

St Katharine Cree and the Pewterers

What's the connection?

Not long ago, William Grant, the Assistant Archivist of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, gave me a copy extract from the Company's Orders & Entries and asked me whether I knew the City Church of St Katharine Cree. He said that the Company's arms were one of several portrayed in the church.

In February 1879, so the extract says, the church was undergoing restoration, and the Company received a request from the Vestry Clerk to join other Livery Companies, and pay the sum of £10 for the restoration of the Company's shield. The shield was one of sixteen Livery Company shields which were part of the ceiling decoration in the church. After



View from the southwest, showing the 16th century tower



The North Aisle: from the far end: Mercers, Drapers, Skinners, and Salters; the Dyers and the Pewterers are out of sight

debate, the extract continued, the Master, Wardens and the Court agreed to pay the money and the shield was duly 'emblazoned in the proper heraldic colours'.

So, in 2015, 136 years later, I went along to have a look; and there they were! Sixteen Companies' arms, joined by those of the City of London, brightly painted on ceiling bosses. Tradition in the church has it that these 17 City institutions used the church, one of very few untouched by the Great Fire, until their Halls and churches had been rebuilt.

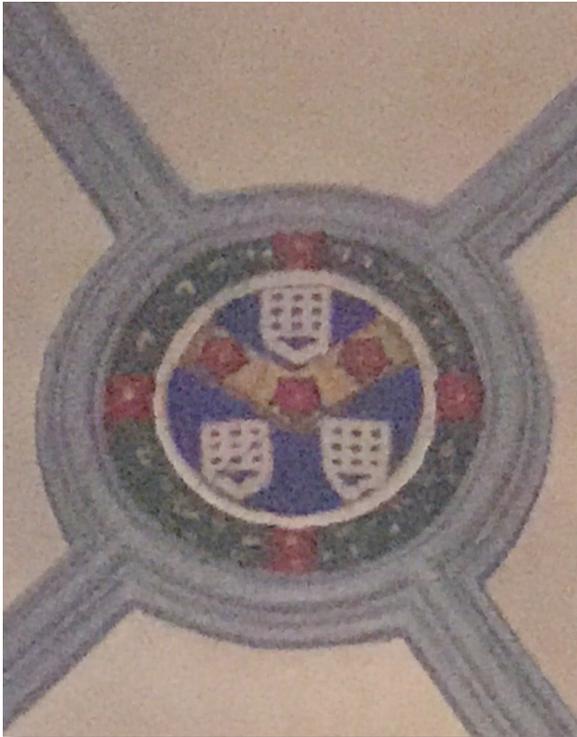
There was damage caused during the Second War; initially thought to be too severe for repairs to be possible, in the end it was possible to restore the church

Founded by Queen Matilda (of Scotland, Henry I's first wife) in 1108, the Priory of The Holy

Trinity was, by all accounts, 'magnificent'. The Priory church had been named 'Christ's Church' by Matilda, then 'St Katharine Creechurch', now 'St Katharine Cree' (more understandable when you learn that 'Christ' was once pronounced 'Chreest'). St Catherine of Alexandria was the half niece of Constantine the Great.

The Priory was dissolved in 1531; and the current church building was erected between 1628 and 1630/31 under the influence of William Laud, then Bishop of London. The church survived the Great Fire intact.

The Companies whose arms are represented on the bosses are: Mercers, Drapers, Skinners, Dyers, Pewterers, the City of London itself, Fishmongers, Merchant Taylors, Ironmongers, Clothworkers, Leathersellers, Grocers, Goldsmiths, Haberdashers, Vintners and Brewers. These are all Companies who, according to the 'Brief History', and as mentioned above, used St Katharine Cree for a time after the Great Fire and until their own Halls and their Guild Churches had been rebuilt.



The Pewterers' arms

Interestingly, while the extract from the O&Es of 20th February 1879 recorded that it had been agreed to pay this sum, there is little mention elsewhere in the O&Es after the Great Fire of the Company's arrangements for rooms in which to meet, pending rebuilding of the Hall, whether for Dinner or otherwise; and none about the arrangements for the Company's religious needs.

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With thanks to *A Brief History and Account of St Katherine Creechurch*, published by the Guild Church Council, from which this brief extract has been taken.

St Katharine Cree: www.sanctuaryinthecity.net

Queen Matilda is buried in Westminster Abbey and was fondly remembered by many of her subjects as "Matilda the Good Queen" and "Matilda of Blessed Memory". The death of her son, William Adelin, in the tragic disaster of the White Ship (November 1120) and Henry's failure to produce a legitimate son from his second marriage led to the succession crisis of The Anarchy. Matilda is thought to be the identity of the "Fair Lady" mentioned at the end of each verse in the nursery rhyme *London Bridge Is Falling Down*.

20th February 1879 Extract from O&Es

An application from the Vestry Clerk of St Catherine Cree was read whereby it appeared that the ancient Parish Church was being restored and that it had been discovered by the Architect that the original decorations of the ceiling of the nave and aisles comprised the shields of the sixteen Senior Livery Companies emblazoned in the proper heraldic colours and that the Rector and Churchwardens were very anxious to restore this somewhat unique decoration but in consequence of their funds being limited it was proposed to restore the above decorations at a cost of £10.10.0. to each Company desiring to have their shields emblazoned whereupon and on debate thereon Mr Alderman Staples moved that the sum of £10.10.0. be contributed for the restoration of the Company's arms in the Church of St Katharine Cree subject to the approval of the Master and Wardens as to the propriety of the expenditure and the same having been seconded and the question being put thereon by the Master was carried in the affirmative and is Ordered accordingly and that the said sum of £10.10.0. be paid out of the funds of the Company subject to the before mentioned approval.

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