

## ST PAUL'S AND THE CITY BEFORE 1300

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The phrase 'St Paul's and the City' perhaps most often calls to mind aspects of that complex relationship between about 1400 and now, including such topics as Londoners' devotion to the site, its role as a symbol of their own and the nation's identity (perhaps especially during the Second World War), the link between the cathedral and the city's fraternities and guilds, civic ceremonial, and the highly-charged post-Reformation sermons at St Paul's Cross. This paper draws your attention to the equally interesting, but inevitably less well-recorded, earlier centuries, in which we can trace some of the fundamental ways in which the cathedral contributed to shaping the identity and institutions of London. In the relationship between the City and St Paul's, those were the formative years.

In his ambition to re-Romanise Christianity in Britain, Pope Gregory the Great envisaged London as the primatial see. But local power structures distorted this plan and in 604 Ethelbert, king of Kent and based in Canterbury where the archbishopric was set up, founded St Paul's as a cathedral to serve the East Saxons, of whom he was overlord. London appears to have been one of several centres of power among the East Saxons at that time and it may have been the location of their seat of authority within the city walls which determined the siting of the cathedral. Whatever the position in the seventh century, it seems that by the eleventh the royal residence in London was very close to St Paul's, a juxtaposition between secular palace and cathedral which was common in European cities. The first cathedral was probably somewhere within the footprint of present-day St Paul's, and there's a good case for arguing that the royal palace lay to the north, in the area now traversed by Newgate Street. It was not until the late eleventh century, following Edward the Confessor's rebuilding of Westminster Abbey as a burial church, that the palace was moved outside the city walls. Such migrations were not uncommon in eleventh-century Europe and it is likely that in London, as elsewhere, the shift indicates the caution, if not fear, that rulers now felt concerning the increasingly numerous and powerful inhabitants of cities.

Well into the twelfth century, bishops had an important role as representatives of the king in the governance of cities, and when royal authority was weak they occupied a quasi-royal position as local rulers. In either case, their status and authority was superior to that of lay officials with urban responsibilities, such as the king's reeves or portreeves in the case of London. Moreover, it

was one of the traditional attributes of a good bishop that he should look after the material as well as the spiritual interests of the citizens. Several early bishops of London appear conspicuous in this role. They include Erkenwald, who in the 670s or 680s seems to have presided over the refoundation of St Paul's, following a period of apostasy and of preference for other Christian sites by the East Saxon; Wulfstan, whose episcopate spanned the difficult transition from English to Danish rule in the early eleventh century; and perhaps Bishop William at the time of the Norman Conquest. Soon after the Conquest, King William wrote to the Londoners to assure them of their traditional rights. The letter, still in the Corporation archives, was addressed to Bishop William, the portreeve and the citizens. This may have been no more than the common form of a royal letter, but Londoners later believed that Bishop William had been instrumental in negotiating a settlement between the Conqueror and the City, and his tomb in the nave of St Paul's became a site of civic devotion.

St Paul's was a major focal point in London. Thus, when King Alfred in the ninth century reordered the city within the walls so that it could accommodate the bulk of London's population, the principal element in the new street plan, the wide market street of Cheapside, appears to have been aligned on St Paul's -- or perhaps rather on an open area lying between the cathedral and the royal palace. This would have been an important political space for assemblies of Londoners in the presence of their king. In such a space, for example, a new king would be acclaimed or even elected, occasions when the Londoners represented, in a sense, the entire people of the realm. Indeed the citizens of London over several centuries claimed the right to elect the king, and this aspect of their strength is apparent as early as 1016 when they elected the successor to Ethelred the Unready. Following the removal of the palace and the great rebuilding of St Paul's after the fire of 1087, this political space survived at the north-eastern corner of the new cathedral precinct, and is identifiable as the place where the great citizen assembly known as the *folk moot* met three times a year. The space was defined by St Paul's Cross to the south and by the belfry containing the bell that summoned the *folk moot* to the east. Just to the west was the cathedral's north transept, containing the 'Great North Door' which was the entrance most commonly used by Londoners, a focus of several important cults and thus a powerful symbol of the close relationship between city and cathedral. The *folk moot* was the highest forum for the citizens' judicial and administrative business, and could also serve as a formal meeting between the monarch and the citizens. Several such encounters between King Henry III and the Londoners were described by contemporaries. They were highly emotional occasions, as the king sought money or other support from the citizens, or bade them farewell on the eve of his departure from the kingdom. Henry presumably remembered that during the last years of his

