

Fig. 1: Plan of the City of London Churches, showing Templeman proposals. The four parish churches are: 1, All Hallows-by-the-Tower. 2, St Bartholomew the Great. 3, St Giles, Cripplegate. 4, St Helen, Bishopsgate.

The Templeman Report on London's churches: can Wren's legacy survive?

Paul Jeffery
Bruce Watson

IN 1992 Dr David Hope, Bishop of London, set up a commission headed by Lord Templeman. The brief was "to consider the place of the parish and guild churches of the City of London in their pastoral and mission role; and make recommendations regarding the practical and financial implications arising therefrom". This Commission reported to the Bishop in January 1994, proposing a radical restructuring of the parish organisation within the City deanery. At present the City has 39 Anglican churches, excluding the cathedral — 24 are parish churches (22 parishes) and eleven are guild churches (including St Benet, Paul's Wharf, which has An-

glican services in the Welsh language). There are four others: St Anne & St Agnes, St Michael, Paternoster Royal, St Nicolas, Cole Abbey and St Ethelburga (destroyed by terrorist bombing) (see Fig. 1).

Lord Templeman recommended that the churches and their present parishes should be regrouped into four new parishes based upon St Bartholomew the Great, St Giles, Cripplegate, St Helen, Bishopsgate and All Hallows by the Tower. There would in addition be eight other "active" churches and 27 "reserve" churches, some of which would still have well-defined functions within the City (see Fig. 1).

1. The Rt Hon. Lord Templeman, City Churches Commission, Diocese of London, Report to the Bishop. January 1994, p. 4.

It is not clear whether all or some of these churches would be designated as guild churches. The four churches named to serve as the “new” parish churches are all medieval, and for the first time in three hundred years there would be no parish church in the City of London that had been built under the direction of Sir Christopher Wren.

The purpose of the Commission was to review the organisation of religious life in the Capital. It is therefore no surprise that Lord Templeman’s report was not unduly concerned with the churches as buildings, which in the words of the report — “would have to be declared redundant or otherwise deconsecrated”². The possibility that a reserve church might be locked up and kept weather-proof is naive. It is completely unacceptable that any of these churches should be left to fossilise as moth-balled relics, they are too much a part of our national heritage to be left to rot.

Media reaction

The publication of the Templeman report prompted considerable comment in the press. *The Times* ran an editorial entitled *Faith in the City*, which stated that the report “will probably have a greater impact on the number of churches in the City of London than any event since the Great Fire”, over looking the fact that earlier proposals which were never implemented (discussed later) were equally drastic. The editorial also observed that “religion is not simply a service like health, education or retail marketing in which supply must be fitted as closely as possible to demand and provision organised with the maximum efficiency. Faith should not be considered in such limited terms”³. Simon Jenkins contrasted the lack of government support in Britain for national heritage and museums with the high degree of support shown by the French government for their national heritage⁴. The Conservation Group known as *Save Britain’s Heritage* called for the rejection of the proposals⁵. *Country Life* described the report as “the philosophy of managed retreat”⁶.

Reactions from the parish clergy varied from acceptance to rejection, one claiming that the report was just a ruse by the Diocese of London to save money⁷. The Rev. John Paul, Rector of both

St James, Garlickhithe and St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe, is reported to have said “the report stinks. I am defending my corner with a vehemence that they have yet to feel”⁸. The Bishop of London described the report as a “lively, realistic and helpful contribution to the ongoing debate about how the church can best meet the needs of the people, organisations and institutions of the City”⁹.

The management history of London churches

The Templeman report must be put in an historical perspective as the most recent of a number of proposals to alter the number of churches within the City of London. The most famous restructuring was caused by the Great Fire of 1666, which destroyed the medieval cathedral and 86 of the City’s 107 churches. It was decided to rebuild the cathedral, but attempts were made to rationalise the number of parish churches. Wren proposed that in place of the 86 destroyed churches, nineteen new churches should be built. His proposal was not implemented. Instead the Rebuilding Act of 1667 authorized the rebuilding of 39 churches. This too was rejected and the Act of 1670 authorized the rebuilding or repair of 51 churches, mostly under the architectural direction of Sir Christopher Wren¹⁰.

