

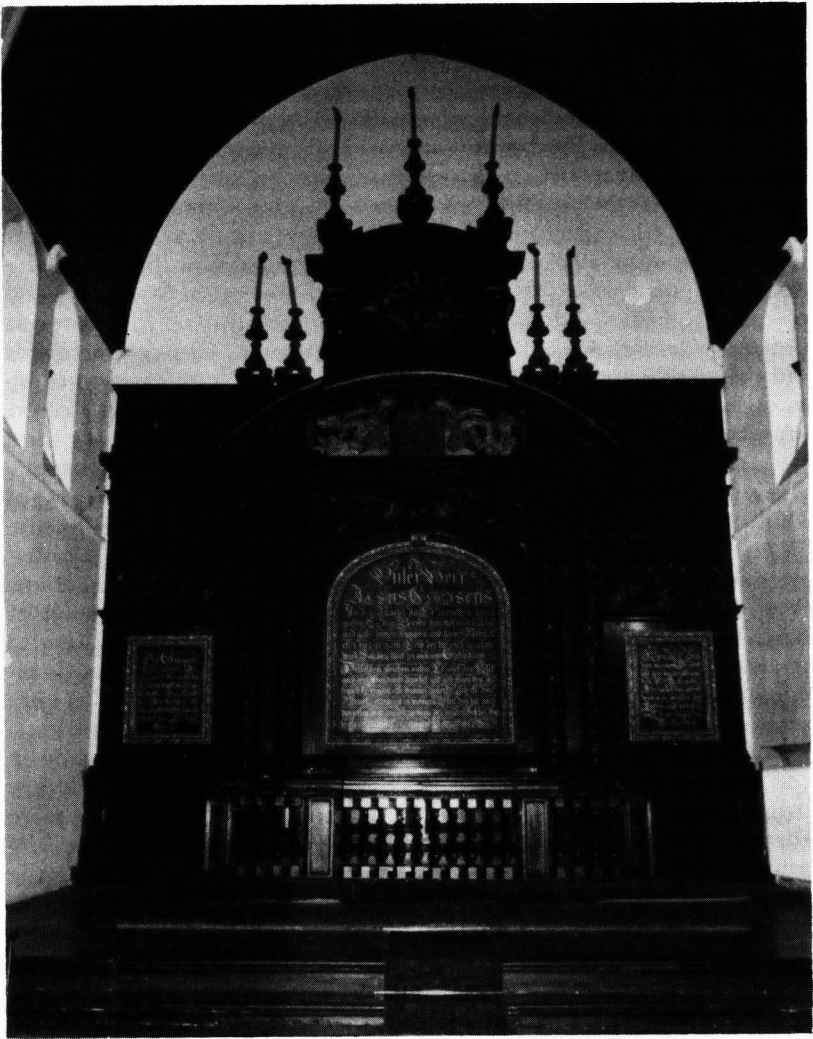
THE REREDOS WHICH SLIPPED THROUGH THE NET

by Susan Gold

One day in the Autumn of 1981 the Chairman of the Ancient Monuments Society, the Secretary, the Assistant Secretary and Mrs. Sarah Webster, who was then a member of the staff, got into a taxi outside St. Paul's and headed east in great excitement. They had been offered an opportunity to see an important church fitting, a reredos from the late 17th century in the style of Grinling Gibbons, which had just come to light and was facing an uncertain future. There had been awareness of it during the late 19th century and again at the outbreak of the Second World War, when arrangements for its safety had been discussed, but it had slipped into oblivion during the interim period. Gerald Cobb, whose knowledge of City churches is encyclopaedic and whom I later took to see it, confessed that he had been unaware of its existence: it is not mentioned in Robert Harrison's extensive survey of the dispersal of furniture and fittings of City churches¹, nor in the relevant volume of Pevsner's *Buildings of England*, neither does it appear on the list of Buildings of Architectural and Historical Interest issued by the Department of the Environment.

After arriving at Ritson Road, Hackney, we obtained a key from one of the residents and entered a neo-Gothic church of brick and stone and there we saw immediately the splendid reredos which almost covered the entire east wall, its warm dark-brown glow giving a special quality to the interior light. There was also an altar table, altar rails, a two-decker pulpit and font, all of the same excellent late 17th century workmanship though the font had been mounted on a 19th century stand, clearly not original. What had been the origin of these fittings? Why were they in this remote church to which they clearly did not belong and where they were no longer required? As I tried to find the answers to these questions the history of the German Lutheran community in London began to unfold and the tale seemed to be of sufficient interest to bear telling. The reredos had been carved for the German Lutheran church built in Little Trinity Lane in the City of London in 1673. Its creation, its subsequent removal to Dalston in 1876 and its predicament in 1981 reflect closely the fortunes of the community during more than three centuries.

German merchants were living and trading in London by the 13th century. Stow refers to an incident, possibly apocryphal, in 1282 when some merchants of the "Haunce, of the Almaines" from Cologne, Trevir, Hamburg and Munster were summoned before the Treasury Barons and told to pay 240 marks sterling towards the repair of the Bishopsgate and to keep it in good order. In return they were given certain privileges: they no longer had to pay "murage" and they could have "their own Alderman".²



The reredos *in situ* at its second home the Hamburg Lutheran Church in Ritson Road, Hackney, where it was re-erected in 1878. The photograph is reproduced by courtesy of Messrs. Clutton.