father's reign the citizens and cathedral chapter had joined the barons in opposition to the king. The barons, of course, had included Robert fitzWalter, the lord of Baynard's castle and the leader of the citizen army, which traditionally assembled outside the west end of St Paul's. In 1216, when it was clear that the Magna Carta settlement had not held, sermons were preached at St Paul's Cross urging the citizens to oppose King John.

The bishop and cathedral and bishop made other contributions to institutional formation in the city. By 1100 London was already remarkable for its large number of small private churches around which the city's parochial system was to evolve. Consequently, the city contained a very large number of priests and clerks. To provide them with the support and regulation that they needed, one of the bishops, probably Gilbert the Universal (1127-34) in about 1130, founded a fraternity of London priests. At about that date we can see what appear to have been members of this association acting collectively as witnesses to business concerning parish churches, especially those numerous churches (about twenty-five in the twelfth century) acquired and regulated by St Paul's. In this way the cathedral made a vital contribution to the formation of the city's system of parishes, which shaped the everyday lives of the citizens and in due course assumed a role in city administration. Parishes were convenient neighbourhood units of association and by the early thirteenth century were already beginning to serve as subdivisions of the much larger wards, the primary units of secular governance. Moreover, the fraternity of parish priests remained an active body throughout the Middle Ages.

The cathedral also interacted with the city's commercial life, promoting trade by its large import of produce from its estates and as a consumer of products made in London or sold by its shopkeepers and merchants. St Paul's also made a more sophisticated contribution in mercantile and financial life. The discovery of a late ninth-century coin weight in the cathedral precincts indicates that in the time of King Alfred the cathedral and its environs had some role, presumably as a site of royal and episcopal authority, in regulating the production of coin. This association appears to have continued, and individual canons of St Paul's were involved in moneying and other activities related to commerce. Algar, a canon of St Paul's in the late eleventh and early twelfth century, was probably a London moneyer, as his father, a landowner in London and elsewhere in south-eastern England, had certainly been. Algar's brothers and nephews included moneyers and leading city figures, including an alderman and a member of the 'knights guild'. These men were almost certainly important merchants, and the 'knights' guild' itself is likely to have been an association of merchants and other leading city men. Algar himself appears to have been associated with the science of measurement which went with commerce, urban land development and building, for the

standard foot length which was carved on one of the pillars of the nave of the new cathedral was known as the foot of Algar. A few years later another canon was also alderman of one of the city wards, probably the one covering the site of the former royal palace and corresponding to a part of Farringdon Within. Similar close links between city families and canons of St Paul's continued into the thirteenth century. Moreover, the cathedral's association with moneying was probably responsible for the establishment of the city's goldsmiths in Cheapside close to St Paul's, for many goldsmiths were also moneyers. The nearby street-name 'Old Change' suggests the former existence there of the official exchange for coin. A related luxury trade was the manufacture of textiles of gold thread. A woman who did this in the early thirteenth century seems to have lived near St Paul's and was the first woman known to have been commemorated at the cathedral. By the later Middle Ages St Paul's nave was a busy place for trade and less reputable secular activities. Especially noteworthy among this business was that of lawyers, essential in a highly-commercial city. This may already have been the case at the time of the establishment of the mayoralty during the 1190s, for William fitzOsbert, the leader of the popular opposition to the elite and, in the view of many, corrupt group behind the mayor, was said to be learned in the law and to have incited tumult and sedition in St Paul's, perhaps at one or more of those unruly business gatherings in the nave. Evidently the cathedral was a site for rehearsing conflict between parties of citizens, as well as for confrontations between the city and the state.

