

ST. BRIDE'S RESTORED

Even when the restoration of St. Bride's was no more than a cherished hope, those responsible for the fabric were resolved that in its post-war form it should be a faithful reproduction of the church as Christopher Wren planned it and saw it built.

Accordingly, at the appropriate time, they invited the distinguished holder of Wren's old office of Surveyor of the Fabric of St. Paul's Cathedral, Mr. W. Godfrey Allen, F.R.I.B.A., to become the architect of the restored St. Bride's. Under his direction, and with the aid of Wren's drawings and records, complete fidelity has been assured, and new features have been related to the original design in a harmony that enhances the beauty which Wren created.

From Mr. Allen's notes, the following description of the architectural features of the restored church has been compiled.

IN the restoration of St. Bride's certain changes have been made in the arrangement of the interior. The galleries destroyed in the war have not been reinstated; the stalls and seating in the nave have been planned on collegiate lines and the new organ has been divided and erected at the west end of the side aisles and in the first stage of the tower instead of in the former position at the west end of the nave.

The omission of the side galleries, which cut across the aisle windows and which were never very happily related to the architecture of the church, has revealed the beauty of the aisles and has made the new St. Bride's one of the best-lighted churches in the City. In order to retain the sense of enclosure which the gallery fronts gave to the main body of the church, oak screens, consisting of columns and entablature in the composite order enriched with carvings and with cartouches bearing armorial devices, have been erected between the columns of the nave arcades. On the north and south sides the screens are open, but at the west end, where the clergy have their stalls, they are closed and finish with terminals surmounted by David MacFall's St. Bridget and St. Paul. The symbols of the Four Evangelists are represented in the friezes over the end stalls.

The aisles are panelled below the windows and are equipped with chapels at the east end and with inner porches, restored to their original design, at the west end.

The centre part of the church is paved in black marble from Belgium and white marble from Italy. Elsewhere Purbeck stone has been used.

The windows (except the east window) are glazed with plain reamy antique glass in leaded lights set in wrought-iron frames. The east window (which has been rebuilt to its original proportions) is glazed in leaded lights to a geometrical pattern designed to reduce glare.

Incorporated in the design is a large cross, in reeded glass, and illuminated from within will be a conspicuous feature seen from outside the church at night.

The removal of the west gallery and the re-arrangement of the organ has made possible the opening up of the east wall of the tower which, with its beautiful little stone gallery set in a shallow alcove (unique in Wren's architecture), is one of the noblest features of the interior. The Royal Arms, in the balustrading of this gallery, is carved in a block of Beer stone weighing nearly two tons.

The culminating features of the new St. Bride's are the great freestanding canopied reredos and the mural painting on the east wall.

The reredos, which is in oak and which is a memorial to the Pilgrim Fathers—in particular Governor Edward Winslow—is linked with the screens and designed in the Corinthian order richly embellished with eight flambeaux and with free limetree carvings in the Grinling Gibbons style. In the panel directly behind the altar is a painting of the Crucifixion: above this is an oval stained-glass panel with a representation of the Risen Christ. The altar steps are in black marble.

The mural painting by Glyn Jones on the east wall derives from the description in E. Hatton's "New View of London" (1708) of the original fresco in Wren's time. It is designed in strong perspective to give the impression of greater depth to the Sanctuary. In the lower part are the pourtrairures of Moses with the Two Tables in his Hands, and Aaron in his Priest's Habit: above is painted a Celestial Choir, or a representation of the Church Triumphant, in the Vision and Presence of a Glory in the shape of a Dove.

The artificial lighting of the church is concealed in the cornices of the screens and is supplemented by candle lights on the stalls. The reredos and mural are floodlit from the sides.

Among architectural improvements carried out to the fabric of the church mention should be made of the removal from the arches of the nave arcades of the plaster architraves added in the nineteenth century and of the reinstatement of the stone seats in the tower vestibule.

The work of restoring St. Bride's went forward with a great spiritual impetus, and under this influence the high standard of craftsmanship which it reveals was achieved. The artists, the builders, the stone masons, the stone and wood carvers, the plasterers, the marble workers and the technicians co-operated harmoniously to make St. Bride's a worthy House of God.