In 1834 a Court of Common Council Committee recommended that because of the declining population in the City, thirteen churches should be demolished¹¹. This recommendation was only rejected by the City authorities, as the Bishop of London expected replacement churches to be built in the suburbs, presumably making the scheme less profitable, so only four churches were demolished between 1781-1860¹²: St Christopher-le-Stocks for a rebuilding of the Bank of England and the remaining three for improvements to the City. In 1853 one clergyman argued that the City had too many churches and that 29 churches could be demolished or even dismantled and rebuilt in the more populous London suburbs¹³. This idea was disputed in a pamphlet entitled *Consecration versus Desecration*⁴.

In 1860 the Union of Benefices Act allowed the reorganisation of benefices or church livings and parishes — which of ten results in redundant churches with consequent demolition¹⁵. This Act was

2. *Ibid.*, 22.

3. *The Times* 29 January 1994.

4. Gallic Flair British Despair, *The Times* 29 January 1994.

5. *The Independent* 29 January 1994.

6. *Country Life* 10 February 1994.

7. *The Guardian* 29 January 1994.

8. *The Times* 29 January 1994.

9. Credo, *The Times* 29 January 1994.

10. M. Whinney (1971) *Wren* 37-102.

11. Churches in London, Report to the Court of Common Council, Corporation of London 1834. [Guildhall Library (GL) Fo pam 3523].

12. St Christopher-le-Stocks, 1781, St Michael, Crooked Lane 1831, St Bartholomew-by-the-Exchange, 1841, St Benet Fink 1846.

13. C. Hume (1853) Papers in Connection with a Plan for Removing Some of the City Churches to Places within the Metropolitan District. [GL A 2. 3. No 47].

prompted by continuous decline in the residential population of the City. Money raised from the sale of city churches was to be used in constructing new churches in London's rapidly growing suburbs. For instance, the site of St Benet's, Gracechurch Street, was sold for 23,894 pounds and four shillings, in 1870-73 a total of 7,2361 pounds, ten shillings and four pence was spent building a new St Benet's at Mile End Road, Stepney¹⁶. From 1860-97 fifteen churches were demolished (twelve of which were Wren churches), although three of the church towers were retained¹⁷.

In 1899 The Bishop of London's Commission recommended the demolition of ten more churches¹⁸. A second Commission in 1919 recommended the demolition of nineteen churches¹⁹. Fortunately neither report was implemented fully, largely as a result of public protest. An attempt to pass a new Union of Benefices and Disposal of Churches Act failed in 1926²⁰. One writer criticised the 1919 Commission "on the general grounds that the ecclesiastical authorities have no right to regard these churches as property to be dealt with at their own discretion" adding "these buildings are a priceless legacy of the past which it is our duty to preserve for posterity"²¹. However, between 1899-1939 another seven churches were demolished, including Holy Trinity, Gough Square, built 1831 and demolished in 1913. The last of these churches — All Hallows', Lombard Street, was demolished in 1939²², although the tower was saved and rebuilt as part of a new church in Twickenham, to which the furniture and fittings of the London church were transferred.

Further damage and destruction of parish churches was caused by war-time bombing, particularly in 1940²³. Some churches such as St Bride's, Fleet Street were so badly damaged that they needed to be rebuilt²⁴. At St Bride's, the remains of the earlier churches on the site, revealed by excavation in 1952, are preserved in the crypt under the post-war building. St Mary Aldermanbury was gutted in 1940, but was dismantled stone by stone in 1965-66, and rebuilt at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, USA²⁵. How curious that a country Wren never visited should crave one of his churches, when the

country that possessed all his churches has undervalued its priceless architectural heritage.

Churches destroyed or gutted by fire during the war, but rebuilt and restored, include St Vedast, Foster Lane, St Lawrence Jewry, St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe, St Mary-le-Bow, St Michael Paternoster Royal, St Andrew, Holborn and St Nicholas, Cole Abbey — all Wren churches. More Wren churches were destroyed and not rebuilt — St Alban, Wood Street, (tower retained) St Augustine, Old Change (tower retained), St Swithin, London Stone, St Mildred, Bread Street and St Stephen, Coleman Street. The ruins of two Wren churches were retained as public open-space — St Dunstan-in-the-East and Christ Church, Newgate.

