

AFTER THE 1666 GREAT FIRE OF LONDON:

A City Full of People



In the September of 1666, much of the City of London was destroyed by what became known as the Great Fire of London. As well as people's homes and businesses, 87 parish churches were burnt to the ground. Local churches played an important role in daily life for members of the established church, the Church of England. It was where parishioners gathered for worship, christenings, marriages, and funeral services.

Following the Fire, City leaders and businessmen had to find huge amounts of money to rebuild and transform London's ravaged streets into a thriving city full of people once again. The City Corporation raised money by putting a tax on the coal used for heating homes and businesses. Celebrated architect Sir Christopher Wren was commissioned to rebuild St Paul's Cathedral, as well as fifty-one new parish churches. A large labour force of skilled craftsmen such as stonemasons, carpenters, joiners and glaziers were given contracts by Wren to rebuild the churches. During this time a wide range of businesses, including banks, theatres, coffee houses, and merchant trading houses were established or expanded.



Above: Map of London by William Morgan, 1682, showing the parish of St Martin Ludgate.
© Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Voices: then and now

In 2023, 300 years after Wren's death, volunteers researched just some of the many craftspeople and parishioners who took part in, or witnessed, the rebuilding work.

Using parish records and archives, volunteers were given the opportunity to select, and briefly follow the threads of people's lives from four parishes within the Square Mile of the City of London. Their archival research has created a snapshot of some of the people who might otherwise be overlooked in the pages of history.

This exhibition is the result of their work and reveals not only some of the City's lost voices but also the volunteers' own exploration of this time and place. Different stories forming this exhibition can be seen in the following churches: St Bride Fleet St, St Botolph Aldgate, St Martin within Ludgate, and St Vedast alias Foster.

Below: Shichavot, or, The burning of London in the year 1666.
© Museum of London

Right: The City of London Corporation is the governing body of the Square Mile, the historic centre of London and banking since the 1660s.



You can also find more about each of the individuals in the accompanying *Stories* booklet.

Find out how Wren was involved in the slave economy and benefitted from the slave trade.



Kindly supported by the National Heritage Fund



THE SQUARE MILE CHURCHES

WREN | 300

Ruins and Rebuilding



The church in ruins

After the church of St Martin Ludgate was burned down on Tuesday 4th September 1666, the site lay in ruins until 1673 when the mason John Young took down the rest of the building. Unfortunately, as his team were taking down the old tower, they accidentally broke the windows of some nearby houses!

So that St Martin's parishioners had somewhere to worship while the church was being replaced, a temporary building called a tabernacle was constructed on the cleared site. This wood and brick structure was used while the new church was built around it.



The work was led by Master Mason Nicholas Young, John Young's son. Like his father, Nicholas was a member of the Worshipful Company of Masons, becoming both Warden and Master.

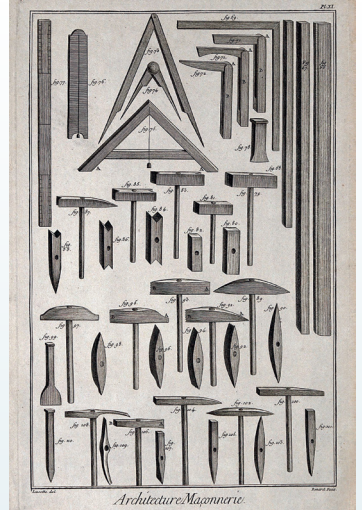
The church rebuilt

The parishes were responsible for paying for the furnishings and fittings of the rebuilt churches. For example, in 1673 parishioner Thomas Morley donated the fine marble font which still stands in the church today.

St Martin's was mostly completed by 1682, with the tower and steeple finished by 1686. It remains one of the least altered of Wren's City Churches as it suffered very little damage during World War II.

Left: The Company of Masons was granted its Arms in 1472 by King Edward IV.

Below: Bricklayers, 1635.
© Rijksmuseum



Above: An assortment of Masons' tools, blocks of stone, and a folding rule.
Wellcome Collection



Crafts and Contractors

Architects and builders

While the church of St Martin Ludgate is thought to have been by Wren, it was his principal assistant, Robert Hooke, who not only contributed to the design, but directed the building work. But it was Wren rather than Hooke who received a gift of wine from a grateful parish.

For eleven years, a team of skilled craftsmen worked on the new church, finishing it in 1686 at a total cost of £5,378 10s. 3d (about £615,569 today).



Above: Robert Hooke was a scientist and astronomer as well as an architect. In 1665, he published *Micrographia*, describing what tiny specimens looked like under the microscope. *Robert Hooke* by Mary Beale, 1680.
© Art History Project

Right: *Queen Mary at Hampton Court* by John Faber the Younger. © The Trustees of the British Museum

One of the main contractors, mason Nicholas Young, was paid over £3,100 (£371,000 today) for his work, including the provision of various different types of stone. Nicholas also had a personal connection, serving on St Martin's vestry committee, and baptising his daughter Sarah there in 1671.

Wren's team

Many of Wren's contractors served in the Office of Works responsible for the rebuilding. These included the master carpenter Matthew Banckes, who lived with his family in one of the official houses at Hampton Green near Wren. In 1688 Matthew was required to transform Hampton Court Palace for the new monarchs William and Mary.



Above: The Old Court House at Hampton Green, where Christopher Wren lived. By Norman Janes, c. 1940.
V&A. Given by the Pilgrim Trust

Inside the church

Worth noting are the four doorcases elaborately adorned with flowers, fruits, and open pods of peas by William Emmett, previously the King's master carver. This naturalistic design was in the fashionable style pioneered by Grinling Gibbons, the celebrated carver of the day whose yard was close to the church in Belle Sauvage Court. He pioneered the use of an abundance of fruit, flowers, game, fish, birds, and peapods, which others copied due to their popularity.



Door decoration by Grinling Gibbons, showing his use of fruit and flowers. An open pea pod is on the bottom right swag.
© V&A



Church Officials



The vestry

The vestry was a group of male parishioners who made decisions on behalf of the parish. They were elected every year and presided over by the vicar or rector. The vestry elected churchwardens from among the group and employed other officers such as the beadle, sexton and women pew openers.

Surviving account books reveal some of the everyday activities which were paid for. These include washing tunics worn by the vicar (called surplices) and the purchase of soap, candles and a mop. More unusually, they also record that the vestry entertained Wren at the coffee house and tavern.



Churchwardens

The churchwardens were also responsible for the welfare of local residents. They made payments to the poorest and most vulnerable in the parish. At one point they spent 12 shillings (£68) caring for 'a poor maide dying of the smallpox'.

However, not everyone was given support. Individuals described as 'burdensome' to the parish were to be returned to their home parish. Thomas Mason was gifted 10 shillings (£57) if he promised to never return. But Anne Waterfall does not seem to have been given even this amount of assistance. The minutes simply say that she was to be 'removed', with her 'bastard child', named Sarah.

Two churchwardens at St Martin's are commemorated on the double chair that stands in the church today. Thomas Mason was a wealthy cabinet maker who lived in Ludgate Hill, and Thomas Saffold was a weaver turned astrologer. Their initials are carved onto the chair made by joiner William Gray in around 1690, but we don't know if they ever sat in it together.

Left: Thomas Pistor made chests of drawers similar in style to these.
© The MET

Below: Interior of a coffee house, c. 1690-1700.
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Above: Beadles enforced moral and religious behaviour within the church and churchyard. This drawing by Kyd illustrates the beadle in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. Sextons helped look after the church building. They were often the bell ringer, key keeper, and gravedigger.
www.allbookart.com



Feeding the City

Old markets

Before the Great Fire, food markets had lined busy routes, causing congestion and leaving behind food and other waste to rot. The need to rebuild was an opportunity to create dedicated market places.

New markets

The City Corporation bought up land and paid for four new markets to be built, all with hygienic facilities. Newgate, Honey Lane, Woolchurch and Leadenhall all had drainage, storage areas, and regular rubbish collections which made the markets much cleaner and safer for stallholders and customers.

These new markets allowed people to buy all sorts of different items from farmers and traders, all in the same location. Women were allowed to be stallholders as well as men, with daughters sometimes inheriting from their mothers. Mary Hind, Anne Burgin, Judith Crozks and Margaret Holme all had stalls in the Green Yard of Leadenhall, selling the fish they had bought wholesale from Billingsgate Market.

Bread shelves for the poor

As not everyone could afford to buy their own food, the City Churches provided some assistance. Vestry accounts show that churches arranged for bread to be distributed to the poor. There were also shelves in the porch where people could leave loaves for those in need. A remarkable example of these bread shelves survives in St Martin's. They date from the late 1600s and were saved from St Mary Magdalen, in Old Fish Street, before it was demolished in 1893. Today, you will find them near the altar storing books and other items.



Left: Billingsgate Fish Market in 1736 by Arnold Vanhaeckens.
© London Metropolitan Archives (City of London)

Above: Honey Lane Market, by Robert Randall, 1913.
© London Metropolitan Archives (City of London)

Below: Newgate Market, 1860.
© London Metropolitan Archives (City of London)



LONDON SKETCHES.—No. 2.—NEWGATE MARKET.