Canterbury Cathedral in Canterbury, England, is the center of the worldwide Anglican Church -- the third largest Christian organization in the world. But since the Anglican Church also is the official Church of England, there is a business office -- a residence called Lambeth Palace -- across the Thames River from London's Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace. And next to Lambeth Palace is an old medieval church known as “St. Mary at Lambeth,” where, for centuries, the archbishops of Canterbury and their families worshipped when they were in London.

It was announced this Easter weekend that the missing remains of five archbishops had been discovered in a crypt beneath the church. One of these archbishops was Richard Bancroft, who was archbishop from 1604 to his death in 1610. He was the “chief overseer” of the King James Bible.

The St. Mary’s crypt was discovered during renovations to the church that have been carried out since 2015. The crypt was not disturbed, but a remote camera on a pole was stuck into the tomb through a hole in the wall. Bancroft’s coffin was not alone, but accompanied by 30 other lead coffins, several of which contained the remains of later archbishops.

Bancroft was perhaps the most important figure in the creation of the King James Bible. To begin with, James became king of England in 1603, after being born the king of Scotland. He was raised and educated within the Calvinist Scottish church. At this time, the Church of England was undergoing difficult and protracted internal debates between the traditional churchmen and the Puritans.

The Puritans were heavily influenced by Calvinism, like England’s new king. They hoped he would be an ally in their attempts to reform the Church of England and petitioned him, as the church’s head, to institute key changes.

James convened the Hampton Court Conference in January 1604 to address their concerns. It was not a success for the Puritans. Bancroft, who was then bishop of London, was widely known as a fierce opponent of the Puritans. He helped persuade the king to reject the Puritan calls for church reform.

But James shared one desire with the Puritans, which he granted. That was their request for a new, “authorized” translation of the Bible. But, even as he acceded to their request, he added a twist: James put the anti-Puritan Bancroft in charge of the project.

King James hated the Calvinist Geneva Bible with a passion, widely used among Puritans. The source of that hatred was that it included interpretative notes, many of which expressed anti-monarchical ideas. Since James believed strongly in the divine right of kings to rule their subjects, these were especially infuriating. The new Bible, he made clear, would have no notes, just translation.

Archbishop Bancroft pioneered a new approach to Bible translation, one which helped the translation overcome the political and religious conflict in which the project was conceived. Earlier translations had essentially been done by individuals, without consultation or review. Bancroft brought together 47 experts in biblical studies from Oxford, Cambridge and London. Here, he was surprisingly even-handed, bringing in the best scholars whether they were establishment or Puritan.

Bancroft divided the experts into six companies: three for the Old Testament, two for the New Testament and one for the Apocrypha. There were multiple levels of review, with himself having the final say. This ensured that the translation was both accurate and pleasant to hear.

This last goal was important, for nearly all England agreed that the last official Bible translation of the church, known as the Bishop’s Bible, was plodding, dull and uninspired. The churchmen did not like it, and the people who listened to it every Sunday found it boring. To have any chance of success among the people, the King James Bible needed attractive prose.

And, by all accounts, the King James Bible succeeded. Within 50 years, its “majesty of style” made it the widest circulating English Bible. It traveled to the American colonies, where it was frequently reprinted. For more than 300 years, it was the main Bible used in the English language, and no other Protestant Bible could compete with it.

Archbishop Bancroft, whose burial site we now know, was a partisan bulldog for the Church of England establishment. Yet he guided the creation of a new Bible translation that lasted for more than four centuries and was accepted by most branches of Protestant Christianity.