In 1952 The City of London (Guild Churches) Act enabled the Bishop of London to designate 16 churches as guild churches to serve the non-resident population²⁶. This Act has allowed many churches to find new roles with a variety of Christian and civic groups — St Lawrence Jewry became the guild church of the Corporation of London; since 1966 St Anne & St Agnes, Gresham Street, has been a Lutheran church (not legally a guild church); St Nicholas Cole Abbey serves a Free Presbyterian congregation; St Peter, Cornhill, since 1990 has been used as a Christian study centre by the Proclamation Trust (still classed as a parish church); All Hallows, London Wall, is the base of the Council for the Care of Churches and St Michael, Paternoster Royal, is used by the Mission to Seamen.

In 1970 a new Commission under Sir Denys Buckley again reviewed the situation of churches in the City of London and recommended that five parish and four guild churches should be declared redundant²⁷. Seven large parishes were to be created, each served by a team ministry. No action was taken to implement his recommendations.

The current situation

In 1991 the residential population of the City of London was only 4,230, but it is the workplace of some 320,000 people²⁸, creating a potential daily congregation of about 9,000 people for each of the 24 parish and eleven guild churches. Some parish churches have adapted to meet this evangelistic

14. Anon. (1854) *Consecration versus Desecration* [GL A 2. 3. No 47].
15. 23 & 24 Victoria c. 142 (1860).

16. Return of the number of churches in the City of London pulled down or now condemned under the Union of Benefices Act of 1860. House of Commons Report 1879, [GL Fo pam 2901]. N. Pevsner (1952) *The Buildings of England: London* (except the Cities of London and Westminster) 415.

17. All Hallows Staining (medieval), St Mary Somerset (Wren) and St Olave Jewry (Wren).

18. The Proposed Demolition of Nineteen City Churches, A Report of the Clerk and Architect to the Council, LCC. 1920. [GL SL II].

19. The Rt. Hon. Walter George Frank Baron Phillimore, City of London Churches Commission, SPCK 1919. [GL pam 3072]

20. The Union of Benefices and Disposal of Churches Act was passed by the Church Assembly on 18 November 1924, but it was rejected by Parliament in 1926. The Corporation of London petitioned for the rejection of the Act [GL Fo pam 69].

challenge. For instance, St Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside, holds daily services and lunch-time concerts; there is also a restaurant in the crypt. The Rector, the Rev. Victor Stock, holds a weekly debate or dialogue with a variety of people. Also, it is worth remembering that London's most famous church — St Paul's Cathedral — is visited by 2,500,000 tourists and pilgrims annually.

The problem of redundant inner city churches is not unique to London; the same problem exists in a number of English cities such as Norwich and York. New uses found for redundant medieval churches in York include an arts centre, a heritage centre and an archaeological resource centre. What new uses could be found for potentially redundant churches within the City of London?

Concert halls

A suggestion made in a number of reports is that some churches could be converted to lecture or concert halls. Already a number of churches are used for music festivals or concerts, but is questionable if any church would find a permanent audience sufficient to justify full-time use for this purpose. However, using churches as concert halls is an excellent supplementary use. It should be stressed that not all churches are suitable for conversion to open-plan halls, because of historic internal fittings, which are an important part of the interior and should be retained in the event of conversion. Other problems to be considered if churches are to be used as concert halls include lack of visitor facilities and problems in complying with the fire regulations.

A Wren heritage centre

Sir Christopher Wren was a brilliant scholar; he was appointed as a Professor of Astronomy at the age of 25. His practical interest in mathematics and structural geometry led to his work in architecture in the 1660s. This culminated in his appointment as Surveyor-General (chief Crown architect) from 1669-1718²⁹. While Wren held this post he designed St Paul's and supervised the rebuilding and repair of 51 City churches after the Great Fire of 1666. These churches have been described as "Wren's principal contribution to the appearance of

London... To this day, they are the outstanding accent of the City and some of them individually its highest architectural values"³⁰.

Of the 51 Wren churches (or 52 if St Andrew, Holborn is included) only 24 now remain; 19 were demolished prior to 1940. Of those remaining, 18 were seriously damaged during the war. Seven Wren churches were destroyed and not rebuilt, or eight if St Mary Aldermanbury is included, although the towers of four of them were retained.

