

RECENT DISCOVERIES IN CITY CHURCHES, WITH HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE CHURCH AND PARISH OF ST. MICHAEL, BASSISHAW.

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BY

CHARLES WELCH, Esq., F.S.A.,
Honorary Secretary.

UNDER the provisions of the Union of Benefices Act the church of St. Michael, Wood Street, was taken down in July and August, 1898, and that of St. Michael, Bassishaw, is now (March, 1899) being cleared of its human remains previous to its demolition. This very necessary work of dealing with the interments within the building has been also undertaken for several existing churches, among them being St. Mildred, Bread Street, and St. Mary Woolnoth. A good opportunity is afforded on these occasions of examining the sub-structure of the churches; such an examination is very difficult, and indeed almost impossible, when conducted whilst the church is being pulled down and its interior consists of a piled-up mass of ruins and débris.

In the case of St. Michael, Wood Street, the Society paid a visit to the church under the guidance of Mr. Philip Norman, whose paper on the occasion, and that of the Rev. James Christie on the records of the church were printed in our Transactions. In St. Mildred, Bread Street, the interesting discovery was made of the lead and stone coffins of Sir Nicholas Crispe, of which an illustration is here given.



LEADEN AND STONE COFFINS OF SIR NICHOLAS CRISPE, BURIED
IN THE CHURCH OF ST. MILDRED, BREAD STREET.

Sir Nicholas Crispe was the son of a London merchant, and born in 1598. He was brought up to a thorough knowledge of business, and on his father's death inherited a great estate, which was further increased by his marriage. A man of great enterprise and ingenuity of invention, he soon came under notice at Court, was knighted, and made one of the farmers of the King's Customs. By his successful trade in foreign parts he enriched both his sovereign (King Charles I) and himself. He was strongly attached to his royal master, whose cause he supported both by his wealth and by personal service. He suffered for his loyalty under the Commonwealth, being compelled to retire to France, and having to rebuild his shattered fortunes when he returned to England. In 1660 he joined the City deputation of nine Aldermen and the Recorder appointed to wait on Charles II and tender him the allegiance of the citizens of London. He was soon afterwards reinstated in his office of Farmer of the Customs, and in 1665 was created a baronet. His principal trade was to the coast of Guinea, where he built, at his own expense, the fort of Cormantine. He died on 26th February, 1665, in his 67th year, leaving a very large estate to his grandson, Sir Nicholas Crispe. He was buried in the church of St. Mildred, Bread Street, but his heart was, by his own direction, entombed in an urn and placed below a bust of King Charles I, which he had in his lifetime placed in Hammersmith church. His splendid mansion at Hammersmith, built at a cost of £25,000, afterwards passed into the possession of many distinguished and noble owners.

In the case of the church of St. Michael,

Bassishaw, an exceptional opportunity was afforded for a thorough examination of its structure by the interval that elapsed between the removal of the human remains and the demolition of the fabric.

St. Michael Bassishaw is unique among city parishes in being at the same time both a parish and a ward. It consists of a single thoroughfare now called Basinghall Street, but described in the 17th century map of London, published by Ogilby and Morgan, as Bassishaw Street. It is bounded on the north by London Wall and on the south by Gresham Street. It includes all the official buildings attached to the Guildhall except the Justice Room and adjoining offices on the west side of Guildhall Yard, and the Irish Chamber, and part of the City of London Court on the east side. Portions of the Guildhall itself at its east and west ends are also in the Ward of Bassishaw, the remainder being in Cheap Ward.

Within the ward were also the halls of four of the City Companies, viz. :—the Coopers', Weavers', Girdlers', and Masons', whilst its contiguity to, and intimate connection with the Guildhall, made it a favoured residence from the earliest times of some of the most influential London families. In the south-west of the parish, and only separated from the Guildhall by the Guildhall Chapel, formerly stood the celebrated mansion known as Blackwell or Bakewell Hall. A building existed on this site from times of remote antiquity, and Stow considers that this house was originally the Bassingshaugh or hall, that is, the seat of the great family of the Basings, from whom both ward and parish take

their names. Other writers, however, are of opinion that there was an ancient family of Bassie or Basset distinct from that of the Basings, and Mr. H. T. Riley adduces in support of this view an entry in the City Records of 13th Richard II, A.D. 1390, which describes a felony committed "in the parish of St. Michael Bassieshawe in the ward of Bassyngeshawe."

