

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, CORNHILL.

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The foundation of this church is attributed to Lucius, the first Christian king of Britain, who is said to have lived in the latter half of the second century of the Christian era. It claimed even a higher rank than a parochial church, and to have been not only the first Christian church founded in London, but the metropolitan church when London was the seat of an archbishop. This great antiquity is supported principally by an inscription on a brass plate, of which we read in Holinshed's Chronicles of Great Britain, 1574.

Howbeit by the Tables hanging in the revestrie of Saint Paules at London, and also a table sometime hanging in St. Peter's church in Cornhill, it should seem that the said church of Saint Peter in Cornhill was the same that Lucius builded.

Weaver, in "Funeral Monuments," 1631, p. 413, sets out the original (destroyed in the Fire of 1666) in the old style of spelling :

Be hit known to all Men, that the Yeerys of our Lord God, An. clxxxix, Lucius, the fyrst Christen King of this Lond, then callyd Brytayne, foundyd the fyrst Chyrch in London, that is to sey, the Chyrch of Sent Peter apon Cornhyl ; and he foundyd then an Archbishop's See, and made that Chirch the Metropolitan and cheef Chirch of this Kindom, and so enduryd the space of cccc yeerys and more, unto the Commyng of Sent Austen, an Apostyl of Englund, the whych was sent into the Lond by Sent Gregory, the Doctor of the Chirch, in the tyme of King Ethelbert, and then was the Archbyshoppys See and Pol removyd from the aforescyd Chirch of Sent Peter's apon Cornhyl unto Derebernaum, that now ys callyd Canterbury, and ther y^t remeynyth to this Dey.

And Millet Monk, whych came into this Lond wyth Sent Austen, was made the fyrst Bishop of London, and hys See was made in Powllys Chyrch. And this Lucius, Kyng, was the fyrst Foundyr of Peter's Chyrch apon Cornhyl ; and he regnyd King in thys Ilond after Brut mcccxlvi yeerys. And the yeerys of our Lord God a cxxiv Lucius was crownyd Kyng, and the yeerys of hys Reygne lxxvii yeerys, and he was beryd aftyr sum Cronekil at London, and aftyr sum Cronekil he was beryd at Glowcester, at that Place wher the Ordrys of Sent Francys standyth.

The exact year in which the original was set up is unknown. Strype says it is supposed to be of the date of Edward IV., and that the plate which is now preserved in the vestry of the church over the mantel-piece is "the old one revived."

To assist in carrying out these repairs, an appeal was made to the principal Companies, as appears by the following entry :

1633, September 3. *The parish having already petitioned the Mercers, Grocers, and Merchant Taylors for assistance towards the repairs, petitions are ordered to the remainder of the 12 Companies.*

The information derived from these parochial books respecting the Church before 1666 is but slight, and from other sources we gain little in addition. All that Stowe writes about the Church is evidently taken from these books. A view of the church is given by Cornelius Visscher in his plan of London, 1618, and a more accurate representation appears by Hollar, in his view of London, published in 1647. The tower is shown square and of two stories, surmounted by battlements, within which was a pointed dome or cupola raised upon clustered columns and crowned by a vane. At the south-west corner of the church, in St. Peter's Alley, Hollar places a round tower embattled. The chancel of the old church extended 10 feet further eastward than at present, and occupied a portion of what is now Gracechurch Street.

Many of the features of the old church are illustrated by the proceedings in vestry after the Great Fire of 1666. In 1667, October 21st, it is "ordered that the ground where upon the round tower of the late church of this parish lately stood, adjoining or lying near to the ground of Mr. Richard Blackburn, shall be granted to the said Richard Blackburn to build upon according to the Act." And 1671, January 31st, it was agreed that "A lease of 999 years, at the yearly rent of £4, shall be granted to Mr. Blackburn and his assigns of the round tower or staircase."

Also in the vestry minutes, 2nd March, 1674, is the following entry. "The Rector and Churchwardens having received £150 of the Chamber of London for melioration money, due from the City, for ground taken away from the east end of St. Peter's church and laid into Gracious Street," &c. This alteration will be seen by reference to Ogilby's plan of London taken in 1677.

The Great Fire of September 1666 consumed all that was inflammable in this church. The walls of the church, and all the upper part of the tower, were afterwards taken down. The foundations may have been used for the present building, but the only part now above ground of the old church is the lower story of the tower.

An interesting record of the steps taken by the parish for rebuild-

ing the church is preserved in the vestry minutes; indeed, they are so full that comment is scarcely needed.