One of these Aldermen was called Arnold, whose ancestors had come from Cologne on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas in Canterbury and had decided to remain in England. It was he who bought about three acres of land bordered roughly by Upper Thames Street, Cousin's Lane and Queenhithe upon which the Steelyard was later built by the Hanseatic merchants.

This was not one building but a group of counting houses, wharves and dwellings along the river frontage, vital to their seaborne trade, all surrounded by a wall, almost a city within the City. This area became the community's centre and remained so until the late 18th century.

They were strongly Lutheran, adhering to the Augsburg Confession—a statement of the Lutheran faith drawn up by Melancthon in that city in 1530—and remained so throughout the many religious changes in England during the 16th and 17th centuries.² These very changes appear to have kindled in them the desire for a place where they could worship in their own way. Edward VI, probably acting on the advice of Archbishop Latimer, granted them a charter in 1550 and this enabled them to form a congregation in about 1668. It seems that they first met at the Embassy of Brandenburg, then in a house on the piazza of Covent Garden and, when this became too small, services were held in the Swedish Embassy. The *Hanover Magazine* announced in 1667 that Gerhard Martens had been elected the congregation's first preacher. In 1669 Daniel Campe, the Ambassador of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, sent £2-4-0 as a New Year's gift while his wife, Dorothea Danielis vom Campe, presented several items of silver-gilt communion plate, hallmarked in Hamburg in 1669, which was still in daily use at the time of the church's 300th anniversary in 1969.³

On 13th September, 1672 the congregation obtained a charter from Charles II allowing them to build their own church where Lutheran services could be held for the benefit of "strangers and foreigners residing in London ... to whom by our Royal Indulgence it is permitted to profess the Protestant religion ... in a pious emulation of our countrymen".⁴ Members of the Church of England were not allowed to join this church and the chosen site was that occupied by Holy Trinity-the-Less in Little Trinity Lane in the Ward of Queenhithe before the Great Fire of 1666. In the up-dated Stow there are two references to this: "The small parish church of Holy Trinity ... lamentably decayed, repaired 1607-8, consumed in the great devastation, is become a church for Lutherans"... "St. Michael, Queenhithe, rebuilt since the great fire, is a good, handsome, well-built church of freestone with steeple ... to this church and parish is that of Trinity united and the church is not now called Trinity church but Lutheran church and known by that name".⁵ From that time the Church of England congregation worshipped at St. Michael's and the Lutherans at the former Holy Trinity.

It is surprising at first that Charles II who, for all his subtlety, never abandoned the hope that England might eventually return to the old religion, should have made this grant. One of the driving forces behind this achievement was Johan

Barkman Leyonberg, the Swedish ambassador. Britain needed trading contacts with northern Europe and allies against the steadily growing power of France. In 1668 a short-lived triple alliance between Britain, Holland and Sweden was concluded to that end. Political and economic considerations had to be taken into account as well as doctrinal ones. But there was another factor at work: before the grant of the letters patent the Lutherans had to give an undertaking that their church would be built within four years and that they would bear the cost themselves. This, surely, is the philosophy of the Fire Court, whose judges were inclined to grant permission to rebuild to whoever was willing and able to do so, often riding roughshod over the rights of the pre-fire owners. "The powers of the Court were used in many directions, a legal lease could be declared void, a defective lease could be declared good though made by a person with no power to lease, a contract for a lease could be declared a good lease in equity. In many other spheres the Court used its powers to remedy defects in the legal situation, always with one object in view—rebuilding."⁶

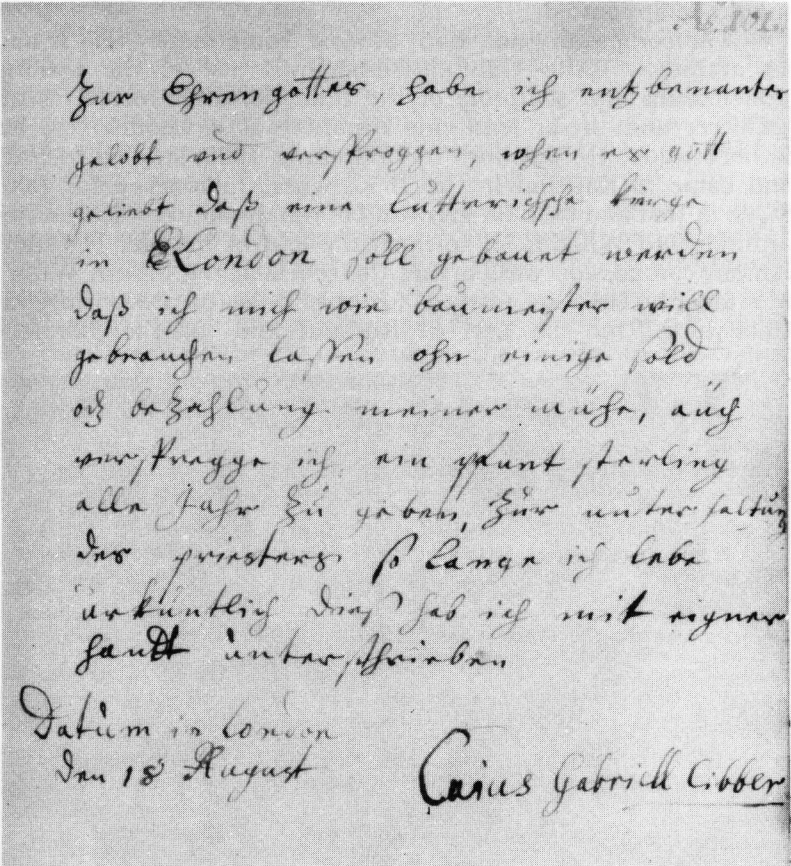
And the German merchants were indeed ready to build. In 1668 they had started collecting money for that purpose and opened a book into which donations or promises of donations were entered. Sir John Summerson pointed out to me that the Lutherans would have had no claim either on the quota of the "coal money"⁷ which was earmarked for the repair of churches after the fire, nor on the services of the Surveyor General, unlike Anglican churches. St. Michael, Queenhithe, now the parish church, was entitled to this benefit and we find an entry in the vestry accounts that "the Churchwardens pay with interest £1,500 to the Chamberlain of London towards building St. Michael, Queenhithe, upon credit of cole money" on 1st October, 1678⁸ though they, too, had raised the money by subscriptions.