Blackwell Hall, however, took its name from one Thomas Bakewell, who dwelt in this house in the thirty-sixth year of Edward III, 1363. Shortly afterwards, in 20 Richard II, 1397, the property passed into the possession of the Corporation of London, and became and long continued "a weekly market-place for all sorts of woollen cloths, broad and narrow, brought from all parts of this realm, there to be sold." In 1516, an Act of Common Council was passed making this the only market for woollen manufactures, and forbidding their sale in London at any other place than Blackwell Hall. The City gave the revenues of this market to Christ's Hospital, whose governors became its controlling authority. The hall was rebuilt in 1588, and being destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, was re-erected out of the hospital revenues in 1672; it was ultimately taken down to make way for the Bankruptcy Court in 1820. Hatton, in his "New View of London," 1708, states that the annual profit received by Christ's Hospital from the factors for their cloth pitchings was estimated at £1,100.

Among the more modern celebrities of the parish were:—Sir Dudley North, sheriff in 1682, who is said by Lord Macaulay to have expended £4,000 on the rich furniture of his

reception rooms ; Sir Jeremy Sambrook, the site of whose house is still identified by the Sambrook Court of to-day ; and the brothers James and Horace Smith, authors of "Rejected Addresses," who were born at No. 36, Basinghall Street, where their father, Mr. Robert Smith, an eminent solicitor, resided. In recent years two important public buildings have been erected by the Corporation on the west frontage of this street. In 1872 the new Library and Museum, which had for forty years previously been most insufficiently housed, were erected on a site extending from the east end of the Guildhall to Basinghall Street, at a cost, exclusive of fittings, of £25,000. The parish can now boast of an institution which is second to none in the City of London for its public usefulness, and which the Corporation of London have established and maintain for the free use of all comers without the cost of a single penny to the City ratepayers. The other new building is that devoted to the Public Health Department, and adjoins the Guildhall Library northwards. This handsome structure, though unfortunately shorn of its original proportions through the insistence by owners of the opposite property of their right to ancient lights, forms, nevertheless, an architectural embellishment to the parish of no slight importance.

Of inns and taverns of the larger sort, the parish has never boasted so many as are to be found in other parts of the city. This, by no means a serious loss, is doubtless accounted for by the extreme narrowness of the roadway, by reason of which such inns would have been inconvenient of

access to travellers and carriers. The "Bear Inn" is mentioned in Ogilby and Morgan's Map of 1677, and two 17th century tokens of Basinghall Street tavern-keepers or tradesmen are included in the Beaufoy Cabinet in the Guildhall Library. One, without date, was issued by George Starekey at the "White Horse," in Basinghall Street. The other is dated 1668, and was issued by Tho. Armestronge in Basinghall Street, the sign of his house being represented by an official in civil costume, which is probably intended for a Lord Mayor, Alderman, or some officer of the Corporation.

I have reserved for the last, the description of the most important building in the parish; the most important, at all events for our purposes this evening; I mean, of course, the Church of St. Michael, Bassishaw. As is the case in most of the City parishes, the antiquity of this Church ante-dates all existing records. The Rev. George Hennesy, whose monumental work upon the London clergy, published in 1898 (on the basis of Newcourt's *Repertorium*) is a most valuable contribution to London historical and archaeological literature, heads the list of rectors of whom any record exists with the name of one Ralph, who was appointed in the year 1286. Earlier notices of the church, however, are to be found. Newcourt states that the church was given to the prior and canons of St. Bartholomew in West Smithfield, by G. Bishop, of London, and mentions three 12th century prelates of that see whose Christian names began with G., namely, those elected in 1128, 1163 and 1199. Henry III confirmed to the priory the gift of this church, which he describes as St. Michael "Bassinges-

hagh." The same king, Stow relates, gave and confirmed in 1246 to Adam de Bassing, certain messuages in Aldermanbury and in Milk Street, and the advowson of the Church of Bassing's Hall. In 1305, the advowson was granted by Roger le Savage and Joan, his wife, to Sir John de Drakinsford, and after passing through the hands of various lay impropiators, finally passed to the dean and chapter of St. Paul's, in whose hands it has remained since 1435.

