

Old London

CONTINUING THE DELIGHTFUL Lecture recently given at the British College of Nurses, Ltd., by the Research Historian, Mr. H. L. Bryant Peers, we deal in this issue with the foundation of many of the old City Churches.

Some Old City Churches.

The lecturer told us that there were twice as many churches before the Great Fire as there are today. At present there are approximately 53, and he dealt with just a few :—

St. Ethelburga, Bishopsgate Within, is said to be the oldest foundation in London, and was dedicated to Ethelburga, the daughter of Ethelbert, King of Kent, who was the first Saxon King to become a Christian. This church was rebuilt in the fourteenth century. Admission to this church is only gained through an archway between two shops in Bishopsgate.

St. Sepulchre, Holborn Viaduct. In the twelfth century the foundation was given to the Prior and Canons of St. Bartholomew, a gift conferred by Henry III in 1253. The larger part of the Church was destroyed in the Great Fire, and later rebuilt.

In 1605, Robert Donne left a sum of money to the church for that on every execution day at Newgate (just opposite) a person should visit the window of the condemned prisoners' dungeon and there ring a handbell with twelve double strokes to call attention to a discourse which the person afterwards was to deliver "with a loud and audible voice" to the prisoners, to impress them with a proper sense of their condition. It was further stipulated that St. Sepulchre's largest bell should toll as a passing bell on execution mornings.

St. Stephen, Walbrook. Between the years 1100-35 the original church was given to the monastery of St. John at Colchester. How long it had then been in existence is not known. After being rebuilt and repaired in different centuries it was completely destroyed in the Fire of London; rebuilt by Wren in 1679, it has been described as a cathedral in miniature.

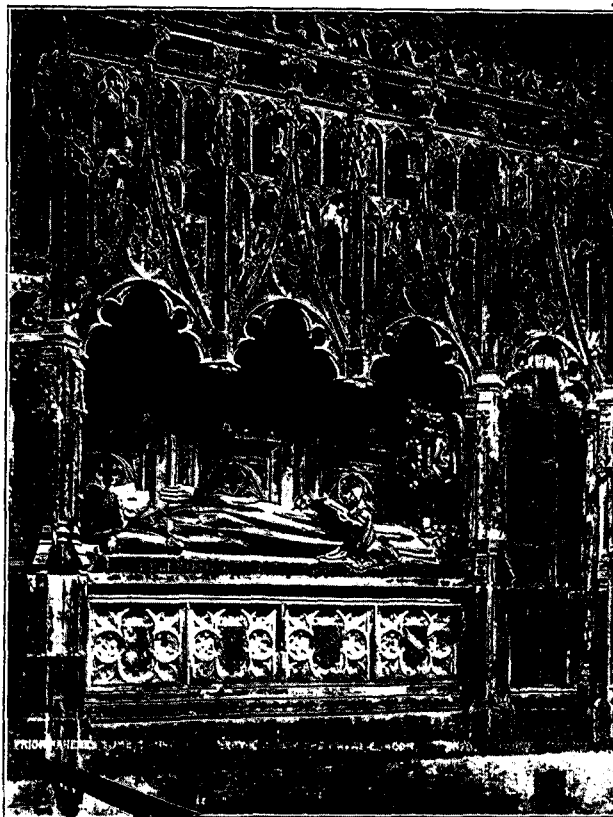
St. Stephen, Coleman Street. It is said that the original church was "sometime a synagogue of the Jews," but this has never been proved. It is certain, however, that it was at some time a chapel to St. Olave, Jewry, which, no doubt, accounts for the synagogue legend. The church dates back to 1183 and maybe earlier. It became a parish church in 1466, but was destroyed by the Great Fire; the present building being the work of Wren.

St. Peter on Cornhill. If the legend of Lucius could be relied on, the original church of St. Peter Cornhill was the first erected in London, but experts say that this is not so.

St. Mildred, Bread Street, Cheapside, has a very ancient origin, for the records state that "The Lord Trenchaunt of St. Albans, Knight" was buried there about 1300. It perished in the Great Fire, was rebuilt by Wren in 1683, but it is stated that the present church is not greatly changed from the original, and remains practically the same as when Wren built it. The Registers of the Parish are said to be perfect from 1559.

St. Mary le Bow (Bow Church), Cheapside, is the most famous church in the City and the bells still rang out until badly bombed in 1940 and 1941. The old church has a stirring history; in 1090 the roof was carried away by the wind; in 1196 it was set on fire to drive out William Fitz-Osbert, and in 1271 part of the steeple fell and killed many people. In 1284 a murder was committed in the church for which 16 men were hanged and a woman burned. Repaired in 1620 it was totally destroyed by the Great Fire. It was rebuilt by Wren 1671-1680.

St. Clement, Eastcheap, is interesting because Purcell, the composer, was at one time organist there. It was destroyed by the Great Fire, and the present building designed by Wren.



THE TOMB OF RAHERE
St. Bartholomew-the-Great

St. Bartholomew the Great, West Smithfield, which comprises part of the church of the priory of St. Bartholomew, is the oldest parochial church in London. The ancient hospital and priory were founded by Rahere, a jester and minstrel of the Court of Henry I in 1123. In the tower are five old bells dating from before 1500. The architecture is mainly Norman. Within the Communion Rails is the tomb of Rahere, the first Prior and Founder. During the nineteenth century the tomb was opened, and in a glass case in the North transept may now be seen the skeleton of Rahere, also part of a sandal which was found with it.

St. Andrew, Holborn, referred to in A.D. 971, how much earlier was its foundation the records do not show. Rebuilt during the fifteenth century, nothing further seemed to have been done until Wren took in hand the edifice which had escaped the Great Fire. Other repairs are recorded as in 1851 and 1872.

All Hallows, Barking by the Tower, Great Tower Street, was an ancient appurtenance of the Abbey or Convent of Barking in Essex, whence the name is derived. It was probably built about A.D. 680 for the convent of Barking. The first church, therefore, would appear to have been built some 400 years before the Tower of London. The parish books record that the church was rebuilt in 1020, repaired in 1634, also in 1814-36 and subsequently.

All Hallows had a very narrow escape during the Great Fire.

St. Pauls Cathedral. From about A.D. 260 there are records that a church stood there, and that it was destroyed about 290.

During the reign of Constantine the Great, who died in 337, this church is said to have been rebuilt, to be destroyed later by Saxon invaders, and re-erected by Ethelbert, King of Kent about 604. Thus church seems to have been burnt

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