

Ewan Christian: Ecclesiastical Architect

(1814-93)

By Tony Jarram

Researched by Tony Jarram and Lynne Dyer for Woodhouse Eaves Volunteers for St. Pauls Heritage

Ewan Christian is best known for being the architect of the National Portrait Gallery, London, but this was an uncharacteristic aspect of his work. The largest volume of his work was in the renovation, extension and restoration of churches previously built.¹



National Portrait Gallery (By Tony Jarram)

The volume of this type of work was extensive. Most of this work was carried out during his tenure of the role as Architect of the Ecclesiastical Commission. Here he succeeded William Railton who had designed St Paul's Church in Woodhouse in 1836, which along with its twin sister church of St Peter at Copt Oak, were both consecrated in 1837. Christian later carried out extensions to both churches.

He also built a number of new churches, including what may feel was his master piece, St. Marks in Belgrave Gate Leicester (1869-72).² Here he excelled, facing the building in dark grey slate from the quarries of the donor, William Perry Herrick (1794-1876) who had his Beaumanor Hall build by William Railton).

¹ 'Ewan Christian', *Wikipedia* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ewan_Christian].

² 'Church of St Mark', *British Listed Buildings* [<https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101300759-church-of-st-mark-abbey-ward#.Ww0lcEgvzIV>].



St Mark's, Leicester (By Lynne Dyer)

His other work in Leicestershire included:

- a complete rebuild of the 1815 St. James the Greater, Oaks in Charnwood (1883)
- chancel and restoration of St Peter's Belgrave Leicester (1860)
- general restoration and rebuilding of the chancel at All Saints Hoby (1863-64)
- chancel, chapels and part of the transepts of The assumption of St Mary the Virgin, Hinckley (1877-78)
- restoration of St Mary Magdalene, Knighton, Leicester (1894)
- restoration of St Nicholas Bingham (1862)
- part rebuilding and part restoration of All Saints Nailstone (1852-53)
- the south aisle and porch St Peter Higham on the Hill (1854)
- the building of St Giles Barlestone (1855)
- His work on the two Railton twin churches were: St Paul's, Woodhouse Eaves, transepts added (1880) and St Peter's at Copt Oak, addition of chancel (1889).



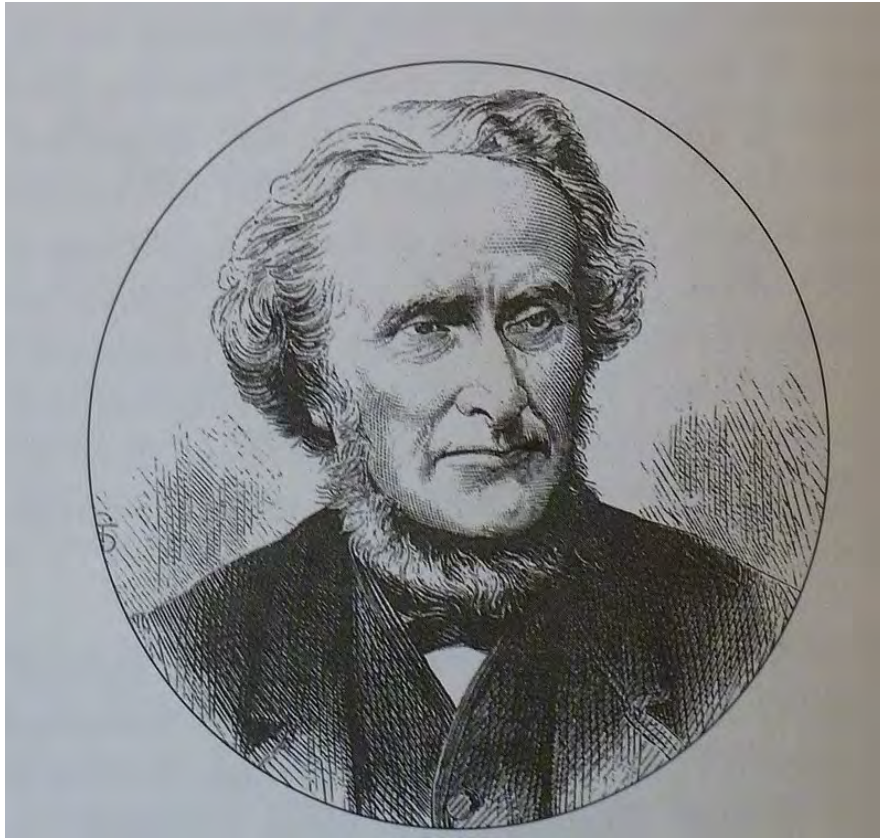
Chancel added to St Peter's, Copt Oak (By Tony Jarram)

The chancel of St Paul's Woodhouse Eaves, was extended in 1871, under the office of the Ecclesiastical Commission. Sadly, it was thought fit to reduce the size of Railton's gallery at the west end of the nave. Christian, mainly after his death, received some criticism for the severity of some of his changes to existing churches, but seems well respected whilst he was alive.

Christian was for a brief period employed by William Railton in 1836 and worked with a number of architects before setting up his own practice in 1842.³ He was made Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1840, becoming a Fellow in 1850 and later becoming the Institute's Vice President and received their Gold Medal. Christian was appointed Architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission in 1851, replacing William Railton. Christian was to hold this appointment until his death in 1895.

His productivity was outstanding and during his career he carried out work on 1300 churches, including 880 chancel restorations and built 90 new churches. His restoration of Southwell Minster lasted for 37 years and his replacement in 1881 of the two pyramid spires lost in a fire of 1711 are its most outstanding feature. He also carried out extensive restorations on Carlisle Cathedral. Christian favoured the English Gothic style but not restricted to it. Most of his work was from his office in Bloomsbury Square London.

³ William Railton (1800-77) The architect of St Paul's Woodhouse Eaves (Volunteers notes 2018).



Ewan Christian (portrait in 'The Builder' 21 May 1870) (Wikipedia)

Ewan Christian married Anne Bentham in 1848 and they had three daughters. He died in 1895 at his home in Hampstead, London, called Thwaitehead, which he designed himself. Ewan Christian was a descendent of Fletcher Christian (1764-c.1793) of the Mutiny on the Bounty incident.

Sources and Acknowledgements

- Visits carried out by Tony Jarram to National Portrait Gallery; St Paul's, Woodhouse Eaves and St Peter's, Copt Oak January 2018.
- 'Ewan Christian', *Wikipedia* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ewan_Christian] used for information throughout.
- For more on the history of Southwell Minster [<http://www.southwellminster.org/minster-history-2.html>].
- Tony Jarram, unpublished journals were also used for additional information.
- Thanks to Lynne Dyer for photographs and additional information for St Marks Leicester.