

= St Lawrence 's Church , Mereworth =

St. Lawrence 's Church is an Anglican parish church at Mereworth , Kent , United Kingdom . It is in the deanery of West Malling , the Diocese of Rochester and Province of Canterbury . The church was built in the mid @-@ 1740s by John Fane , the 7th Earl of Westmorland following his removal of the village 's 12th century place of worship to allow for the enlargement of Mereworth Castle .

The Palladian @-@ style stone structure has been described as " the outstanding 18th @-@ century church in the county , in scale , ambition and architectural interest " . The architect is unknown , but prominent Palladian @-@ era figures such as Henry Flitcroft , James Gibbs and Roger Morris have been suggested .

Many internal fixtures survive from the medieval church , including heraldic stained glass and a series of high @-@ quality brass and stone memorials . Alterations were made several times in the 19th and 20th centuries , including repairs to wartime bomb damage , and restoration work undertaken in 2009 . The church has been awarded Grade I listed status in view of its architectural and historical importance .

= = History = =

= = = Medieval church = = =

There was already a church dedicated to St. Lawrence in Mereworth during the reign of Henry II (1154 ? 89) , when its advowson belonged to Roger de Mereworth . The original church was said to have been built by the de Clares and was appropriated by the Knights Hospitallers on its foundation . During the reign of Henry II , there was a dispute between de Mereworth and Leeds Priory concerning the patronage of the church . Gilbert , Bishop of Rochester was asked to adjudicate on the dispute . He found in favour of de Mereworth , but the parson of the church was to pay the sum of 40s per annum to the priory as a perpetual benefice . Shortly after the settlement of the dispute the church was granted to Tonbridge Priory , in whose possession it remained until the priory was dissolved in 1525 . The church then passed into the possession of Cardinal Wolsey , but was amongst the properties forfeited to the Crown in 1529 .

The advowson was then granted to Sir George Nevill , passing on his death to his son Henry Nevill and on Henry 's death to his daughter Mary , thus coming into the possession of her husband Thomas Fane . In 1589 , Leeds Priory abandoned their right to the benefice granted by Gilbert of Rochester . In 1634 , the church possessed lands amounting to some 352 acres (142 ha) in Mereworth .

In the 1720s Mereworth Castle was rebuilt as Palladian villa to a design by Colen Campbell and in the 1740s two flanking pavilions and a stable block were added , necessitating the removal of the church ; in 1744 John Fane , the 7th Earl of Westmorland , obtained a faculty for the demolition of the " ancient and most inconvenient " church .

= = = Present church = = =

Fane built the new church on a site in the centre of the village , ? mile (1 km) northwest of its predecessor . Construction began in 1744 and was completed two years later , with consecration by Joseph Wilcocks , the Bishop of Rochester , on 26 August 1746 . Coffins and memorials from the old church were moved to the new building . John Grinsted , the son of John and Mary Grinsted was the first person to be baptised in the church on 23 September 1746 . There had been no burials or marriages in the village in 1745 due to the lack of a church .

In 1752 , Horace Walpole visited the church . He said that it seemed designed for Cheapside and that the spire was so tall that the poor church curtsied beneath it . Thomas Bengue Burr in his History of Tunbridge Wells (1766) said that the church " will bear , and indeed richly deserves , the attentive inspection of the curious traveller " .

In 1770 , the church was " repaired and beautified " , possibly by Nicholas Revett , who went on to design Mereworth Rectory in 1780 . In 1798 , the advowson of the church was in the ownership of Francis , Lord de Despencer . The annual income of the church was then valued at £ 14 2s 6d .

The spire was rebuilt in 1870 , and in 1875 a new round @-@ arched window was cut into the east wall of the church . It is flanked on either side by blind windows . The bells were repaired in 1885 and a clock was installed in the base of the lantern at the top of the tower in 1894 , in memory of Eliot Stapleton , rector of Mereworth from 1874 ? 92 . A plan by the architect George Crickmay , dated 1896 , to extend the church eastwards by building an apse of the same proportions as the west portico was not carried out .

Major repairs were carried out to the spire in 1946 ? 47 under the supervision of architect Kenneth Dalglish , following damage sustained during the Second World War . In 1957 , the bells were again repaired . On 25 August 1959 , the church was added to the register of listed buildings . It is Grade I listed . The clock was repaired in 1972 in memory of George Prentice , rector of Mereworth from 1966 ? 70 . A new fibreglass clock face was fitted at this time and the winding mechanism converted to electric power . In 2005 , an inspection revealed that the church needed major repairs . English Heritage made a grant that covered 95 % of the £ 500 @, @ 000 cost of restoration . The work was carried out under the supervision of architects Thomas Ford & Partners , and won the 2009 Georgian Group award for best restoration of a Georgian church .

The church is still actively used as a place of worship - you can find details on the church website .

= = Description = =

St. Lawrence 's is a Palladian @-@ style building by an unknown architect . Colen Campbell worked in a similar style , although he died in 1722 , so the design may have been executed by one of his followers . The second @-@ generation Palladian architect Henry Flitcroft has been suggested ; by 1746 he was the master carpenter at three London palaces , and his St Giles in the Fields at Holborn was London 's first Palladian @-@ style church . James Gibbs has also been suggested , as the spire of St Lawrence 's is similar to that of St Martin @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Fields in the City of Westminster , London . Sir Howard Colvin tentatively attributes the church to Roger Morris .

