

**MEMORIALS OF THE PARISH  
CHURCH OF BOW; OR, ST. MARY  
STRATFORD BOW, COMMONLY  
CALLED BOW CHURCH**

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Memorials of the Parish Church of Bow; or, St. Mary Stratford Bow, Commonly called Bow Church by W. P. Insley

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**W. P. INSLEY**

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BOW CHURCH 1880.

Memorials of  
THE PARISH CHURCH OF BOW;  
OR  
ST. MARY STRATFORD BOW,  
COMMONLY CALLED  
BOW CHURCH.

BY THE  
REV. W. P. INSLEY, M.A.,  
RECTOR OF BOW, AND FELLOW OF SIGMUND COLLEGE, LONDON.



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1885.

*Good old Middlesex  
16° 1.*

## PREFACE.



I can hardly venture to expect, though I should be glad to learn otherwise, that much of what is contained in the following pages will have more than a local interest, and indeed the primary object of this little work is to show the parishioners of Bow how historically interesting is the venerable edifice which stands in their midst. Still, it is possible that this may come into other hands than those of the Residents in the immediate neighbourhood, and it seems necessary, therefore, to explain to them that it was written for those who were acquainted with and interested in the locality to which it relates; and consequently some knowledge of the names of places and persons mentioned has been assumed. For the benefit of strangers,

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however, I will just add that the Parish of Bow or St. Mary Stratford Bow, stands at the extreme eastern point of the County of Middlesex, and is bounded by the River Lea, which divides Middlesex from Essex. The Church, a conspicuous object in that part of London, is within a hundred yards of the banks of the River, and is universally called in its own neighbourhood "Bow Church," while the bridge which spans the River behind it is still known, as it was in the days of Defoe, as "Bow Bridge."

In addition to the foregoing explanation I have also to acknowledge my obligation to my friend and predecessor, the Rev. G. T. Driffeld, for interesting information on several points.

THE RECTORY, BOW, E.

*March, 1885.*



## MEMORIALS OF "BOW CHURCH."

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*Landator temporis acti.*

*Horace, de Arte Poet*

They dreamt not of a perishable home,  
Who thus did build.

Few things are more interesting to the lover of History than the search into the actual relics of days long past and gone. Old Buildings, Monuments, and Records have each their story to tell, if their inscriptions can but be rightly deciphered or their characteristics correctly traced. Silent witnesses they are of the ages which have fled; but witnesses whose silence may be rendered eloquent, if it be correctly translated by one who has studied them with affectionate interest and care. Such an attempt has been briefly made in the following pages with respect to the Old Parish Church of Bow.

The name of Bow, Bowe, Bogh or le Bow, as it is variously written, is derived from the bridge built over the River Lea about the year 1110 or 1130, and attributed by popular consent to the Empress Maud, daughter of Henry I, who is said to have built it in consequence of her narrow escape from drowning when fording the river. Leland, however, who lived in the Reign of Henry VIII, and is usually a most trustworthy authority, states that the bridge, which he says was one of the first stone bridges ever erected in England, was built—not by the Empress Maud—but by her mother, Queen Matilda, wife of Henry I, and describes it as having been built at Stratford, afterwards called from this Stratford de Arcubus, or Stratford le Bow—the Latin word *Arcubus* or *Arcus* signifying both “Arch” and “Bow.” I cannot do better than quote his words. “Matilda, wife of Henry I, having herself been well washed in the water, caused two bridges to be builded in a place one mile distant from the old ford, of the which one was situated over Lee, at the head of the town of Stratford, nowe called Bowe, a rare piece of work, for before that time the like had never been seen in

England."\* This latter account, after a careful investigation of the probabilities of the case, though sorry to disturb a venerable tradition, I am inclined to prefer. The Empress Maud passed a considerable portion of her earlier life in Germany, and was certainly living there at the reputed date of the erection of the bridge; whereas Queen Matilda, who was Saxon by birth, and was much attached to and beloved by her English subjects, was Abbess of the Convent of Barking; and in her visitations of that Institution, would frequently have had occasion to cross the River Lea, as she travelled from London, and had doubtless often experienced the dangers and inconveniences of the ford.†

The name of Stratford is a corruption of Straight or Strait ford, and is derived as follows. Before any bridge existed over the river Lea, travellers from London to Essex, journeying along the road where the Bow Road runs now, on arriving at the river,

\* Leland's Collectanea.

† This bridge of Queen Matilda's was in existence until some fifty years ago, when, having become dilapidated and beginning to be regarded as unsafe, it was removed to make way for the present structure.