27th December, 1667. At a meeting of the vestry, held at the Nagg's Head tavern, Leadenhall Street, the following resolution was passed—"Ordered, that the foundations of the parish church of this parish shall be forthwith clered of the rubbish in reference to the preparing of the said church for new building, and that a surveyor may be inquired after and procured to survey the same, and give a modell for the building thereof, together with an estimate of what the charge thereof will amount unto."

7th April, 1668. "Ordered, that if any person having leave to erect their buildings against the church or steeple walls do desire to erect their chimneys against said walls, that the chimneys and shafts shalbe set not exceeding nine inches in s^d wall, provided they shall contract the shafts thereof into the butterice or peere, after such manner as shalbe directed by Mr. Jermyn the surveyor, &c., and so as same shall not deface the frontispiece of the church."

"Ordered, that Mr. Jermyn have £4 given him for drawing several drafts and platts (plans) for rebuilding of the parish church. Also, that all the rag stones arising out of the church and steeple shalbe forthwith sold, and the money gotten for the same applied towards providing of brick and other materialls for the rebuilding of the said church."

9th April, 1668. "Resolved, that Mr. Jermyn continue to be surveyor for rebuilding the church, but subject to the directions of the churchwardens. Mr. Fowler to have allowance for the annoyance he receives by rebuilding the church, as also Mr. Ingoll. Resolved, that the churchwardens have power to take downe the east wall of the church, and to erect a new one, and that such new wall be 30th feet in height at least, or as high as the surveyor judge necessary."

19th April, 1668. "Resolved, that Mr. Jermyn be continued the church surveyor as before determined."

2nd February, 1669. "Agreed, that Mr. John Oliver be appointed surveyor instead of Mr. Jermyn deceased."

15th April, 1669. "Resolved, that Mr. John Oliver be continued surveyor, and that he have for his care and pains, and to encourage him therein," &c.

7th April, 1670. "Ordered, that the churchwardens consult with workmen for the coping or otherwise securing the east wall of the church lately new built, that it may sustain no further prejudice, and likewise the north wall of the church lately built by Messrs. Price, Blackburn, Ricraft, and Purchas."

20th September, 1670. "That information be given to Dr. Wren of an encroachment upon the church yard," &c.

31st of December, 1672. At a vestry held in the chappel in Leadenhall—"Ordered, that the churchwardens do present Dr. Wren with 5 guineas as a gratuite for his paines and furtherance of a tabernacle for this parish." And in 1673, we find by another minute £10 more voted to Dr. Wren.

April 8th, 1675. "Ordered, that Mr. Beveridge* and the churchwardens, &c.,

* Afterwards the eminent and pious Bishop of St. Asaph. He was appointed Rector of this parish by the Corporation of London in 1672, before the church was

do treat and discourse with Sir Christopher Wren, and his surveyor, as to the receiving his proposals in order to the rebuilding of our parish church."

1680, September 7th. In the vestry minutes we find the contract for all the wood-work in the church. It includes the screen which divides the chancel from the body of the church, and the pulpit with its canopy, stairs, and rail, which were to be completed for £30. Special mention is made of the royal arms—"and they the contractors shall make and set up the King's arms above the screen, raised fair and to appear on both sides, according to the best art and skill of the trade or mystery of a carver, which shall be done according to model for £8."

From these entries in the vestry books we learn, that, although two surveyors were employed at an early period of the preparations for rebuilding the church, and a model was ordered of the same, still but little if any progress was made in the works before the employment of Sir Christopher Wren as surveyor or architect of the new church in 1670. We may therefore consider that the present church is mainly his work. The fine oak screen was designed by Sir Christopher Wren's daughter and carved by Thomas Poultney and Thomas Athew. "It was to be 13 feet high from the pavement, and made according to model." The vestry minutes inform us that the church was completed in 1682 and opened November 27th, when Bishop Beveridge, then Rector of this parish, delivered his famous sermon on the excellence and usefulness of the Common Prayer. The church, he said, had lain waste for above five times three years, but is now rebuilt and fitted again for service. He also alludes to the great screen; and, speaking of the chancel, he says that it "was always made and represented the highest place in the church," and therefore, he adds, "it was wont to be separated from the rest of the church by a screen or partition of network, in Latin *cancelli*, and that so generally that from thence the place itself is called the chancel." After having said that this was generally to be found in all considerable churches of old, he adds, "I mention it only because some perhaps may wonder why this screen should be observed in our church rather than in all the other churches which have lately been built in this city, whereas they should rather wonder why it was not observed in all other as well as this." He further proceeds to say that the chancel in all Christian churches was always looked upon as answer-rebuilt. He died 5th March, 1708, and was buried in St. Paul's cathedral. His arms (date 1704), with those of his immediate successor in the rectory, Dr. Waugh, Bishop of Chichester (who was buried in the chancel), are in the east window.

able to the Holy of Holies in the Temple, and that all the seats should look towards the chancel.

