g* may be omitted altogether, as *lufige*, *I love*, may be written *lufie*, or *modig* may pass into *modi*, or *frinan*, *ren*, then, may appear for *frignan*, *regn*, *thegen*, the vowel in the shortened form being no doubt lengthened.

Instances of this softened *g* appear in the Vespasian Psalter. The Latin text of the psalter is attached to an original Charter of Æthelbald, King of the Mercians, dated 736, and is probably older than the Charter. "The interlinear English gloss, extending also to the hymns at the end of the Psalms, is mainly in a very fine hand which cannot well be earlier or later than the first half of the ninth century, and this date is fully supported by the language, which shows a remarkably consistent type, uniformly but not excessively archaic."¹ It would be easy to multiply instances, but two will be sufficient :

Ps. lxxvii. 26. in medio juvenum tympanistriarum
 in midle iungra plægiendra tympanan
 „ 28. ibi Benjamin adulescentior
 thær se gungesta

Ps. xlii. 4. ad Deum qui lætificat juventutem meam
 to Gode se geblissath juguthe mine

Ps. cxxviii. 1. Sæpe expugnauerunt me a juventute mea
 Oft oferfuhtun mec from guguthe minre

Here *g* and *j* are interchanged, even in one instance in a space of three verses. It is, however, quite unnecessary to dwell on this point further; it will be sufficient to give the opinion of the present Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, and the latest Editor of Bede's works.

In an original Charter of about 848, preserved at Christ Church, Canterbury,² by which King Berchtwulf granted nine hides of land to his thegn Forthred, the form *higid* is twice used for *híd*. On this unusual form Professor Earle comments thus:—"This document is remarkable for the

¹ The *Oldest English Texts*, 184.

² K. C. D. cxxliii.; C. S. 452.

form *higid*, which with a collateral *hiwisc*, tends to identify *hid* with the idea on which are based such terms as *familiatus*, *casatus*, for quantities of land. See Kemble, *Saxons in England*, vol. i., c. 4, p. 91 sq. It is, however, doubtful whether a single instance of the form *higid* will bear so great a weight as is thus put upon it. Especially as the letter *g* plays in Anglo-Saxon a semi-vocalic part, as a mere consonantal film to keep two vowels distinct, so that the *g* might have just the same value as a modern diæresis; thus *higid* = *hiid*." ¹

The two manuscripts which afford the only authorities for the text of the *Anonymous History of the Abbots of Jarrow and Wearmouth* differ in one place in § 11 with regard to the omission or insertion of the *g* in *figeret*. On this Mr. Plummer remarks: "The reading of H. 'fieret,' illustrates the 'Verhauchung,' or reduction to a mere breath of a *g* between vowels." And with regard to the name of Bishop Agilberctus, in H. E. iii. 7, he writes thus: "Ægelbert or Ethelbert: the difference in writing is due to the fact that both *th* and *g* between vowels became a mere breath, and ultimately disappeared, leaving us the name Albert. (Cf. Aelbert, § 29 of the *Anonymous History of the Abbots*)." ²

It is obvious that precisely in the same way in which Ægelbert would be contracted to Aelbert and Albert, Augustinus or Agustinus—for the latter seems to have been the more usual form in English—would be contracted to Austinus and Austin in popular speech. The only question which arises is, whether this contraction can have taken place as early as the time of Bede; and because there is absolutely no direct evidence with regard to the way in which the name was pronounced at that time, affirmation and negation would be equally incapable both of proof and disproof.

Since, however, in the inscription on the Bewcastle Cross, which is the oldest piece of English we possess, the *G* in the Saviour's name was evidently soft, that it was obviously equivalent to *J* in the inscription on the Hauxwell

¹ *Land Charters and Saxon Documents*, 123.

² Plummer, *Bede*, ii. 373, 145.

Cross, that it was omitted from the name of Ec(g)frid on the Dedication stone of Bede's own Minster, and several times in that and similar names in the early Northumbrian copy of Bede's own History, that glossaries of Bede's own date in several instances treat its insertion or omission as a matter of no importance, that *g* and *j* are interchanged in the English of the Vespasian Psalter, that in the later language a *g* between two vowels would almost certainly have been silent,—we should conclude with very considerable confidence that though, when writing his history or teaching in the Minster at Jarrow, Bede would have said that Augustine met the Bishops “in loco qui Robur Augustini appellatur,” in a popular sermon or familiar talk he would have said: “on thære stowe the mon nemneth Austinaes Ac.” And this form is not at all unlike that “æt Austin” which King Æthelred used in his grant of Aust to Bishop Otf for about the time when St. John of Beverley ordained Bede a Deacon.

It is necessary also to consider Bede's use of the word *confinium*. Besides this passage it occurs, so far as I have been able to find, only in two places in the History: i. 25 and v. 23; and in each case in the phrase “ad confinium usque Humbræ fluminis”; Humber being the boundary between the peoples to the north and south of it, as Avon was between the Huiccians and West Saxons near Aust, or as Thames divided them near Kempsford. But it is evident that *confinium*, in each case meaning a river, “in confinio,” could not possibly mean that Augustine's Oak was actually on the boundary or in the river, but that it lay near to the boundary. Of the two places mentioned at Over Park, the Down Ampney Oak stood about half a mile from the present shire boundary, and about one mile and a quarter from Thames, the probable ancient boundary; Aust is about seven miles from Avonmouth. It is a matter of nicely calculated less or more; and to a monk of Canterbury or Jarrow, half a mile, a mile and a quarter, and seven miles might be equally well described as *in confinio* with regard to a boundary line one hundred and thirty or three hundred miles from his

home. And if the matter of convenience of access is to be brought into question, Aust was certainly a more accessible spot both for the West Welsh south of Severn and the North Welsh beyond that river than a point near Cricklade.

To sum up. There are only two indications of the locality of the place of meeting: one, that it lay near the boundary between the Huiccians and West Saxons—that is to say, near the present boundary between Gloucestershire on the north and Wilts and Somerset on the south; the other, that in Bede's time the place of meeting was still known as Augustinaes Ac. The place-names of the district shew that the oak was a very abundant tree, so much so that the existence of any one well-known oak is worthless as a mark of locality. There is, however, within a short distance of the boundary a place which was known in Bede's lifetime as Austin and which is now known as Aust. We have seen also that there is abundant evidence for thinking that already in Bede's lifetime the *g* in Augustinaes Ac would have been softened, so that it would have been pronounced Austinaes Ac. And this being so, Aust can certainly put forth a better claim than any other single spot to be the place where St. Augustine first met the British Bishops.
