

RESTORATIONS IN THE TEMPLE CHURCH

WITH NOTES ON MIDDLE TEMPLE HALL

The Anniversary Address given by David Lewer, A.R.I.B.A., to the 45th Annual General Meeting of the Society, held in the Hall of the Middle Temple, London, on 15th June, 1968.

I WAS eleven years old when I became a Temple chorister and the Temple, with its mysterious courts, sunny gardens, murky basements, music-haunted church and homely practice-room, began to cast its spell over me. I well remember my first glimpse of the old church. It was from the doorway below the organ loft and all I could see in front were the backs of the dark towering Victorian pews; but above were the soaring vaults—so much higher to a boy's eyes, and the spandrels with heraldic devices and spirals of colour, examples of Victorian exuberance now removed.

The 19th-century "restorers" made many changes to the church between 1839 and 1842. So in 1680-2 did Sir Christopher Wren, who swept away the enclosed choir of the Reformation and refurnished the church with oak screens, box pews, an elaborately-carved pulpit and panelled wainscotting all round the walls, thus creating a classical unity within a Gothic framework, a concept of great charm. A few years later, after the famous "Battle of the Organs", Father Smith's fine instrument was installed on a screen masking the central arch between the Round and the quire. Emil Godfrey's new organ-case is not unlike the original in design, which incorporated the royal arms, now finely carved by Charles Lewis.

At the re-dedication of the church on 11th February, 1682, the Bishop of Rochester took as his text "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God", and so anticipated only too literally the sentiments of the Gothic Revivalists of 1840 who swept away all Wren's work. As early as 1808 the *Gentleman's Magazine* had declared that "if a day should come when

pew-lumber, preposterous organ-cases, and pagan altar-screens are declared to be unfashionable, no religious building stript of such nuisances would come more fair to sight, or give more general satisfaction to the Antiquary, than the chaste and beautiful Temple Church". The 1839 plan was at first limited to repairing the pews, pulpit and screens, and providing a heating system; but this plan was soon extended to opening up the side arches between the Round and the quire, and to removing the white-wash from the Purbeck-marble pillars and the ceiling. It was later decided that the Wren reredos and the screen under the organ should be removed. On close inspection the essential work was found to be very extensive, for the woodwork of all the lower parts of the pews, pulpit and reading-desk were rotten from contact with the damp earth beneath; and William Burge, an Inner Temple bencher and the driving force behind the whole operation, realized that the "noxious effluvia" from the choked drain "intended to take the leakage from the coffins' in the catacombs under the Master's Garden would, "on the introduction of warm air, be more sensibly felt". Further, the lowering of the floor level by ten inches to its original level (as proved by patches of mediaeval tessellated paving¹), revealed that the bases of the pillars were defective. Also, the vaulted ceiling when scraped was found to be in a dangerous condition; and after coats of white-wash and Roman-cement patching had been removed from the marble piers in the Round these too were seen to be in an advanced state of decay. In fact "the whole fabric was in truth on the verge of dissolution". Even the organ was in danger of toppling over, so that both the architect and the organ-builder agreed that "any considerable motion from persons in the organ-loft might have thrown it down".²

¹ The tiles now in the triforium are the Minton encaustic tiles, based on mediaeval examples in Westminster Abbey Chapter House and elsewhere, which were laid down throughout the church in 1842.

² Dr. E. J. Hopkins, the organist for fifty-five years, has described the procedure in the old Wren organ-loft in 1838: "There were only two ladies and two gentlemen in the choir and they used to sing in the organ gallery. The curtain would be drawn aside for a few minutes, the singers would sing, and everybody would turn west to look at them; then the curtain was banged to with a rattle of brass rings."

The quire has two massive longitudinal walls over the arcades and these and the roof are supported on eight slender piers. These piers apart from their bases only needed minor repairs but in the Round all the columns had to be renewed. Therefore "a special messenger was dispatched to Purbeck, and arrangements made for the re-opening of the ancient quarries at that place". The Knights Templars' use of Purbeck marble raises an interesting point. The Knights moved to the New Temple in 1161 and their new round church was consecrated by Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, in 1185, so the building was probably well in hand by 1175 if not earlier, and I therefore believe that the six main piers in the Round provide the earliest example of Purbeck marble used structurally on a large scale. William of Sens and William the Englishman had used this marble in the quire at Canterbury (1174-84) but there it is in the form of attached shafts and decorative work and not, as at the Temple, of free-standing structural piers. The original marble for the Temple Church probably came from a quarry very close to the one at Woodyhyde near Corfe Castle which was re-opened in 1840 for the Victorian restoration. Sidney Smirke succeeded James Savage as architect and described the tricky work of replacing the piers in the Round: "For the purpose of supporting the lofty superstructure a cast-iron frame was shaped to receive the springing of the great arches, and this was supported by timber uprights brought closely up to their bearing by iron wedges. By these means the very difficult and even dangerous task of giving new pillars to the whole of the upper part of the Round church was effected without accident". The Inner Temple records say that the old marble, lying in Hare Court, was taken away by Sir Frederick Pollock. One wonders what he did with it. As for the rejected Wren fittings, the pulpit and altar-table were reverently placed at the disposal of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the former found its way to Christchurch, Newgate Street, where it was destroyed in the blitz. It was decided that the wainscotting, pews and screens should be offered for sale and they fetched £365. The pews were bought in at valuation for a new church within the Liberty of the Rolls. John Bowes of Barnard Castle, Co. Durham, the founder of the Bowes Museum, purchased the altar-screen carved by William

Emmett (Lot 24) and the two Corinthian columns supporting the organ-loft, as an old Museum inventory shows. The organ-case itself is not mentioned and has unfortunately disappeared. In 1953 the altar-screen was restored to the Temple Church but the two columns remain in the museum.

The removal of the reredos disclosed beneath the great east window three aumbries and marks of locks and door-fastenings in the surrounding stonework. These aumbries were restored in an altered form and the screen-panels now over them have been hinged to open. Near the east end of the south aisle was uncovered an unusual double marble piscina. This remains, partly in its war-damaged state. Next to it is a cusped niche, and there is a corresponding one in the north aisle. Both the piscina and the niches are at a height appropriate to the mediaeval raised floor-level of the east end of the church. Under the whitewash of the ceiling were ancient decorative paintings but these were too far perished to discern their original design. Willement therefore redecorated the ceiling in what he considered correct style, based on mediaeval patterns and incorporating the emblems and devices of the Knights Templars and the Honourable Societies of the Inner and Middle Temple. Willement also designed the stained glass for the eastern windows, which had previously been clear. For their period this glass was of superior quality and colour and was executed in small pieces with generous leadwork. Some surviving lozenges can be seen in the present south-aisle windows.

When the organ was taken down for safety the vista thus opened up so delighted everyone that James Savage suggested a new organ-chamber against the north wall of the quire although this position would block the central window there. The larger post-war organ chamber, built for the fine 1927 Harrison instrument presented by Lord Glentanar in 1953, covers a further window westwards and has increased this disadvantage, and the whole structure, though necessary, is architecturally a detraction from the simplicity of the original 13th-century conception.

The 1839-42 restoration followed soon after that of Sir Robert Smirke in 1827. He had refaced in ashlar the southern exterior of the Round after the demolition of the remains of St. Anne's Chapel, and had restored the arcade in the aisle together with

Charles Lamb's "grotesque Gothic heads that gape and grin in stone around the inside of the old Round Church (my church) of the Templars". The actual work on these heads was executed by "a young man who had been a fisherman and quarryman, and was then working as a mason". Some of the heads appear to be real, others perhaps legal in character. Sir Robert also provided plain parapets for the upper and lower roof of the Round except on the north side of the triforium, which was hemmed in by buildings. In 1862 J. P. St. Aubyn rebuilt these roofs and gave the upper one a steep-pitched conical shape as he considered this to have been the original form. The Round Church at Cambridge had been similarly treated some twenty years earlier. The original roofs of both were probably similar to that of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, restored or rebuilt in the early French Transitional style by the Crusaders and re-consecrated in c. 1148. It is known that the earlier church on the Jerusalem site had been designed by the Byzantine Patriarch Thomas and that it had "a remarkable conical roof of timber covered with lead" (G. H. E. Jefferey, *Brief Description of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem*, 1919). The roof of the Crusaders' church was probably destroyed in 1245 by the Tartars but must have been rebuilt in more or less the same form, for in 1621 George Sandys reported that the church then in existence was "covered with a cupola sustained with rafters of cedar, each of one piece, being open in the midst like the Pantheon at Rome". Contemporary illustrations "invariably show a straight-lined conical roof, with the straight beams of the original construction showing as a ceiling within the church". This roof, unusual because of its central aperture, was destroyed in 1808 by fire which "consumed the cupola of wood covered with lead". It should be added that the 13th-century seal of the Templars' preceptory at Ferreby North in Yorkshire and other Templars' seals show round churches with steep-pitched conical roofs. William Emmett's curious stylised engraving, c. 1682, of the south elevation of the Temple Church in London also shows curved roofs to both the aisle and the clerestory of the Round; and John Strype (*Survey of London*, 1754 ed.) described the roof as "something like a dome". This upper roof was later changed to a low-pitched roof with

battlements, and the lower roof over the aisle was given a similar pitch with a plain parapet. This was the form reverted to by Walter Godfrey after the Second World War.

As well as altering the form of the roof St. Aubyn pulled down the old buildings against the north and west sides of the Round, including the three-storey chambers over the porch. This porch, which he drastically restored, is probably somewhat later than the great Norman west doorway. St. Aubyn also opened up and glazed the beautiful and unusual wheel window which was revealed over the porch.

On the north side of the mediaeval church was a tower known as the "Bastelle" and this may be the tall narrow tower, higher than the Round and apparently connected to its upper roof by a sort of bridge, which appears in a 1671 bird's eye view of the Temple and also in Emmett's engraving. It is not clear whether this tower was a detached structure or an extension of the staircase tower which since 1840 has been topped with a bell turret. In the 18th century the belfry cupola was above the south quire aisle, but by 1840 the bell was hanging in the roof of the Round. The bell is dated 1695 and inscribed, "James Bartlett made me".

The cumbersome elaborately-carved oak Victorian stalls and pews which almost completely filled the quire and which burnt so fiercely on 10th-11th May, 1941, dated from 1842. They were no loss for the very high inward-facing stalls in the aisles had reached almost to the window-sills, and the massive central blocks of pews facing east had no central aisle, so that the scale and simple majesty of the church were lost. The bombing of the Temple precinct began at 3.50 a.m. on Thursday, 19th September, 1940, when the clock-tower of the Inner Temple Library was hit. Other bombs soon fell on the Gardens, Crown Office Row, Middle Temple Lane, Essex Court and the porch of the Inner Temple Hall. Next, a parachute mine exploded in Middle Temple Lane and brought down the east wall of Middle Temple Hall, blew into thousands of fragments the Elizabethan screen within, and blasted some of the windows of the church. On 12th January, 1941, a heavy bomb demolished the north-west corner of King's Bench Walk and the east wing of the delightful 17th-century Master's House. Nevertheless an Easter Day service

was held, when ten boys and twelve gentlemen sang Stanford's "Te Deum in C" and Beethoven's "Hallelujah", with Dr. Thalben-Ball at the dusty organ. This service, which included a celebration of Holy Communion, was the last in the old church, for on 10th May, of that year, a fine moonlight night with a stiff easterly breeze, a bomb smashed the water mains and another, an incendiary, set fire to the south-east corner of the church roof. The water pressure was so low that in half an hour the fire was out of control and spread to the Master's House and Lamb Building, the flames being fanned by tremendous wind eddies from other huge fires in this last and worst night of the blitz. The stone vaulting of the quire held but the Purbeck-marble pillars were split by the heat. The timbers of the conical roof of the Round burnt like a giant firework and threw out fountains of sparks in all directions before the whole collapsed onto the knights' effigies below, unfortunately "protected" by baulks of timber. The last parts of the Temple to be consumed that night were the Cloisters and Pump Court. Those ten hours of destruction took ten years to mend. The only parts of the church that remained unscarred were the staircase tower with its forbidding penitential cell where Walter le Bachelor, Grand Preceptor of Ireland, is said to have starved to death, and the porch, doorway, great door (1842), and marble-shafted aisle of the Round. The effigy of de Ros, brought from York in 1682, also survived as did another exceptionally fine one of a mediaeval bishop, in the south-east of the quire; this possibly represents Heraclius, the above-mentioned Patriarch of Jerusalem, who is known to have been buried in the church. Three other monuments to escape were the large altar-tomb of Edmund Plowden (d. 1584), whose alabaster effigy is beneath a richly-carved canopy; a second altar-tomb to Richard Martin, Recorder of London in 1618; and the unusual 17th-century heraldic ribbon brass to Edward Littleton, now near the quire stalls.

It was Edmund Plowden, the then Treasurer, who supervised from 1562 to 1572 the re-building on a new site of Middle Temple Hall, which has one of the finest double hammerbeam roofs in England. The architect and the carver of the screen of 1574 are unknown, and so is the designer of the elegant screen doors added

in 1671 to keep out the junior members of the Inn who, in defiance of the Benchers, had taken possession of the Hall in the previous year to keep a disorderly Christmas. The Tudor door at the south end of the screens passage probably came from the old Norman hall built by the Knights Templars on the eastern side of Middle Temple Lane; and the carved escutcheon of Sir Francis Withens and the gilded figure of the Holy Lamb above this door came from the Wren screen removed from the church in 1840. Sir Francis was Treasurer of the Middle Temple in 1681 and was later one of the judges at Lord Jeffreys' "Bloody Assize". The coats-of-arms round the Hall, the earliest dating from 1597, commemorate members of the Inn who have held the ancient office of Reader, and the armour is mostly of the 16th century. The royal pictures are noteworthy. The largest, probably by Van Dyck, is of Charles I on horseback. Sir Godfrey Kneller painted Charles II in his Garter robes, and the portrait of James II when Duke of York is attributed to John Riley. William III, Queen Anne and George I are in their coronation robes. The portrait of Elizabeth I is probably contemporary. It was she who gave the Benchers their great table, 29 feet 4 inches long and formed of three planks from oak grown in Windsor Forest. The smaller table (the "cupboard") is reputed to be of oak from Drake's "Golden Hind". Sir Francis was a member of the Middle Temple and was honoured at dinner in the Hall on 4th August, 1586 (A. R. Ingpen, *The Middle Temple Bench Book* (1912), p. 64 n.) At this table the Reader used to deliver his discourse and here members are still "called to the bar". The two oak lids covering the 1612 wine-cooler were made from the bridge or jetty erected by the Knights Templars on their Thames frontage to afford access to and from the river at all states of the tide.

These early owners of the Temple precinct were closely connected with an outstanding post-war discovery in the church. This was the three-bayed chamber under the western end of the south aisle of the Early English quire, for this chamber was almost certainly the Norman treasury of the Knights Templars. Nearby was found the tomb, covered with a slab of black marble, of John Selden (d. 1654), the notable Inner Temple jurist, legal antiquary and scholar.

The task of restoring the Temple began in 1949 and once again "a special messenger was dispatched to Purbeck". This time the marble for the quire piers was quarried at West Lynch, south of Corfe Castle, a little to the west of the Woodyhyde quarry, and the new marble for the columns in the Round was dug near Swanage and worked at W. J. Haysom's St. Aldhelm's Head quarry. It should be noted that the piers in the quire are built out of the vertical to conform with their predecessors, which had inclined outward with the thrust of the roof; and that the new capitals are copies by Walter Haysom from plaster casts of the originals. The new paving is of Purbeck-Portland squares. The Glaziers' Company gave the glass for the great east window, and this and the other glass at the east end was designed by Carl Edwards and executed at the Whitefriars Glass Works, originally situated next the south-eastern boundary of the Temple precinct. At the top of the central light in this church of the lawyers is Christ enthroned as the Supreme Judge.³

³ On the responds of the centre arch between the Quire and the Round are inscriptions recording the re-dedication by the Archbishop of Canterbury of (a) the Quire, 23 March, 1954, in the presence of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, and (b) the Round, 7 November, 1958, in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II, the Duke of Edinburgh and the Queen Mother.