The interior of the church is divided into a chancel, nave, and two aisles. The spacious vestibule is entered either from Cornhill or St. Peter's Alley. The entrances to the tower, organ gallery, and vestry are in this vestibule. The roof of the church is arched and springs from an attic story above the cornice, which is supported on eight square piers fronted with pilasters of the Corinthian order. The length of the church within the walls is 80 feet, the breadth 47 feet, and the height 40 feet, being nearly a double cube. The height of the steeple is 140 feet, and is terminated by a key, the emblem of St. Peter.

The south side of the church and the tower are built with red brick, but in some portions of the body stone saved from the old church or neighbouring buildings is used. The building cost £5,647 8s. 2d., which was paid out of the coal-duties and subscriptions.

The communion plate is not particularly handsome, but undoubtedly old and massive. The two cups and patens are of silver-gilt, the gift of one Thomas Symonds whose arms are engraved upon them, bearing the date 1625, therefore before the Fire. The flagons of silver were the gift of one Thomas Webster, grocer and alderman of London. These also bear the date of 1625 and the arms of the donor. The alms-dish, with the royal arms of Charles II. dated 1682, seems to have been provided by the parish at the opening of the church after the Fire.

The very fine organ was built by Bernard Schmidt, better known as Father Smith, a German, in 1681. He was appointed organ-builder to Charles II. in 1671, and apartments were allotted to him at Whitehall. In 1644 organs were banished from churches, but at the Restoration organ-builders were invited from abroad to furnish churches with new instruments. Amongst them was Father Smith. He erected an organ in Westminster Abbey and a pair for St. Margaret's, Westminster, where he was elected organist in 1672.

From the Vestry Minute Book it appears that this organ cost £210.

The organ was remodelled by Messrs. Hill under the inspection of Dr. Gauntlett, at a cost to the parish of about £1,000. It has forty-five stops and a particularly full and fine swell. Several of the old and most beautiful stops that were in the former organ have been retained. Mendelssohn, only a short time before his death, played

upon it, and on one occasion extemporised, to the great delight of the congregation, upon the melody of Haydn's Hymn to the Emperor. He had a very high opinion of this instrument, and of all the organs which had come under his notice he considered it second only to the large one erected by Messrs. Hill at Birmingham. He presented his autograph to our talented organist, Miss Mounsey (who has to-day displayed her perfect mastery over this grand instrument), which is preserved in the vestry.

The font does not require any particular notice, but its cover is interesting as being perhaps the only portion of the furniture preserved from the Great Fire; and even this has not escaped unmarked by the destroying element.

The earliest chantry established in the church was that of Roger Fitz-Roger in 1284.

From the "Valor Ecclesiasticus," compiled by order of Parliament in 1534-35, 26th of Henry VIII., we learn the following values:—

	£	s.	d.
The Emolument of the Rectory - - - - -	39	5	8
A Chantry founded by William Kingston - - - - -	7	0	0
Tenths therefrom - - - - -	0	14	0
Another Chantry - - - - -	7	0	0
Tenths therefrom - - - - -	0	14	0
A Chantry founded by John Hoxton - - - - -	6	13	4
Tenths therefrom - - - - -	0	13	4
A Chantry founded by Thomas White - - - - -	7	10	0
Tenths therefrom - - - - -	0	15	0
A Chantry founded by Alice Brudenel - - - - -	7	10	0
Tenths therefrom - - - - -	0	15	0
Another Chantry founded by Richard Morley - - - - -	7	10	0
Tenths therefrom - - - - -	0	15	0

From the above and other sources it would appear that there were not less than seven chapels or altars belonging to the church.

The minutes of vestry proceedings commence in 1574, and have already afforded us much information relating to the old church, the tabernacle or temporary building used by the parish for worship during the time the church was rebuilding after the great fire, and of the progress of the present church. In addition we will add a few extracts:

1577. Sunday, March 10th. Only claret wine of the best to be used at the communion.

1579-80, Sunday, Feb. 14. Eight Women's pews ordered on the south side of the

church and so many on the north, and "but one Maydes on eyther syde." This perhaps has reference to an old practice of Protestants abroad, namely, the separating the male and female parts of the congregation, and was probably introduced into England on the increase of the Puritans in the reign of Elizabeth, and a custom now revived (strange to say) in several churches, where at least the services are not conducted in a Puritanical style.