The Germans, then, had set about collecting money, realising that this was the first requirement if they were ever to have their own church and the entries into the donation book⁹ make fascinating reading. One of the first donors was the King of Sweden; Ambassador Leyonberg gives on behalf of "Le Roy mon Maistre" an amount of "dix Livres Sterling". And so follows donation upon donation. They gave large and small amounts in currencies varying from Daller to pistoles d'or, Rixdallers, ducats, écus and Hollander Gulden. Some gave outright, some, like Daniel vom Campe, were more cautious. He promised to pay "quand on commencera a bastir l'eglise". One Gustave Horn came near to making a deal with the Almighty by promising to pay forty Rixdalers "a ma Première arrivée a Hambourg". Most entries are in French which appears to have been already the lingua franca of the educated and cultured sections of the community.

The most important donation was the one entered by Caius Gabriel Cibber on p. 102. One of the few entries in German with a few strange, probably Danish, words it reads in translation:

"To the Glory of God have I, the undersigned, vowed and undertaken that, should it please God that a Lutheran church be built in London, I am willing to be made use of as architect without any pay or wages for my troubles, I also undertake to give one pound sterling towards the maintainance of the clergyman each year as long as I shall live, this document have I signed in my own hand. Date (d) in London the 18th August.

Caius Gabriell Cibber"



Handwritten German text, likely a letter or document, written in cursive script. The text is written on a piece of paper with a faint grid pattern. The handwriting is in black ink. The text is as follows:

Zur Ehre Gottes, habe ich unterschrieben
gelobt und versprochen, sohan als Gott
gütlich das eine lutherische kirche
in London soll gebaut werden
das ich mich kein barmhertze will
gebrauchen lassen, sonder meine sold
und bezahlung meiner mühe, auf
mein künfftig ein pfund sterling
alla Jahr zu geben, Zur unterschreibung
des priesters so lange ich leben
unkünfftig dies hab ich mit eigener
hand unterschrieben

Datum in London
den 18 August

Caius Gabriell Cibber

Letter from Caius Gabriel Cibber offering to build the German Lutheran Church without payment. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Hamburg Lutheran Church. (Copyright: Guildhall Library.)

Unfortunately the year is not given but all entries are from the years 1668-72. The letter E in front of London has been crossed out, indicating that he originally intended to write "England" and then changed his mind and altered it to "London". From the beginning the affairs of the Hamburg Lutheran church (HLC) were managed by a number of trustees, the original ones being six German merchants then residing in London who were instrumental in obtaining the grant of the letters patent. The grave of one of them, Jacob Jacobsen, was found in 1969 in the churchyard of All Hallow's the Great.¹⁰ In 1703 the statutes provided that the trustees should be in the fourteen most senior members of the congregation and that, should the number of trustees drop to seven, five new trustees should be appointed.

The community now had, at least, some money and it had an architect. Caius Gabriel Cibber was one of the leading stonemasons and sculptors of the time, he also worked as an architect and, in at least one instance, as a woodcarver, his father's trade. He was born in Holstein in 1630, studied in Italy and came to England in the 1650s where he worked for John Stone at first and then on his own. He was appointed "sculptor in ordinary" to William III towards the end of his life. His most famous commission was carving the reliefs at the foot of Wren's Monument. He also worked for the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, for the Earl of Rutland and for the Skinners'



Another Cibber building: The Danish Church, Wellclose Square, London, erected in 1693 and demolished in 1869. (Guildhall Library.)

Company. When the Steelyard was burnt down in 1666 the Master was Jacob Jacobsen, one of the original trustees of the HLC, who employed Cibber as surveyor. Cibber carved the eagle which surmounted the new entrance. The building was demolished 1863 and the eagle is now in the Museum of London.¹¹ In 1694 he designed the church for the Danish Protestant community in Wellclose Square (demolished 1869) for which he accepted no payment.¹² Cibber was a member of the German Lutheran congregation—in the great vellum ledger 1669-1679, kept in a mixture of German, English and dog-Latin an account had been opened for him as well as for the other leading members of the congregation¹³ debiting him with £2 per annum. He never paid this and finally an amount of £22 was written off.

