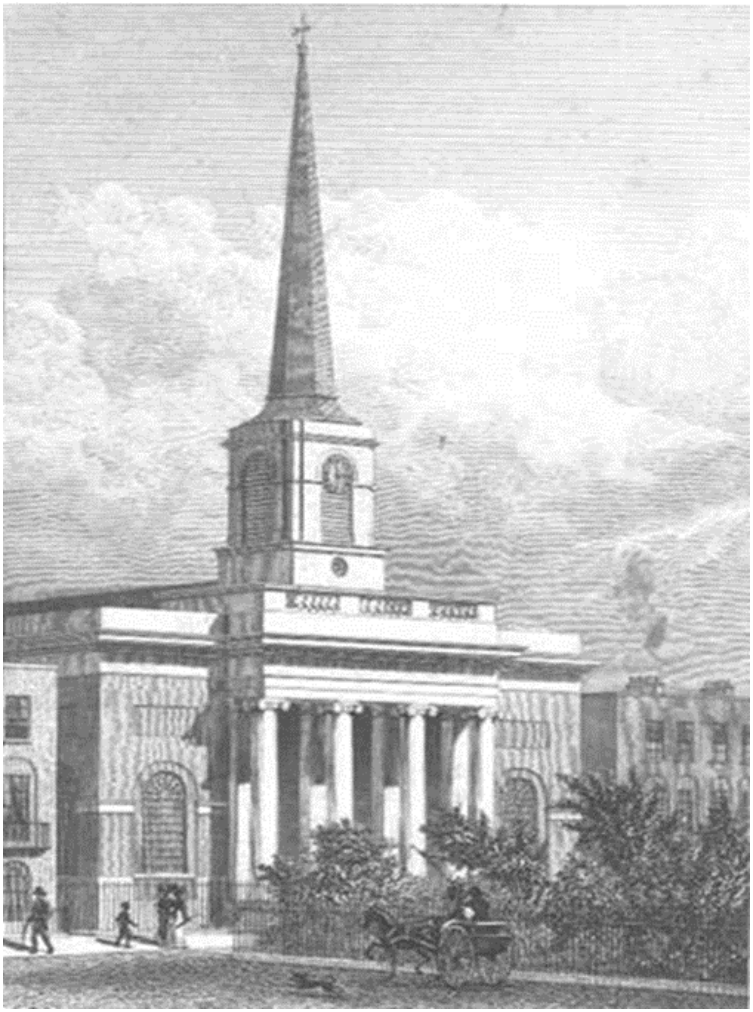
The History of St Clement with St Barnabas and St Matthew



The Beginnings

For many centuries the area of Moorfields and Finsbury was open grazing land, too poorly drained for market gardens or building, and was a place for drying clothes, archery practice and for Sunday strolls. Shakespeare mentions the area, close to the City, in Henry IV Part One "...as if thou never walk'st further than Finsbury…" (Act III, Scene 1). When the boggy ground was drained during the 16th century the area became the site of a plague hospital (there's a plaque marking the site in Bath Street) and later the tent city of London citizens displaced by the great fire of 1666.

The growth of the city in the 18th century led to the establishment of St Luke's Church on Old Street, a church associated with John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Wesley, who had received a public rebuke from one vicar over his open-air preaching and informal prayers early in his ministry, came to be a regular Sunday preacher at St Luke's later in life.

St Barnabas

St Clement's Church, consecrated originally to St Barnabas, was designed to be a "chapel of ease" (an extra place of worship for those in a parish too far from the parish church, or for extra space if the parish church was too small). Certainly the area was becoming a populous place. The orchards that covered the area in the 18th century were, by the 1820s, giving way to smart new developments on the city fringe, including King Square (named after the newly-crowned King George IV). Houses in King Square were large and designed for artisans and clerks at a convenient distance from the City.

The government had set aside a fund of £1 million "for building new churches in populous places", in thanksgiving for victory over the French in the Napoleonic Wars. And St Luke's parish was chosen to be the site of one of these so-called "Waterloo" churches. However, in those days, both church and local government were run by the churchwardens and local "Vestry", who didn't have to be church people, merely residents of the parish. The vestry of St Luke's, Old Street, thus resisted the proposal, believing that the new church would "impose on the inhabitants a needless and oppressive expense", and that "no additional chapels are necessary". Despite their protest, the Church Building Commission went ahead and purchased the land in King Square.

