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SIR CHRISTOPHER WREN.

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SIR CHRISTOPHER WREN.

PART II.

CHRISTOPHER WREN, one of the most eminent architects and mathematicians whom the world has produced, was born at East Knoyle, in Wiltshire, the rectory of his father, Dr. Christopher Wren, afterwards dean of Windsor, between the hours of seven and eight in the afternoon, of Friday, the 20th of October*, 1632.

* This, and many other of the authorities quoted in this work, are from a manuscript in the Lansdowne Collection at the British Museum, entitled, “Chronologica series vitæ et actorum, Hon^{mi}. Patris mei Dⁿⁱ. Ch^r. Wren, Eq: Aur: &c. &c. &c. (Quem Deus conservat)” and witnessed in Sir Christopher’s hand-writing. “Collata* Oct^r. 1720, C. W.” The following entry is the first: “Octob. 20, 1632, D^s. Christophorus Wren à Christophoro natus est apud *Knoyle Epi* in agro *Wiltoniensi*, Die 2, inter 7^{am} et (juxta) 8^{am} horam post merid: cyclo solis, 17; Lunæ 18; literâ dominicali B; 3^o post bissextum * *ex schedis avitis*.” This manuscript, which is in the hand-writing of Sir Christopher’s son, countersigned by himself, and is as curious as it is valuable, I shall distinguish in future by the title *MS. Wren*.

His father, a most respectable and learned divine, was descended from an ancient and distinguished English family of Danish* origin, which was settled at Binchester, in the county palatine and bishopric of Durham; and his mother, Mary, the daughter and heiress of Robert Cox, of Fonthill in the county of Wilts, Esq., was of a family of equal respectability and worth. Of this marriage he was the only son.

His uncle, Dr. Matthew Wren, occupies a prominent figure in the ecclesiastical history † of England. He was the elder brother of Sir Christopher's father, and was, after several other considerable preferments, dean of Windsor, registrar of the order of the Garter, and successively Bishop of Hereford, Norwich, and subsequently of Ely. He had four sons, of whom Matthew, the eldest, was first a student of Cambridge, and then at Oxford. After the restoration, he became secretary to Lord Clarendon, representative in parliament for St. Michael's in Cornwall in 1661, and afterwards secretary to James, Duke of York. Thomas, the second son, became Archdeacon of Ely; Charles, Burgess in

* Parentalia.

† As a specimen of the character of the times, the following titles of some of the pamphlets of the day against this distinguished prelate, which are all in the library of the British Museum, are cited: namely, Articles of Impeachment of the Commons, against Matthew Wren. 4to. London, 1641. Articles exhibited in Parliament against Matthew Wren, with the Resolutions of the Commons, touching the Queen of Bohemia. 4to. London, 1641. The Wren's Nest defiled; or, Bishop Wren anatomized. 4to. London, 1641. Wren's Anatomy. 4to. 1641. A most strange Letter, that was found in the Old Change, directed to Matthew, Bishop of Ely. 4to. London, 1642. Speech of Sir Thomas Widdrington, on the Impeachment of Bishop Wren. 4to. London, 1642.

parliament for Cambridge in 1685; and William, Sir Christopher's youngest uncle, received the honour of knighthood.

He was impeached, by order of the House of Commons, July 5, 1641, shortly after the impeachment of Archbishop Laud, and compelled to give ten thousand pounds security. At the treaty of Uxbridge, which was signed November 23, 1644, he was one among many other persons of distinction who were to expect no pardon*.

On March 14, 1648, the council of state reported to the House of Commons, "That Dr. Wren, Bishop of Ely, and the Marquis of Winchester, be not tried for their lives, but imprisoned till farther notice †."

On March 15, 1659-60, it was ordered, "That Dr. Wren, Bishop of Ely, be discharged of his imprisonment; and that the lieutenant of the Tower of London be, and is hereby required, to discharge him accordingly."

He was never brought to trial, although he was imprisoned nearly twenty years, which deprived him of delivering his very able defence, which is extant in the *Parentalia*, or, *Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens*, by his grandson, Mr. Christopher Wren, the son of the architect. This defence is clearly and well written, in an excellent style, and abundantly refutes every article of the impeachment against him.

These articles are published in a quarto pamphlet, of the date of 1641, with a most violent puritanical speech of Sir Thomas

* *Short View of the Troubles of England, and Treaty of Uxbridge*, p. 741. Oxford, 1681.

† *Whitlock's Memoirs*, p. 380.

Widdrington, to the House of Lords, which rivals, in style, the cant of the celebrated William Prynne, who was one of the most violent of his accusers.

Of his firmness in adversity the following anecdote of him and his illustrious nephew is a lively and illustrative proof.

Some time before the decease of Oliver Cromwell, Mr. Christopher Wren, the bishop's nephew (afterwards Sir Christopher), became acquainted with Mr. Claypole, who married Oliver's favourite daughter. Claypole being a lover of the mathematics, had conceived a great esteem for young Wren, and took all occasions to cultivate his friendship, and to court his conversation, particularly by frequent invitations to his house and table. It happened at one of these invitations that Cromwell came into the room as they sat at dinner, and without any ceremony, as was his usual way in his own family, he took his place. After a little time, fixing his eyes on Mr. Wren, he said, "Your uncle has been long confined in the Tower." "He has so, sir," replied Wren; "but he bears his afflictions with great patience and resignation."

CROMWELL.—"He may come out if he will."

WREN.—"Will your highness permit me to tell him this from your own mouth?"

CROMWELL.—"Yes, you may."