We do not know if Cibber actually built the church but it seems likely. Although the community themselves have done some research into their early history in the 19th and 20th century no architect has been named for the church, neither has Cibber's promise been mentioned anywhere and it seems that nobody has looked for the architect in the book of donations. This is a negative reason but there are more positive ones: one can point to a great many stylistic similarities such as the oculi over niches with statues—rare in England at that time; the small interior dome—over the entrance in the HLC, halfway down the nave in the Danish church; the references to Moses and Aaron—in niches on the facade of the HLC, flanking the reredos in the Danish church and this time certainly by his own hand and carved in wood (they are now in the Danish church, formerly St. Katherine's, in Regents Park).¹⁴

John Stone, for whom Cibber had worked since his arrival in England, had died in 1667 and Cibber had started working on his own. He was a sculptor and stonemason by trade rather than an architect. The Danish church seems a very much more accomplished building but it is conceivable that the HLC was a first building by an inexperienced architect working on a low budget in times of great shortages, as this was a few years after the Great Fire, while the Danish church was built more than 20 years later, probably to a higher budget and in more prosperous times.

While Cibber probably carried out his first promise he certainly did not carry out the second—to give one pound annually towards the maintenance of the clergyman. If he did build the church he may have felt that he had done enough. Besides, he was almost constantly in financial difficulties. While working on the Monument (1673-75) he was confined in the King's Bench prison for debt but was able to continue work, returning to prison nightly. In 1670 he married his second wife, Jane Colley, who was to become the mother of Colley Cibber, the

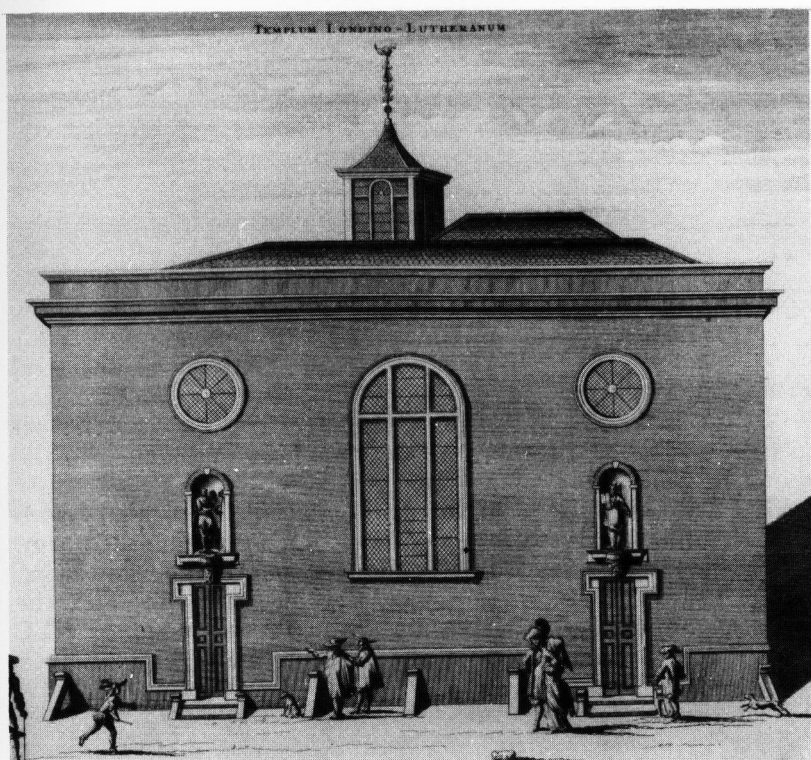


The interior of the Danish Church in 1697 as drawn by Kip. It is inscribed: 'C. Gabriel Cibber Flensburg Architectus'. (Guildhall Library.)

famous author and playwright, later Poet-Laureate. She was an heiress and brought him £6000 but even this did not improve matters.¹⁵

The foundation stone was laid on 21st November, 1672 and the church was completed within a year. The building was not greatly appreciated stylistically; contemporary comments were: "a plain brick building with a small cupola over the entrance"¹⁶ and the rector of the rival Lutheran church in Savoy Hill, who may have been biased, declared that "it is almost buried among the surrounding buildings, receives little light and (was built) without any symmetry".¹⁷ It was possibly built in too much haste

for exactly a hundred years later, in 1772, it was structurally unsound and had to be completely rebuilt.



The original home of the reredos: The German Lutheran Church, Little Trinity Lane, London, built, probably by Cibber, in 1672. It was demolished in 1872. (Guildhall Library.)

But we must return to our reredos which runs like a leitmotiv through the story. It is made of English oak and has been divided vertically into three unequal parts. The most prominent central section consists of an aedicule between paired Corinthian columns on which rests a pediment filled with limewood carvings of putti, leaves and flowers surrounding an open bible. Framed between the columns is a roundheaded panel crowned by a carving of a Pelican feeding her young.

In the spandrels are more carvings of ears of wheat and grapes. The two smaller sections on either side of the central panel have rectangular tablets supporting tympana filled with carvings of natural objects which may be of cherrywood or willow, and which, in their turn, support pediments. The crowning

superstructure is decorated with heads of cherubs fluttering round the name of God in Hebrew letters. The reredos is surmounted by seven flaming candlesticks. All three panels bear German texts in flowing Gothic gilt lettering and all referring to the Eucharist. In Lutheran services the stress is on the Eucharist—the communal taking of bread and wine—and on the word of God—hence the repeated representations of grapes and ears of wheat, the central position of the open bible and the importance of the sections from the scripture referring to the Eucharist. Luther had continued the medieval teachings on the Eucharist while the later Calvinist reformers stressed the importance of the ministry.