Despite this opposition, on the 27th January 1822 the foundation stone was laid, an event ignored by the Vestry of St Luke's. Work on the building is said to have been done by French ex-prisoners-of-war and locals. The new church building was considered to be "for use and duration, rather than particular ornament". Designed by Philip Hardwick, the architect of Euston Station, St Barnabas was built in the ancient Greek (Ionic) style, but with a spire attached. The windows on either side of the porch were originally glazed, but not the oblong recesses above them, as the illustration, from 1828, shows. There was no vestibule - the main doors led directly into the church and the door on either side of the porch led into galleries which went around three sides of the building. Altogether it could hold 1,600 people!
It was very plain inside. There was a small temporary organ in the west gallery and the altar was in a small semi-octagonal recess at the east end. Gas lighting was fitted in 1827, but on condition that no service started later than 3pm.

St Barnabas was complete by July 1824, but had to wait two years for consecration by the Bishop. This delay was because St Luke's was reluctant to recognise it as a parish chapel, or pay for it to be furnished and decorated. In November 1824 they set up a committee to make sure that ratepayers paid no more than the absolute minimum toward the new church. Eventually, however, £660 was contributed for bibles, prayer-books, altar, communion-plate and furniture, rejecting an offer by the first priest of the new church to pay for many of these himself. They also paid £585 for the wall around the churchyard and for decorating and mending windows already broken by vandals.

The consecration finally took place on the day after St Barnabas Day, 12th June 1826. The building had cost around £17,000!

St Barnabas - 1930s

The church was declared redundant shortly before WW2. In September 1940, the original St Clements, City Road was destroyed in the Blitz. St Matthews, City Road was also damaged during the blitz and demolished circa 1948.

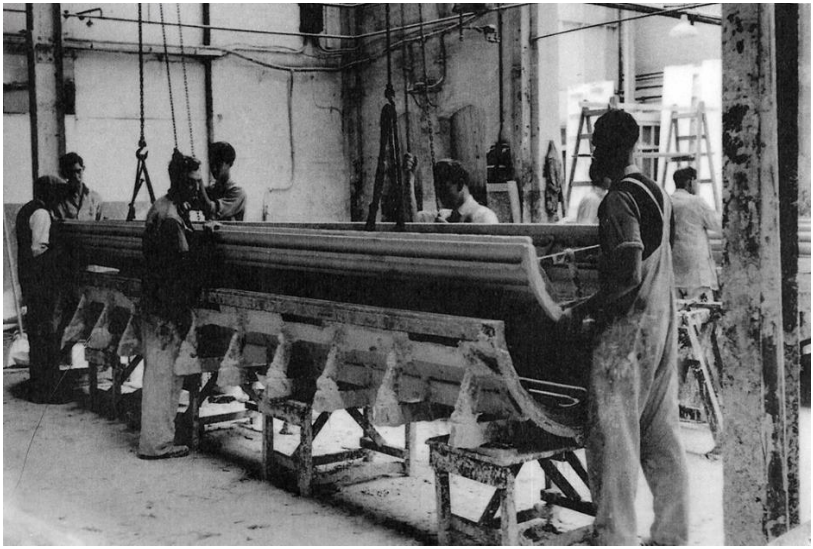
During the war, St Barnabas was used as a store for furnishings salvaged from surrounding damaged churches. Meanwhile, the congregation of St Clements met in a local hall in the ruins of the church.. In the early 1950s the three parishes and the somewhat dilapidated St Barnabas building was redesigned and restored by Norman Haines architects in the light, airy classical style you see inside today. On St Barnabas Day 1954 the church was re-consecrated to St Clement with St Barnabas and St Matthew.

Since then the church's fortune has varied as the area changed rapidly with post-war slum clearances, new estates and the gentrification of the neighbourhood in recent years. Today, with new facilities and a congregation drawn from locals and newcomers from every corner of the world, the round of prayer and service to the local community continues.