1580, Sunday, June 12. A door ordered for Master Parson to come in at, at the west end of the church, as at the great door by the clock-house through the belfry, at all times when it pleaseth him.

1598, March 14. Agreed, that the parishes of St. Peter and St. Andrew should at their joint costs set up a cage for Cornhill Ward for the reclaiming and shutting up of vagrant persons.

1782. An entry of this year has lately been very erroneously put before the public in some of the newspapers. It was said there is an entry for money to be paid for the destruction of noxious insects in the parish. The fact is, there is an entry in the vestry minutes, That 1*s.* 6*d.* was to be paid per bushel to persons collecting lady-birds off the hedges and elsewhere in the Metropolitan suburbs, it would seem, for the double purpose of staying an anticipated famine through this plague of insects, and for providing employment for the large number of distressed poor at that time. This order was rescinded at the next vestry meeting.

In 1679, April 24, the following kind privilege was granted, and occurs in the minutes of vestry of St. Michael, Cornhill :

Resolved, "That leave be given to the Parson of St. Peter's to walk in the churchyard."

The register of the parish is what is known as a Queen Elizabeth's copy. An injunction was issued by Thomas Cromwell, as Vicar-General of Henry VIII., dated September 8th, 1538, directing that every parson, vicar, and curate throughout the realm should keep a register of all weddings, christenings, and burials. Many such records were immediately commenced, although few such now remain. Instructions were issued under the Great Seal, October 25, 1597, for their better preservation.

The register-book of this parish is of the latter date, and the old register is copied into it in a very beautiful style by Wm. Averill, the schoolmaster.

The following entry shows when the book was purchased :

This Booke was bought at the charge of the Parish of Saint Peter's upon Cornhill, Maister Ashbooled, Doctor, beeing then Parson, and Maister David Powell and Maister William Partridge beeing the Church Wardens; the two and twentieth day of September in the year of our Lord one Thousand five hundred and nynety and eight.

The first name among the christenings is that of Hugh Kellsall, Sunday, 15th December, 1538.

On Sunday, the 13th March, 1602-3 (folio 30), a few verses are written deploring the death of Queen Elizabeth.

The first entry of burials is that of John Johnsonne, the 17th of January, 1539.

The number interred during the pestilence of 1665 appears to have been very considerable.

The entries of weddings commence January 19, 1538, with that of Richard Holland and Anne Boro.

A singular case of forgery exists in the register of marriages, and occurred under the following circumstances, in 1829, when Sir John Page Wood was Rector of the parish. A chancery suit was pending, the issue of which turned upon an entry in the register, and two persons came to see the books in company with the parish clerk. They afterwards induced him to retire to spend the evening at one of the taverns in the parish, and then after making him drunk, as the evidence sworn before the Lord Mayor would seem to show, he delivered up the keys of the church and registers that they might search them (as they said) early on the following morning. They paid an early visit it would seem to the church, erased the original entry, and in a very clumsy manner inserted another and then decamped.

The importance of the position held by the Rector of this parish is proved by a decision giving him the right of priority not only over the Rectors of St. Magnus and St. Nicholas Cole Abbey, but over all other the Rectors of the City, in the procession to St. Paul's in the week of Pentecost. In the Records of the Corporation of London, "Letter Book I. fol. ccii. 5 Henry V. A.D. 1417," we read:

All events that take place are the more firmly established, and the less likely to be disturbed by any future questioning thereof, if they derive their force from written testimony. *Therefore*, be it known unto all persons now living, and let those learn who shall come hereafter, *that* on past occasions of the Procession, which in the week of Pentecost was wont yearly to take place, an apostolic contention oftentimes arose between the Rectors of the churches of St. Peter Cornhill, St. Magnus the Martyr, and St. Nicholas Cold Abbey, in London, which of them would seem to be the greater, and by reason of such dignity should occupy the last place in the procession. *And* although the contention that ensued upon this discussion was not [inflamed] by the Rectors themselves, but rather by their parishioners, who would light the torch of discord on the one side and the other, more for the sake of worldly pride than through any title to probity on their part, *who* so did their best to break the peace of the city, and satisfy a lurking malevolence: *still*, this accumulating fuel for strife was only added to with the revolution of every succeeding year; *and* this notwithstanding that the rectors of that Basilica of the chief of the Apostles, which was formerly the metropolitan see, by reason of the everlasting reverence due to such a dignity, were wont to go in the last place in

the procession as being Priors, or rather Abbots, over all the Rectors in the said city, and of right ought to go in that place, by reason of such priority; in accordance with a certain sentence that had been pronounced thereon, on the 6th day of February, in the year of our Lord, according to the course and computation of the English Church, 1399, by Thomas Stowe, of blessed memory, Doctor of Laws, and Official of London, and many others learned in the law, then assessors with him, in behalf of William Aghtone, the then Rector of the church of St. Peter aforesaid, and solemnly decided upon; and which, before Henry Bartone, the present Mayor, and the Aldermen, in full court read and shown, most manifestly has appeared, and does appear.

