

ST. HELEN'S, BISHOPSGATE.

(Now the Parish Church of the united Parishes of St. Helen and St. Martin Outwich.)

A Paper read at a General Meeting of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, held at the Church of St. Helen, Bishopsgate, on 15th June, 1907,

BY

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THE Church of St. Helen, Bishopsgate, was dedicated to the Empress Helena, mother of Constantine, the first Christian Emperor of Rome. Its foundation is certainly earlier than the year 1010, for in that year Alwyne, Bishop of Helmeham, deposited the remains of King Edmund the Martyr in the Church of St. Helen for three years, during the period when the Danes were very destructive in East Anglia.

The patronage of the Church belonged in early times to the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's, and they granted the right of patronage to William, the son of William the Goldsmith, who subsequently obtained leave to found a Priory of Nuns, as appears by the following instrument :—

Priory of St. Helen next the way of Bishopsgate Street, in the City of London. Of the constituting of Nuns in the same.

Know all present and to come, that I, ALARDUS, Dean of the Church of St. Paul, London, and the Chapter of the same Church, have granted to William, the son of William the Goldsmith, patron of the Church of St. Helen, London, that he may constitute Nuns in the same Church for the perpetual service of

God therein, and of the College there established, and may bestow on the Society there established, the right of patronage of the said Church, which had been granted to him by our predecessors ; provided that whoever shall officiate there as Prioress, shall, after election by the same College made, be presented to the Dean and Chapter of London and shall swear fidelity to the Dean and Chapter as well for such Church as for a pension of half a mark yearly, payable within eight days of Easter, and not to alienate such right of patronage, nor to subject themselves to any other College. And we have moreover granted, as far as in us lies, that the College there ordained may convert to its own use all the revenues of the said Church, excepting the said pension ; and the same College shall discharge all Episcopal obligations appertaining to the said Church ; but if in the aforesaid place by any chance accident the manner of life of the Nuns shall be found wanting, we have granted that men of religion be established there without molestation, in the same manner as is above mentioned with respect to the Nuns ; and shall be bound in like manner to the Dean and Chapter of London ; and that this our grant and the whole agreement may be firmly held in perpetual remembrance and firmly observed, we have caused the same wholly to be written in the form of a deed : one part whereof has been ratified, by our seal, and the other part by the seal of the same William and of the Nuns, to remove every occasion of future dispute and for mutual protection.

WITNESS, ALARDUS, Dean, and others.*

* Records of the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's, A fol. 246. Original in Latin.

Alardus de Burnham, Dean of St. Paul's, died on the 14th August, 1216, and the foundation of the Priory may probably be placed about 1212. The Nuns were of the Benedictine Order and their costume consisted of a black habit with a cloak, cowl, and veil. William Basing, one of the Sheriffs of London in 1308, was a great benefactor to the Priory, adding greatly to the revenues; by some he has been regarded as its founder.

The names of three prioresses are given by the last editors of Dugdale, viz., Eleanor de Wyncester, in the 7th and 12th years of Henry III; Alice Asshfeld, who granted a lease to Sir John Crosby, the builder of Crosby Hall, in 1466; and Mary Rollesley, the last prioress, who on the 26th January, 19 Henry VIII (1527-8) leased to one Richard Berde, a tenement in the Parish of St. Ethelburga the Virgin for a term of 40 years at an annual rent of 20s. The Priory, valued at 1,314*l* 2*s.* 6*d.*, was surrendered the 25th November, 30 Henry VIII, 1538.

On the 29th March, 33 Henry VIII, 1542, the King granted by way of exchange to Sir Richard Williams, alias Crumwell, Knt., the site and precincts of the late Priory of St. Helen. The north aisle of St. Helen's church was the "Nunnes Quire" and was divided by a screen from the main body of the church. The partition was now removed, and the Nuns' Choir given as an addition to the parish church.