1950s

Restoration begins

New columns ready to deliver



The finishing touches

The pipe organ built by Hill in 1843 was destroyed by bomb damage in WW2. The current organ was built in 1876 by Father Willis for St. Thomas's church, Agar Town, Camden. That church was heavily bombed in WW2. The organ pipes were saved and it was rebuilt in St. Clement's in 1954 by Noel Mander.

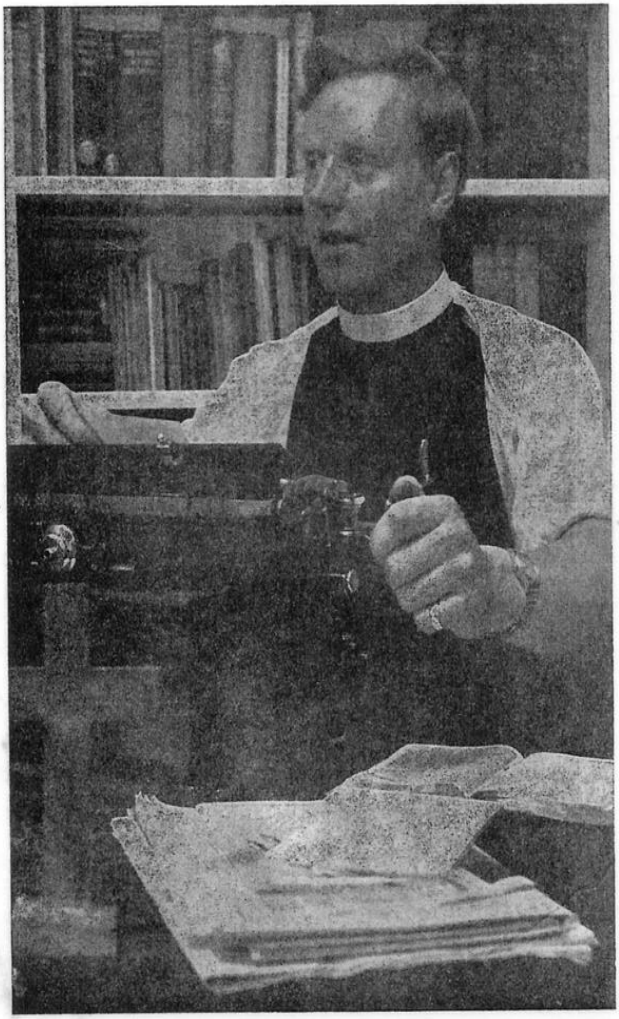
The front cover of the church magazine from 1966

APRIL. 1966.

THE ANCHOR

The Magazine of ST. CLEMENT with ST. BARNABAS and ST. MATTHEW · KING SQUARE, E.C.1

SIX PENCE.



SUNDAYS.

8.0 a.m.
Holy Communion.
10.30 a.m.
Morning Prayer.
11.0 a.m.
Sung Mass &
Sermon.
6.0 p.m.
Evening Prayer &
Adoration.
(Address on some
Sundays.)

WEEKDAYS.

Mass on Mondays
at 7.0 a.m.
Wednesdays:9.30 a.m.
Fridays: 6.30 a.m.
Thursdays &
Saturdays: 8.0 a.m.

These times are
subject to change.
See Notices in
Church.
For principal
mid-week evening
service, usually
a Thursday, see
back page.

Notice of Holy
Baptism, Churching,
Banns of Marriage,
Weddings, etc,
to be given at
The Vicarage.