As soon as Wren could retire with propriety, he hastened with no little joy to the Tower, and informed his uncle of all the particulars of this interview with Cromwell. After which the bishop replied, with warm indignation, that it was not the first time he had received the like intimation from that miscreant; but

he disdained the terms proposed for his enlargement, which were a mean acknowledgment of his favour, and an abject submission to his detestable tyranny; that he was determined to tarry the Lord's leisure, and owe his deliverance, which was not far off, to him only*.

This illustrious prelate died at Ely-House, Holborn, April 24, 1667, aged 81, and upwards. He was buried at Cambridge, the whole University attending his funeral. Dr. John Pearson, then master of Trinity, and afterwards bishop of Chester, delivered his funeral oration in Latin.

Among other distinguished persons of this family was GEOFFREY WREN†, who was chaplain to King Henry VII. He was presented to the rectory of Bolden, in the county of Durham, June 27, 1502; was instituted to the prebend of South Cave, in the cathedral church of York, in the year 1508, which he exchanged for that of Knaresborough *cum* Bickhill, in the same church, Dec. 16, 1512. His next preferment was that of being admitted prebendary of Curborough in the cathedral of Lichfield, April 4, 1511, which he resigned, and was re-admitted, Dec. 7, 1512. At that time he was rector of St. Margaret's, Fish-street, in the city of London, and of Hanslap, in the county of Buckingham. He was privy counsellor to Kings Henry VII. and VIII. In the year 1515 he was installed a canon of Windsor; was colated to the mastership of Sherbourn Hospital, in the county of Durham, about the year 1522, and died April 5, 1527. He was buried in the north aisle of the choir of St. George's chapel at

* Parentalia.

† From a MS. in my possession.—J. E.

Windsor, with the following incscription on a ledge of brass around his tomb-stone: namely,

“ Hic jacet humatum corpus venerabilis viri magistri Galfridi Wren, quondam hujus collegii canonici necnon illustriss . . . qui obiit quinto die mensis Aprilis, anno Domini millesimo quingentesimo vicesimo septimo. Cujus animæ propicietur Deus, Amen.”

On the middle of the same stone was his effigies in brass, decorated with the mantle of St. George, and the following inscription under his feet :

“ Sub saxo ponor, et vermibus ultimis donor,
Et sicut ponor, ponitur omnis honor.

Dr. Christopher Wren, the father of Sir Christopher, was the youngest son of Francis Wren, a distinguished citizen of London. He was educated at Merchant Tailors’ School, and became a fellow of St. John’s College, Oxford; where he took his degree of bachelor of divinity in 1620, and held the office of senior proctor of the University in 1619. About the same time, he became domestic chaplain to Dr. Launcelot Andrews, Bishop of Winchester, and also chaplain in ordinary to King Charles I.; and rector of Knoyle, in the county of Wilts. On April 4th, 1635, he was installed dean of Windsor, and the 29th of the same month, made registrar to the order of the Garter. In 1638, he drew up a catalogue of the knights of this illustrious body, which was extant a few years since at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.

This latter situation afforded him the opportunity of performing a great public service, and for which posterity will be for ever indebted to him. After the chapel of St. George at Windsor, and the treasury belonging to it, had been plundered by the rebels, he sedulously exerted himself in recovering as many of the records as could by any means be procured, and had the good fortune to redeem, for a considerable sum of money, the three registers of the order of the Garter, distinguished by the names of the Black, the Blue, and the Red books. These he carefully preserved to his death, and committed them to the custody of his son, who, soon after the restoration, delivered them to Dr. Bruno Ryves, then Dean of Windsor, and registrar of the order; thus restoring to the most illustrious order of chivalry in Europe their invaluable records.

Sir Christopher's father was a man of great scientific knowledge, and of extensive attainments in literature and mathematics. He early directed the mind of his son to those pursuits for which he became afterwards so distinguished: and the precocious tractability of the child delightfully repaid the attentive cares of the anxious parent. He was one of the most learned, pious, and amiable men of his time, and was associated with all who were eminent in the literary and scientific pursuits of that enlightened period. He possessed considerable skill in the noble art of architecture, and a specimen of his abilities in this department of scientific knowledge is preserved in the state papers of Edward earl of Clarendon; by which it appears that he was employed, in 1634, as an architect to a building, about to be erected for the queen of Charles I. Whether the building was erected does not

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appear; but as the estimate is a curious document, I have appended it as a note*.

The period of Dean Wren is distinguished as one of important discoveries, useful inventions, and of brilliant talents. The year preceding his birth is memorable for the discovery of the circulation of the blood, by Dr. William Harvey. Sully, Galileo, Rubens, Vandyke, Inigo Jones were among his contemporaries. In his day, and with his co-operation, the first meetings took place of those illustrious men, who afterwards, under the mature

* “ Estimate of a building to be erected for her majesty,—
Being the whole south side of the privy garden double; the ground story eleven feet high; the second story nineteen, containing the gallery and the queen’s apartment; and the chapel the height of both the stories. The ground story to be fitted with deal wainscot into lodgings and offices for the treasury, secretaries, lord chamberlain and others: the second story and galleries to be finished as the king’s new lodgings, and the chapel decently adorned.

For the queen’s apartment, with the rooms under and in the roof, and the chapel, containing 84¼ squares, at £100 the square	£8425	0	0
For the gallery and rooms under, containing 52 squares, at £75 the square	3900	0	0
For altering, raising, and adorning the vane room	500	0	0
For alterations that may happen in piecing the old works to the new, and joining the banqueting house, the council chamber, the lord chamberlain’s and the old lodgings	1500	0	0
Sum	£14325	0	0

The old buildings to be pulled down, when the charge of carting away the useless rubbish is defrayed, may be valued at	1020	0	0
Which being reduced, remains	£13305	0	0
May 15, 1635.	CHRIST. WREN.”		