A feature distinguishing St Paul's from some other cathedrals was the powerful sense of the presence of its patron saint, although the cathedral can have possessed no primary relic of the Apostle himself. Also unusual was the way in which the body of citizens regarded St Paul as their patron. Elsewhere there was often no discernible connection between the identity of the citizen community and the patron of the cathedral, and in some cities the citizens' choice of a patron saint was clearly intended to establish a distance between themselves and the cathedral. This may testify to the relatively uncontested position of the bishop and cathedral clergy as leaders of London in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. St Paul's role as patron is evident in the magnificent seal, not their first seal, which the citizens had made about 1220 for use in authenticating their written acts. One side of the seal depicts St Paul, with a sword, as the stern protector of the city. The other shows a more intimate scene of the citizens themselves under the protection of the great Londoner who had been murdered in 1170 on the orders of the king. This was St Thomas, archbishop of Canterbury, who had been born in Cheapside and whose parents were buried just north of St Paul's nave. The new city seal was an important political statement, perhaps made in the year of the magnificent translation of the relics of St Thomas at Canterbury cathedral, and certainly

asserting the independence of the City of London and the power of its protectors, only a few years after the city had been in violent confrontation with the king. The seal may also allude to the alliance between the city and St Paul's at that time. In due course the cathedral became an important site, along with Thomas's birthplace, for the rehearsal of an élite civic identity, in which, by about 1300, veneration of the tomb of his parents came to play an important part.

During the thirteenth century and later, the cathedral became in some ways less directly and intimately involved with the life of the citizen community. The many reasons for this include the increasing competence and coherence of the citizens' collective system of government; the prohibition of clerical marriage, which hindered the formation of dynastic links between the families of citizens and those of canons at St Paul's; and the increasing tendency of the king and the pope to appoint their own officials as canons. Moreover, by 1300 the folk moot, meeting in the churchyard, had almost faded away as a political and judicial institution, although St Paul's Cross continued as an important site for controversial sermons. In this period, however, the cathedral's processional liturgy, had an important impact on the citizens' developing sense of their identity as a political and social body. By about 1250 the most important regular processions associated with St Paul's were those in Whit Week, when the clergy of the archdeaconry of London, the archdeaconry of Middlesex and the archdeaconry of Essex on successive days assembled at some distance from the cathedral and then and processed through the streets of the city to a great service in St Paul's. The clerics were to be accompanied by their parishioners, so that in theory the participants in these processions were very numerous, to be numbered in tens of thousands in the case of the archdeaconry of London. The processions had presumably been instituted, possibly in the twelfth century when the bishop took the parish priests in hand, so as to emphasise the unity of the Christian community of the city and diocese, with a particular emphasis on the spiritual and social role of the parish clergy. In due course, each of these processions acquired a civic component in the form of the mayor, sheriffs and aldermen, a development which appears to have been well underway by 1300. The importance of these and other processions to St Paul's and to other religious sites for the sense of civic identity is clear from the way in which they are enumerated and carefully described near the beginning of the Liber Albus, the great collection of the city's laws and customs compiled in 1419. The fact that this civic ceremonial had grown out of the more ancient practice of the cathedral is not readily apparent from the way in which it is described in this record.

Other, less regular, processions to St Paul's had an important influence on the civic sense of the space and significance of London. We might suspect that

assemblies to elect the king or for other great events in the eleventh century and earlier involved processions to St Paul's and its environs, since processional liturgy was deeply embedded in ancient and early medieval city life. The first such event that we know of in London dates from 1184, when the king welcomed distinguished visitors from overseas in London, showed them the splendours of the city and conducted them to St Paul's. A number of similar events are recorded for the thirteenth century. They involved the welcoming of notable personages, royal brides and the king himself, processions through richly decorated streets, crowds of citizen onlookers and solemn dancing that expressed ancient ideas of order and harmony. In most cases they ended up at St Paul's. They were fully comparable to the famous 'royal entries' of the later Middle Ages, for which Burgundian models are sometimes claimed.

In these ways, the cathedral, perhaps from its foundation, and certainly from the tenth century onwards, articulated the public spaces of ceremonial display in the city – above all in Cheapside. This enabled the citizens, and in due course the Corporation itself, to express their own sense of the social and political order and their role as the embodiment of the chief city and capital of the realm. Remnants of those collective practices persist today.