

**THE CHURCHES OF  
THE CITY  
OF LONDON**

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The churches of the city of London by Herbert Reynolds

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**HERBERT REYNOLDS**

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CITY OF LONDON  
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BEING A SHORT HISTORY  
of the City Churches. Illustrated  
with Fifty-Four Original Drawings of  
the Towers and Steeples by the Author



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## INTRODUCTION

**T**IME works strange mutations in all human affairs. It is no cause for wonder, then, that London should have lost much of its ancient surroundings; the marvel is that so many of its old landmarks still remain. Portions of the famous Roman Wall may still be traced, some of the towers of which were in existence not much more than a century ago.

London of to-day stands upon the site of a city many times destroyed and as oft rebuilt, yet has not shifted from the scene of its earliest occupation. The distant views of the 'Metropolis of the World' reveal the landmarks of many centuries. The St. Paul's of to-day stands upon the same site as the early minster founded by Ethelbert, King of Kent, in 610. The towers of Westminster mark the spot on which was reared the church begun by Sebert and completed 360 years later, receiving the name of Westminster because of its position west of St. Paul's. The third landmark is also with us to-day, and has 'marked time' for many centuries; we refer to the White Tower of the keep of the Tower of London. It remains, even to its white bleached stones, rendered so by the rain and wind of the passing years. Besides these three principal landmarks may be seen the towers, turrets, and steeples of the City churches: thirty-four rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren after the great conflagration of 1666, nearly all upon the sites

of the older churches, ten built after his time, and nine others that escaped the ravages of the Great Fire. The Tower or Steeple may be regarded as the completed work of the architect and builder. The laying of the Foundation Stone is an important event often attended with much ceremony, but there must always be a feeling of satisfaction when the topmost stone is set, and the 'something attempted' becomes the 'something done'; the idea is expressed in the words of the Master Himself: 'Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply after he hath laid down the foundation and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, this man began to build and was not able to finish.' This thought must filter through the minds of many as they get a view from the street of the finished work appearing above the house-tops. Wren seems to have had a vision of the future, when perchance much of the lower part of the structures he was erecting would be hidden from view, and thus it seems he put his best work into the towers and steeples of the churches he rebuilt in what are now the busiest parts of London. This idea is clearly demonstrated, for if we walk almost in a straight line, west to east from the Law Courts, Fleet Street to the Tower, the first to catch our eye is the lofty steeple of St. Bride, the highest in the City, just a step back from busy Fleet Street; then again in Cheapside, above the rush and turmoil of the traffic, we get a view of the tower and spire of St. Mary-le-Bow,



considered by many to be his most beautiful creation. Further east, turning slightly north, we get a glimpse of St. Michael's, Cornhill; then back again towards Eastcheap, into perhaps the busiest part of all, above the din, confusion and smell of Billingsgate, rise the graceful towers of St. Dunstan's and St. Magnus, the body of the church, in each case, being hidden more or less from our view. Thus it seems the great architect anticipated what might happen in part concerning his handiwork, but one questions whether he ever thought of their wanton destruction.

The demolition of the City churches began in the year 1871, with the removal of St. Christopher-le-Stocks (the first of Sir C. Wren's churches to go), since which time as many as twenty-one, eighteen of which were the work of the great architect, have been swept away. After a short respite the work of destruction is about to recommence. We would plead for their retention upon the basis of an historical fact, apparently overlooked, that the citizens of London, in spite of plague and fire, preferred to submit to further taxation (one shilling per chaldron on coal) rather than sell the sites of their ancient churches and, with the money thus gained, build new ones elsewhere, realizing that this meant the desecration of the graveyards of their honoured dead, and the removal of the edifice from a close association with its historic past.

Thus the citizens of a less enlightened age put to shame the Vandal of to-day, who, for purely pecuniary gain, would destroy nineteen of these priceless ancient architectural heirlooms which have

remained for well-nigh two centuries and a half, silent though eloquent witnesses to the homage and unselfishness of the people of London who, thirty-one years after the Great Fire, had expended more than £253,000 upon their restoration, and who, when St. Paul's was declared finished by the Act of the 9th of Anne, 1711, had spent the huge total of well-nigh one million pounds, raised by taxation and from private benevolence. Surely their willingness to give and to work should have some claim upon our regard, and be an incentive to preserve, rather than destroy, that which they, by patience and perseverance, have bequeathed.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The writer is indebted to W. Jeffrey, the author of a very excellent little book published in 1824, entitled 'London Parishes'; and to a number of other works that he has been able to scan, through the unfailing courtesy and help of the attendants at the Guildhall Library. Mention must also be made of a book entitled 'The Old City Londiniensis, Antiquities, Memories, Faith,' by James Graham Churcher. The Author's thanks are also due to Mr. William E. Rickwood, who has kindly reviewed the text.

It should be added that the sketches of the towers and steeples reproduced in this book were made by the author from the actual structures, and not from photographs. In fact, it would in many cases be

almost impossible to obtain a properly focused photographic view of any of the towers or steeples here represented. Photographs that have been secured of the tower or steeple have generally been taken from the roof of a neighbouring building, and in consequence appear as more or less flat views, lacking the light and shade so essential to a pleasing picture, and in any case do not represent the view familiar to the City man—namely, the view from the street. To make these sketches from the street has been in many instances a matter of no small difficulty, as, with many, a view can only be obtained from an acute angle in a busy thoroughfare. The author had some adventures while making the drawings, but everywhere met with the greatest courtesy and interest from all who noted him at his work, and now that the work has been completed he feels that it was well worth the time and the trouble expended.