Very little information exists concerning the structure of the church. Stow, writing in 1598, speaks of St. Michael's as "a proper church lately re-edified or new-built, whereto John Barton, mercer, and Agnes his wife were great benefactors, as appeareth by his mark placed throughout the whole roof of the choir and middle aisle of the church. He deceased in 1460, and was buried in the choir, with this epitaph—

John Barton lyeth under here
 Sometimes of London citizen and mercer,
 And Jenet his wife, with their progenie
 Beene turned to earth as ye may see :
 Friends free what so ye bee
 Pray for us we you pray,
 As you see us in this degree
 So shall you be another day.

From Stow's statement it is clear that the older church occupied the same site as that of the building to which the Bartons so munificently contributed previous to the year 1460.

The church was extensively repaired in 1630, being, soon after, reduced to ashes in the Great Fire of 1666. The extensive repairs carried out so shortly before the great catastrophe had no doubt improve-

rished the parish and disheartened them in the task of re-building their church. The site lay in ruins for ten years, but the new building was begun by Wren in 1676 and finished in 1679. The dimensions of Wren's church were :—length, 70 feet ; width, 50 feet ; height, 42 feet ; and height of the tower, 75 feet. There were two bells.

Among the eminent citizens buried in this parish church were Sir James Yarford, Lord Mayor in 1519 ; Sir John Ayliffe, an eminent surgeon, and sheriff in 1548 ; Sir Wolston Dixie, Lord Mayor in 1585 ; Sir Leonard Halliday, Lord Mayor in 1605 ; Sir John Gresham, of whom I shall speak later, and several others of later times.

The church owes its doom, most unfortunately, to the praiseworthy efforts of the Rector, the Rev. J. Stephen Barrass, to repair and beautify it, shortly after his appointment in 1892. Some attempted alterations to the floor level necessitated the removal of the interments in the basement of the church, and the work had not long proceeded when it was found necessary to stay it through the danger which it involved to the foundations of the fabric. It was subsequently decided to pull down the church of St Michael, Bassishaw, and unite the benefice with that of St. Lawrence Jewry and St. Mary Magdalene, Milk Street. The union took effect upon the resignation of the Rev. M. S. A. Walrond, Vicar of the latter benefice, and the work of removing the human remains which had been suspended was actively resumed in January, 1899.

Through the courtesy of the Rev. J. Stephen Barrass, the present Rector, the Vestry of St. Michael's

Bassishaw, and their officials, I was accorded free access to the church during the progress of the work, and Mr. F. C. Eeles soon afterwards joined me in following the course of the excavations with a view to illustrate and describe such portions of the remains of the former church or churches of St. Michael as might be brought to light. For this purpose, the Council of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society have authorised the expense of procuring all necessary sketches and photographs, a selection from which has been made to illustrate this paper and that of Mr. Eeles. It was felt that the opportunity was very favourable for examining the re-construction by Sir Christopher Wren of one of his London churches. No doubt the methods which he pursued were similar in most cases, and an examination on so complete a scale will hardly be necessary in another case. The views had, for the most part, to be taken on very short notice, but being practically on the spot, I have been able to procure all that seemed necessary.

It is not often that a City building, whether church or hall, which passed through the terrible conflagration of 1666, shows much evidence of its ancient state beyond the fragments of sculptured stone which are sometimes found built into its walls. Occasionally, however, Sir Christopher Wren, hampered as he was by considerations of cost, speed, labour, and materials, made use of the sub-structures and even of portions of the walls of the old churches which he rebuilt with such marvellous genius after the Great Fire.

The south aisle was first excavated, and beneath its wall were discovered three arches, two of

which are shown in the illustration to Mr. Eeles's paper (p. 169.) Above them were two or three courses of 15th century work extending to the level of the present church. These arches were found to extend for some feet beneath the passage outside the wall of the church, and were filled with coffins. On the north side of the aisle were found similar arches (*see* illustration, p. 172), on which stood the pillars dividing the nave and aisle. This work probably belongs to the structure erected shortly before the year 1460, mainly through the liberality of John Burton, citizen and mercer of London, whose mark appeared in the roofs of the nave and choir.

