



Fig. 1: July 2007: low stone wall, representing the line of the original east wall of Christ Church Greyfriars.

The Pineapple Project

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Christ Church Greyfriars is one of London's great heritage churches, but Second World War bombing and civic indifference have left it as an empty and unsightly shell. The Pineapple Project aims to bring it back to life.

From the 13th century to the Great Fire

The history of Christ Church Greyfriars and its contribution to the cultural heritage of the City began in AD 1224 with the arrival in England of a small party of Franciscan friars. Within a year a plot for their use had been purchased near Newgate, a stone's throw from St Paul's Cathedral, and between 1227 and 1242 further land was gifted by the City. This allowed the original Grey Friars Church and Convent to be constructed, and by 1243, eighty friars

were in residence. As the years went by, further land was gifted and the buildings were extended. Friars could not legitimately hold property, so such land donations had to be made in trust to the City of London.

The church was demolished in 1306 and the new Church of the Grey Friars – paid for by Margaret of France, the second wife of Edward I – was completed in 1327. Described as a 'great and sumptuous building',¹ it was at 91 metres (300 feet) long, 27 metres (89 feet) wide, and 19.5 metres (64 feet) high, the second largest church of medieval London.² With the dissolution of the religious houses under Henry VIII, what was known as the 'church of Friars Minors' was surrendered to the King in 1538. It was not destroyed however but until 1544 remained

unoccupied, being used as a store for 'merchandise captured at sea from the French'.³

Shortly before his death in 1547, it was given by Henry VIII 'to the Cittie to be employed to pious and charitable uses whereupon the magistrates of the Cittie faithfully and religiously converted the Church into a parrish church and the lodgings into an Hospitall and Grammar Schoole'.⁴

The church became Christ's Church-Within-Newgate', and 'probably no other parish church contained the remains of so many of the great, there being there buried four queens, four duchesses, four countesses, one duke, two earls, eight barons, thirty-five knights, etc'.⁵

In 1552 the repaired Grey Friars' lodging house became Christ's

Hospital, and in the following year it was granted a charter by Edward VI. It was intended for 380 poor and orphaned children, usually filthy and ragged, who were rescued from the streets. These waifs and strays were given a distinctive uniform of long blue coats and yellow stockings, and attended services in Christ Church. Samuel Pepys made a considerable contribution to Christ's Hospital, which continued as a school on this site until 1902. It then moved to Horsham, where it has remained true to its charitable intent of helping children (or families) who are not well off or who have any form of need that could be helped by a generously endowed academic boarding school. The building in Newgate Street was demolished in the 1920s.

From the Great Fire to the Second World War

The church was destroyed in the Great Fire, and a much smaller structure was

constructed between 1677 and 1687 using the foundations of the original pillars and walls of the medieval building. Although it was 'still, by City standards, a large church',⁶ it was now only 34.5 metres (113 feet) in length. The intricately designed and constructed tower, described as 'one of the most splendid in London',⁷ was completed in 1704.

While it is often described as a Wren church, it has been proposed that although the spirit of the church is decidedly that of Wren, the architecture shows differences in detail suggesting that it was more likely to have been designed by Robert Hooke, who was Wren's assistant. 'A decorative feature widely used by Hooke was the use of urns and pineapples on the parapets of his churches. Christchurch Newgate has them'.⁸ It is these features that have given the Pineapple Project its name.

It was important to the musical life of the City, and in 1842, the young Felix Mendelssohn wrote to his mother,

'Recently when I played the organ in Christ Church, Newgate Street, I thought for a few moments that I would suffocate, so great was the crowd and pressure around my bench at the organ'.⁹

The incendiary bombing of 29th December 1940 (when it has been estimated that 127 tons of high explosive and 10,000 incendiary bombs rained down on London between 6.00 and 9.30 pm) destroyed the roof and interior, leaving just the tower and the walls standing.

After the Second World War

Although the tower survived the bombing, the spire had suffered severe structural damage and was in need of restoration. Remedial work that was carried out in 1960 must have given hope that the rest of the ruin would be given similar treatment.