The church is a Gothic structure of the lighter kind, consisting of a plain body with large windows, 122 feet long, 50 to 56 feet wide. There are also a south transept and two chapels dedicated respectively to St. Mary the Virgin and the Holy Ghost. The

Belfry was not built till 1669; and, according to Stow, Sir Thomas Gresham promised to build a steeple in recompense for the ground occupied by the erection of his monument in the church, but (by an oversight it is presumed) no provision was made in his will for that purpose.

The Nuns' Hall and other houses were, after the Dissolution, purchased by the Leathersellers' Company, who were incorporated by letters patent of 22 Henry VI (A.D. 1442). They converted the Nuns' Hall into a Common Hall for meeting, and it continued in use by them until it was demolished in 1799. In the same year, and on another part of the site of the Priory, were built the present houses in St. Helen's Place, which are now let out as offices and chambers.

Although the church fortunately escaped destruction in the Great Fire of London, it has undergone a series of restorations and renovations coming down to recent times. One of the most extensive of these restorations took place in 1865-8, when the organ gallery at the west end was taken down and the organ removed into the south transept. A quaint piece of carved work is attached to the pillar dividing the Choir from the Chapel of the Holy Ghost, and forms a "rest" for the Lord Mayor's sword and mace. It consists of two twisted Corinthian columns, supporting an entablature highly enriched and an Attic panel. On the frieze are the arms of Sir John Lawrence, Lord Mayor in 1665, and in the attic is the City arms, the whole structure being crowned with the arms of Charles II, supported by two gilt angels and surmounted with the royal crown. There is also an elaborate wrought-iron rest for the insignia of the Lord

Mayor, with the Royal Arms and those of the Mercers' Company emblazoned, painted and gilded by my father, Mr. Robert Barton, during his churchwardenship in 1868.

On the south side of the church is the pulpit, an elaborate piece of carving of the 17th Century, with a large sounding-board said to have been designed by Inigo Jones.

During the restoration in 1868 tiles were discovered showing a double-headed eagle which evidently referred to Constantine the Great, also a large anchor embedded in the north-west corner of the church. The fabric was again restored in 1874-6, and, lastly, in 1891, when over £12,000 was spent in further restoration and in the removal of the whole of the human remains, with few exceptions, to the City of London Cemetery at Ilford, Essex.

MONUMENTS.

In the Chapel of the Holy Ghost is the monument in Purbeck marble (A.D. 1475) of Sir John Crosby and his first wife Anneys. He is represented in plated armour, with a mantle gathered up on his right shoulder, and falling over on his left under his back, with a standing cape, and over it a Yorkist collar of rondeaux; on the little finger of the right hand is a ring, and others on the little and third fingers of the left hand. His hair is cropped and parted, and under his head is a helmet, the crest gone. He has a dagger at his right side, fastened by a singular belt, but no sword. His knee-pieces are riveted on the inside, and there is a fold or parting on his greaves. At his feet is a lion looking up to him. His lady is in a mantle and very close-bodied gown, in which her

feet are folded up, with long tight sleeves down to her wrists. Over the back of her hand passes a singular band. She has a ring on her fore and little fingers, and round her neck a collar of roses. A small cordon hangs on her right hip from a belt sloping from the left side ; her cap is fitted close to her ears and the hair tucked up under it, a veil falling off the cushion under her head which is supported by two angels. At her feet lie two little dogs. The inscription directed by Crosby's will to be put on the ledge of his monument has been long since removed. Translated from the Latin, it ran as follows :—

“Pray for the souls of Sir John Crosby, Alderman, and in his life-time Mayor of the Staple of the town of Calais, and of Agnes his wife, and of Thomas, Richard, John, John, Margaret, and Joan, children of the same Sir John Crosby. He died in 1475 and she in 1466. *On whose souls may God have mercy.*”

Another very interesting tomb is that of Sir Julius Cæsar Adelmare which is inscribed :—

“To all faithful Christian people to whom this writing may come. Know ye that I Julius Adelmare alias Cæsar, Knight, Doctor of Laws, Judge of the Supreme Court of Admiralty of Queen Elizabeth, one of the Masters of Requests to King James, and of his Privy Council, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Master of the Rolls, by this my act and deed, confirm with my full consent that by the Divine aid, I will willingly pay the debt of nature as soon as it may please God. In witness whereof I have fixed my hand and seal, Feby. 27. 1634.