It would be a fitting tribute to Wren that his work in the City should be commemorated and presented to the public by establishing a visitor or heritage centre devoted to him and his architecture. It could be housed in one of the Wren churches such as St Vedast, Foster Lane, or St Martin's, Ludgate. Both churches are close to St Paul's cathedral, which would help boost visitor numbers. There is great wealth of material associated with Wren — particularly drawings, which would make an impressive exhibition³¹.

A City walls heritage centre

London's most undervalued historic monument is its city walls. Sadly, the excellent city walls scheme started in 1985 has never been revised or updated³². A visitor centre would be a logical start to an updated wall walk. A exhibition with computer generated graphics and images could offer an exciting and imaginative introduction to the city walls.

A new exhibition would be an excellent opportunity to display more of the associated archaeological material from the city defences, such as the wealth of finds from the infilled medieval and post-medieval city ditches, obtained from recent excavations, which have never been put on public display. Perhaps this project could be undertaken in conjunction with the Museum of London. A very good site for this centre would be St Vedast, Foster Lane. This church would be very suitable for a city walls visitor centre as it is near St Paul's and very close to Noble Street, where there is a very imposing stretch of Roman fort and city wall and would make an excellent place to start an updated walls walk (see Fig. 2).

21. Sir R. Blomfield 'London City Churches' *J. Royal Inst. British Architects* (1924) 69-70.

22. G. Cobb *London City Churches*, revised by N. Redman (1989) 138.

23. G. Cobb *The Old Churches of London* (1941-42) 102-3.

24. N. Pevsner *The Buildings of England: London vol. 1* (second edition) (1962) 275-6.

25. *Op cit* fn 22, 172-5. The rebuilt church was reconsecrated in 1969.

26. Halsbury *Statutes of England and Wales, vol. 14 Ecclesiastical Law* (1986) 573-593.

27. The Rt. Hon. Sir Denys Buckley, Report of the Commission

of Churches in the City of London, October 1970. (Church Army Press 1971) [GL pam 11656].

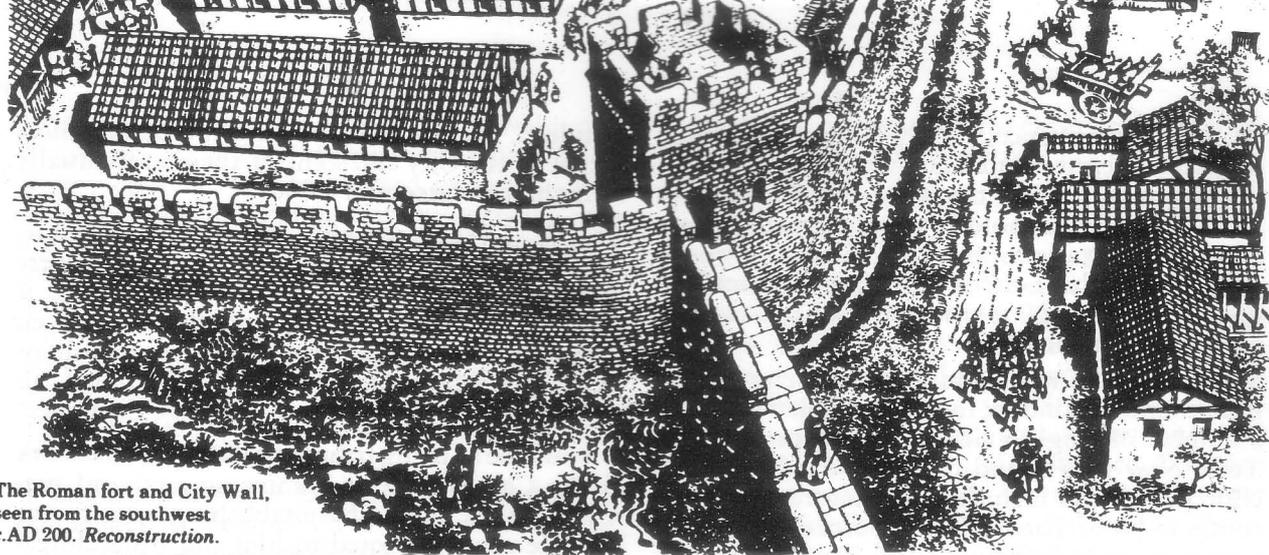
28. 1991 Census (resident population), Corporation of London (working population).