= = = Exterior = = =

The church is of blocks of Kentish ragstone with dressed ashlar Wealden sandstone used for the porch columns , quoins and tower . The sandstone has galletted joints . It has a simple rectangular form in the 18th @-@ century " temple church " style . St Paul 's , Covent Garden in London , an early Palladian church by Inigo Jones , was the model for the design , which was then " purified by neo @-@ Palladian theory " . The roof is covered in slate and has prominent eaves and pedimented ends .

Rising above the roof at the west end of the church is a tall tower topped with a steeple flanked by decorative urns . The stone structure , with its square base supporting octagonal upper stages with columned sides and a balustrade , is so similar to the steeple at St Giles in the Fields that the Buildings of England series says that it was " copied almost directly " from that church . Projecting from the west end below the pedimented end of the roof is a semicircular open porch with Tuscan columns topped by a cornice . Its design is based on that of the Baroque church of St. Paul 's , Deptford ; St Mary le Strand in central London has also been cited as a model . The tower has a peal of six bells , cast in 1746 by Joseph Eayre of St. Neots , Huntingdonshire . They are in the Key of G.

= = = Interior = = =

The interior is in a Neoclassical style . Entrance to the church is through a porch at the west end , which leads into a circular chamber in the base of the tower . Rooms to the sides of this vestibule

house monuments from the original church . On the north side is the Yotes Court Chapel , where the brass of William Shosmyth and his wife Julian can be found . Shosmyth was the warden of the religious guild of the Worshipful Company of Skinners in 1461 , and the brass has the earliest known representation of the Skinners ' coat of arms . As of 2011 , this chapel serves as a vestry . On the south side is the Despencer or Lady Chapel . It contains the brasses to Sir John de Mereworth and Thomas Nevill , and monuments to either Edward Neville , 3rd Baron Bergavenny or his son George Nevill , 4th Baron Bergavenny . Another memorial contains the heart of George Nevill , 5th Baron Bergavenny . The tomb of Sir Thomas Fane and his wife Mary . Their sons Francis and George are depicted kneeling at the base of the tomb .

Beyond the vestibule is a wide aisled nave , seven bays long , its barrel @-@ vaulted ceiling painted with trompe @-@ l ' ?il coffering (" not very convincingly " according to the Buildings of England guide) , a chancel and a side chapel . The nave and aisles are separated by painted marble @-@ effect stone Doric columns , which were originally partly panelled , They support a horizontal entablature rather than the more usual arches . The strict geometry of the interior ? each bay of the aisles is a square , and the nave is three times wider than each aisle ? gives it an " austere Neoclassical appearance " not normally associated with the Georgian era in which it was built .

At the east end is a grandiose lunette or " Diocletian window " , in imitation of the type used at Roman baths , filling the space left clear by the arch of the barrel vault . Below this is the round @-@ headed window added in 1875 .

Fixtures include a marble font which is contemporary with the church . There is much stained glass : the oldest , in the form of heraldic emblems in cartouches , dates from 1562 and is visible in the Diocletian window in the east wall and in another window on the southwest side . The east window was erected in memory of Sir Frank Stapleton , rector of Mereworth 1832 ? 74 . Other similar glass dates from the 17th and 18th centuries . Another , depicting the Raising of Lazarus , was designed by Frederic Shields for the Heaton , Butler and Bayne firm in 1889 .

The organ is by Gray and Davison . It was installed in 1882 by Lord Falmouth at a cost of £ 200 . In 1892 , the rector , E H Stapleton extended the range of the organ in memory of his wife .

The crypt contains several Fane coffins .

= = Memorials , brasses and notable burials = =

Memorials

Sir Thomas Fane , High Sheriff of Kent in 1572 . This " grandiose standing monument " dates from 1639 and depicts Fane and his wife (d 1626) reclining above their kneeling sons . It is supported on a prominent entablature carried on Corinthian columns .

James Master (d 1689) . His memorial is a cartouche of marble .

Brasses

Sir John de Mereworth , High Sheriff of Kent in 1340 and joint High Sheriff of Kent in 1341 , who fought at the Siege of Calais in 1346 . The " fine brass " , 33 inches (84 cm) long , shows de Mereworth as a knight and closely resembles brasses of a similar era at St Mary Magdalene 's Church in Cobham , Kent .

William Shosmyth (d 1479) . Warden of the religious guild of the Worshipful Company of Skinners in 1461 . His brass is 18 inches (46 cm) long .

Burials

Evelyn Boscawen , 6th Viscount Falmouth .

George Byng , 7th Viscount Torrington , courtier .

John Fane , 7th Earl of Westmorland , builder of the church .

Mary Fane , Countess of Westmorland , wife of John Fane .

William Hutcheon Hall , Royal Navy admiral .

Charles Davis Lucas , first person to win the Victoria Cross .

Thomas Nevill (c1480 ? 1542) , Speaker of the House of Commons 1514 ? 15 . He is commemorated inside by a monument decorated with quatrefoil emblems and angels and

surmounted by a " poor brass " 18 inches (46 cm) long .

Francesco Sletter (d 1775) , Italian artist . He also has a wall @-@ mounted memorial on the south side of the church .

Sir Robert Southwell , Master of the Rolls 1541 ? 50 .

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= = The church today = =

The parish covers Mereworth village , the surrounding rural area and part of the village of Kings Hill . Administratively , it is part of a joint benefice with St. Dunstan 's Church at neighbouring West Peckham .

As a Grade I listed building , the church is considered by English Heritage to be of " exceptional interest " and greater than national importance . As of February 2001 , it was one of 38 Grade I listed buildings , and 1 @, @ 291 listed buildings of all grades , in the district of Tonbridge and Malling ? the local government district in which Mereworth is situated .

The church is still in active use as a place of worship each Sunday and the church website gives full details of times of services .