JUL CÆSAR.”

He died April 18th, 1636.

On the south wall is the magnificent monument of Sir John Spencer, usually called rich Spencer, Alderman and Clothworker, Sheriff in 1583-4, and Lord

Mayor in 1594. In a curious pamphlet entitled "The vanity of the lives and passions of men. By D. Papillon, Gent.," 1651, the following remarkable passage occurs, taken from a private record. "In Queen Elizabeth's days a pirate of Dunkirk laid a plot, with twelve of his mates, to carry away Sir John Spencer, which if he had done, fifty thousand pounds had not redeemed him. He came over the seas in a shallop with twelve muskietiers, and in the night came into Barking Creek and left the shallop in the custody of six of his men, and with the other six came as far as Islington, and there hid themselves in ditches near the path in which Sir John came always to his house. But by the providence of God, Sir John upon some extraordinary occasion was forced to stay in London that night, otherwise they had taken him away; and they, fearing they should be discovered, in the night time came to their shallop, and so came safe to Dunkirk again." Sir John's country house to which reference is here made was Canonbury, his town residence being Crosby Place, which he had bought of the representatives of Antonio Bonvisi. When Sir John took possession of Crosby Place he found it in a state of great dilapidation. In this noble mansion he lived in great state, and here, as was then the civic custom, he kept his mayoralty. Sir John had one daughter and heiress, Elizabeth, who is said to have been carried off from Canonbury house in a baker's basket by the contrivance of William, the second Lord Compton, afterwards Earl of Northampton, to whom in the year 1594 she was married.

The tomb was restored in 1865-8 by the Marquis of Northampton. It is of the purest alabaster, with

the recumbent figures of Sir John and his wife (life size) in the habits of the times in which they lived ; at their feet is the figure of their daughter in an attitude of prayer. The inscription, translated into English, reads :—" Here lies Sir John Spencer, Knight, Citizen and Member of Parliament for London, Lord Mayor of the same City, A.D. 1594. By Alice Bromfield his wife he left an only daughter, Elizabeth, who was married to William, Baron Compton. He died 3 March, 1609. To his most excellent father-in-law, this was erected by William, Baron Compton."

Another interesting memorial is that of Francis Bancroft, who by his will, dated March 18th, 1727, directs " That my body may be embalmed within six days after my death, and my entrails to be put into a leaden box and included in my coffin or placed in my vault next the same as shall be most convenient ; and that my coffin be made of oak lined with lead, and that the top or lid thereof be hung with strong hinges, neither to be nailed, screwed, locked down, nor fastened any other way, but to open freely and without trouble, like to the top of a trunk. And I desire to be buried in a vault which I have made and purchased for that purpose under my tomb in the parish church of St. Helen's, London, within ten days after my decease, between the hours of nine and ten o'clock at night, and I do direct that the whole expenses of my funeral shall not exceed the sum of two hundred pounds. I give my silver bason to the Church of St. Helen's, there to be used at the Communion Service.

" And whereas I have been at considerable expense in erecting my tomb in the Church of St. Helen's,

I give and appoint the sum of two pounds per annum for ever, and more whensoever needful, for cleansing, preserving, taking care of, and repairing my said vault and tomb, it being my express intention and desire to have the same kept up in good order and repair for ever, whether the Church be standing or not, and to that end I hereby subject and charge all my estates with the payment and support thereof."

The following inscription was on the tomb:—
"The ground whereon this tomb stands was purchased of this parish in 1723 by Francis Bancroft Esq^r for the interment of himself and friends only (and was confirmed to him by a Faculty from the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's London the same year), and in his lifetime he erected this tomb, Anno 1726, and settled part of his estate in London and Middlesex for the beautifying and keeping the same in repair for ever."