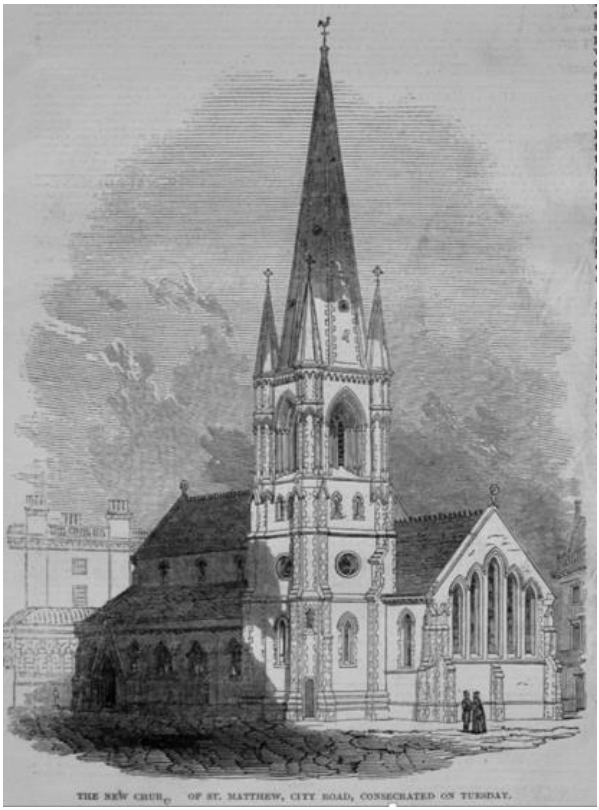
Vicar:- The Reverend Prebendary Ronald Arthur. M.A.,
St.Clement's Vicarage. King Square. E.C.1.
Telephone:- CLErkenwell 0804.

The original St Clements

ST. CLEMENT'S, CITY ROAD, was one of William Butterfield's most memorable churches. W. R. Lethaby used to draw a line between the "hard" and the "soft" Gothic Revivalists. Butterfield was as hard as nails. With merciless consistency he used the vernacular materials of his time—pit-sawn timbers, harsh red and brown bricks, shiny tiles—and out of these he made a rugged poetry, more energetic and moving than any that the Gothic Revival produced. The photograph shows the wreck of St. Clement's before the "west" wall (it stood, actually, north and south) was demolished. Built in 1874, some years after St. Alban's, Holborn (page 46), and nearly thirty years after All Saints, Margaret Street, St. Clement's was lofty and severe, with a single aisle and a high lancet-pierced clerestory. The bell-turret, with its original and exciting pattern of brick and stone, the high-pitched east window and the angular waggon roof were all typically Butterfieldian. The tracery and mouldings were, as usual, strictly according to medieval precedent; it was the disposition and proportioning of the church which gave it its strong appeal. Its loss, together with the loss of St. Alban's, Holborn, is all the more unfortunate in that the work of Butterfield has still not had the study and recognition it deserves.

St Matthew's City Road

Built in 1848 by Sir George Gilbert Scott (architect of Midland Hotel, St Pancras Station). Damaged in the September 1940 blitz and demolished after the war.

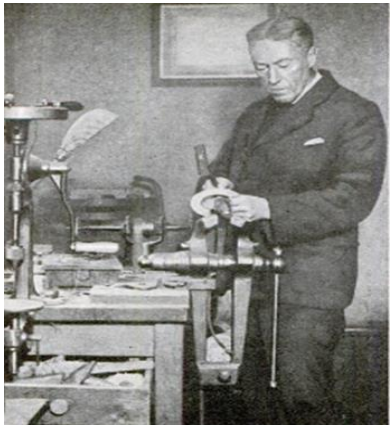


Above Picture:

The exterior of St Matthews. The vicarage can be seen to the right of the church and junction of City Road and Nelson Terrace is behind the church.
Those buildings are still there today.

Right side picture:
The interior of St Matthews, City Road

The vicar was Father Langdon. The block of flats standing on that site is named after him— Langdon Court.
He was also an amateur silversmith and candle sticks he made were salvaged from the damaged church and are in use at St Clements today.



JANUARY, 1934

SAINT MATTHEW'S

CITY ROAD, E.C.

CLERGY :

Reverend C. G. LANGDON, M.A.,
S. Matthew's Vicarage,
City Road, E.C.1.

LIST OF SERVICES.

Sundays :

HOLY COMMUNION, 8 a.m.; MATINS, 10.30 a.m.; SUNG MASS AND SERMON, 11.15 a.m.; CATECHISM, 3 p.m.; EVENSONG, 6.30 p.m.; PEOPLE'S SERVICE, 7 p.m.; PRAYER AND WORSHIP, 7.45 p.m.