29. *Op cit*. fn 10, 42-4.

30. *Op cit*. fn 24, 63.

31. *Wren Society* 9 (1932); Sir J. Summerson *J. Royal Inst. British Architects* 59 (1952) 26-9.

32. H. Chapman *et al* (1985) *The London Wall Walk* Museum of London guide.



The Roman fort and City Wall, seen from the southwest c.AD 200. Reconstruction.

Fig. 2: Reconstruction drawing of the Roman fort and city wall in Noble Street (source: fn 32, 20).

Fragile heritage

The Templeman report suggests that no churches should be demolished, but that the 24 surplus churches should be retained as “reserves”³³. This sounds harmless enough, but is potentially very dangerous as without regular maintenance and ventilation all historic buildings and their interiors deteriorate. There are redundant churches in Greater London such as St Stephen, Rosslyn Hill, which have become derelict due to a total lack of routine maintenance, while the Diocese explored the possibility of finding a new owner or use for them³⁴.

While the report acknowledges that all the buildings on the reserve list (some of which are still well used) possess religious, architectural, historical and

cultural values, it also acknowledges that it is not the primary function of the Church of England to act as guardians of buildings of national importance. Surely, with this acknowledgement the time has come for the church to hand over those buildings which no longer have a religious use to some other body. The description of the City churches as a “burden on the income of the City Churches Fund” underlines the dilemma of the Church. It is compelled to maintain the City churches, yet casts an envious eye on the funds set aside for this purpose.

The need for careful management of the City’s architectural heritage is best illustrated by listing the recent accidents and catastrophes. In May 1988 the church of St Mary-at-Hill was gutted by fire

after unsupervised contractors accidentally set fire to the church roof, causing several million pounds worth of damage. However, it is pleasing to be able to state that St Mary-at-Hill has been restored³⁵, except for the Wren period box pews, which still await restoration and reassembly. In September 1991 a tower crane collapsed on to St James, Garlickhithe. Most recently in April 1993 St Ethelburga’s, Bishopsgate, one of the City’s nine remaining medieval churches, was destroyed by an act of terrorism (see Fig. 3). These catastrophes also show that there is a need for a proper store for fittings and furnishings from damaged or redundant London churches, to avoid loss or further damage.

We should remember that the history of a city comes alive through its buildings, because they are our closest link with the past. The destruction or neglect of historic buildings will impoverish the vistas of the City and with it our lives. However, with the preservation and utilisation of these buildings comes an enrichment of our lives and environment, which we can all enjoy and pass to our successors with pride.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jenny Hall of the Museum of London, Early Department, for permission to reproduce Fig. 2 from the *London Wall Walk Guide*.

33. *Op cit.* fn 1, 22.

34. T. Sladen *et al* (1990) St Stephen’s Rosslyn Hill and the Problem of Redundant Churches in the Diocese of London. Victorian Soc. [GL Fo pam 7779].

35. A report on the architectural and archaeological work undertaken in 1988-91 is under preparation.

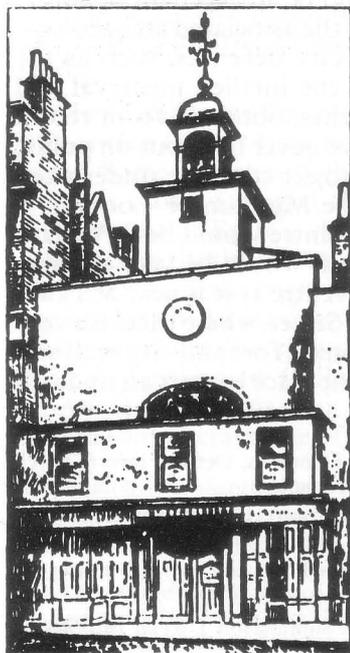


Fig. 3: St Ethelburga’s, Bishopsgate, before the removal of the shops and the medieval porch from the west front c 1931 (source: fn 23, fig. 9).