Therefore, the said Mayor and Aldermen, on their part, not presuming themselves to define aught that had been settled by ecclesiastical judgment, but desiring more promptly to carry out, with filial obedience, that which such authority had rightly laid down, and wishing to promote that peace and tranquillity which, by the bond of their oath, they are especially bound to watch over in the city aforesaid, and with especial zeal to ensure; having first taken into diligent consideration the ancient ritual, and the solemn proofs, decrees, and sentences that had transpired and had been passed in the case, on the one hand, as well as having deliberately thought upon the damages and perils, which, through such dissensions and commotions, every year manifestly and probably might happen and arise, on the other, unless some aid should be speedily brought thereunto; on the 27th day of May, in the 5th year of the reign of King Henry after the Conquest the Fifth, did decree, ordain, and, so far as unto them, for the nurturing of peace, did pertain, did award and enact, as a thing for all time to be observed, that Sir John Whitby, the then Rector of the church of St. Peter aforesaid, and all his successors, Rectors of the same church, successively, of right, and for the honour of that most sacred Basilica of St. Peter (which was the first church founded in London, namely, in the year of Our Lord 199, by King Lucius, and in which was the metropolitan see for four hundred years and more), shall go alone after all other the Rectors of the same City in all and singular Processions within the City aforesaid, on the Monday in the week of Pentecost in each year, as being priors or abbots over them, and occupying the last and most dignified place; and that without impediment, molestation, disquiet, or disturbance on part of the Rectors of the churches of St. Magnus and St. Nicholas aforesaid, now being, their successors and their parishioners, or of any other persons whatsoever, on pain of imprisonment of their bodies, and of making fine, at the discretion of the Mayor and Aldermen, as to those who shall cause breach of the peace or disquiet of the people in this behalf.—*Memorials of London*, &c. pp. 651—653.

The advowson of the rectory of St. Peter-upon-Cornhill was originally united with that of St. Margaret Pattens, Rood Lane, and belonged to the family of Neville of Essex; and in 1362 they appear with the manor of Leadenhall to have been conveyed by the Lady Alice, widow of Sir Hugh Neville, to Richard Fitz-Alan, Earl of Arundel and Surrey. Thence they passed into other hands. Sir Richard Whittington was by marriage connected with one of these families,

and it has been supposed by some, that, having become possessed of the advowsons of the two livings of St. Peter-upon-Cornhill and St. Margaret Pattens, he, having no children, made them over with the manor of Leadenhall to the Corporation of London. Certain it is that in 1408 these two advowsons with the Leadenhall manor were conveyed by charter to Richard Whittington and other citizens of London (some have supposed only as agents) for the Mayor and Corporation, to whom the property was transferred in 1411. The Corporation of London thus became the patrons of this church. Their first presentation was made to Thomas Marchant in 1429, and they have exercised the right ever since up to the time of the present Rector, Richard Whittington, who was appointed in 1867. He is by birth a citizen, and a Merchant Taylor, and has reason to believe that he might claim collateral descent from the family of the great Sir Richard Whittington.

The monuments in the church are not of any great interest. A beautiful mural monument on the south side of the church commemorates the terrific destruction by fire of the seven children of James Woodmanson of Leadenhall Street. This fire caused no little stir, as several other persons perished at the same time. Mr. Woodmanson was present at a ball at St. James's palace on the Queen's birth-day, and was called out only to find his seven children consumed in the flames. This sad occurrence was deeply felt by the Royal Family, some of whom visited the scene of the fire.

In the vestry of the church is preserved a copy of Jerome's Vulgate, very beautifully written throughout in a bold hand on fine white vellum. It consists of 586 leaves. The miniature paintings, which are 150 in number, are very curious, comprising historical scenes, portraits of the patriarchs, evangelists, and others, and afford interesting examples of English costume at that early period. The painted borders which decorate some of the pages are beautiful specimens of mediæval art, and proximately fix the date. But what renders this volume the most interesting and valuable to us is, that by the colophon at the end we learn that it was written for this church. It runs thus—

Iste liber pertinet perpetue Cantarie duorum capellanorum celebrantium ad altare Sancte Trinitatis in Ecclesia Sancti Petri super Cornhill.