It is reported that the reputation this individual bore during his lifetime was not of the best. He was a descendant of Archbishop Bancroft, and in early life is said to have been in poor circumstances. He obtained the appointment of Lord Mayor's officer, and had the privilege of laying informations and of obtaining half the fines that were levied upon those who had infringed the law. So unpopular was he that when he was buried the populace mobbed his remains and attempted to upset the coffin. The whole of the tomb is now sunk and buried beneath the level of the pavement.

One of the most remarkable amongst the many remarkable monuments for which this church has obtained the name of "The Westminster Abbey of the

City," is that of Martin Bond, Captain of the Trained Bands of the City in 1588, when that body of citizen soldiers was reviewed by Queen Elizabeth at Tilbury in preparation against the threatened invasion of the Spanish Armada. It represents an encampment in the foreground of which is a large open tent, wherein he is represented sitting in a thoughtful posture at a table. At the side of the tent a page holds his horse, and in the front are two sentinels with partisans, in large boots and slouched hats. The whole is enclosed in a frontispiece, consisting of two composite columns sustaining an entablature and pediment, the cornice broken to admit the arms; below the sculpture is the inscription. The monument is invaluable, as displaying to perfection the costumes of the time. The inscription reads:—"Memoriæ Sacrum. Neere this place resteth y^e body of y^e worthy cittizen and soldier, Martin Bond, Esq^r. Son of Will^m Bond, Sherief, and Alderman of London. He was Captaine in y^e yeare 1588 at y^e Camp at Tilbury and after remained Cheief Captaine of y^e trained bandes of this Cittiy until his death. He was a marchant adventurer and free of y^e Company of Haberdashers. He lived to the age of 85 yeares and dyed in May 1643. His pyety, prudence, courage and honesty have left behinde him a never dyeing monument."

Amongst other interesting monuments and brasses are those of John Otewich and wife, Hugh Pemberton, Richard Staper, Robert Hooke of the Royal Society, Sir Martin Lumley, Sir John Langham, Alberico Gentili, and Sir John Lawrence, Alderman of Bishopsgate Ward, Sheriff 1658, Lord Mayor 1664, who kept his mayoralty at his house in Great

St. Helen's and continued in the City during the whole time of the Great Plague, 1665. He died on 23rd August, 1718.

MEMORIAL BRASSES.

A merchant and his wife, name unknown	...	<i>cir.</i> 1400.
John Breieux, Rector of St. Martin Outwich		1459.
Nicholas Wotton, Rector of St. Martin Outwich		1483.
Thomas Williams and Margaret his wife	...	1495.
Lady Abbess (unknown)	Henry VII.
John Leventhorpe	1510.
Robert Rochester, Serjeant of the Pantry	...	1514.
Thomas Benolte, Clarencieux King at Arms		1533.

STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS.

The large East centre window of the parochial nave, representing the Ascension, consists of seven lights with traceried head, and was the gift of Kirkman, Daniel, and James Stewart Hodgson, in memory of their father.

The East window in the Nuns' Choir, of five lights with traceried head, was given by the Gresham Committee as a memorial to Sir Thomas Gresham.

The window of three lights in the South aisle was put up by the late Alderman and Colonel Wilson in memory of Martin Bond, Captain of the Trained Bands in 1588.

The window of three half-lights over the South door was the gift of the Messrs. Macdougall, lay impropiators.

The three-light window in the Lady Chapel represents the Conversion of Constantine, and was given by the Merchant Taylors' Company.

On the 5th of May, 1873, by an Order in Council, the benefices of St. Helen, Bishopsgate, and St. Martin

Outwich were united, the patronage being committed to the Merchant Taylors' Company, who have always taken the greatest interest in the Church.

From the joint parochial funds an annual sum of £41 only is allowed by the City Parochial Foundation, and there is also the interest on £1,500 standing in the books of the Bank of England. These small sums, together with voluntary contributions from the Merchant Taylors' Company, the Leathersellers' Company, and the congregation, form the only income for maintaining the fabric and defraying the costs of Divine Worship in this ancient City church.

For much of the information contained in the above paper I desire to express my indebtedness to the Rev. Dr. Cox's "Annals of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate."