

THE TEMPLE CHURCH AND ITS RESTORATION

BY LT.-COL. WILLIAM W. DOVE, C.B.E., T.D., D.L., F.S.A., C.C.

The original home of the Knights Templar, which they built in 1145, was just north-east of Chancery Lane. Sixteen years later (in 1161) they moved to a new site between Fleet Street and the River Thames. Here they built their new home which they called New Temple, and also their new church, round in plan, as was the original one.

In 1312 Pope Clement V suppressed the Order of the Templars and decreed that all their property should pass to the Hospitallers—the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. King Edward II ignored this decree and granted New Temple to the Earl of Pembroke, but twenty-two years later (1334) Parliament decreed that all the Templars' lands should go to the Hospitallers. Edward III ignored this decree, but fourteen years later (in 1348) New Temple was conveyed to the Prior of St. John of Jerusalem upon the payment of £100 by the Prior to the King for the consecrated portion of the land and a rental of £10 per year for the remainder of the land and buildings.

All Templar and Hospitaller Churches throughout the world were built on the same plan as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, namely with two parts, a round and an eastern choir, the latter usually with an apsidal end. The new Temple Church was on this plan, and the round portion had a floor diameter of 59 ft. 0 in., the lantern being 30 ft. 0 in. in diameter and carried on six clustered purbeck marble columns. The London Temple Church is smaller than its sister church in Paris, the corresponding dimensions being 62 ft. 0 in. and 35 ft. 0 in. The ground measurement of the Hospitallers' church in Clerkenwell was 65 ft. 0 in.: no portion of this church remains above ground level, but the outline of the round is indicated by granite sets on the surface of the road of St. John's Square. By contrast a Hospitallers' church in Little Maplestead in Essex, still intact though much restored, is only 35 ft. in diameter at ground level.

The first portion of the New Temple Church to be built was the round, which was dedicated to the Virgin Mary on 10 February 1185 by Heraclius, the Patriarch of the Church of the Holy Resurrection in Jerusalem, in the presence of King Henry II and his court. Heraclius also dedicated the Hospitallers' church in Clerkenwell on the same day, and in the same year the Manor of Maplestead was given to the Hospitallers. An interesting point is that whereas Templar churches were dedicated to the saints to whom the original churches had been dedicated, the Hospitaller churches were all dedicated to the order's patron saint, St. John the Baptist.

The choir to Temple Church, which comprises a central nave with two aisles, is 82 ft. long, 53 ft. wide and 37 ft. high. There are five bays with a stone-vaulted roof springing from the clustered stone columns. This portion of the church was dedicated 45 years after the round on Ascension Day 1230, King Henry III and his court being present on that occasion.

On the south side of the church, at the junction of the round and the choir, there once existed the Chapel of St. Anne, which was thought to have been built at the same time as the choir. It was of two storeys, the ceilings at both levels being stone-vaulted like the choir, and the area of each storey forming a double cube. It was in this chapel,

according to the historians, that novices were initiated into the Order of Knights Hospitallers. The chapel was also used as a depository for judicial records and writs. These were unfortunately destroyed in the disastrous fire known in the Temple as 'The Great Fire of 1678'. The fire spread so rapidly that in order to prevent it reaching the church the chapel was blown up with gunpowder. All that now remains of this chapel is the lower portion of the walls, which are now below the present ground level but can be seen by descending a brick manhole outside the church. It is recorded that this fire, which lasted over twelve hours, broke out about midnight in the chambers of one of the members named Thornbury who lived in Pump Court. All the buildings in this court, Hare Court and Brick Court and the Cloisters were destroyed. The River Thames, then considerably wider and consequently shallower than it is now (it did in fact extend almost up to the church), was frozen over at the time. The water supply for the hand-pumps was thus cut off, and they were fed with the beer from the Temple Cellars: needless to say, this supply soon ran out, and so gunpowder was used to blow up the chapel and prevent the fire spreading.

It is on record that the Lord Mayor went to the scene of the disaster with assistance. However, he could not resist this opportunity of pressing home the City's claim for jurisdiction over the Temple, and arrived at the scene with his swordbearer carrying the City sword upright, in front of him; distracted as the lawyers were, they would not suffer this indignity, and beat down the sword. The Lord Mayor departed angrily, but wrought his vengeance on the lawyers, for on his way back to the City he ordered a hand fire-pump coming from the City to help fight the fire to return, and then soothed his outraged dignity by getting royally drunk in a neighbouring tavern.

In the north-west corner of the choir is a narrow Norman doorway opening onto a winding staircase which leads to the triforium of the round; on the left of this staircase, about half-way up, is a penitential cell. This is built in the thickness of the wall and is 4 ft. 6 in. long and 2 ft. 6 in. wide, so constructed as to render it impossible for a grown man to lie down. Here were confined the disobedient brethren of the Order to suffer solitary confinement. The cell has two small openings to admit light and air, one looking eastwards so that the defaulter could see and hear the office being carried out at the High Altar, the other looking southwards into the round. At the bottom of the staircase there is a stone recess where bread and water for the defaulter were placed.

The triforium over the round was originally open to the sky having only a parapet around it. It may have been so built for defence purposes. What, however, is certain is that this roof was used by Londoners as a vantage-point to view the surrounding countryside, and this explains references to 'persons taking air on the leads of Temple Church'.

Over the period of years the church has undergone many restorations occasioned by general decay, neglect, fire and so on. In 1682 Sir Christopher Wren was the architect for a restoration which included a complete repaving of the church. He replaced the stone paving with black and white marble squares; added oak wainscoting to the walls up to the cill level of the windows; fixed a new altar and reredos executed by the famous carver Grinling Gibbons; provided a new pulpit and new pewing throughout; and added an organ screen between the round and the choir. The re-opening service after this restoration took place on 11 February 1683. The next major restoration was undertaken by Robert Smirke in 1825, when the whole of the inside of the walls on the south side of the choir and all the lower portion of the walls of the round were refaced with

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stone. The works were completed in 1827 at a cost of about £2,300. Restoration work was recommenced in 1840 under the supervision of Sidney Smirke and James Savage. In this scheme the outer walls of the choir and the round were rebuilt, a new roof (conical in shape) was put on the round, and the great wheel window at the west end of the church was opened up and repaired (this window had been blocked up with masonry or brickwork in 1700 when a house was built over the west porch). The paving Wren had put in was taken up, the floor level lowered, and specially designed ceramic tiles were made and laid. The Wren altar, reredos, pulpit and pews were removed and sold and were replaced by others of a new design; the accumulation of plaster and paint was removed from the columns and the building was restored generally to something like its original state. The Chapel of St. Anne, however, was not rebuilt. The initial estimate for this scheme was about £3,000, but more and more work was undertaken over the years, and the final cost was £53,000. The work was completed in 1846 and the Queen Dowager visited the church. She was the first Queen to have set foot in the church since Queen Elizabeth had done so some 300 years before.

The next large-scale restoration was made necessary by enemy action which caused the greatest fire and damage the Temple has ever suffered. It is interesting to note that whereas in the year 1678 the Temple Church was saved from destruction by fire by the use of explosive, it was fire and high explosive which destroyed it some 263 years later, for on the night of 10 May 1941 incendiary bombs rained down on the Temple and the Church, and very soon the wooden roofs of the round and choir were on fire. The blazing timbers in the centre portion of the round crashed to the ground within the walls, where the chairs and other combustible materials were soon ablaze. The round, now roofless, became a vast chimney for the blazing timbers which, fanned by the air rushing through the now glassless windows, turned the fire into an inferno which caused the stonework to split and crack with the heat; the most serious damage to the stonework being at the seat of the fire, namely ground level and 10 to 20 ft. above. Though a large number of incendiary bombs fell on the nave roof the fire which resulted did not penetrate the stone-vaulted ceiling; however, the blaze from the round very quickly spread to the pews and other woodwork in the choir, destroying everything of a combustible nature. Again, the heat played havoc with the stonework and the glass in the windows, and the church became a complete wreck. Only the walls, the stone columns (all badly damaged) and the stone-vaulted ceiling (partly damaged) remained—a very sorry sight indeed.

As soon as possible the Middle Temple Surveyor, the late Mr. George Swanson, made an inspection of the ruins, and organized immediate first-aid repairs. His first aim being to make the building as watertight as possible, he roofed over the choir and triforium with asbestos sheeting, and the round with a precast-concrete slab which when in position was covered with asphalt. The columns and voussoirs in the round were so badly shattered that they were in great danger of collapse, so a licence for the fabrication of a steel grillage to support the whole structure of the round was given by the Ministry of Works; the columns in the choir, though badly damaged, were not in such a bad condition as those in the round, and brick piers were erected round each of them. So the building remained until 1947, when a detailed survey of the damage was made.

Due to the unwillingness of the Ministry of Works to issue a building licence for work on the church until the repairs to the damaged chambers and Middle Temple Hall had been completed, restoration could not start until 1948, and the licence then issued was

only for work on the choir, the organ chamber and the vestries. It was almost six years to the day after the commencement of the work that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Fisher, reconsecrated the choir in March 1954.

Work on the choir completed, the restoration of the round was started. This work entailed not only the complete restoration of the interior but alterations in the design of the triforium in order to give additional headroom, and a new design for the roof of the round more in accordance with that of the original building. The work on the round took four years, so after ten years of very exacting and detailed work the Temple Church was once more a complete building; and it was rededicated on 7 November 1958 by the Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Fisher) in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

The following brief description of the restoration may be of interest. I have referred to the way in which the fire split and cracked the stonework, and the damage caused in this way was enormous. However, it did reveal something which as far as I am aware was unknown, namely that the columns of purbeck marble, which had been treated with a varnish to give them the highly polished effect we so well remember, had in fact only a veneer of purbeck. We found that the original columns were of clunch, a soft stone which is very easily worked. It is thought that it was during the restoration of 1840–1845 that the clunch-stone of the columns, the face of which no doubt was badly decayed and worn, was roughly cut back to a solid face and the 3 in. purbeck marble veneer then fixed on the face of the old. Purbeck marble was extensively used in the structure of medieval cathedrals and churches, and also for monuments and grave slabs, but it has been little used in modern times; consequently the quarries had virtually ceased operating for many years, but when the restoration began I was able to arrange with Mr. W. Haysom (whose family had owned the quarry for generations) that he should restart quarrying, and so we were able to build the columns both in the choir and the round in solid purbeck marble.

Looking round the choir, visitors may notice that some of the columns are not perpendicular. This is not due to incompetence on the part of the masons but because when fixing the new columns we had to build off the original foundations (which survived undamaged beneath the floor) and finish at the springing of the original stone vaulting, which fortunately was still intact though damaged in places: over the period of 700 years there had been a certain amount of shrinkage in the subsoil, and this had caused some subsidence, the result of which visitors may now see. Before the fractured columns could be removed it was necessary to support the whole weight of the vaulted ceilings, arches and roof on specially-made wooden centres. These massive wood frames, supported on huge wooden legs from floor level, were wedged tightly under the stone arches and vaulting, where they remained until the new columns had been erected. The next operation was to remove the wooden centres and transfer the weight from them onto the columns. To do this we made use of bottle-jacks to take the weight while the wooden wedges between the centres and the arches and vaulting were removed, and on a given signal from the foreman the men on the jacks lowered them one quarter of a turn at a time until the weight had been transferred to the columns. It was, of course, only possible to carry out this operation one centre at a time, and the centres on the north and south side of the church were lowered alternately. This was a very tricky undertaking for it was not possible to know if the columns, which were not perpendicular, would deflect

in any way. It was estimated that the load coming down on to each column was about 80 tons, but thanks to the skill of the foreman, Mr. A. H. Bernard, and the team-spirit of all those who took part in this operation, it was completed without any mishap.

Visitors may remember that before the last war the vaulted ceiling and the arches were painted in Victorian floral stencil-work with the symbols of the two inns figuring in each bay. I am glad to say that I was able to persuade the Choir Committee responsible for the restoration of the work, under the chairmanship of Master Kenneth Carpmael Q.C., not to reinstate the damaged stencil-work but to do away with all of it, and I am sure the church now looks not only more magnificent but bigger than it did before, and has now much more of its original dignity and grandeur.

History has repeated itself in many ways throughout the existence of the building. In his restoration of 1682 Sir Christopher Wren took up the existing paving and replaced it with black and white marble; in 1846 Sir Sidney Smirke took this marble paving up and replaced it with specially designed ceramic tiles; in 1950 Mr. Walter Godfrey, the architect in charge of the restoration, had the ceramic tiles taken up and new purbeck Portland stone paving laid. However, Mr. Godfrey did not discard the tiles but had them laid in the new floor of the triforium. Again, Wren arranged his new pewing collegiate style, facing inwards, north and south, with a centre aisle; Smirke changed this and arranged his new pewing to face east without a centre aisle; Godfrey with his new pewing returned it to the collegiate style. Wren put in a new reredos; Smirke removed this and replaced it with one of his own design; the Wren reredos which had been sold found a resting place in the Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle, County Durham, and thanks to the generosity of the Trustees of that Museum it is now back in its original position. Smirke replaced the original flat roof of the round with a conical one; Godfrey reverted to the flat roof with battlements.

The stained glass east window, designed and made by Carl Edwards, is the gift of the Glaziers' Company. It depicts incidents in the history of the Temple, the coats-of-arms of the two inns being shown on their respective sides of the church. It is unfortunate that the whole of the window is not seen, part of the lower portion being obstructed by the reredos; but it was in position before it was known that Wren's reredos was to come back. All the other furniture in the church except the font, which was only slightly damaged, is made to Mr. Godfrey's design; the two chairs in the chancel were presented by the South African Bar Association and made in South Africa of South African timber by South African craftsmen.

In the round, there are nine monumental effigies of knights clad in chain armour. Some authorities think these effigies represent not Knights Templar (for effigies of such knights were always shown wearing the habit of their order) but associates of the Temple. Whoever they represent they are of great historic interest and certainly are monumental tomb slabs of knights of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Though steps had been taken to protect them from damage they were severely calcined when the building was destroyed. When the building work had been completed it was decided that they should be restored; and Mr. H. Haysom, the mason who had worked on the rebuilding of the church and round and was a brother of the Purbeck quarry owner, was entrusted with the task of piecing the fragments together—and an excellent job he made of it after eighteen months of infinite patience. The figures had already been thoroughly repaired about a hundred years ago when all the pieces then missing, such as noses, hands, and swords, were

restored in plaster. In a niche in the south wall at the east end of the church there is a Purbeck tomb of a bishop, said to be Silvester Du Evenden, Bishop of Carlisle 1247–1255. Fortunately this escaped with very little damage.

In the restoration of 1840 all the mural and other monuments were removed from the nave of the round and fixed on the walls of the triforium, as were also the two magnificent seventeenth-century monuments of Plowden and Martin. In 1936 my firm was entrusted with the work of removing these two monuments from the triforium and re-erecting them in the position they now occupy. Fortunately they were bricked up during the war and so suffered no structural damage, but the paintwork had deteriorated and they have now been thoroughly cleaned and redecorated.

During the rebuilding operation we made some interesting historical finds and in giving a brief description of them I shall in places quote from the paper which Mr. Walter Godfrey read to the Society of Antiquaries in 1951. He says:

It seems to have been the usual practice with these round churches to build a short unaisled chancel terminating in an apse.

When the damaged pavement of the choir was removed my first desire was to discover if there remained any foundations of the original apsidal termination of the old chancel. The ground had been very much disturbed by burials, and the large brick channels for heating pipes which were built in line with the piers, on their inner sides, had removed all traces of lateral foundations. I did, however, find part of a cross-wall of unusual thickness, the eastern face of which was some 47 ft. distant from the round. The foundations were not far below the surface and the eastern face was tolerably intact, but on the west the stonework was broken away. I judged it to have been about 5 ft. thick, and it would appear to have represented either a square east end, or more probably the chord of the apse.

I had resigned myself to my disappointment in failing to discover more definite evidence when it was noticed that part of the walls of the south aisle continued down below the floor, indicating as we thought at first that this section at least of the choir had been built with an undercroft. The walls had been rendered with a fine plaster and were in an excellent state of preservation, and it was resolved, with the ready consent of the Benchers, to have the area fully excavated.

The necessary building licence to proceed with the work was obtained, thanks to the assistance given by Mr. Chettle, F.S.A., of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments. As a result of the digging a chamber 42 ft. long, 13 ft. wide and 6 to 7 ft. high was disclosed, the western wall of which was roughly in line with the west wall of the choir. On the north and south sides there was a stone seat along the full length of the walls, on which were slender wall shafts, one in each corner and two in between, thus dividing the building into three bays. The bases of the shafts are still intact and traces of carving on the lower moulding could be seen. The shaft in the south-west corner was complete, with the original capital carved with stiff foliage and a bead enrichment, and from this capital it was possible to date the building to the latter part of the twelfth century: the building therefore could not have been the undercroft of the choir as the latter was not built until the thirteenth century. There was no trace of any stone paving, but it would seem by the way the ground had been rammed that, had there been, it would have been laid direct upon the earth. The walls were plastered, and circles incised in the plaster

with compasses (evidently done by the mason when setting out the curves for the arches when building the thirteenth century choir), are still clearly visible.

There had evidently been an altar at the east end, for on the south wall there is a double piscina, square in plan, the eastern basin being rebated for a cover. East of the piscina are two stone lockers still retaining the hinges for the doors, and on the south wall the vertical joints of the splays of two windows, one window in each bay, still remain. The windows had been built up and the inside plastered, evidently while the building was still in use. On the eastern end of the north wall there is a small section of mural decoration, and a very faint hint of colouring can be seen on the south wall.

Mr. Godfrey was of the opinion that the slender columns would not have been strong enough to support an upper building, and therefore that this could never have been an undercroft but a building outside the church. As the ground sloped southwards the windows now blocked up would originally have been functional. But what was the building?

There is a vast amount of evidence that the Templars played a great part, not only in fighting for the Christian faith, but in allowing their houses and buildings to be used as depositories for public and private treasure. It is recorded that monies collected in the national subsidies in medieval times were often ordered to be delivered at the New Temple, London; further, Kings and their richer subjects made use of the House of the Templars, as we today use a bank. Certainly the Round Church in Paris was used as a Royal Treasury, so it seem likely that this building, which came to light as a result of enemy action, was used for a similar purpose. In fact it would have had a dual purpose, for it was also used as a chapel, the double piscina indicating this, while the cupboards appear to have afforded security.

The supposition that the building was used as a treasury was reinforced by the fact that the windows had not only been bricked up but plastered on the inside. Stow relates that the Templars acted as bankers, jewels and other personal possessions being deposited with them for safe keeping. While Hubert de Burch, Earl of Kent in 1232, was a prisoner in the Tower, King Henry III heard that much of his treasure was stored in the Treasury of the Temple and ordered the Master of the Temple to deliver it to him. The Master refused to comply without the Earl's consent: this was easily obtained, and the key to the Treasury House was then delivered to the King. Stow also relates how in 1282 King Edward I, while at the Temple on the pretext of looking for his mother's jewels which were kept in the Treasury House, entered it, broke open the coffers of persons who had deposited monies there, and left with cash to the value of some £1,000. It is possible to view the remains of the supposed treasury, and access is obtained by means of the stairs within the south porch.

Another interesting discovery was the tomb of John Selden, the exact position of which was not known. Anthony Wood in *Athenae Oxonienses* says that the grave was on the south side of the round walk. Aubrey in his *Minutes of Lives* says:

On Thursday 14th of December [1654] he was magnificently buried in the Temple Church . . . His grave was about 10 ft. deepe or better, walled up a good way with bricks of which also the bottome was paved but the sides at the bottome for about 2 ft. high were of black polished marble wherein his coffin (covered with black bayes) lyeth and upon the wall of marble was presently let down a huge marble stone of great thicnesse with the inscription:

Hic Jacet Corpus Johanni Seldeni qui obit 30 die Novembris 1654.

In the Temple Church register the record reads:

John Selden esquire a learned and judicious antiquary and of the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple—a bencher was buried in the Temple Church neare the steps where the Saints bell hangeth—in a sepulcher of marble 5 ft. in the ground with the inscription:

‘Haec Inhumatur Corpus Johannis Selden j Decem Anno Domini 1654.’

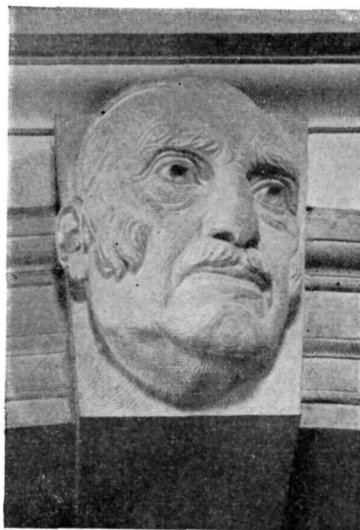
In the above position was found the grave of marble cased in brick, with the inscribed marble slab still in position, though fractured across. The inscription varies slightly from the Temple records.

Two other brick tombs were found adjoining that of Selden, both without any inscription: one of these is believed to be the grave of Roland Jewkes (d. 1665), an old friend of Selden and one of his four executors. The tombs have not been disturbed but have been carefully sealed and remain in position on the floor of the newly discovered chamber, while let into the floor at the choir level over Selden’s grave is a large piece of glass paving so that it is possible to see the grave and read the inscription. These finds bring to light more of the history of this ancient Church.

The building had suffered such extensive damage from the fire that it was virtually a dangerous structure, so the work of restoration was not a simple operation but one requiring great thought and vision: before any stone or portion of the building could be cut into or removed steps had to be taken to ensure that no other portion would be weakened in any way by hasty action. Thanks to the untiring work, skill and patience of my general foreman, Mr. A. H. Bernard, the masons, carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers and labourers—in fact all the craftsmen who had a hand in the restoration work—this very complicated and dangerous undertaking was completed in ten years. It had originally been expected that the work would take 15 years.

I must record my most grateful thanks to Master Kenneth Carpmael Q.C., the Chairman of the Church Choir Committee which was responsible for the rebuilding work; to the late Mr. George Swanson, the surveyor of the Middle Temple, and to his assistant, Mr. W. Shephard, and his staff; and to the architect, the late Mr. Walter H. Godfrey C.B.E., F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., and his son Emil, for the great encouragement and help they gave to me and my staff at all times.

Over the past hundred odd years my firm has been entrusted with the work of restoring many ancient and historic buildings throughout the country, and during my years with it I have always given such works special attention. I can say without hesitation that, in spite of the difficulties, the problems and the anxious moments with which the restoration of the Temple Church confronted me, no other undertaking has given me greater satisfaction or pleasure. I am indeed proud, not only to have been entrusted with this work, but to have had such a magnificent and keen team of craftsmen to carry it out; and I thank God that it was completed without any accident or mishap to any person or to any portion of the structure.



Colonel William Dove.
Carved corbel stone at
St. Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside