

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

S. Stephen's, Walbrook

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1898, Vol. 21, 205-207

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S. STEPHEN'S, WALBROOK.

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THIS is the third church of that name and locality. The first, according to Dugdale, stood on the west side of the "Brook;" the second, built in 1429, on the east side, on ground left for that purpose by William Standen, Lord Mayor of London, in 1392; and the third, the one we now see, was built upon the same site, from the designs of Sir Christopher Wren.

It was one of the earliest erected after the Great Fire, the first stone being laid on October 16th, 1672, and was finished, with the exception of the tower, in 1678.

Hidden away as this church is, Wren concentrated all his efforts externally on the tower and spire, upon which he lavished all his care—for the probability is that the tower was so hemmed in with houses at the time it was built that only the upper portion could be seen.

Like S. Mary, Abchurch, this belongs to a type quite distinct from the other city churches, in that they both possess a dome and a large central area plan.

The first church rebuilt after the fire in 1666 was S. Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside, begun in 1671; next was S. Stephen's, Walbrook; followed in the same year by S. Michael, Cornhill, and S. Mary at Hill.

These four form a group representative of types of plan and arrangement that are most interesting, and, after S. Paul's Cathedral, S. Stephen's may be considered Wren's masterpiece.

The plan is very simple, combining the Early Basilican plan with the central dome carried on an octagon. The ceilings over the chancel and nave and short transepts are

barrel-vaulted, and those of the aisles flat. The dome is carried on eight columns, not exactly on the points of an octagon, but so adjusted as to give the requisite proportions to the several aisles, the centre being the widest and the two outer ones the narrowest; indeed, the whole proportions are most harmonious, and the interior is one of the most charming that Wren ever conceived.

The dome is 45 feet in diameter, is hemi-spherical and constructed of timber, and is surmounted by a lantern-light in the crown. It is coffered horizontally into four compartments, divided vertically by bands; the panels of modelled plaster-work in relief, though rather coarse in detail, are very vigorously executed. The groined ceiling over the nave is divided by a band of bold scroll-work, and at the intersection is a finely-modelled flower.

The columns, of the Corinthian order, are exquisitely proportioned, and support an enriched entablature. They originally stood on octagonal pedestals, panelled in oak to the height of the old pews; but when these were removed the bases were replaced by the existing stone square ones.

The oak panelling around the church, containing the arms of the Grocers' Company, the patrons of the living, the altar-screen, organ-case and gallery are all very richly executed and carved. The organ, built by England in 1675, occupies nearly the whole west end, and with its gallery and supporting columns forms a very rich and beautifully-designed composition.

The font is of white marble and is surmounted by a wonderful oak cover, beautifully carved in panels, wreaths, and cherubs' heads, terminating with an ogee-shaped top, around the base of which are grouped eight small figures.

The pulpit also has festoons of fruit and flowers and a canopied sounding-board, with angels bearing wreaths.

In the old framed print hanging at the west end of the church, by Samuel Wale, it will be noticed that it was drawn before the organ and screen under it were built, and the



ST. STEPHEN'S, WALBROOK. N.E. CORNER OF CHURCH.



ST. STEPHEN'S, WALBROOK. REREDOS AND ALTAR RAILS.

plan shows two doorways on the north and south sides of the nave, which are now walled up.

The two doorways at the east end, on either side of the altar, are evidently later insertions, and it is probably fair to conjecture that the canopies and door-cases now in front of them were removed from their original doorways in the nave when these latter were closed.

Timbs, in his *Curiosities of London*, has much that is interesting to say about this church—amongst other things, that in the parish accounts there is an entry that upon its completion “a hogshead of claret was presented to the architect, and twenty guineas to his lady;” and also that Pendleton, the celebrated Vicar of Bray, subsequently became rector of S. Stephen's, Walbrook; that Sir John Vanbrugh, the architect and dramatist, is buried here, in the family vault; and that during the repairs to the church, in 1850, over 4,000 coffins were found beneath the floor, covered with brickwork and concrete to prevent the escape of the noxious effluvia.

S. Stephen's serves also for the parish of S. Benet Sherehog, and on the north side of S. Pancras Lane is a small enclosed piece of ground, with a stone on an adjoining house, inscribed “Before the dreadful fire, anno 1666, here stood the parish church, S. Bennet Sherehog.”

West's painting of the Martyrdom of S. Stephen, presented in 1779 by the then rector, Dr. Wilson, was removed in 1850 from over the altar to its present position.