This was not to be. The City Corporation decided in favour of a road widening scheme, and in 1972 the east



Fig. 2: July 2007: view of Christ Church Greyfriars, showing truncated south and north walls.



Fig. 3: drawing showing how Christ Church Greyfriars could look after the reconstruction of its walls.

wall of the church was completely demolished, while parts of the north and south walls were removed. The road was never widened however and the scheme was quietly shelved, never to return. Although the 'lost church of Christ Church Newgate Street probably had the best interior of the larger churches', the City Corporation 'demonstrated their love of Wren by demolishing walls that had survived the Blitz for road widening'.¹⁰

Having abandoned the traffic scheme, the City Corporation in 1989 planted the interior as a rose garden designed to match the floor plan of the former church, but did nothing about the mutilated remains of the walls. The garden, which is maintained by the City of London, represents the chancel of the monastic church of the Greyfriars, while the pergolas that support the roses represent the position of the piers. In 2001 a low wall was erected by Merrill Lynch and British Telecommunications to mark the line of the demolished east wall, and in 2006 the tower and spire were converted by the architects Boyarsky Murphy into a private residence.

Other City churches that had been bombed have however been treated rather differently to Christ Church. One such is St Lawrence Jewry, which in the same raid that ruined Christ Church was also destroyed on the 29th December 1940. Nothing but its walls and tower were left standing. It was fully rebuilt however between 1954 and 1957, and its interior was comprehensively recreated in the spirit of Wren's original 1677 church. It is a beautiful church, and a testament to all who were involved in its reconstruction. St Stephen Walbrook too has been fully rebuilt.

St Lawrence Jewry does of course face Guildhall across Guildhall Yard, while St Stephen Walbrook is next door to the Mansion House. Christ Church Greyfriars, in a rather less sensitive location, has been allowed to remain a ruin.

The present day

In 2008 Merrill Lynch, which has offices just to the north of Christ Church Greyfriars, became concerned about the structural integrity of the north wall, which it felt might be in danger of

falling onto its property next door. This led to consolidation works, which have recently been completed.

The church is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade 1 listed building within the Postman's Park Conservation Area (designated in June 2007), and just to the south of it Paternoster Square has been redeveloped. This open space is next to St Paul's, which attracts thousands of visitors a day coming up from the Millennium Bridge. Cheapside is undergoing massive redevelopment, and the City of London is spending £4.5 million on the Monument. Christ Church Greyfriars however has only received the bare minimum of attention and expenditure.

The future

This is where the Pineapple Project comes in. Wren and Hooke must have been aware of the significance of the site's heritage when deciding to preserve the plan of the medieval church in their own new building. One of the key aims of the Pineapple Project therefore is to reconstruct the missing parts of Christ Church Greyfriars' outer walls, allowing the outer fabric to



Fig. 4: April 2008: view from the east, showing the (truncated) north wall of Christ Church Greyfriars under repair.

become complete and coherent once again, and enabling the restitution of the pineapples that were removed when the walls were demolished. Wren's existing foundation stonework would be used as a template. This reconstruction would reclaim the external unity of the church and re-establish its contribution to the cultural identity of the Newgate area of the City. By fully enclosing the garden, the walls would separate it from traffic noise and create a more effective urban sanctuary.

While no definitive figure is available, it is believed that about 30,000 people lost their lives in the Blitz. The Pineapple Project would like the restored walled garden to act as a formal memorial to their heroism and

courage, with equal importance to other long-established memorials such as those at Tower Hill (Merchant Seamen) and St Clement Danes (Royal Air Force). The latter, although badly damaged by bombing in the Blitz was restored, and the Pineapple Project believes that the same respect and treatment should be given to Christ Church Greyfriars.

The Pineapple Project was initiated by Ian Heron as a fringe contribution to the 2006 London Architectural Biennale, and articles by John Garrod – a firm supporter of the Project – have appeared in *cityguide*, published quarterly by the City of London Guide Lecturers Association.

Perhaps it is time for London

archaeologists to add their authority, credibility and backing to the Pineapple Project.

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