



East Knoyle's Famous Son

Sir Christopher Wren

Honoured in his Birthplace

Yesterday's Commemoration Ceremony

A Newspaper Attack Resented

The beautiful little village of East Knoyle has rarely been so disturbed as it has been this week by the statement which was given publicity in a London paper, that it had forgotten its most illustrious son, Sir Christopher Wren, the tercentenary of whose birth was celebrated yesterday (Thursday). From this little corner of Wiltshire there came the great architect, whose memory and work is being honoured throughout the country, and the article, with its gross misrepresentation, has cast a grave reflection on the knowledge, the intentions, and the good name of the village that is very strongly resented.

East Knoyle may have had nothing to do with the cultivation of those remarkable qualities of a mind which has left so deep an imprint upon the national life, but it has always been quietly conscious of the pride of having been the scene of the early childhood of the immortal genius. There was no possibility of Knoyle forgetting either the man himself or the great commemorative event of this week. There is too much in the village to remind residents and passers-by of Wren's association with it.

Wren's Birthplace

Haslam's house where he was born, was pulled down in 1877. On the wall of Knoyle House, the residence of the Dowager Countess of Pembroke, and the nearest spot to the actual birthplace of Wren, there was erected in 1923 by the Parish Council a tablet to mark the 200th anniversary of his death. It is true that this records the birth as having taken place a year earlier than it did, but the people of Knoyle can hardly be blamed for that. This tablet was erected some years before the remarkable discovery by Professor Edward Bensly of a book in the National Library of Wales which contained in Dr. Wren's own handwriting a record of the births and deaths of his eleven children. Before that time, not only East Knoyle, but every biography of the Wren family had been wrong about this essential fact.

Knoyle has forgotten! Any of the school children could have told the London journalist almost all he wanted to know about the salient facts of Wren's life. Long before the tercentenary of Wren's birth was probably thought of, the Women's Institute was hearing all about him and his association with the village, and on Sunday gratitude was offered by the church "for the fact that from this tiny village there

went forth England's greatest idealist, artist, and architect, and that from this humble place he gained some of his earliest appreciation of beauty."

Loans to London Exhibition

And there has gone to London to the great loan exhibition at St. Paul's some of the village Wren treasures. The Rector and church wardens have lent the baptismal register showing the entry of Wren's baptism. The Committee of the Village Club has lent a painting of the interior of Knoyle Church showing the nave as it was in Dean Wren's time and also a photograph showing Haslam's shop in which Wren was born. Wren's father was rector of East Knoyle, he had married Mary, daughter of Richard Cox, of Fonthill, in 1623.

The great Christopher was the second son of that name in the Rector's family, but the first was "born, baptised, and dead in the same hour." The second Christopher was born a year later. The circumstances of his birth were probably the cause of his being none too robust in his early days. Just before his birth a small fire had occurred at the Rectory (a picture of the house has been lent to the London exhibition by Mr. F. W. Barnes), and while the damage was being repaired the Dean and his wife went into lodgings at the village shop kept by a man named Haslam. In the London exhibition there is a picture of the shop (also lent by the Club Committee) showing the bay window of the actual room in which Christopher Wren was born.

Two other photographs lent by Mr. F. Tuck, are particularly interesting. On the walls of the church there can be seen to-day the "suspicious pictures of Frette work" (later mutilated by the Puritans), for the doing of which Wren's father was deprived of the living of Knoyle, though he continued to reside at the Rectory. There are other interesting features in the church which show the leaning of Wren's father towards architecture, particularly the plaster work containing flower borders, figures, &c., from what is known as the "Bishop's Bible." The contributions which the village has made to the London exhibition are sufficient answer in themselves to the charge that Knoyle has forgotten Wren.

Yesterday's Commemoration Ceremony

The school children, too, knew too much of Wren for them or future generations to be unmindful of the immortal architect who, had he not been frustrated, might have made London the fairest city in the world. This week the picture of Wren in the school is adorned with laurel wreaths made by the scholars.

The village's commemoration yesterday was a not unworthy tribute to the memory of a great man. Flags and bunting were flown in the streets, and the elder parishioners joined with the school children in a ceremony on the actual spot where Wren was born. The village owes much to the headmaster of the School (Mr. F. W. Barnes) for the part he has played in seeing that the village's association with that "prodigious worker of architectural marvels" should not be overlooked. He took all the children in procession yesterday to the place where stood the village shop that was Wren's birthplace, and there they were joined by many residents and visitors. The Union Jack was flying from a flagstaff erected on the corner of Haslam's shop.

Mr. Barnes gave a short talk not only on Wren's pre-eminence in the architectural world, but on those traits of his character and mental abilities which are not quite so well known. He emphasised that Wren was not only the architect of St. Paul's Cathedral, but a clever mathematician, a learned astronomer, a great patriot, and a wholly lovable and deeply religious man. He reminded the children of the fine example they had in him whose early years were spent in that place.

A chaplet of bay leaves having been placed in position, the new Rector (the Rev. Ernest Cross) read the passage from Ecclesiastes beginning, "Let us now praise famous men," and the chief events of Wren's life in chronological order were read by Mr. Barnes, who called on the children to give the Olympic salute in homage to the great architect. The Doxology was sung in thanksgiving for the work, the inspiration, and the example of a great life, and cheers were afterwards raised.

In the afternoon there was a large congregation in the church for a replica service to the national thanksgiving and commemoration in St. Paul's Cathedral.

Arrangements had also been made by the Women's Institute for a lecture in the evening on "Sir Christopher Wren" by Mr. F. W. Barnes, with Colonel the Hon. George Herbert as chairman, supported by the Dowager Countess of Pembroke (president of the Institute).

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