Weekdays :

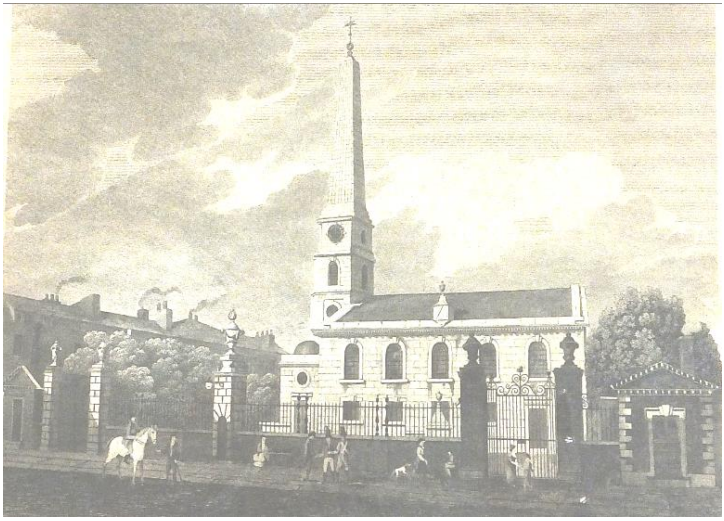
MASS: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, 7.30 a.m.; Wednesday, Friday, 7 a.m. Evensong daily at 7 p.m.

Holy Baptism—1st and 3rd Sundays at 4 p.m. Notice should be given.
Confessions—Saturdays at 8 p.m.; and at other times by appointment.
Confirmation—Arranged on application to the Clergy.
Holy Marriage—Notice of Banns to be given to the Clergy.
Churchings—Before Evensong on Weekdays.
Visitation of the Sick—The Clergy will gladly visit any who are ill, if notice is given.
Burial of the Dead—Arrangements to be made with the Clergy.
Classes—Lads and Girls: Clubroom, Sunday, 4 p.m.
Scouts and Cubs—Scoutmaster, Mr. C. Hammarton;
Cub Mistress, Miss Thornton.
Girl Guides—Captain, Miss Hart.
Brownies—Brown Owls, Miss Graham.
C.B.S. Meetings at the Blessed Sacrament on 1st Fridays, at 7.30 p.m.
S. Simon of Cyrene Companionship—Office as announced.
Sponsors' Fellowship—Office as announced.
Women's Fellowship—2.45 p.m., Tuesdays, at the Vicarage

PRICE TWOPENCE EACH

Around the parish

St Luke's church, Old Street—1700s



St Paul's Pear Tree Street

Old Street Station before the roundabout was developed

King Square 1950s

King Square 2011

2018/19

The roof, whose English oak and Welsh slate had kept us warm and dry for nearly two hundred years needed serious work. Relaying and rebuilding the parapets in 2008 was a great help, but now the roof needed to be re-laid and many of the original slates renewed. For this we were fortunate to secure a Heritage Lottery Fund Grant, approved by Heritage England, for these works.
With a HLF grant of £250000 plus additional grants from the Richard Cloudesley Charity, the Garfield Weston Foundation and the Allchurches Trust, were able to complete a number of important improvements to the building's accessibility.
After wide consultation, and lots of prayer and discussion, St Clement's decided to build an additional entrance accessed by a ramp along the south side of the church, with an Accessible WC. There is also a new room for St Clement's Kid's Club, allowing the font to be moved into the centre of the north wall. We also have a new "cupboard kitchen" in the vestibule to allow hot and cold refreshments to be served by all those using the church building.
New lighting was installed in January 2019

Cloudesley

Bishop Graeme Knowles dedicated the new works in a special service on 27th January 2019. The font, kitchen, kid's room, ramp, Accessible WC, kitchen and finally the roof....
he didn't climb up onto the roof;
we had a slate to represent the roof!

Garfield Weston FOUNDATION

ALLCHURCHES TRUST LIMITED

The Heart of Finsbury
yesterday, today and tomorrow

heritage lottery fund

LOTTERY FUNDED