The reredos is thus similar to others of the same period, especially the one formerly at All Hallows, Lombard Street, now in All Hallows, Twickenham, except that those made for Anglican congregations bear the Ten Commandments, the Creed or the Lord's Prayer, usually inscribed on panels resembling the tablets of the law. The design for the HLC was in fact based on this design for if one were to insert a central column into the round-headed panel one would arrive at approximately the traditional design. Inscribed texts are almost unknown on North German altar pieces, paintings of biblical scenes being the norm. St. Michael, Hamburg, built 1762 and therefore somewhat later, is one of the foremost Lutheran Baroque churches and the reredos is not dissimilar in style and feeling to the one of the HLC but the central panel has a painting of Christ preaching and it is surmounted by a crucifixion.

Dr. Heimo Reinitzer, Head of the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Hamburg, confirmed this and thought that the German Lutherans living in London in the 17th century had to adapt to the ways of their hosts, only preferring texts from the Bible and from Luther's writings to the ones currently being inscribed on the altar pieces of Anglican churches. Mr. Angus Fowler of Foerderkreis Alte Kirchen in Marburg an der Lahn shares this view though he did send details of the altar in the Laurentius Kirche in Jtzehoe with an impressive, wide Baroque reredos of 1661. This has a series of painted panels with biblical scenes but the uppermost part, which is similar in shape and design to the part on the HLC reredos which bears the name of Jehovah, does have written texts. This is the only instance which he could find. Donald Findlay thinks that the furnishings of the HLC "are a tangible witness to the long and fascinating history of the German Lutheran congregation in London and its close links with the people of the city in which it was established. For the altar, the communion rails and the reredos the congregation clearly used the craftsmen employed by Wren in the Anglican churches of the City rebuilt after the



A detail of the reredos showing paired Corinthian columns and a spandrel filled with carving of wheat and grapes symbolizing the Eucharist—the communal taking of bread and wine. (Cluttons)



The reredos is made of English oak, but these carvings of fruit, leaves and flowers in a tympanum are of willow or cherry wood. (Cluttons)

fire...".¹⁸ Our piece is therefore a synthesis of the customs of both nations, it is unique in England, having German texts inscribed on it, it would be very unusual in Germany in having texts at all. Henry-Russell Hitchcock's book on German Renaissance architecture does not show a single instance of such a piece.¹⁹

A small square altar table, a hexagonal raised pulpit and a font completed the furnishings of the church. The table is also of oak with mouldings on the stretchers and round the edges which match the decorations on the altar rails. The pulpit surmounts a reading desk, a small staircase leading up to it. It is in a simpler style than the reredos and the altar rails and probably of later date, ca 1720, the staircase later still, possibly 1740. There is no comparable piece in Wren's churches.²⁰ The font is of white marble and was mounted, when we saw it, on a 19th century pedestal. Fortunately the original mount has since come to light and it will probably be remounted. On the domed wooden cover is a cartouche bearing a coat of arms and the name "Johann Christian Luderss" whom we know to have been a trustee in the early years of the 18th century.

It cannot be stated with any certainty who made the reredos, only that it is in the manner of Grinling Gibbons or, at any rate, of his style and period. Dr. Walbaum, who was the rector at the time of its removal to Dalston in 1876, did some research but was unsuccessful in finding out the name of the maker. At that time even the possibility of its having come from Germany was investigated only to be dismissed again as unlikely as it was made of English oak. Mr W.A. Thorpe, Keeper of woodwork and furniture at the Victoria and Albert Museum, inspected the reredos in 1940 at the request of the trustees with a view to safeguard it from bomb damage. He found that it was "a very fine piece of the Grinling Gibbons period" adding that there were not many authenticated pieces by the artist in existence.²¹ Mr. Frederick Oughton commented that there are only three such pieces known to have been executed by Gibbons, the rest being attributions either via the Evelyn diaries or Celia Fiennes' notes, the latter being unreliable. Gibbons' workshop was sited at Belle Sauvage off Ludgate Hill and managed by Quellin. Gibbons himself travelled a great deal but kept a salon in Marlborough Street where he received would-be clients, frequently introduced by Evelyn.²² Mr. Simon Jervis, who is Mr. Thorpe's successor, considers that, though fine, it is not by Grinling Gibbons but possibly by Robert Leighton and probably dates from c. 1680. The records of St. Michael Queenhithe, which was rebuilt at about the same time, show several references to Robert Leighton (also spelt Laighton, Layton, etc.), for example on 25th June, 1680 a payment of £25 was made to him for pews and a pulpit.²³ On 3rd September, 1679 the trustees set up a joint committee

with the churchwardens of St. Michael Queenhithe for the purpose of embellishing their respective churches²⁴ so Robert Leighton would appear to be a likely candidate. The pulpit, reading desk and font are almost certainly by a different hand.

The church, as we know, was completed inside a year though possibly more care should have been taken over the construction. The cash book²⁵ provides insight into the life of the community between the formation of the congregation in 1668 and the building of the church in 1673. Gerhard Martens, the first Pastor, initially received a stipend of £12-10-0 per quarter, which rose to £15 and finally, after the church had been built, to £20. The church made quarterly payments of, at first £6 and later of £7 to the Painters' and Stainers' Company for the use of their hall which was just across Little Trinity Lane, which ceased in 1673. One must assume that services were being held in this hall while the church was being built. Another recurring quarterly payment is to John Oliver of £6-10-0 "for the priest's house", which goes down to £5-10-0 after the completion of the church. Did Martens occupy a smaller house or less space in the same building? His landlord was almost certainly John Oliver (c. 1616-1701) "a glazier by trade, surveyor by profession and master mason by virtue of his office"²⁶ who was one of the four surveyors appointed by the corporation together with Wren, May and Pratt, to supervise the rebuilding of London after the fire. He became assistant surveyor of St. Paul's in 1675 and also did the glazing in the rebuilt cathedral. As a parishioner of St. Michael's Queenhithe he lived in the immediate vicinity of the HLC and as assistant supervisor of the building of the Monument he must have known Cibber. In his will, proved 18th November, 1701 (PCC, 157 Dyer) he left his "severall messuages and tenements" in Great and Little Trinity Lane, which he held from the Merchant Taylors' Company, to his grandchildren, exhorting them to renew the leases when they fell in.

On 6th October, 1673, when the building reached its final stages, there are payments to various workmen, all with German names and described as being "from Hamburg" in the amount of £16 and on the same day occurs the largest single payment in the cashbook of £84. The name of the payee has defied decyphering, even by the experienced eye of the Guildhall archivist and one may assume that he may be the building contractor. However, it is clear that on the day of the inaugural service in December 1673 the church was little more than a shell. Payments continue for the next few years to locksmiths, book-sellers (for Bibles), and as late as 1679 payments are recorded, on 1st January to Samson Allen, glazier, £5-7-6, on 26th February to Heinrich Zimmermann for three chairs, £3-12-0, on 30th March to Henry Pocock for work in the church £3 and on 14th July to Michael Lindermann for

whitewashing the cupola £15. German and English workmen appear to have worked side by side. In January 1704/5, April and May 1705 there are very substantial payments to a Mr. Cherry amounting altogether to £134.17.8 whom I have been unable to identify. If any reader has come across this name I would be grateful for information.

At the inaugural Service the Pastor, Gerhard Martens, preached a sermon on Ezra 6, V 16-18 which ran into 36 printed pages! Martens remained at his post for 18 years and was only 46 when he died in 1686. Internal differences, which beset so many expatriate communities, soon developed. In 1692 part of the congregation seceded after a dispute over the election of the minister and founded their own church in the Savoy. In the same year the Swedes and Danes obtained a charter from William and Mary and built their own church, which has already been mentioned as being certainly by Cibber. Swedes and Danes, in their turn, separated at the time of the Swedish-Danish war in 1710. In spite of the differences the community increased and flourished. After the revolution of 1688 England became an attractive place for Protestants; between 1686 and 1713 300 baptisms took place, between 1700 and 1740 the congregation doubled. On the accession of George I in 1714 a stream of German officials, diplomats, officers, musicians and artists came to settle.²⁷

While the church was being rebuilt in 1773 the congregation was offered hospitality at All Hallows' the Great. As thanksgiving Jacob Jacobsen, presumably the son of one of the original trustees, presented a magnificent rood screen of German origin and workmanship which is now in St. Margaret, Lothbury.

The German community, like the rest of the City's population, gradually drifted away towards the leafy suburbs and came to settle around Dalston for it was there that the German Hospital was begun in about 1845. The present buildings were designed by Professor Donaldson in 1875.²⁸ The moving spirit behind its foundation was a Dr. Freund, a native of Prague. It was he who "encouraged" the leading members of the German community in London (The Hanseatic merchants had now become powerful international bankers) to contribute towards what was to become "the most important welfare institution for the German community in London."²⁹

A German orphanage was to follow in 1879 donated by Baron J.H.W. von Schroeder to commemorate the Golden Wedding of the German Emperor, William I.

In 1865 plans were advancing to build the London underground system. The Metropolitan and District Railway Company applied for permission to purchase the site of the HLC for the purpose of building Mansion House Station. This seems to

have been in the nature of a compulsory purchase yet it could not have been unwelcome. It offered the community a chance to exchange their small, dark church in an overcrowded area for a new modern building in a part of London which had become the centre of the congregation.

The trustees had always been astute in managing financial matters as befits Hanseatic merchants and their descendants. Already in the 17th century the same phrase occurs at the end of each financial year in the cash book: "31 decembris ballance transferiert an Johanes Lemskuhl", in other words, the annual surplus was invested by one of the trustees.

There is a reference to the charity in the Charity Commissioners' Register of Unreported Charities which states that the Metropolitan and District Railway paid £9564 into Court which was invested in £10,215-4-5 Consols which sum, together with a sum of £905-6-5 cash, was transferred to the official trustees of Charitable Funds under authority of orders of the Court and the Charity Commissioners dated respectively 6th June and 3rd July 1874. On 18th July 1874 the Commissioners authorised the purchase of two pieces of freehold land in Dalston for £1,515 as sites for a new church and parsonage and subsequently conveyed them to the trustees upon the trusts to which the former church in Trinity Lane was subject under the Letters Patent of Charles II. Sale of part of the investments provided the purchase money. On 5th May, 1876 the remainder of the stock was sold the proceeds together with the cash sum of £905-6-5 and the accrued dividends paid for the erection of the new church and parsonage in Dalston, about £10,000.³⁰

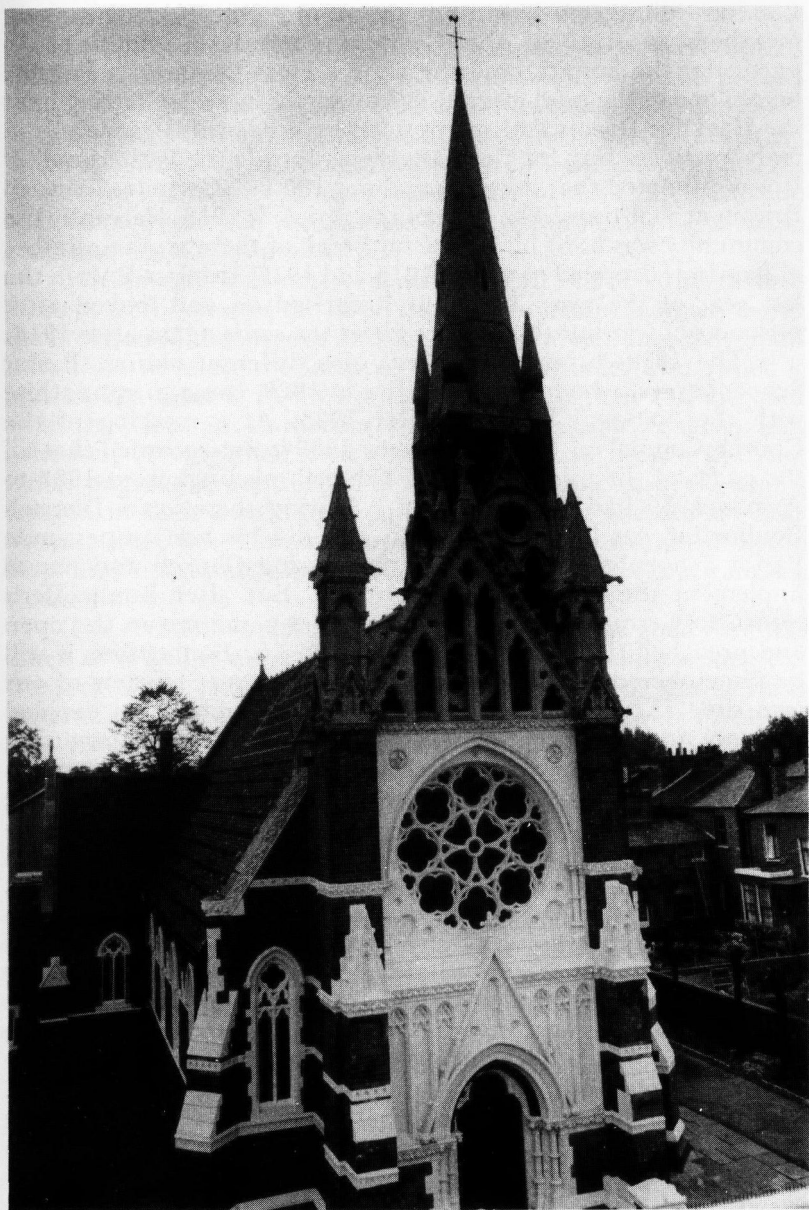
But at the same time the trustees made what is for our purposes a most important decision: they would take their 17th century fittings with them, indeed the new church can be said to have been planned around them. The architect chosen was E.P. Loftus Brock, of Messrs. Habershon & Brock, of Bedford Place, Russell Square. He designed the church which arose in Alma Road (now Ritson Road), a brick building dressed with stone, having a single nave with gallery, transept, chancel, with a meeting room and vestry leading off—a Neo-Gothic church attempting to reproduce the "Old German Style" with a pleasing robustness about it. It has a tower with steeple and the most decorative feature is a rose window on the west front. A passage connects it to the German Hospital on the North side. It was an expensive church, similar churches were being built for about £5000 at that time.

On Ash-Wednesday, 1st March, 1878, Mr. Brock who was then the Hon. Secretary of the British Archaeological Association, gave a paper on the reredos in which he gave the outline of the carving's history, closing as follows:

"The reredos was badly dilapidated; but it has been carefully restored under my advice, and regilded in accordance with the original design, by Mr. Jacoby. It will be speedily re-erected in the new church at Dalston, which I have designed for the trustees and where I hope, thanks to the energy of Mr. Brandt and his co-partners, it will be very many years visible in its complete proportions, and be classed as not the least unworthy of the productions of Grinling Gibbons. I may add that although the style of the new church is altogether different it has required no pressure on my part with the trustees to preserve it; and I trust that when it is erected we shall be satisfied with an effect not inharmonious, while we all have the gratification of preserving a work of art and great beauty, which we could not have done had we given way to the prevalent notion that nothing can be made to harmonise with a new building unless it is in the same style."³¹

Mr. Julius Jacoby restored and refurbished the reredos (replacing a probably decayed cherub here and a bunch of grapes there—the stylistic differences, which were unnoticeable high up in the dark church are very evident when seen at close quarters now the piece has been dismantled). He also did work on the pulpit and the other fittings and dealt with related tasks in the new church for all of which he was paid £870-2-9.³² He, incidentally, inclined to the opinion that the reredos was the work of Grinling Gibbons, at least in part. Mr. Jacoby had his workshop at "The Renaissance", 52 Regent Street and the arrangement whereby he worked on the fittings while the church was being rebuilt must have solved the problem of storage. Altogether a very astutely planned and managed move and an astonishing act of preservation at a time when the church of England sold the contents of at least seven City churches at public auctions.³³ Cibber's Danish Church had been demolished a little earlier, in 1869 and for no obvious reason. The fittings fared badly, "no consideration was paid by the Danish trustees of the church to the memory of Cibber's wife and celebrated son, their tombs were destroyed and the figures sold by public auction at a time when interest in art and veneration of historical remains were at their lowest ebb".³⁴

The new church was dedicated on 13th July, 1876: things continued to go well for the community. It was a time of great prosperity for some sections of the German nation but also of great hardship for others. Industrialization came much later than in Britain and had a devastating effect on some workers, mainly the weavers. Germany had potato blight just as much as Ireland and many emigrated, some to the United States but others to this country where they mostly prospered. A very self-satisfied report



The Second Hamburg Lutheran Church in Ritson Road, Hackney, built in 1876. It is now the home of a West Indian congregation belonging to the Church of God.
(Photograph: Mick Gold.)

on the fortunes of the German community in London—illustrated by a photograph of eighteen smug-looking members of staff of the German Consulate—mentions in particular the hospital and the church close by and the Pastor's house, one of the most elegant in London in its sylvan setting near the Hackney Downs and surrounded by a beautiful garden—"a truly worthy setting for Germans living outside the Fatherland".³⁵ It was estimated that there were about 100,000 Germans living in Britain at that time. The date of the article is 1913! Naturally the community was hard hit by the outbreak of the war, the number of baptisms dropped to one in 1916 and 1917, rising to four in the last year of the war. The church carried on and looked after prisoners of war but things were never the same again after 1914.

The 1930s brought problems of a different nature; Pastor Schoenberger, who had taken office in 1929, came to sympathise with the National Socialists after 1933. At a meeting of the Church Council on 16th November, 1939 it was recorded that all the pages of the minute book of Council meetings from 1933 to August 1939 had been torn out.³⁶ During these years Dietrich Bonhoeffer was living in London and did his best to persuade Pastor Schoenberger to join the Confessing Church and not to implement the laws of Nazi Germany. But after Bonhoeffer's return to Germany in 1935 Schoenberger came out in the open and preached the gospel of the Third Reich. Bonhoeffer, it will be remembered, was to become one of the great martyrs of our own time. After years of agonising heart-searching he decided that not to oppose Hitler was a greater sin than committing murder. He became implicated in the unsuccessful attempt on Hitler's life in August 1944 and was tried and executed with the other conspirators.³⁷

Services continued to be held throughout the Second World War. A retired Methodist minister, Dr. Goebel, having replaced Schoenberger who had returned to Germany in order to join the army, kept things going. But the community never recovered from the effects of this interlude. Perhaps after more than 300 years of exile the community had finally scattered and become absorbed in the host nation. With the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948 the hospital came under the Hackney Area Health Authority; it is now a Geriatric and Psychiatric hospital. The church battled on bravely, rising to the occasion of its 300th anniversary in 1969 but the writing was on the wall.

In 1981 the trustees began to make arrangements for a suitable dispersal of the fittings and it was at this point that the AMS was alerted and consulted. In due course agreement was reached with the Victoria and Albert Museum to take the reredos, the altar table and the altar rails, the pulpit and the

reading desk. The font will go to another Lutheran church, the German Christ Church in Montpelier Place, Chelsea.

In November 1982 the church was sold to a West Indian congregation belonging to the Church of God with the proviso that the German Lutherans could continue to hold services there once a month as there are still members of the congregation living in the neighbourhood, some of whom grew up in the orphanage. The new owners are taking excellent care of the church and the wall from which the reredos has been removed has been made good and panelled up to sill level.

We have now almost reached the end of the story. I have related, to the best of my ability, the circumstances which led to the creation of the reredos and then turned myself into a fly upon it in order to relate the fortunes of the community who owned it and looked after it in an exemplary way. In their self-imposed exile the German Lutherans showed remarkable tenacity and cohesion. Having their own church must have been a unifying factor of great importance. They could meet once a week, hear a sermon in their own tongue and sing together the old familiar hymns. They were sustained by this as they were sustained by the help and assistance, especially financial, of some outstanding trustees.

The reredos was lost sight of precisely because good care was taken of it and it never changed hands. Outstanding among the trustees were the Jacobsens at first and then, for several generations, the Schroeder family who are still actively involved. The Schroeder Wagg empire now occupies an area which is probably not much inferior to the Steelyard in the 17th century and it is to the vaults of the Schroeder bank, a mere stone's throw away from the site of the first church, that the church plate has now returned, so in some ways the wheel has come full circle. While maintaining close links with North Germany—all ministers came from there to take up their appointment and retired there unless they died in harness—there is little doubt that the community enriched their host nation.

For the reredos the future is bright, it will be on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum before long. Mr. Jarvis outlined his plans: a new restaurant will be built shortly and the present restaurant, which is roughly nave-shaped, will become an exhibition hall. The reredos will be displayed at one end together with the other fittings in the right liturgical arrangement and they will be faced, on the opposite wall, by the great organ from Fonthill Abbey. "Curious" said Mr. Jarvis to me as we parted, "how this reredos has slipped through the net".

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