One of the most interesting discoveries made during the demolition was that of the tomb of Sir John Gresham. At the eastern end of the south aisle, and within an arched recess, as shown in the illustration on p. 160, was found the vault of Sir John Gresham, who was Lord Mayor in 1547, and died in 1556. The inscription painted on the plaster coating of the vault is much defaced, but reads: "I H S. This vaute was made [f]or Sir Io[hn] [Gr]essam Knight, was ley[d in] it the xxx daie [of O]ctober, 1556." At the top was scratched in a running hand, over the painted letters I H S: "John Greshm knyght October 1556." Being on the wall at the end of the vault, the inscription escaped destruction in the Great Fire which consumed the tenant of the vault and his monument in the church above.

The funeral of this worthy knight, who died of a malignant fever on 23rd October, is described as one of special magnificence. Henry Machyn, the parish clerk and quaint old diarist, describes the "pennons



VAULT OF SIR JOHN GRESHAM AT END OF SOUTH AISLE,
 ST. MICHAEL, BASSISHAW.

of armes, elmett, targett, and sword, mantylles, goodly hersse of wax, and 12 dosen of stochyons." There were five dozen torches (for in those days the funerals took place at night) and black gowns for the aldermen, city officers, and others. All the church and the street were "hangyd with blak and armes grett store," and on the morrow three goodly masses were sung, and a goodly sermon preached by Master Harpfeld. The poor were not forgotten, and after was as great a dinner "as has bene sene for a fish-day" for all that came.

Sir John Gresham and his brother, Sir Richard, with whom he was in partnership, were foremost among the English merchants and financiers of the early Tudor period. He acted as agent for Cardinal Wolsey and Sir Thomas Cromwell, was a gentleman pensioner, and was assessed in the subsidy of 1535 for the large sum of 3,000 marks. His principal trade was with the Levant, and besides being a Merchant of the Staple and a leading member of the Merchant Adventurers' Company he was one of the founders of the Russia Company.

During his mayoralty, in 1547, he revived the costly pageant of the Marching Watch on the eve of St. John the Baptist, which had been suspended since 1524. The family seat was at Holt, in Norfolk, which Sir John purchased from his brother William and converted into a free grammar school under the charge of the Fishmongers' Company. His place of business was in Bassishaw Ward. His family mansion at Titsey, Surrey, has passed into the possession of his descendants, the family of Leveson-Gower. Sir John Gresham, his brother Sir Richard, and the latter's

more famous son, Sir Thomas Gresham, were all eminent members of the Mercers' Company.

Here was buried also Alderman Kirkman, sheriff-elect in 1780, who died at the age of thirty-nine from cold and exposure, in consequence of the energetic part which he took in suppressing the Gordon Riots. The sword buried with his remains is exhibited this evening through the courtesy of the Rector. The following is an account of the stirring scenes at his funeral:—"Military Funeral, Sunday aftⁿ 24 September 1780, accompanied from St. Geo. Fields by gen^l of military ass^{ns} and conducted to Blackfriars Br., where lord m. and corpⁿ joined. Procession was accomp^d by drums and fifes, trumpets sounding the Dead March, the London Foot Assocⁿ and the Light Horse Volunteers, with mounted bands, pall bearers, &c." The writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* says "the concourse of people assembled on this occasion was the greatest ever known."

Following the practice usually observed on like occasions, the monuments of St. Michael, Bassishaw, were, after the removal of the church, placed in the church of St. Lawrence Jewry, with which the benefice was united. The most interesting of the existing monuments is that from the east wall of the south aisle to the memory of Dr. Wharton, the celebrated physician of Charles II's reign, who stayed in London, as did the Lord Mayor, Sir John Lawrence, during the terrible plague year of 1665, to minister to the sufferings of the poorer citizens, when the wealthier sort had secured their own safety by flight. Dr. Wharton's monument is of marble, with four winged cherubs holding back drapery, two on either

side, with finely sculptured flowers below. His arms are displayed on a shield, sa. a manacle arg. Crest, a bull's head erased, arg.

Mr. F. C. Eeles kindly associated himself with me in the investigation conducted on behalf of the Society at the church of St. Michael, Bassishaw, and the result of his enquiry and conclusions will be found in a separate paper which follows.

It is a very pleasing duty to acknowledge the kind help which we have received from Mr. J. H. Edmonds, acting on behalf of the Vestry Clerk, Mr. Walter Beard; but for the facilities which Mr. Edmonds afforded, and his great zeal and personal services, it would have been impossible to have laid this account before the Society. To Mr. Watkins, the foreman of the works, our thanks are also due for his ready help at all times and for valuable suggestions derived from his long experience.
